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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I wish to welcome our two special guests: the Hon. Josée Verner, Minister of La Francophonie and Official Languages, and the Hon. Gordon O'Connor, Minister of National Defence.

[English]

I would like to also welcome Judith LaRocque, Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage; General R.J. Hillier, Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence; and Colonel J.L. Milot,

[Translation]

Director of Official Languages at the Department of National Defence.

Welcome to you all.

Your appearance this morning marks an historic moment. I believe that this is the very first time that a committee is hearing from two ministers at the same time.

[English]

I believe we might be making history, in that I think it's the first time, certainly in my time, that two ministers have appeared before this committee. I think it's rather historic that this is happening.

I want to thank both ministers for the respect they've shown to the official languages committee, and to official languages. I must thank your staff too, because it was quite a job getting you both here on such short notice, and both of you together. So we thank you for that. As a committee, we respect that you think so much of us to do that, and we respect what you're doing for official languages.

[Translation]

We will begin by asking Ms. Verner to speak for approximately 10 minutes. She will then be followed by Minister O'Connor. We will then move on to two rounds of questions.

Madam, you may begin.

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages): Honourable members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to speak before you today.

Accompanying me are the Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage Judith LaRocque, my colleague the Minister of Defence Gordon O'Connor, and the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier.

We are here to explain the benefits of the new Official Languages Program Transformation Model, after which we can respond to your questions.

I would like to first remind you that as Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages, I am responsible, on the one hand, for programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage having to do with linguistic duality, and on the other, for coordinating the entire range of federal government activities concerning official languages.

I ensure the overall consistency of our government's efforts on this issue, and I intend to continue providing leadership and showing the way to be taken so that our two official languages have their rightful place in our communities and our federal institutions.

Over the past year, I worked, and I continue to work with my cabinet colleagues to see that linguistic duality is integrated into the process of developing policies and programs.

Counting on my support, my colleagues ensure that the institutions for which they are responsible comply fully with the Official Languages Act. They are accountable before Parliament, they consult with the communities, and they maintain good relations with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

My colleagues and I can also count on the President of the Treasury Board, who plays an important role with regard to official languages within the public service.

As you are aware, our government is firmly committed to promoting our two official languages. For us, linguistic duality is a basic component of our identity. It is an economic, social and cultural asset, both for Canadian society and for our country on the international stage.

During the past year, our government took practical, positive action to carry out our commitment. I too have several achievements to my credit. For example: I signed education agreements with each province and territory, agreements on minority-language services as well as a cooperation agreement with Quebec's English-speaking community. I supported the creation of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario and I took part in efforts to relaunch the Festival franco-ontarien. I provided funding to the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada to organize its 2007 summit. I transferred funds to the city of Ottawa to help it offer French-language services. I worked closely with my colleagues to move forward Bill C-23, which would allow an accused person to receive a hearing by a judge or jury in the official language of his or her choice. I proposed amendments to the Air Canada Public Participation Act so that official languages requirements will continue to apply under the new structure of Air Canada and its affiliates. With Citizenship and Immigration Minister Monte Solberg, I tabled the Strategic Plan to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities. Last year, our government eagerly welcomed the new Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser.

With our actions and deeds we have proven, and continue to prove, that we give priority to compliance with the Official Languages Act within all departments, and that includes National Defence and Canadian Forces.

I will even go further and say that our intention is to ensure that all civilian and military employees of the department are led, trained, managed and supported in the language of their choice when and where the act requires this.

● (0910)

[English]

The former Commissioner of Official Languages, Dyane Adam, noted on many occasions that during the past few years the Department of National Defence has had difficulty creating a work environment in which employees, both civilian and military, can use the official language of their choice. The former universal model failed to address all areas for the Canadian Forces to be completely compliant with the Official Languages Act. Dyane Adam acknowledged it. We acknowledged it.

Moreover, the new Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, is concerned that this approach did not provide the expected results. When we come to this conclusion, it's time to change course.

This is why I was happy to see that after having learned about the analysis and recommendations of the former commissioner, my colleague Minister O'Connor has taken real, concrete action. Thanks to his leadership, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces are putting forward a functional approach that will better accommodate their operational structure, while paving the way for these organizations to be fully compliant with the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

Contrary to the current widely held impression, this change does not amount to an acceptance of defeat. Instead, we are taking action so that the provisions of the act are genuinely put into practice. The

new model not only takes into account the recommendations in the former commissioner's report, but it meets the requirements of the act.

We are in the process of acquiring the tools to make a real difference for anglophones and francophones at National Defence and in the Canadian Forces.

I am following these efforts closely, and I am pleased to be able to work with the Commissioner of Official Languages to promote this invaluable treasure and asset—Canada's dual heritage of English and French. I had the opportunity to discuss this topic with Commissioner Fraser a few weeks ago, and I know that he is giving his full attention to the issue.

We will be able to meet him when he appears before the committee in March. The commissioner has expressed interest in the new transformation model. Like myself, he is awaiting the outcome of this initiative, which has the benefit of being innovative, concrete and focused on the future.

I can assure you that our government will take the commissioner's recommendations into account, and that Minister O'Connor and I will study those recommendations carefully.

● (0915)

[English]

I would like to conclude by assuring you that I will give my support to Minister O'Connor and to all those who feel strongly about the future of linguistic duality within the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Forces, and the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

I will now give the floor to Minister O'Connor, who will go into greater detail about the Official Languages Program Transformation Model. After that I will respond to your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Verner.

I now ask Minister O'Connor to take the floor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

As Madam Verner explained, the Official Languages Program Transformation Model ushers in a whole new approach to managing official languages in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. Like my honourable colleague, I have taken a strong personal interest in this initiative and I welcome the chance to talk to you about it.

As you know, the Transformation Model comes into effect at the beginning of April. I am confident that it will promote the Official Languages Program in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces.

The previous approach failed to meet the needs of the Official Languages Act and our new approach will fix the problems and myths of the previous approach. I believe its implementation will also significantly improve our compliance with the Official Languages Act.

[English]

Let me begin by assuring you that I recognize the importance of supporting and promoting the use of both official languages. I believe that it takes a well-integrated defence team to get the job done, a team in which military and civilian francophones and anglophones can work seamlessly together. I also know that the ability of the Canadian Forces to function in both languages can be a distinct advantage in the conduct of operations around the world and an absolute necessity for operations here at home.

[Translation]

The Canadian Forces have a long history of recognizing both English and French in the workplace. In 1914, well before there was any thought of an official languages act, the Royal 22^e Régiment became Canada's first official French-speaking regiment.

[English]

When the Official Languages Act was enacted in 1969, the Canadian Forces formalized their system of designating units as English-speaking, French-speaking, or bilingual. These designations underwent some adjustments in 1988, when the Official Languages Act introduced a regional system for the linguistic designation of federal work environments. The national capital region, eastern and northern Ontario, and areas of the province of Quebec and New Brunswick were designated by the federal government as prescribed bilingual regions for language of work purposes under the act.

The military establishment periodically reviews the language designation of all its units to ensure they remain compliant with the act.

[Translation]

On top of this, to meet their operational requirements, the Canadian Forces have created a number of bilingual work environments outside the prescribed bilingual regions. Units in Trenton, Halifax, Winnipeg and Esquimalt are good examples of this. These designations have assisted the Canadian Forces in building and maintaining a strong bilingual presence in all 10 provinces and 3 territories. However, confirming the language designations of our units was not the only action we took in response to the Official Languages Act.

The Canadian Forces adopted a universal approach to bilingualism. That is, the Canadian military set a goal for itself of providing second-language training to every regular force member so that the entire institution would be fully bilingual.

● (0920)

[English]

Overall, the Canadian Forces have an enormous bilingual capacity. Over one-third of our men and women in uniform are bilingual to some extent. But the military's bilingual capacity is scattered throughout the length and breadth of the organization. It is not concentrated in the functions or at the language proficiency levels required by the act. Accordingly, universality has not proven to be the answer for the armed forces. It has wasted the before-mentioned capacity of our forces.

The Auditor General's 1990 annual report also questioned whether this was the way to go for our forces, as it did not seem to be sufficiently meeting the requirements of the act.

[Translation]

So, why has the universal approach not worked for the Canadian Forces? Well, there are a number of reasons for this, and I would like to highlight some of them for you.

First, the scope of the universal approach was unattainable. The Canadian Forces' training capacity cannot realistically create a full bilingual military, despite the significant investment we've already made and are continuing to make in language training. Because the language training effort has been universally focused, it has not concentrated on where bilingualism is needed to comply with the act.

[English]

Second among federal institutions, the Canadian Forces' role and structure are unique. For operational reasons, military personnel are subject to hiring, training, and employment practices very different from those of the public service employees.

For example, the Canadian Forces take a functional approach to staffing, managing personnel by unit rather than by position. Each unit operates as a team to carry out its assigned mission. Commanders have the authority to relocate personnel within their units, as needed, to carry out these missions. This includes relocating bilingual personnel whose language qualifications may be needed in different functions to meet official languages obligations. Military personnel are not and cannot be employed against fixed positions in the way public servants are.

[Translation]

Yet, the Canadian Forces have been taken to task by this committee for not filling their bilingual "positions". I want to point out that the Official Languages Act does not mention "positions". It simply states that federal institutions are required to maintain a sufficient bilingual capacity to provide services and supervision in those cases provided by the act.

[English]

Our armed forces do an incredible job on this front, but the frequent postings and operational deployments that are part of military life exacerbate the challenges encountered by the Canadian Forces in consistently meeting the expectations of the act. It is simply neither realistic nor feasible for the Canadian Forces to meet demands that go beyond the expectations of the act, such as meeting public-service-related staffing requirements.

I firmly contend that a shift is needed to improve the official languages record of the Canadian Forces. However, counting the number of bilingual military personnel serving in bilingual functions, as the public service does with its positions, does not measure whether these functions are being delivered in both official languages, and it simply does not work for the Canadian Forces. What is required is language training that is better focused where it is required, and a results-based performance measurement system that accurately determines whether supervision, leadership, and training are being provided in both official languages when and where they are required by the act. The transformation model proposes to do just that.

● (0925)

[Translation]

The Commissioner of Official Languages recently published two reports. The first was on the impact of language of work on the recruiting, appointment and transfer of unilingual personnel to bilingual positions in the Canadian Forces. And the second was an audit of the language of work at National Defence Headquarters. In both cases, the commissioner found that the Canadian Forces were not in full compliance with the act.

[English]

All the recommendations made by the commissioner in these two reports have been taken into account and are formally addressed in the transformation model. Let me emphasize again that the aim of the transformation model is to better comply with the act.

As Madam Verner mentioned, the Commissioner of Official Languages will follow the implementation of the transformation model with interest. The new model sets out both the strategic plan and the road map for better aligning our official languages program with the act. It takes into account the integrated nature of the department and the Canadian Forces.

The civilian part of the department's official languages program will remain firmly rooted in the public service policies and directives emanating from the Official Languages Act and the Public Service Employment Act. The Canadian Forces, which are not subject to the Public Service Employment Act, must produce their own official language policies, directives, and procedures to implement the Official Languages Act. This has always been the case.

For the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence, the implementation of the transformation model will ensure that linguistically qualified personnel are provided in the right place at the right time. Defence team members are fully aware of their official language rights and obligations, and the institution's ability to meet the requirements of the Official Languages Act is accurately monitored.

[Translation]

At this point, I should mention the ongoing Project to Review the Linguistic Designation of CF Units, Civilian Positions and Military Functions. The review aims to ensure that National Defence has accurately determined which Canadian Forces functions—and civilian positions within those functions—must be designated as bilingual, and to which level of linguistic proficiency.

[English]

Once the review is completed, individuals employed in those bilingual functions and positions will be provided with second language training if they are not already at the required level of proficiency.

As you know, section 91 of the Official Languages Act sets out the principle that official language requirements related to staffing must be objectively determined. The review is being carried out with complete objectivity, in strict accordance with the criteria of section 91.

The model will also place a lot of emphasis on the senior military ranks. Senior officers have been receiving and will continue to receive priority access to second-language training. I want to stress this point because there is a false perception that bilingualism will no longer be a condition of service at the senior rank levels.

[Translation]

Since 2005, 70% of newly promoted colonels and captains (navy) at minimum, have been required to attain a superior level of language proficiency within a year of promotion. And the Canadian Forces have exceeded that goal each year. The objective will continue to be in effect under the transformation model.

[English]

The model requires all senior officers serving in bilingual regions or in bilingual functions to attain a superior level of language proficiency. This is the same measure used for senior public servants. The Canadian Forces will attain this ambitious goal by 2011, beginning immediately with the most senior general and flag officer rank levels.

Let me repeat that the model sets clear milestones for bilingualism among our senior officers. The levels of bilingual proficiency at the senior rank levels will continue to rise as a result of the transformation model.

A second misconception about the transformation model is that this will have a negative impact on career progression for francophones. Again, this is false. Approximately 24% of Canadians speak French as their first language, but francophones make up 27.4% of the Canadian Forces overall. They account for 32.9% of all chief warrant officers—that is, the senior rank, the non-commissioned rank—and 28.4% of all general officers.

● (0930)

[Translation]

Therefore, francophones are very well represented in the Canadian Forces. And they will continue to be very well represented in the future. Indeed, the transformation model will have a positive impact on the career progression of both francophones and anglophones.

[English]

It will ensure that all occupation-related training is consistently provided in both official languages from coast to coast, and that personal services to Canadian Forces members are offered to them in both official languages wherever they may serve, across Canada and abroad. This exceeds the intent of existing federal policies and practices, which result in training and most services being provided in both official languages only within bilingual areas.

The Canadian Forces objective related to provision of bilingual services and training will be facilitated through the transformation model. The model will accomplish this by better targeting second-language training to those who need to be bilingual to meet the requirements outlined in the Official Languages Act. This focused approach will better equip the Canadian Forces to fully meet their official languages obligations.

[Translation]

I have talked about how we will achieve the first aim of the transformation model: ensuring that linguistically qualified personnel are provided in the right place and at the right time. There are two very important issues that the transformation model will address: firstly, the lack of awareness of official languages rights and obligations.

[English]

The second question is the lack of an appropriate mechanism to measure National Defence's bilingual capacity and ability to provide services, training, and supervision where and when required by the act.

To address the first, the transformation model will put in place an enhanced official languages awareness and education program. This will ensure that civilian and military personnel are fully informed of their linguistic rights and obligations. The model will also establish a results-based performance measurement system to accurately monitor the provision of bilingual services, leadership, and instruction in accordance with the Official Languages Act.

Rather than counting bilingual military persons against positions, the new methodology will determine whether National Defence's military and civilian personnel are actually meeting their official languages obligations in the workplace. I'm confident that the transformation model will resolve the issues that the Commissioner of Official Languages raised, and will put to rest the concerns of those who have so recently spoken against it.

[Translation]

I would like to give you a snapshot for the future. A culture of respect for the use of both official languages will be actively fostered throughout National Defence.

[English]

Anglophones and francophones serving in bilingual functions will be provided with more ready and equal access to second-language training so that all military personnel are able to receive occupational instruction and personal services in their language of choice wherever they may serve, and members of the Canadian Forces are able to be led in their language of choice wherever official languages demands it. Change takes time, but we believe the

implementation of the transformation model is the key to making the future a reality. At the same time, it will go forward toward enhancing the Canadian Forces' operational effectiveness.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister O'Connor.

One of the few privileges I have as chair is to be able to ask for points of clarification.

Minister, I think I heard you state in your speech that currently one-third of the personnel in the armed forces are bilingual.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Yes.

The Chair: A full third is currently bilingual.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Approximately, yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We will begin our first round of questions. Each member has five minutes.

Ms. Folco, you may begin.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Firstly, I wish to thank Minister Verner.

[English]

as well as Minister O'Connor for their very prompt reply to our request for them to appear before the committee. I think we are all very much on the same wavelength, in the sense that we want the army to be bilingual.

Minister O'Connor, I would like to clarify my position. I'm a former linguist, and as I listened to you, especially in the last part of your speech, I heard the kind of speech we used to hear 20 years ago when we were talking about making the Canadian armed forces bilingual. It seems to me we're going back 20 years and talking about making the army bilingual, so something obviously has not worked right. In this, I totally agree with what you and Madame Verner have said.

● (0935)

[Translation]

I believe that everyone here has serious concerns over bilingualism within the Canadian Forces, especially since other committees in the past have worked very hard to make CF members bilingual, and representative of the Canadian public. How our country is portrayed abroad is important. I think we all agree on this.

When a language program is not working, we must focus on several factors to find the cause of the problem. We can try and determine if the expected results were too ambitious, if the work tools were appropriate, or if people were motivated enough to learn the other language.

I'm among those who believe that anyone can learn another language. I'm addressing my remarks to both ministers. It's a matter of motivation, and having the proper learning tools.

Minister, when you say that only senior officers of the armed forces should have to learn the other language, I believe that on the one hand, we must begin much earlier, and on the other hand, this may indicate that we automatically assume that junior officers are unable to learn a language. I disagree with this.

After having read your document and heard your speech, there are three elements of the Official Languages Act, in relation to the Canadian Forces, which catch my attention. They are parts IV, V and VI of the act.

Part IV deals with services to the public; part V deals with language of work at headquarters; and part VI deals with soldiers' access to promotions, particularly francophones.

Gathering from what you have said and what I have read, the transformation model deals specifically with services to the public, and therefore falls under part IV. Yet, this committee and other committees on official languages working previously have extensively gone through parts V and VI, which deal respectively with language of work and the promotion of bilingual people, francophones in particular.

My question is addressed to both ministers. Why should we emphasize service to the public, when this appears to me to be a minor factor? Why not focus on language of work at headquarters, which plays a major role in internal services, not only in terms of the image that the Canadian Forces want to project, but also in terms of promoting francophones and bilingual employees?

That is the first part of my question.
[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Thank you very much for your question.

I want to address one assertion you made earlier that may be a misunderstanding from the way my speech was structured. We're not saying that only senior officers are going to be trained in the official languages. In fact, everyone who needs the other official language to carry out their work will be trained. So thousands of people are going to be trained in the official languages. I spoke about the senior officers because there's a myth out there that I have seen in the media that somehow senior officers will not have to be qualified.

I'm going to turn it over to the chief here to address services to the public, work, and promotion.

General R.J. Hillier (Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): Minister, thank you very much.

Madam, we have spent huge amounts of money, effort, and time to meet both the spirit and intent of the law with respect to dual linguistic capabilities for the Canadian Forces. We want to reflect our nation. What we have not done well in the past is use people who are bilingual to provide services to men and women in uniform and their families in the regions around the country where they are posted. So we need to get much better at qualifying people, and use those people in positions where they can provide the services.

I suggest it would be wrong to focus on headquarters. The vast majority of the Canadian Forces and their families are not in our

headquarters; they are scattered around our country, and we need to provide service to them also.

In support of what the minister has said about the senior officers, we are making sure that our senior officers reflect our dual linguistic ability. We are making obvious progress every day, and it meets the objectives we have stated. But we also start at the junior level.

Officer cadets at the Royal Military College provide more than 50% of our officers. They all start with a language instruction program that they must complete to become bilingual by the time they graduate. So we concentrate on the top end, where we provide leadership, but we also build for the future with all of our young officers. They are required to develop skills in both languages and be officially bilingual, as part of their requirements to become leaders in the Canadian Forces.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, General Hillier. Unfortunately, I have to stop you there.

[Translation]

Mr. Nadeau, you may ask the next question.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister Verner, Ms. LaRocque, Minister O'Connor, Mr. Hillier, Mr. Milot, good morning.

In my own family, three of my uncles and my father served in the Second World War. They all came back in one piece, which is rather rare. One of them served in the air force, the other in the navy, and my father and my uncle Claude fought in Normandie and Berlin.

That being said, I also wanted to be a soldier when I was younger. During the summer of 1980, I happened to be in Arnprior, Ontario—because I am originally a Franco-Ontarian—and on day two of my stay there, I asked a question in French during a training session. I was told: "Sorry, we don't speak foreign languages here." That was in 1980. You can be certain that by that evening, as a proud member of the Nadeau family, equally proud of my language and culture, I did not make a toast to the Queen of Canada. The next day, I took a taxi back to Ottawa, and then a bus back to Hawkesbury. I had had it with the Canadian armed forces. This anecdote is quite vivid.

Today, I am the Bloc Québécois critic on official languages. I, for one, have chosen my country—I have chosen Quebec—but so long as we remain a part of Canada, you can be certain that protecting the French language will remain very important.

I wish to remind you of what you said earlier, that bilingualism is expensive, it's horrible. You are clearly demonstrating that you are not very proud of this country. In fact, when one is proud of one's country, and wishes to represent it properly, one does not talk about how expensive services cost. We talk about investing in our country, and that's exactly what we have to do.

You say that changes have been made, after having observed that things were not running properly, and that the decision was made to make the requirements less stringent. The act says one thing, but it can be bypassed by reducing the requirements to the furthest extent possible. Only generals and lieutenant-generals will be required to be bilingual. Other senior officers will not have to be bilingual. This takes us back to the spirit of the 1980s, and I think if my father were here to talk to you about his own experience within the armed forces, he would say that not much has changed. He served in the Canadian Forces during the Second World War; you know the dates as well as I do.

It appears to me that there is a lack of will. Requirements are being reduced. When we look at the statistics—and I won't get into the fine details because I only have seven minutes, Mr. Chairman—between 39% and 44% of positions designated bilingual were held by unilingual anglophones. These statistics were provided to us by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. This morning, you are telling us that this measure aims to reduce requirements, level things off, so that high-ranking officers who hold important positions do not have to learn both official languages. By doing so, we are clearly mocking francophones, bilingual people, whether they be anglophone or francophone, who serve in the Canadian army, and who eventually will be outpaced by a unilingual anglophone once again, when everybody is supposed to be on an equal footing. As you have clearly demonstrated, the equality of both official languages remains a myth, and you are perpetuating this myth by reducing requirements.

Mr. O'Connor, I listened to you give your speech earlier. I also heard you, Ms. Verner: "the will to act—, blah blah blah—, we are going to take action—" The Official Languages Act came into effect in 1969, and is 38 years old! We repatriated the Canadian Constitution 25 years ago, a Constitution that recognizes the equality of both official languages, and guarantees that those working at the federal level are served and can serve in both official languages. Yet, today, we are reducing requirements. A now-retired former senior officer, Mr. Landry, also talked about ghettoization. There is now going to be an army for francophones, for bilingual people, and one for unilingual anglophones, and at the same time, you talk about the importance of team work. What kind of team are you talking about? Three different teams for one single country? This is my response to you.

● (0945)

You are reducing the criteria. In fact, you are further abdicating your responsibilities. You are not heeding the demands of the Official Languages Commissioner who has given you very poor grades on everything pertaining to "bilingual positions" within the Canadian armed forces.

That was my spiel, I don't have any questions to ask you after what I have just said, but you can respond to my comments. I already have an idea of where you stand on the subject, but in actual fact, francophones are still being pitted against anglophones, and anglophones continue to have better chances than francophones.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Again, Mr. Minister, I'm going to have to hold your reply to under a minute and a half, please.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I reject some of the premises that you have put forward. First of all, there's no disadvantage that I'm aware of for any francophone with relation to promotion. In fact, francophones have a slight edge in promotion if you actually check the general officers and the chief warrant officers. To get to be a chief warrant officer you have to get up the whole rank structure to the top. So there's no disadvantage that I know of for francophones, and that's a myth you're creating.

The other one is that the system we have been following up to now is a system of universality. The myth there is that everyone in the armed forces will become bilingual. That is not possible, not in the Canadian Forces. We move people around to Saskatchewan, in the Northwest Territories, and move them all over the country. We're not like the public service, where you get a job, it's your job, and you stay in Rimouski for 25 years or you stay in Waterloo for 25 years. They aren't—

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. O'Connor, I see that there are people here who were born in different regions of Quebec—

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Am I going to be able to respond or not?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: —and they all did their studies in English on military bases, because the Canadian armed forces did not provide their members with the necessary services. Again, this just goes to show you how things actually work.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau.

[English]

The time is finished.

Mr. Nadeau, I think we've invited these two ministers as guests, and I think we have to respect when we ask them questions that they have the opportunity to answer them.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I know that it is my turn to speak soon. Pardon me, but here in committee, witnesses take up the time that is allotted to each individual member, and I am fully entitled to my seven minutes. So if I feel that a witness is taking up too much of my time, I have the right to interrupt him. It is my privilege, as a parliamentarian, to do so. Those are the rules.

The Chair: When one asks a question, one must show respect and listen to the answer.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The seven minutes belong to the members.

The Chair: It is your turn, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wish to welcome our witnesses. Firstly, I wish to congratulate you on how quickly you made your presentations. This should be pointed out. I won't say too much, because I only have seven minutes. Time goes by quickly.

Ms. Verner, in response to a question that I asked in the House of Commons, you said that a plan had been drawn up in cooperation with the Official Languages Commissioner. After double checking these answers, it was found that there was no cooperation. The only thing that I was told—and we're going to check this on Thursday or summon the former commissioner because Mr. O'Connor had mentioned this—is that many recommendations were made, and of all of those recommendations, only three were retained.

I would like to hear your answer on this question, because there is a difference between cooperating, and simply hearing somebody else's ideas.

• (0950)

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Mr. Godin, for the opportunity to restate, once again, that as my colleague has ensured me, the transformation model is the result of collaboration and consultation with the Official Languages Commissioner. The transformation model was presented to Ms. Adam. I have been informed that of the twelve recommendations she made, ten were adopted in order to respect the spirit of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I wish to thank our dear friend who once sat alongside us in this committee, Mr. Benoît Sauvageau. In a report published in May 2006 which would have been tabled by Mr. Sauvageau himself, or by the person who last held the report, the conclusion states:

Overall, we have observed that the Canadian Forces' commitment to increasing the number of bilingual CF members who meet the linguistic requirements of their position is being implemented too slowly. This appears to be the case because the CF gives priority to operational needs [...]

I will not read the entire passage, as it will take up more of my seven minutes.

Mr. O'Connor, you are practically telling us that we francophones are lucky because we make up 24% of the population, whereas 27% of the positions within the CF are held by francophones. Francophones are reputed to have better chances of being promoted within the officer ranks. If they have better chances, it is because they were forced to learn English.

What is the number of francophones who have gone through the ranks and reached the top echelons, and who do not speak a word of English? Are there any?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: What I'm saying is that a francophone has no disadvantage in the Canadian Forces. They have the same advantages as an anglophone.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are you sure about that?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Yes, I am.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are you telling me, then, that you have a francophone who has not learned the English language and has had a promotion all the way? Are you saying that?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Yes, I'm saying that. And it's the same for an anglophone. We have English-speaking units. We have French-speaking units. We have bilingual units.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Well, I'm talking about going to the higher rate.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Which higher rate are you talking about?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: As ranks go, some are higher, some are lower. Are there any francophones, not in the units, but in the senior ranks?

The situation with deputy ministers is similar: some don't speak French, but there isn't a single French-speaking deputy minister who doesn't speak English.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Yes. And what I'm saying is that today, for example, in the military about 28% of colonels and general officers are francophones.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But they speak English.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: They speak French and English, and so do the anglophones.

Mr. Yvon Godin: And how many in the anglophones?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: It's the same thing. To get to the very top, to get to colonel and above, you have to be qualified at a superior level.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Well, why is the official languages office saying it's not happening and we are behind? And why did Rémi Landry say we're behind by four years? Why, if it's so good? Why are you here if it's so good?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I'm not saying it's so good. I'm saying the previous plan, where we tried to universalize everybody, to train everybody in the other language, is not too good. We have to focus on getting the people who are going to meet the public, who are going to command units, who are going to be the managers throughout the armed forces, to be bilingual.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I don't know how much time I have left. I'll give you a quick example. Recently, in September I think, we went to Romania for the Sommet de la francophonie. I flew home with the Prime Minister on a military aircraft. A film was shown. Normally, all you have to do is push a button if you want the movie to be in French or in English. But the film was only available in English.

Our francophone military personnel who have to take military aircraft when they travel abroad, to Afghanistan for example, aren't able to watch the films in French when every DVD you get at Blockbuster is in both languages. This shows a lack of respect.

Maybe you're going to tell me that I will no longer be entitled to travel on these planes.

• (0955)

Hon. Josée Verner: No. That was your experience on the plane. Let me tell you about my experience when I went to Afghanistan. I can assure you that the four officers aboard the Hercules I was travelling on addressed me in French.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The people on board my plane spoke to me in French too. But the example I gave was the onboard movie.

Hon. Josée Verner: I'm responding to your example and I can even tell you that one of the pilots I spoke to in English asked me to give him an opportunity to practice his French.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's good.

Hon. Josée Verner: I think that—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Don't change the subject.

Hon. Josée Verner: Well, one story equals another.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's what you may think, but I'm telling you that a francophone on board the aircraft that night was not able to watch a movie in his mother tongue. It's just one example, and I wouldn't want to rely solely on that example.

Do you agree that it is not right?

Hon. Josée Verner: Do you agree that the example I gave you was positive?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Hold on, I'm asking you a question: Do you agree that it is not right? I don't want an answer to another question. Do you acknowledge that it was not right?

Hon. Josée Verner: That's not a question. I answered your question, sir. There is a real willingness to learn French, and I witnessed this when I went to Afghanistan in the fall.

The Chair: Your time has already run out.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can't you increase it to 10 minutes, Mr. Chairman? It's too short.

The Chair: Mr. Pierre Lemieux, please go ahead with your question.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To begin, I'd like to thank Ministers O'Connor and Verner for agreeing to meet with us on such short notice this morning to discuss these important issues.

I'd like to start by telling you that I served with the Canadian Forces for 20 years. I started as an Officer cadet at 17 years of age, and I retired as a lieutenant-colonel.

[English]

It's necessary to explain this so that you know I have lived the military system at all steps, from being a junior officer right through to being a senior officer. Unlike my colleagues, especially those across the table, I have a thorough understanding of the system and how it worked and how it did not work.

I've been sitting here listening to my colleagues, and as well-intentioned as they may be, they clearly do not understand the military. They do not understand what makes the military unique, and they don't understand why the previous official languages policy did not work in the military. I look at Monsieur Nadeau. He spoke of many things, but his experience with the military lasted less than one day.

I'd like to tell you that the old system did not work—and it's not just me saying that.

[Translation]

The former Official Languages Commissioner, Dyane Adam, reviewed the former government's bilingualism policy and was very disappointed with the findings. The new Official Languages Commissioner has also described the recent bilingualism policy as a failure.

There's a considerable amount of money being spent on second-language training, \$20 million annually, all for minimal results: the wrong candidates were chosen and were not trained to high enough levels, and were assigned to the wrong places. So yes, it was a total failure.

[English]

What does our military teach its soldiers and its officers in situations like this? If something is not working, then make the necessary changes in order to accomplish the mission. If plan A is a failure, then develop and implement a plan B. Having listened to the opposition, the opposition says no, continue with plan A, pour more resources into plan A. It's plan A or nothing, even if it's failing.

There's no sense in this. We have had two Commissioners of Official Languages tell us that the system put in place by previous governments was a failure, so let's make the necessary changes in order to accomplish the goal.

[Translation]

Could you remind us what was ineffective and inappropriate about the universal approach and warranted the implementation of the current transformation model?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I'm going to ask Colonel Milot, who's the expert here, to identify these areas.

Colonel J.L. Milot (Director of Official Languages, Department of National Defence): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

A few elements are responsible for the DND and the CF going away from the universal approach and going toward a functional approach as proposed in the transformation model. One element is obviously the recommendations made by the Commissioner of Official Languages, whereby the transformation model had to take into account all those recommendations, and it does. That's the first element.

The second element is a realization that the universal approach did not provide us with what was required, and it was unattainable both in terms of time available to train all personnel in the Canadian Forces to a bilingualism level and in terms of finance. It is unachievable to think the CF can train 100,000 people to become bilingual, especially since our model of movement of people entails people being transferred to unilingual units. If you provide French-language training or English-language training to a military member when he first arrives in service and then you transfer him to a unilingual organization for a period of five to seven years, chances are that your investment will erode with time. It did not make sense. It was, in a way, an inappropriate use of money.

What we have done in the functional approach is earmark the people who will occupy functions that are to be provided bilingually, be they services to the public, as was brought up earlier, or leadership positions or supervisory positions. When necessary, you provide the second-language training to those people prior to them occupying these functions, be it in a bilingual organization or in an organization of French or English designation.

By taking this approach, what you get in return is that once the formation or the second-language training has been provided to that person, that person immediately occupies functions requiring the use of that second language. Hence, he immediately puts to good use the training he has just received, and in many cases will improve upon that particular training.

I'm hopeful that I've provided two very key elements of why the universal approach had to be modified and why it was so important that we make a *virage*, if I may say, toward a new approach.

• (1000)

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I have two minutes left. Thank you.

I'm wondering if you could tell us some of the key advantages, then, of the new policy.

Col J.L. Milot: The aim of the official language transformation model is clear: it's to better meet the exigencies of the law. We have areas where we have done particularly well, primarily under part III, military justice. We've made great strides in this particular area. Even in the area of our senior leadership—among our colonels, navy captains, and general flag officers—most of our senior officers have a level of bilingualism. The numbers are quite high when we're looking at BBB, and they are certainly very high even at the CBC level.

What we're saying is that progressively, with our senior leadership, we will put forth an aggressive plan to rapidly close the gap and ensure that our senior leadership meets the expectancies of a superior level of bilingualism. That will be done progressively, starting this year, by having the lieutenant-general level and above meet CBC. And I can say, today, that the expectancies are to meet that for December 2007. Today, already, we meet those exigencies. I checked last week.

Two years later, in 2009, the same will apply to our major-generals who occupy bilingual functions or who are in bilingual regions or are even outside bilingual regions. The same will apply to brigadier-generals starting in 2009, and there will be a very aggressive second language training program for colonels and navy captains once they're first promoted. It doesn't mean that when those people are promoted to brigadier-general or higher ranks that they're not sent on second language training to even further accelerate the process. What we're saying in the transformation model is that the engagement for ensuring that our senior leadership becomes bilingual very quickly is certainly an engagement that is listed in the transformation model.

Have I answered your question?

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Milot, I have to stop you there.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

Mr. D'Amours will be asking the next question.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to start by thanking you for appearing today. And I must say, Mr. O'Connor, that I appreciated the fact that you made the effort of speaking French in the first part of your speech. As a French-speaker who did not use to speak English, I simply want to acknowledge that effort.

Colonel Milot, you said that not imposing bilingualism helps ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act. That's illogical. I'm not going to ask you to respond to that, but I can tell you that the opposite is true.

Ms. Verner, you referred to concrete action. Section 2 of Bill S-3 states:

43.(1) The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take measures to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society and may take measures to [...]

"Shall take measures" means doing your utmost to reach the equality of status and use of French and English. No reference is made to limiting bilingualism measures. You said earlier your government had taken concrete steps. I'm not about to congratulate you. Axing the Court Challenges Program was perhaps a concrete step in your opinion, and it may very well be as far as your government is concerned, but it certainly is not a positive measure.

Mr. O'Connor, you referred to the work you're doing on bilingualism and you mentioned there were francophone, anglophone and bilingual units. But it won't always be possible to have francophones with other francophones, anglophones with other anglophones, and bilingual persons with other bilingual persons.

Minister, can you tell me, in the sort of situations Canada is currently facing, how you're going to make sure our soldiers are safe and healthy?

I'd like you to answer me in French.

• (1005)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: That would be very, very difficult.

Since the beginning of the Official Languages Act, we have had English-language units, French-language units, and bilingual units. They work quite well, no matter what the circumstances are. We have also employed English-language units beside French-language units, but what we do is ensure that the headquarters is bilingual so that they can operate with both units. We've had no difficulty with this approach. It allows anglophones to operate within an English milieu, it allows francophones to operate within a French milieu, and it allows them to achieve their full promotion possibilities within those structures. But those people who wish to—not so much the men, but the officers—attain the highest levels of the armed forces must become bilingual, and they must be able to operate in the bilingual units.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, I asked you to answer me in French. I'm going to make my final argument. I know that time is running out.

If I were a lower-ranking French-speaking soldier and my superior gave me instructions just like you did, in other words, only in English, I wouldn't understand a single thing. As it turns out, thank God, I am bilingual.

You've just given us a perfect illustration of the problem, Minister. The fact that people only speak French or English is not the problem. However, when the safety and security of our soldiers is at stake and superiors are unable to give assistance, information or orders to soldiers in their mother tongue, that's serious business. How do you think it's possible to respect or protect such people under those circumstances? It's impossible. If I hadn't learned English, minister, I wouldn't have understood your answer.

If I were a soldier and I wasn't bilingual, how do you think I'd manage in the army given the new measure you intend to implement this April? It's distressing and shameful that things are as they are, Minister. You're saying that bilingualism is commonplace. So why don't you continue to make it the policy? Why doesn't the department do that?

• (1010)

The Chair: Your time has run out.

The floor is yours, Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I'd like to thank the two ministers for having agreed to appear on such short notice and for explaining their new approach.

As you are all aware, I'm the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages. It's very important for me to understand exactly what is happening. My question is directed to Minister Verner.

Ms. Verner, our Prime Minister made you responsible for official languages, which gives you an opportunity to set the tone when it comes to policies affecting federal institutions. I know that you're very demanding when it comes to official languages. As far as horizontal coordination is concerned, your approach is based on cooperation across the board. In fact, you mentioned in your speech that you're going to continue to work with each and every one of your colleagues. So that brings me to my question.

What is your specific role in assisting Minister O'Connor in the implementation of the Canadian Armed Forces Official Languages Program Transformation Model?

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Ms. Lavallée.

The Prime Minister gave me the dual responsibility of horizontal coordination and specific duties in relation to the Department of Canadian Heritage. This dual role ensures that government action is more consistent. Not only does it give me a more broad-based understanding, but it means I have the tools to play a coordination role and to set the tone for government policy in relation to the official languages support program.

I'm working very closely with my colleagues. I made a number of announcements a few months ago alongside my colleague the former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The purpose of these announcements was to promote francophone immigration. I have also worked with my counterpart from the Department of Health to make sure minority groups get access to health care services. In short, I've worked with all my colleagues around the cabinet table. More recently, I have had an opportunity to work with Minister O'Connor on the transformation model.

I particularly welcome my colleague's initiative as he sought to respond to what amounted to a record of failure. I listened to Mr. D'Amours, the member for Madawaska—Restigouche attack the work my colleague has done in response to the former Official Languages Commissioner's recommendations. Even though I wasn't present, I presumed that he was just as virulent when asking questions of the former government whose record was far from brilliant and was criticized on several occasions.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chairman, I have a lot of respect for the Hon. Josée Verner, the minister responsible for official language, but she is not here to moralize about what other governments may or may not have done. We are asking her to be accountable for what is occurring under her watch as the minister appointed by the Prime Minister of Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your comments.

You may continue, Minister.

Hon. Josée Verner: I'll continue. Thank you very much.

In response to Ms. Folco, I would simply say that I am trying to put things into perspective. If it is okay for one party to be critical, then it should also be okay for the other party to do likewise. Rest assured that my colleague, Minister O'Connor, is determined to ensure compliance with the act. He has implemented a results-oriented transformation model. This initiative should be welcomed.

It's all very well to criticize us, to role play and pretend you're a soldier in the line of fire and ask the minister to play the role of general, but we need to deal with the real issues. We'll be following the transformation model my colleague has brought forward with much interest.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I'll have to stop you there.

Mr. Malo, please go ahead and ask the next question.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for coming today.

Everybody around this table agrees that the transformation under way is a major one. The fact that you agreed to appear before us on such short notice is evidence of this. On that note, Minister, I would like to quote a passage of your opening statement:

Counting on my support, my colleagues ensure that the institutions for which they are responsible fully comply with the Official Languages Act. They are accountable before Parliament, they consult with communities [...]

I'd like to know, Minister O'Connor, with which communities you consulted before you brought forward these reforms.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I'm going to ask Colonel Milot to answer that, since he developed the detailed plan.

Colonel.

[Translation]

Col J.L. Milot: The transformation model was developed based on the minister's office's recommendations, including recommendations which came as a result of complaints we received.

The approach adopted with respect to some communities caused a number of incidents over the recent years. The recommendations which came as a result of this can certainly be found in our Official Languages Program Transformation Model. I'm referring here to part VII of the act, which is a major section and which is now justiciable.

Mr. Luc Malo: No community was expressly consulted before the model was developed.

[English]

Col J.L. Milot: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: Ms. Boucher said that you were demanding, Ms. Verner. Don't you think you haven't been particular enough? Did you ask your colleague to conduct broader consultations with francophone communities before moving ahead on this proposal?

Hon. Josée Verner: As Colonel Milot just pointed out, there were a number of incidents over which complaints were made to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. These complaints came from people from various communities throughout Canada, and the commissioner's recommendations were then implemented. In this sense, we took into account the complaints made by communities.

Mr. Luc Malo: Thank you very much.

Minister, you stated, and you used figures to back you up, that francophones were very well represented throughout the Canadian Forces. But the more relevant statistics would be in relation to the number of francophones who are able to use French on a daily basis as their language of work.

Do you have any figures on that? I think that kind of data is important as it would paint a more accurate picture of the situation francophones face in the Canadian Forces.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I'll attempt to get you those statistics.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: Excellent.

Minister Verner, have you previously been a member of the Canadian armed forces?

Hon. Josée Verner: No. Unfortunately, I was never a member.

Mr. Luc Malo: Do you know how the language system within the Canadian armed forces works?

Hon. Josée Verner: It's important to remind people of my role. My role is not to be a member of the Canadian armed forces, but rather to ensure that my ministerial counterparts comply with the Official Languages Act. And in that regard, my colleague Mr. O'Connor has assured me, as have all my colleagues—

• (1020)

Mr. Luc Malo: So you have a firm grasp of what your colleague is trying to achieve.

Hon. Josée Verner: Absolutely. His objective is to comply with the act.

Mr. Luc Malo: Thank you.

The minister has just contradicted Mr. Lemieux who said that because we have never been in the Canadian armed forces we're not in a position to fully understand how the language system works within the Canadian armed forces.

I'd simply remind him that just because you haven't been a member of the Canadian armed forces does not mean you're not able to understand the situation. But the way that you've understood the situation is very clear. You are driven by an extremely partisan and highly conservative ideology.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll stop there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malo.

I'd ask Mr. Godin from the NDP to ask a final question.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to congratulate you, Ms. Verner, for having admitted that the former government didn't do a good job. That's why a number of reports have been released. You were right to say what you said, because we have been fighting for official languages for years.

However, I can't congratulate you for the fact that your government axed the Court Challenges Program, which gave minorities an opportunity to defend themselves. Instead, the government's attitude has been to say that it doesn't see why it would give money to people who would use this money to fight the government.

I've already said in the House of Commons that the government shouldn't use taxpayers' money to appeal any ruling in favour of an everyday Canadian. Why would you use taxpayers' money to appeal decisions in favour of Canadians?

Over the course of our national tour, we consulted people from all regions about the program. We weren't there to hear people's complaints, but rather to consult them. Everybody agreed that scrapping the Court Challenges Program hurt bilingualism in Canada.

You say that the transformation model will provide results. What mechanism has been established to measure these results? You've given yourselves up until 2011. Mr. Milot said that you'd have a model by the end of 2007, but that it was already producing results. What mechanisms do you currently have in place producing these results?

Hon. Josée Verner: As you know, the issue of the Court Challenges Program is currently before the courts. So I won't comment on that. As far as measures—

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's before the courts because you have taken taxpayers' money and used it against them.

Mr. O'Connor.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Benchmarks will be set within the armed forces on what will be achieved in all the different categories. They will be measured each year, and a public report of our achievements will be made each year.

Mr. Godin, we are starting to implement the transformation model on April 1. We haven't implemented it yet. We're starting now.

In the past—and I'm not going into the political realms of the past, but failure after failure after failure over decades—We are trying to break that approach. We are trying to get to a plan that will actually achieve what the Official Languages Act calls for.

We are on your side. I know you keep attacking us as if we're working against you, but we're not.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You're doing what you were doing when you were in the opposition and you were doing a good job.

What I'm saying is, if you go to being functional instead of universal, where is section 7 of the Official Languages Act, and where are sections 41, 42, 43? Where do you want to make the promotion of bilingualism? By moving from universal to functional, automatically you're telling people they don't have to do it any more. You're telling the kids in school they don't have to learn the two languages, because the government has a spot for them.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: We cannot achieve the universal within the Canadian Forces. We cannot get everybody to a bilingual level. It's the way the armed forces operate. We cannot leave people in locations for decades in either an English zone or a French zone. We cannot get them bilingual. We cannot do the entire armed forces.

What we're trying to do is meet the requirements of the Official Languages Act. By the way, the Official Languages Act does not demand that everybody in Canada be bilingual.

• (1025)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Don't you think there is a disadvantage when you look at it? Eighty-nine percent of francophones are bilingual, and of the anglophones, only 11%, which means the francophones, to go up in the ranks, have to be bilingual.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Not any more than an anglophone.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Then why is it 89% to 11%?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Because it's imagined they have the opportunity to learn the English language more than English people have a chance to learn the French language.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: It's because of the geography of our country. We have a country of 10 million square kilometres.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I was in British Columbia, and the Chinese communities come to British Columbia and learn French. How could they do it?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: How many?

Mr. Yvon Godin: The percentage is going up every year—pick it up.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Our percentage is going up every year.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I honestly think what you have done here, and probably I agree, is you're saying you're following the law, but the promotion of bilingualism will fall apart.

Mr. Landry said it himself on Radio-Canada television that they're going backwards. I think it's sad, and I hope you review what you have done.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Godin, I don't believe we're going backwards. I believe we're going to achieve the goals set out in the Official Languages Act. They haven't been achieved for decades. We are attempting to do so.

As I said, the current system doesn't work, and we're trying a new system. We will be measured year by year. When I come back here a year from now, we'll see whether there are any changes or not.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, your time has run out.

[English]

This is the end of our second round.

[Translation]

I'd like to thank the two ministers. As all the members of the committee said, you were very kind to accept our invitation to testify before the committee despite such short notice.

[English]

I want to really thank you, both ministers and the other guests, for being here on very, very short notice. I'm sure the members all agree with me. They've all mentioned we're really, really pleased you care as much about official languages as we do. We urge you to continue the good work. Thank you very much for coming this morning.

We're going to suspend for about two minutes, because we have some future work we want to discuss.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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