



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 117 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, November 1, 2018

—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, November 1, 2018

• (0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) we are resuming our study on the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future.

This morning, it is our pleasure to receive the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages, and La Francophonie. We are very pleased to have a minister for official languages and La Francophonie, among others. In addition, it is in the minister's title.

Welcome to our committee, Ms. Joly.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie): Thank you.

The Chair: This is extremely important. It's your first appearance before our committee in the discharge of your new duties.

I will let you introduce the people who are with you. As per our usual procedure, you will have about 10 minutes to make your presentation, and this will be followed by questions and comments from the members of the committee.

Once again, welcome, Madam Minister Mélanie.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I like that, “Madam Minister Mélanie”. Thank you, Mr. Chairman Denis, I appreciate your kind words.

I am pleased to be here with you today, and to see familiar faces. I want to emphasize the presence of my parliamentary secretary, Ms. Alaina Lockhart, and I want to thank her for her work.

I wanted to thank the committee for all of the good work it does above and beyond the different political parties that make up the committee; I appreciate your work. We are always looking for official language allies from all parties. It's important.

I also want to thank all of the people who contribute to the work of the committee.

Let me introduce my team: Guylaine Roy, Deputy-Minister in charge of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie; Denis Racine, Director General, Official Languages Branch, and Yvan Déry, Senior Director, Policy and Research, Official Languages Branch.

I am pleased to be able to share with you today the achievements of our government in the area of official languages.

[English]

This is also an opportunity for me to talk to you about the action plan for official languages 2018-2023, “Investing in Our Future”, which I unveiled in the spring.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister has given me a strong mandate for official languages, which allows me to continue to meet our government's commitment, while supporting the Francophonie nationally and internationally.

The Prime Minister has also asked me to continue to implement the Action Plan for Official Languages, which proposes historic investments of \$2.7 billion over five years, including \$500 million in new funding. It's a clear indication of our government's commitment to our communities and our official languages.

Last March, together with the Prime Minister and several of my colleagues, I was honoured to unveil the action plan at Mauril-Bélanger School, the school that, as we know, bears the name of a passionate advocate for bilingualism and official language minority communities across the country. The school is in the riding of our colleague, Mona Fortier, here with us today. Mauril Bélanger, unfortunately, left us far too soon.

Our plan proposes a clear and ambitious vision, new funding, and specific measures to meet the needs of official language minority communities, while ensuring their vitality and promoting English and French across the country.

What is our vision? We believe in Canada's linguistic duality. We believe that it is one of the pillars of the social contract that unites us as a country. Our linguistic duality can be preserved only if it is rooted in the vitality of dynamic communities, only if it is embraced and expressed by millions of people across the country.

We believe that we are in a watershed moment for our communities. Indeed, after 10 years of inaction on the part of Harper Conservatives, even as linguistic communities faced important demographic challenges, it was time to act to protect them.

Canada cannot claim to be a bilingual country if its communities cannot live every day in the official language of their choice. In short, our population's bilingualism and the strength of our linguistic duality depend on the vitality and sustainability of our official language minority communities, and that is what we want to defend and promote.

Bilingualism is a crucial factor in protecting our official languages and supporting those who defend them across the country.

•(0855)

[English]

Let's be clear. Our communities are dynamic. I've seen this firsthand on many occasions, whether on National Acadian Day, at the opening of Place des Arts in Sudbury, or during my visits to the Yukon and British Columbia.

I have also seen the challenges these communities face. The 2016 census indicates that our country's overall population is growing faster than the number of francophones across the country, and that among the English-speaking majority outside Quebec, bilingualism is stagnating. So we must take action, and that is why the action plan sets ambitious targets.

[Translation]

Our goal is to restore the relative proportion of francophones outside Quebec, and increase the bilingualism of English-speakers outside Quebec. We want a strong Canadian francophonie and a Canada where citizens' efforts to learn their second official language yield results.

[English]

We want to support the unique needs of the English-speaking communities in Quebec, particularly those in rural areas. To help achieve this, we have announced new funding. The new investments provided for in budgets 2017 and 2018 add up to almost \$500 million over five years. This amount is in addition to our current and permanent investments, which will be maintained.

[Translation]

In total, we are talking about almost \$2.7 billion over the next five years—the biggest investment in official languages in our history.

We are devoting more resources to measures with a proven track record—for instance in the areas of early childhood and education. We always listen to our communities, and that is why we have also begun to implement new measures based on our observations during the consultations. For example, there were heartfelt pleas from community organizations when they told us about their lack of resources. We heard them. That is why we have increased their core funding by 20%. They are major partners, and we will continue to work closely with them to ensure that the action plan brings concrete results to communities.

Indeed, we believe the action plan must be implemented by, for, and with our official language minority communities and organizations. That is certainly something you've heard too. It's a winning approach that allows us to better tailor programs to the needs of communities. We've also taken into account the particular situation of English-speaking communities in Quebec, which face different challenges, from limited access regarding employment opportunities to a shortage of services in English.

The plan also includes some important new measures to guarantee the vitality of our two official languages. Indeed, this will include strong support from early childhood, so that our youngsters may be educated afterwards in the language of the minority, and develop a strong sense of belonging from a young age, which will contribute to the building of their identity. This will also involve the recruitment, settling and integration of francophone immigrants in official

language minority communities, in order to maintain their demographic weight and ensure their long-term survival.

I recently had the pleasure of further outlining two initiatives that are particularly important to me. The first affects our young people: we believe that all children should be able to flourish, grow and have fun in their first language. It's a matter of community identity, vitality and sustainability. On September 25, I announced that we were doubling the Community Cultural Action Fund, bringing the total funding envelope to more than \$21 million. By 2019, 1,000 official language minority schools will be able to offer more cultural activities to their students. Thanks to this investment, more than 4,000 cultural activities could take place over the next four years. And hundreds of thousands of children will be able to benefit.

Across the country, citizens have also told me how important it is to read community news and stories in your own language, and to hear your own accent on the radio. It is a matter of linguistic security, and of a confidence in your way of seeing the world, and approaching one's environment with the regional colour that informs each of our minority official language communities, whether they are on Isle Madame, in Nova Scotia, or in Whitehorse, in the Yukon.

•(0900)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):
Let's hear it for Isle Madame!

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Long live Isle Madame!

Our government is also aware that official language minority community media face significant challenges. For the first time in an action plan, the government is responding directly. On October 4, I outlined the implementation of the Community Media Support Fund, with an envelope of \$14.5 million, including \$4.5 million for hiring interns and \$10 million for special projects, to be managed together with the Official Languages Community Media Consortium, which brings together thousands of organizations, throughout the country.

While we are getting ready to mark the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, I have been mandated to start a review to modernize the act. We intend to conduct the review in collaboration with official language partners and communities and also with parliamentarians and members of the public. This is an important exercise.

Also, I am continuing this work with all of my colleagues to see to it that our official languages remain at the heart of our action. Last week, I was proud to announce, along with the President of the Treasury Board, the proposed amendments to the Official Languages Regulations, which had not been reviewed since they were created in 1991. That announcement was long overdue.

Our proposal responds to requests from community representatives, particularly francophones outside Quebec, who must deal with a completely different reality. Indeed, the fact of being geographically dispersed throughout the country can sometimes cause major challenges when it comes to providing bilingual services. Our changes will mean an improvement in bilingual federal services offered in Canada pursuant to the Official Languages Act. We want additional services to be offered where people need them.

In Alberta, this could mean opening new offices to serve citizens near a French-language school. In Charlottetown—and in all provincial and territorial capitals—this will mean service in French for travellers at railway stations and airports. In Quebec, the English-speaking communities, for example, in Gaspé, could have access to more services in their first language.

The bottom line is that across the country, close to one million Canadians will be better served by their government. The proposed amendments aim to support and strengthen the vitality of our communities across the country, taking into account the reality of those who live there.

No services will be eliminated; on the contrary, we will improve them for everyone. With this initiative, we are contributing to the presence and influence of the French fact in Canada. We will all benefit from it and we can all be proud of it.

Speaking of which, I would like to touch briefly on the influence of the French fact in Canada, and particularly as concerns francophone communities outside of *la belle province*. However, one thing is clear: the Canadian francophonie is alive and well, it is dynamic and it is also different, depending on whether you hail from Moncton, North Bay, Trois-Rivières or Winnipeg. Having studied this subject closely, you know this only too well.

If Quebec is the heart of a strong francophonie in the country, we know that we must protect French from coast to coast, and that minority francophone communities need our support.

Linguistic rights are written into our Constitution and our Official Languages Act, and we will continue to protect them and promote them. Our government is committed to providing that support, which includes notably the deployment of our action plan. And our government is working hard to implement it. The work is well underway, and I am delighted to continue it with you.

[English]

It will be a pleasure for me to answer all of your questions.

[Translation]

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Without further ado, we will now have our question period with the members of the committee.

We'll begin with Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, we are very pleased to have you with us this morning.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am happy to be here.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That is fine.

You closed on the very topic of my questions. You talked about linguistic rights and the fact that they have to be applied. Minister Brison and yourself share a responsibility for the act and its implementation, both in the government apparatus and in government agencies.

Over the past three years, have you had to intervene through email, letters, telephone calls or verbally, at Cabinet meetings or with one of your ministerial colleagues, to point out that in a given area of activity in a given department, the act had not been followed?

• (0905)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm very happy to be able to defend official languages with a strong voice within Cabinet. I am also very happy to have a Prime Minister who believes in the importance of official languages. He has indeed invested in an important action plan, but also committed to more protection for official languages, as well as for official language minority communities, by launching the process to modernize the Official Languages Act.

I often have to intervene with my colleagues. Most people know that when it comes to official languages, we can always...

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Could you give us an example?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: ... do better. All of the members here, around the table, would agree that we can always do better. However, we have shown, be it through the Action Plan, the review of the Official Languages Regulations or the modernization of the act, to what extent this dossier is a priority for us.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: We learned, thanks to Mr. Orfali from the *Journal de Montréal*, that the Canada Infrastructure Bank provided no bilingual services when it opened in the beginning of the year. And yet, it is a Crown corporation. Did you intervene at that time with Minister Sohi, to ask him to remedy that situation?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We feel it is very important that bilingual services be offered, both in the public service and at the Canada Infrastructure Bank. That is why we committed to a real improvement in service provision, notably in those provided by the Infrastructure Bank. We are very happy to have appointed a francophone Quebecer to the bank's management. I also discussed things with my colleague François-Philippe Champagne, who agreed that it was unacceptable that...

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I saw him yesterday.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: ... the current linguistic quality of services offered by the bank were not up to expectations. He committed to remedying that, and of course I am going to work with him to ensure that the bank complies with its obligations under the act.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Very well.

A lady in Calgary, Alberta, wrote to me, not too long ago. She feels that the Service Canada Royal Vista office should be providing bilingual services. This lady has been going there often, for several years. There is a sign displayed there that says that citizens can obtain services in both official languages. However, this citizen says that systematically, she can only access service in English.

Personally, I find that situation deplorable, and I intend to send you a letter about it soon. Can you act? Can you speak to Minister Jean-Yves Duclos, since this falls under his responsibility, I believe, and ask him to remedy the situation?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It will be my pleasure to receive your letter and to reply to it.

We have brought in various measures, because we find it important that our minority official language communities have access to bilingual services. We feared that the low demographic weight of francophones in some regions of the country would hamper the provision of bilingual services, because of Official Languages Regulations provisions that required a certain percentage of francophones in minority situations in a given region, in order to offer services in French.

In order to avoid a possible lack of French services, we first of all imposed a moratorium, to make sure that in all of the federal offices outside Quebec that normally provide services in French, those services continue to be dispensed.

Afterwards, we amended the Official Languages Regulations to ensure that we increase our French-language service provision outside Quebec, since we knew that this was a big concern. That is what I announced last week, with the President of Treasury Board. From now on, a million Canadian men and women, especially outside of Quebec, will be receiving more services in French.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: We did see that announcement.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Pardon?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: We saw that announcement. We are well aware of that.

I'd like to ask you another question. Some of the replies you provide to committee reports are long, and others less so. In all of your replies, however, there is a paragraph referring to the Conservative decade and to budget cuts.

Could you give us an example of cuts made by the Conservative government between 2006 and 2015?

• (0910)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There was a lot of inertia on the part of the Conservative government.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I have a list.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: The minister was answering.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Since you have opened that door, dear colleague, and in order to show you to what extent official languages are not a priority for the current Conservative opposition, the last time the expression “official languages” was used by your political party in the House goes back to last May.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Could you give us an example of cuts that took place during the 10 years we were in power?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: And in fact, the critic Steven Blaney asked me another question about official languages since his appointment to this file.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Chair, I'd like to obtain an answer to my question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: In addition...

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Chair, could you intervene, please? That is not an answer to my question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It will be my pleasure to discuss this matter with the opposition.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Chair, please?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The Conservative opposition did not really provide any direction in the matter of official languages.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Mrs. Boucher, please let the Minister finish her sentence.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: ... I have a point of order.

The Chair: Madam Minister, have you finished?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes. I was asked a question and I was answering it.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Do you have an example of a cut?

The Chair: Let us move to the next speaker.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have the floor.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you.

[English]

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

As you know, I worked for the English Montreal School Board prior to entering politics. We know that education in the minority language is essential to preserving the strength of the community as well as the language.

Can you please elaborate on the new investments this plan has outlined? How will this money be used?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, dear colleague. Congratulations again for all the leadership you're showing to support the anglophone community in Quebec. It is very important.

Regarding education in general, first of all, we've stabilized funding that will be sent to provinces and territories. That was really important to us. We've also heard about the importance of supporting infrastructure projects in education, and therefore there will be more money in that sector. In the official languages plan, there is more money for infrastructure in education—more than \$10 million.

Also, we've heard all around the country about the importance of supporting first- and second-language learning in French, and about the need for more teachers. We'll be working on that, as well. That was a demand coming from the different ministers in charge of official languages across the country, in all the provinces and territories. Following that demand, we decided to support it.

Finally, one of the things we announced a month ago was more money to organizations that will be supporting cultural activities in English and in French in minority settings all across the country. For the Quebec anglophone community, this program will be managed by ELAN, the English-language association in Quebec.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Perfect. That's excellent news. Thank you very much.

Obviously, we always speak about the French minority in all of Canada, but in Quebec we know there is a very strong English minority and oftentimes, because of the provincial politics, maybe they don't always have the same access to services and all of that.

In what ways is our plan helping anglophone Quebecers, other than through education? How are we ensuring that we're doing things the community actually wants us to do? Are we hearing from people on the ground who are telling us what they need in their communities?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: What we've heard is that anglophone communities, English-speaking communities in Quebec have specific needs. In particular, the ones outside Montreal really need our support because they don't necessarily have access to many services in the official language of their choice. Therefore, we decided to provide a specific funding mechanism, which is \$5 million to support English-speaking communities, and that will be to the benefit of the communities. We will work with the communities to support their specific needs. It could be access to employment or support for youth initiatives, which are two things that the English-speaking community has mentioned to me.

I've had the chance to have many discussions with QCGN, and I was also in Richmond recently, where I went to see the fantastic community of townshippers, who were advocating for more community services in their official language and were also demonstrating the strength of the English community in Quebec, which is so important to who we are as a country.

• (0915)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you so much.

[Translation]

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have a minute.

[English]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: This is my last question, quickly. Can we get an update on the reinstatement of the court challenges program? When should we expect to see people being put on a panel and money becoming available?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We've entered into a contract with the University of Ottawa. The university is putting in place its expertise centre and hiring people, and we've also created a panel. All the interviews have been done, and we're really in the final stage.

Basically, I just need to do the final take on it, and we'll have really good news to announce very soon.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now move to François Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Madam Minister.

I would like to continue with the subject that Ms. Lambropoulos just mentioned.

Does "very soon" mean "in 2018"?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: That's great. So, it will be in a month or two. That is very good news.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, it is very good news.

We are pleased to have revived the court challenges program. To answer my colleague's question, I should say that the court challenges program was abolished by the previous government.

Mr. François Choquette: Congratulations on reviving it.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We felt it was important to do so.

Mr. François Choquette: That's great.

The exact date of the decision escapes me, but how did you feel when you became aware of the Federal Court judgment in the matter of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique versus Employment and Social Development Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That case is currently before the court.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, but what do you think about it personally?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Because it is currently before the court, I will respect their independence, but the impact of the judgment concerned me and still does.

That is why I decided to send a letter to all my cabinet colleagues, so that I could assure myself that they still support more positive measures from the government. In fact, for our official language minority communities to really have some vitality, we need Part VII to be strong. The Supreme Court tells us that our interpretation of Part VII must be broad and liberal.

I will be happy to continue this conversation both in the context of the modernization of the Official Languages Act and of any other instrument needed to maintain Part VII and the vitality of official language minority communities.

Mr. François Choquette: I am happy to learn that it concerned you and that are still worried.

I know that the FCFA and the QCGN sent you a joint letter on the matter. It was after that letter that you sent a letter to all your colleagues pointing out the importance of continuing to comply with the same rules of Part VII and reminding them that they still apply.

The Commissioner of Official Languages also changes his way of seeing things. I do not know whether we can still talk about the Netflix agreement—it happened when you were Minister of Canadian Heritage—but it also involves official languages and Part VII of the act. I am one of those complaining about that confidential agreement between the government and Netflix, and I received an answer. Seeing that answer, and in the light of the new interpretation of Part VII, it can be said that “positive measures” no longer means anything.

What would be a good definition of “positive measures” for you?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: First of all, I had the opportunity to speak to the Commissioner of Official Languages last week and to encourage him to give his mandate a broad and liberal interpretation. With a proactive commissioner, while we respect his independence—which is fundamental—we can be assured of having language rights not only protected but also promoted.

As for the Netflix agreement, I must tell you that we are very proud that we were able to secure needed investments and resources in both our official languages.

As for the way in which we interpret the federal government's overall role in official languages—you ask quite a broad question—it goes without saying that it is a priority for our government. We recognize that the Official Languages Act is a quasi-constitutional act. We recognize that our Constitution protects language rights. By reviving the court challenges program, we can support minority communities that wish to defend their language rights.

• (0920)

Mr. François Choquette: Excuse me, Ms. Joly, I only have five or six minutes...

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Generally, as I said, in terms of positive measures, it is important for us that the government be proactive.

Mr. François Choquette: I see that it is complicated to define positive measures, isn't it?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No. The government has developed a guide that gives a number of examples.

Mr. François Choquette: Can you send us that guide that defines proactive measures?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, with pleasure.

I think the Commissioner of Official Languages talked to you about it. The guide—

Mr. François Choquette: Ms. Joly, I am sorry to interrupt you. I really do not have a lot of time.

Last week, the Commissioner of Official Languages told us that positive measures were everything and nothing at the same time. In other words, for example, the part of the action plan for official languages on early childhood includes positive measures dealing with the Netflix agreement. But there is no connection.

With online language courses, the plan puts the positive measures with Employment and Social Development Canada, in British Columbia. But there is no connection.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's what the commissioner said.

Mr. François Choquette: This is why I am asking you about your definition of positive measures in connection with specific cases. For example, with the Netflix agreement, what would be some positive measures in your opinion?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As I told you, there is a guide in the government. My team will be pleased to send it to all committee members.

If the committee is interested in studying that issue, I would be happy to listen to your recommendations, because it is a concern for our government. As I told you, we have a broad and liberal interpretation—

Mr. François Choquette: I am really sorry to interrupt you, Madam Minister.

I have one last question for you.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Fine, go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: I am in the final minutes of the time I have.

Will we have Statistics Canada's enumeration of rights holders before the next election?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Listen, we revived the long-form census...

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, but will it have all the questions we need?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: ... that the previous government had abolished.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That is not what we want to know.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: For us, it will be important to use the new data in 2021, because, with that data, we will be able to come with good—

Mr. François Choquette: Will you go and see your colleagues in order to ask them...

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am sorry, I just want to finish my sentence.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, I know.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: With good data from Statistics Canada, we can then have good programs and strengthen our official language minority communities. As I told you, in the regulations we revised, we included a new definition of official language minority communities.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, but that is something else.

Enumerating rights holders...

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, I have to move to another speaker.

Mr. François Choquette: I understand, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Fortier, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you for being here today, Madam Minister.

As you know full well, I have been an activist for 30 years. Currently, my role is member of Parliament for the constituency of Ottawa—Vanier, which allows me to work with the government and to have a seat at this table.

A few weeks ago, I told my colleagues that I was extremely proud. When I was young, I hoped to be at this table. It is a pleasure for me to be here. I thank you for having recognized the work of my predecessor, Mauril Bélanger, for his defence of French during his time as a parliamentarian.

I would like to discuss the recognition of Ottawa as a bilingual city. The good news is that, last December, there was a resolution to make the City of Ottawa bilingual. In the action plan, I noticed that there is a funding measure to support and sustain the City of Ottawa in fulfilling its new role.

What is our government's position not only on the bilingualism of the City of Ottawa, but also on the way it is going to make those resources available?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for that question, my dear colleague. I also have to thank you for the leadership in official languages matters that you have shown throughout your entire career. I think also thank you for having helped to have Ottawa recognized as a bilingual city.

My thanks go to everyone who has worked on this issue and provided a huge amount of effort for years, especially the movement for an officially bilingual capital of Canada and all its allies in the government. I know that it is very important for our chair here today.

We also celebrate the leadership that the former Ontario government of Ms. Wynn has provided on the issue. For us, it was really important to finally recognize Ottawa as a bilingual city.

My fellow members, thanks to your work and to all those you represent, we have invested \$2.5 million to provide more support for Ottawa communities who finally want to work to recognize French and the active offer of French services. We will be working with the communities that are going to submit projects so that we can distribute the \$2.5 million.

● (0925)

Mrs. Mona Fortier: That is excellent. That was in line with the action plan.

Let us move to the modernization of the act now. I have already had conversations with Ottawa people who would like the soon-to-be-bilingual status of the city to be better reflected in the act. Do you have any comments? Do you believe that strengthening the status of our national capital as an officially bilingual city could be part of the exercise of modernizing the act?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: All good news is welcome, I feel. I will be happy to have that conversation with you, with those involved in Ottawa, and with my parliamentary colleagues, because it is not every day that we amend the Official Languages Act. We have a golden opportunity here, a historic opportunity to have those conversations and I hope that we will have them in the coming months.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: The other topic I want to discuss is the “by, for and with” you mentioned. I particularly appreciate the “with” because we often just hear “by” and “for”. The “with” is really important; we see in the action plan that priority has really been given to civil society and that communities will genuinely be able to work for their own development.

I would like to understand how the government will be working with the provinces and territories to demonstrate the importance of the “by” the “for” and the “with”. Could you explain the way in which you will be working, not only with civil society, but also with the provinces and territories?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: For us, certainly, more direct support for communities was fundamental. As I was saying, we have heard their heartfelt pleas. The way to ensure the vitality of language communities involves providing services by, for and with those communities. That will create and keep jobs in the communities, and it will develop that feeling of linguistic security that is so important for their vitality and their long-term development. As a result, the largest part of the \$500 million in new money that we have invested will go directly to official language minority communities.

At the same time, we have decided to hold constructive discussions with the provinces and territories, especially in the area of education. It seemed important to us to obtain an accounting of the use of the money made available by the federal government in education in order to ensure that the money is really being used to support official language minority communities specifically. We have decided to keep that funding stable. As I said to our colleague Emmanuella Lambropoulos, we have also made sure that we respond to some of the requests, such as better support for recruitment and training of teachers of French as a first and a second language, and for infrastructure.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Fortier.

For the next comments, the time will be shared by René Arseneault and Jean Rioux.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Please let me know when half the time is up.

The Chair: We are not pressed for time.

Mr. René Arseneault: My thanks to you, Madam Minister, and to the officials who are here with you, for coming to answer our questions.

I am hoping to focus on the practical side of the wonderful announcements that we have heard from your lips. I come from a minority community, I am Acadian and I feel that culture must begin at school. I will leave that topic to my colleague Darrell Samson, who is an expert in education. Outside school, however, we must also hear our language spoken, we must read our poets and our novelists and hear our musicians and singers. So this involves community media, such as community radio.

Last spring, before the session adjourned for the summer, we heard an alarm sounded by community media who told us that it was only a matter of weeks or months before anglophone community radio stations in Quebec or francophone ones outside Quebec would be closing their doors. It really was a distress call and we are only just responding to it. Can you tell us what the reaction has been to the announcement of \$14.5 million and what that money means for the interns and the other front-line people?

● (0930)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you very much.

As you said, when we held consultations on official languages in 22 cities across the country, we really heard the heartfelt pleas from community media, including community radio. We saw the extent to which hearing one's own particular voice on the radio helps to build local and regional pride. It generates their feeling of being a proud francophone or a proud anglophone, even though they live every day in the language of the minority.

I was really touched by the issue and I wanted to work with my colleagues to make sure that it was recognized. To support community media, we have developed a strategy with funding of \$14.5 million that includes two programs.

First, \$4.5 million goes to Young Canada Works, so that young Canadians can work in community media and become the next generation of journalists, which is so important for our democracy and our communities.

Then, we wanted community media to operate “by and for communities”, and independently, of course. So we worked with the Association de la presse francophone, the Association des radio-diffuseurs communautaires du Québec and the English-language Arts Network, ELAN, the anglophone organization that has created a consortium of community media in Quebec. Working with those organizations, we are going to allocate \$10 million to special projects that will really respond to community media requests. That is how we are going to support them.

This official languages initiative is added to those that I announced as Minister of Canadian Heritage, including \$50 million to support local media all across the country. In his mandate letter, my colleague, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, received a strong mandate to support the country's media.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We move immediately to Mr. Rioux.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Good morning, Madam Minister.

You know that I am from Saint-Jean, a military town.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Each year, the base takes in 5,000 recruits who come to immerse themselves in a francophone environment. We also have the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean. For me, that was the main reason why I went into politics. People wanted university education back and our government announced it last year. The first officers are already at the college.

What is the impact of the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean on bilingualism in Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: One of the first announcements we made, in fact, was to bring back university education to the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean. University education was provided in Kingston, mostly in English, but it was not provided in French at the military college in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. It had a direct impact on the advancement possibilities for members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

We were able to see the first university cohort enter last September. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Rioux, for all your fine work on this file. Finally, members of the military will be able to take university education in French. That will help us not only in ensuring a better presence of French in the Canadian forces, but also, internationally, to have troops going into French-speaking conflict zones.

When the previous secretary general of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie went to the UN Security Council, she noted that half the conflicts where the blue helmets are present are occurring in French-speaking locations. For us, it is important to have senior officers who can speak French and command armed forces in French.

●(0935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

It is now Mrs. Boucher's turn. She will be sharing her time with Mr. Clarke.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Chair, yes, I will be sharing my time with Mr. Clarke, because I have just come from a major trip to Africa and I am a little tired.

I am sorry, Ms. Joly, but you are going to bear the brunt of that.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am ready.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Ms. Joly, I am very happy that you have joined us today, but I am going to correct certain statements you have made.

I was elected in 2006 and I have been fighting for official languages ever since. So I am asking for an apology to the Conservatives here who fight for the official languages on a daily basis, just as much as your Liberal colleagues and our New Democrat colleague.

You said earlier that the Conservatives did not give a damn about official languages. That is false, Madam Minister, and I want an apology now. I have been fighting like everyone else since 2006. Our committee is not political. We are fighting for the same rights, the rights of minorities all across the country.

If you have not had questions from Mr. Blaney, it is perhaps because we do not get proper answers from you, Ms. Joly. I will not stand for you saying such things, while the people around this table are fighting with your colleagues to achieve the same goal.

That is all I have to say to you.

The Chair: Over to you, Madam Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I understand my colleague's point of view, but the Conservatives have nothing to teach me about official languages.

You must know that, during the 10 years they were in power, they slashed more than \$675 million from CBC. That had a direct effect on the vitality of minority language communities.

They also abolished the court challenges program, which is critical for the advancement of language rights in the country. The court challenges program is cut every time a Conservative government gets into power.

In addition, we know that the Conservatives eliminated the long-form census, which is critical for the understanding of language rights and the reality of language communities in the country. When no information is forthcoming from Statistics Canada, the government, Liberal or Conservative, does not have the data it needs to properly respond to the needs of our communities.

I understand my colleague's comments and I respect her commitment. However, in reality, the facts speak for themselves. In official languages issues, we are investing \$2.7 billion. We have modernized the regulations to Part IV of the Official Languages Act. We are going to modernize the act itself.

So I have no lessons to learn from my colleague.

The Chair: Mr. Clarke, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: In a number of places in Canada, Canada Post uses Shoppers Drug Mart as a subcontractor. Where I live in Beauport, it happens to be a Familiprix.

A number of places where Canada Post subcontracts its services to Shoppers Drug Mart are in locations with the 5% of the population needed to get bilingual services. But, clearly, the employees at Shoppers Drug Mart, a subcontractor, often do not have the ability to provide bilingual services in those specific locations.

What do you think about that? Do you not see it as a problem? I have received a number of emails on the matter saying that we should make sure that, when Canada Post uses subcontractors, provision is made for bilingualism.

I think it's something that warrants examination.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I know that my colleague Carla Qualtrough is currently working on the Canada Post issue.

There were a lot of cuts to Canada Post under the Conservative government, and we wanted to make sure that home delivery was maintained and that better services are provided for Canadians in all regions.

I recognize that modernizing the Official Languages Act is important for all members of the committee. We can certainly discuss Canada Post being able to provide bilingual services everywhere in the country and having an active offer.

Personally, as Minister of Official Languages, I would be perfectly fine with that.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Perhaps it would be good to write to the subcontractor to tell them about the problem.

In addition, how do you explain the fact that the court challenges program has been inactive for eight months? No requests have been accepted. There is a lot of unrest in the communities about this. How is it that the program has not been working for eight months?

• (0940)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I do not want to add insult to injury, but we first had to re-establish the court challenges program, because the Conservatives had abolished it.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: It is not working.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We have agreed on a contract with the University of Ottawa. They have developed a centre of excellence

and have started hiring people. We have a committee that has conducted all the interviews.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: All the requests have been rejected, have they not?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I will be making the appointments very quickly and then cases will finally be able to be heard through the court challenges program. Our government knows that it is important.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: When I was appointed spokesman for official languages a year and a half ago, you provided me with the opportunity and the privilege to go to your department. I did not meet with a deputy minister there, but with one of the directors, and I no longer remember his name.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It may have been Hubert Lussier, who unfortunately has retired.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, he was very well placed.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We all liked him.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: His knowledge was impressive. The briefing he gave me was amazing.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: As a senior official, he had the integrity to confide in me that, in reality, the court challenges program had only been closed for two months and that its funding had lasted for the 10 years during which Mr. Harper was in power. It has now been eight months since any request has been accepted and I can tell you that it is causing unrest in all OLMCs, all across the country. So something has to be done quickly.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The Harper government's intention was to abolish the entire court challenges program. Thereafter, the department expressed its opinion that the program was very important, if not almost constitutional, and it was impossible to abolish it without compromising Canadians' language rights. Given that situation, the government of the day was forced to maintain a degree of funding, but without protecting the court challenges program in its entirety.

As I was telling you, each time a Conservative government takes power, everything is abolished. The approach we wanted was certainly to do something about the appointments. We wanted a committee to appoint the most competent people in the country. In the next few days, I will have good news for you on the matter.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay, that's good.

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

Mr. Samson, you have five minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

Madam Minister, I would first like to speak in support of all the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages around this table. There is no doubt that they work in close cooperation for the advancement of the francophonie. However, what happened between 2005 and 2015 has weakened francophones all over Canada. Let me just give you the perspective of one francophone, and all my francophone friends, from one end of Canada to the other.

First, funding for the Action Plan for Official Languages did not increase for 10 years. If you calculate that at 2.5%, it probably means a loss of 15%. The effect was to weaken front-line organizations.

Here is the scenario. Because they have been weakened, they decide to undertake a court challenge, but there that program is, gone! They cannot even challenge the fact that it has gone. Then they decide to check the facts. They tell themselves that there are certainly a lot of francophones outside Québec and it will be good to check that. But there the long-form census is, also gone! What, no more census? How can that be?

Mr. François Choquette: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I honestly do not know what is happening today. I am not sure whether we are going to have a snowstorm or whether this is about something else, but we are losing it. We do not see our minister very often...

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am happy to be here.

Mr. François Choquette: ... could we take advantage of the fact that she is here with us to ask her reasonable questions? We have a lot of issues to deal with: the enumeration of rights holders, early childhood, and so on.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would have got to that if you haven't interrupted me.

Mr. François Choquette: I feel that the comments have been very partisan for a few minutes, and that is a pity.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your comments, Mr. Choquette.

• (0945)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, he interrupted me. I was in the process of ...

The Chair: I will give the floor back to Mr. Samson, and I am sure he will bear in mind the comment that was made.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I need a preamble in order to describe the situation on the ground.

In a word, that information was not available from the census. As a result, 187 offices providing bilingual services were going to be closed, but a moratorium was issued. That was a good thing. Then, the government announced that it was going to amend the official languages regulations. Not only did it decide to keep the 187 offices, but it also announced that 600 offices, newly designated as bilingual, would provide services across Canada. That is incredible!

The other day, I sent a note encouraging the establishment of French schools across Canada. I mentioned that, in every place with French-language schools, there would be bilingual services. That is powerful, it is incredible. As regards immigration, we have been trying for 10 years to get past 4% in francophone immigrants, but the figure is stuck at 2%. The reason was simple: no investments to encourage francophone immigration.

In that regard, let me read the announcement you made to the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne when you were in Toronto with Minister Hussen. It reads as follows:

This is a major advance on two levels. First, because it is a solution for a situation where francophone immigrants arriving at the country's largest airport are not even informed of the existence of French-language services and communities.

Things have changed overnight. In addition, requests for proposals go specifically to francophone organizations. The concept of "by" and "for" francophones is being applied. This is another incredibly important file, albeit a forgotten one. It was also one of the cuts that weakened francophones.

Today, we are in the process of re-establishing the situation and we must work together to do so. I thank you for the work that you are doing in that regard. My question is about federal-provincial agreements. We understand the issue of jurisdictions, but it is no longer a matter of wondering what is going to be done for francophones. As each project, program or initiative starts, it must be taken for granted that there are two communities and we must ask ourselves what impact the initiative will have on each of them. Then the initiative has to be developed as a result of that impact. That is the way we have to proceed. We have to back up if we want real success.

We met with Minister Duclos on early childhood. For children, that stage of life is critical. If we are unsuccessful in including them when they come into the world, we will always be unsuccessful. That is one of the most important objectives. Mr. Duclos managed to insert a language clause. Some people say that it could be a little more substantial, but let's say that it's a good place to start.

In addition, Madam Minister, for francophones, you have added—

The Chair: Mr. Samson, the minister has one minute left to respond to your comments.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay. The language clause is important, as is the strategic agreement with school boards. Those two measures give us some clout.

Do you think we will be able to continue down that path? It's crucial for the communities, which must regain their strength.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you.

Clearly, we have a strong defender of official languages here.

The Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023 contains two new features. First, early childhood is recognized for the first time. For young people to continue to be part of a minority language community, they must be raised in the minority language from the outset, that is, from daycare. The same applies to kindergarten, primary and secondary school. This is fundamental to the sustainability of our language communities.

There is also the issue of immigration. For the first time, the importance of francophone immigration is recognized. This will make it possible to recruit, welcome and integrate francophone newcomers into our minority language communities, whether in Moncton, Winnipeg or elsewhere.

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

I would also like to ask a question. Your new mandate focuses on the international Francophonie.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

The Chair: You attended the last summit of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF).

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

The Chair: I think it's important that someone take care of the international Francophonie. In terms of funding, Canada is the second largest contributor in the world, after France. Then there are countries such as Switzerland and Belgium, in particular, which contribute less. We have an important role to play, through the OIF, in the Americas and around the world in promoting the Francophonie.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

The Chair: In your opinion, could the draft of the new legislation mention that Canada will indeed continue to play this role, that is, to promote the international Francophonie?

● (0950)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: First of all, I think Canada has an important role to play in the international Francophonie. You are absolutely right and, as minister responsible for the international Francophonie, I thank you for your work.

At the last congress of the Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF), we were able to demonstrate how our government can play a leadership role on this issue. We talked about the importance of protecting the French fact on the Internet. We are currently working with France and various countries to come up with concrete solutions to protect the French fact on the Internet.

In his speech to the OIF, President Macron recognized Canada's leadership in this area. That's good news.

On your more specific question, I think it would be worth having that conversation. There has rarely been a link between the international Francophonie and the Canadian Francophonie in our legislation. However, from one government to the next, Canada has always recognized the importance of promoting the international Francophonie. I think it would be worth having that conversation. I see it in a very positive light.

Let us remember that OIF is the second largest organization in terms of membership after the United Nations. In this sense, it is a very credible organization that we want to continue strengthening because, as a country and as a government, we have said that we want to strengthen our multilateral organizations and Canada's presence in the world. We are part of the international Francophonie and the Commonwealth, the two great networks that distinguish us as a country.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much for your presentation and for answering our questions.

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

Thank you, everyone.

The Chair: We'll suspend for a few minutes and then continue with the people accompanying you for the second hour.

● (0950)

(Pause)

● (0955)

The Chair: Please take your seats.

We'll continue our meeting until 10:30 a.m. Then we will suspend the meeting again to sit in camera to discuss the work of the committee for about 10 minutes.

We are now pleased to welcome Yvan Déry, France Fortier and Denis Racine.

Welcome to the second part of the study on the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in our Future.

We have about half an hour with you, so we'll start right away.

Mr. Clarke, you have the floor.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the renewed mandate letter that the minister received this summer, we are still pleased to note that the Prime Minister requires her to begin an examination towards modernizing the act. However, the mandate letter does not say whether this will happen this year, next year or after the next election.

Could you, who work on this every day in the department, tell us what is happening right now? Could you tell this committee whether the examination has begun? Is the department currently working on launching, undertaking, starting this examination, in short, moving towards modernizing the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Denis Racine (Director General, Official Languages Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage): Yes, the department is getting down to work on it.

It is actually a complex process that takes some time. We are currently weighing the different options on how to do this. Of course, the minister will have to decide which route she wants to take.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: So you talk to each other about it?

Mr. Denis Racine: There is of course the whole legislative process, but well before that, it may be necessary to hold consultations on certain fundamentally different, but complementary, parts of this complex legislation. Some parts are directly aimed at the public, while others are much more directed at the machinery of government.

Those different amendments may require parallel activities, but they will have to be combined at some point. We need to assess what we can do in the coming months and year and determine how far the minister can go within the current mandate. Then we will determine the next steps and establish a critical path. That is what we are studying.

● (1000)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Let me interrupt you, Mr. Racine.

Let's assume that the government has good intentions and does want to modernize the act. Based on your understanding of the time and the steps required to do so, have we reached the eleventh hour? From an objective, bureaucratic and rational point of view, do you think it is possible to modernize the act before the next election?

I'm sure it's difficult to answer that question. Are we going to modernize the entire act or just parts of it? Assuming that we make significant enough changes to the act to modernize it from top to bottom, which is what the OLMCs want, will it be possible to do so by the next election or is it too late to do so?

Mr. Denis Racine: We can certainly start the exercise very soon. However, it is too ambitious to believe that we can introduce a new bill before the next election. There are steps to be taken between now and then that will take some time.

However, the exercise can get under way quickly.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I'm sure.

You must be following the work of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, which has just published a preliminary report.

As mandarins who know the official languages well, what advice can you give us? What do you think we should be looking at here at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, since we have about six or seven months left? We had thought about studying the granting of enforcement powers to the commissioner, or the positive measures mentioned in part VII of the Official Languages Act. What do you propose that we do? If you were in our shoes, what would you do? What would you focus on in particular, especially in light of the comprehensive study being conducted in the Senate?

By the way, my question is for all of you.

Mr. Denis Racine: I may not be in a position to advise you.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: You are in a very good position.

Mr. Denis Racine: However, various exercises are under way, and it would be ideal if they could be completed. As you said, the Senate committee is conducting an extensive in-depth study. The commissioner conducted an online consultation. In both cases, some aspects may not have been discussed enough.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: In your opinion, what aspects have so far not been studied by the Senate and the commissioner?

Mr. Denis Racine: The act has various aspects. For example, it is undeniable that part VII is being extensively discussed everywhere. However, the act also deals with concepts such as linguistic duality that should be further studied. There may be other aspects of the act that would be worth exploring.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: In the wake of the worrisome decision in *Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique v. Employment and Social Development Canada*, were there any directives from the Department of Canadian Heritage or from senior officials of the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie on how to apply the act in the future?

The commissioner himself told us that, for all intents and purposes and to his great dismay, he was no longer receiving complaints related to part VII of the act, if I am not mistaken. Is that right, Mr. Choquette?

I am addressing Mr. Choquette because he is well versed in this area.

As for you, in your respective departments, have you had to take any administrative actions to that end?

Mr. Denis Racine: The Department of Canadian Heritage has a very specific role, which is to promote part VII of the act and coordinate its implementation by supporting federal institutions.

Within the federal public service, there are various governance mechanisms and networks, including the official languages champions and those responsible for part VII. Tools have been developed, and we continue to do so every day, as we did before the decision. Promoting part VII and supporting its implementation in the federal public service continues as before. The Official Languages Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage will always continue to do so.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Samson will now be sharing his time with Mrs. Fortier.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I therefore refrain from any preamble.

First of all, thank you for being here.

Mrs. Fortier, it has been a while.

I know Mr. Déry very well, but this is the first or second time I have met Mr. Racine, I believe.

You play a very important role in the official languages file and the ensuing work. I have comments on three topics.

The first is research, an issue that always concerns me when it comes to minorities, because if we don't have the necessary data, we can't justify our arguments. Earlier, I mentioned the "by" and "for" francophones. When it comes to tourism, I don't want to hear that we are going to do this for tourism first and then do that for francophones. I would like planning to be integrated. I'm just putting the idea out there for you.

Finally, the minister has just announced changes to the official languages regulations to confirm that more bilingual services would be available across the country, particularly at airports and stations in provincial capitals. As an example, I would like to mention Halifax airport, which, for five or six years, has had a reputation for being the worst in terms of French-language services. How will you do that? How will you ensure that you can honour that commitment?

Mr. Yvan Déry (Senior Director, Policy and Research, Official Languages Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage): We discussed research before the committee resumed its meeting. The need for research is very real, and different organizations are funded to do the research. However, the programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage were not designed to fund research in the communities. But the organizations to which we provide core funding can use it to pay for research contracts.

In the past, we have used an endowment fund to create the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities, based in Moncton. This was not done as part of our programs, since it was a separate decision by the government. In summary, we financially support the circulation of research to a degree, but not research as such.

You mentioned my title as a policy and research officer. When we need to do research for our programs or for the government, our approach is to award research contracts, such as to Statistics Canada or to our in-house researchers. However, this mechanism cannot fund the activities of institutes that conduct research for communities. That is the current situation, and I am aware that this may be a challenge or a shortcoming.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Is my time up, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'll turn the floor over to Mrs. Fortier. Perhaps you could answer my other questions during the discussion or in writing at a later time.

Mr. Denis Racine: May I answer with respect to tourism?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'll turn it over to Mrs. Fortier on that issue.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

My question is about the new Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future. I know that, during the consultations, the communities submitted to you the idea of seeing the machinery of government through the lens of official languages. I understand that, as an administrator, you are responsible for applying such a lens to the action plan.

Could you explain to me how this will work? For example, will there be new round tables or other initiatives in support of the action plan that will be the direct result of your role as an administrator?

Mr. Denis Racine: Shortly after the action plan was announced, we put in place what we call a dialogue process. For each of the action plan initiatives under the responsibility of the Official Languages Branch, we brought together the community and institutional stakeholders involved to launch the discussion, listen to them and put in place the “by” and “for”. It is important for us not to make decisions in isolation or assumptions about the situation. It is really about taking the time to meet with community organizations and educational institutions, for example, and having a real in-depth discussion on how to optimize those investments while listening to stakeholders, their reality and their needs.

This process is ongoing. Some of the funding initiatives will only be launched next year, which gives us some time to prepare properly and be constantly listening. After all, we use the word “dialogue”, which proves that the exercise has no end and is ongoing. I think this will really allow us to better help the people we serve every day.

• (1010)

Mrs. Mona Fortier: I'm trying to understand the immigration initiative. This initiative is not necessarily new, but it is critical for communities.

To achieve the targets that have been set, how will you support the Department of Citizenship and Immigration on this issue, while playing your own role?

Mr. Denis Racine: One of the main initiatives in the action plan is immigration. This component has been assigned to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. This department is also in the implementation phase. Like us, it has initiated a process of dialogue with the communities. It is in the process of establishing the parameters and criteria for new initiatives.

Funding enhancement initiatives are already in place. We are working closely with that department, but it is responsible for the file. The good news is that our ways are similar. Before even taking action, the department will discuss with key francophone stakeholders outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec to develop initiatives that reflect local realities. The bulk of the funding is expected to start flowing in the next fiscal year. I think there is already some funding available this year.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Choquette.

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

Again, thank you for being here.

It has been announced that the court challenges program would be ready in 2018, in other words in one or two months. That's good news.

For how many years will the court challenges program be funded, so that official language communities have access to it? Do you have that information on hand?

Mr. Denis Racine: We have the information somewhere, but we can send it to you later, if you wish.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, I would appreciate that.

The committee would also like to know the amount from the language rights support program (LRSP) that will be available for official language communities over the next five years. How much of the funding will be allocated to official languages? If memory serves, the program is now geared toward official languages and human rights. Could you tell me how much of the funding will be devoted to official languages, because it is not clear?

Ms. France Fortier (Acting Director, Operations and Regional Coordination, Official Languages Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage): The former LRSP allocated \$1.5 million per year. The new court challenges program provides \$5 million per year, with a minimum of \$1.5 million for official languages. The same envelope was maintained for official languages.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

Mr. Yvan Déry: Let me give you some additional information. The court challenges program (CCP) is not managed by our branch. So we are not the best people to give you an answer. However, I can tell you that the envelope for the old LRSP was \$1.5 million, which included program administration, promotion and conflict resolution, while the \$1.5 million in the new CCP will be used primarily to support cases. That's a real improvement.

Mr. François Choquette: Good, that's very good news.

I have another question about the revision of the official languages regulations. That too is good news and we are very happy to hear that. Most organizations and associations are very happy about it too.

If I understand correctly, the moratorium is ongoing, meaning that the current programs will be maintained and money will be invested. How many millions of dollars will be invested in implementing the regulations?

• (1015)

Mr. Yvan Déry: The Treasury Board has estimated the cost of bilingual services in the new offices. I believe you will be meeting with Mr. Brison later this month. You will have to ask his team those questions to find out the details.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay. So you have not participated in the revision of the part IV regulations.

Mr. Yvan Déry: That is really the responsibility of the Treasury Board team.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

I also have a question for you on another issue that actually is important to you, namely the enumeration of rights holders. Earlier, I asked Ms. Joly the question, but she did not have time to answer. What role do you play in this issue? This is an issue of great concern to our committee. It is important for official language minority communities that the number of rights holders be properly counted. In addition, under part IV, the number of rights holders will increase.

What role will you play in the enumeration of rights holders in the next census?

Mr. Yvan Déry: We are working with Statistics Canada, but it is a complex issue.

It is easy to determine someone's mother tongue, but it is very difficult to figure out the schools that the parents attended, whether they went to French-language school, immersion school, and all that.

Mr. François Choquette: My question is more about—

Mr. Yvan Déry: Yes?

Mr. François Choquette: Earlier, the minister did not have the opportunity to answer it. Is there a will to do this before the next election?

Mr. Yvan Déry: You say “the next election”, but it must be done before the next census, in reality, because it is during the census that the count will be done.

As a result of the work of this committee—you heard from Statistics Canada officials—the government's response was quite clear. It mandated Statistics Canada to examine all the possibilities, all the possible ways to enumerate rights holders. It has set up a committee of experts who are testing questions, and you mentioned, I believe you mentioned, that they came to see you last March to discuss them. So the work is being done and different approaches are being tested.

Mr. François Choquette: Now that the Department of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages are divided, how does that change your daily activities?

Mr. Denis Racine: Honestly, not much has changed.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

Mr. Denis Racine: We are still part of the Department of Canadian Heritage, but we also serve Minister Joly with the help of Ms. Roy, who was here earlier.

Mr. François Choquette: For example, in the case of the Netflix agreement, the responsibility was with the Department of Official Languages and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

In terms of communications—earlier, we talked about community media—is it the Department of Canadian Heritage or the Department of Official Languages?

How do you find your way through that?

Mr. Denis Racine: We clearly have a privileged relationship, if I may put it that way, with our colleagues responsible for the various issues within the Department of Canadian Heritage. So, on a daily basis, nothing changes. We have access to those people, we can discuss and point out concerns or opportunities.

In terms of operations, we are still located in the same place, on the same floor, in the same offices—

Mr. François Choquette: I understand, yes.

Mr. Denis Racine: —and it's business as usual.

I think the good news is the positive feedback from organizations, telling us that the transition has not had an impact on their relationship with us. People wanted to create a seamless process and we are very proud of it.

We are pleased that this change within government, within cabinet, has not had a negative impact on the people we serve on a daily basis. I must tell you that we have made an effort to ensure that there is no negative impact as a result of this change.

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

We will move on to the next remarks, those of Ms. Lambropoulos and Mr. Rioux.

They will be sharing the time.

Go ahead, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuela Lambropoulos: Exactly. As you said, I will be sharing my time with my colleague Mr. Rioux.

[*English*]

Sorry, I'll ask my question in English.

Are there any specific programs or monies allocated for immigrants who come to Canada and who are part of a minority language group but live in a different language reality, such as immigrants who come to Quebec whose second language is English and who do not speak French? Is there any plan for these people? Is there any help coming from this action plan?

•(1020)

Mr. Denis Racine: Again, that is an initiative that is under the leadership of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. One major initiative that falls under its lead is to create a pathway for immigrants when they come to Canada, which applies to anglophones who have English as a second language and immigrate to Quebec. The department is working on a pathway to facilitate the process of arriving in Canada, integrating into the community, and getting access to services in one of the official languages of this country. This initiative is being delivered by the department in collaboration with some community stakeholders, which is key to the success of this initiative. This is how your concern will be addressed over the next few years.

France, I don't know if you have some additional information.

Ms. France Fortier: No.

Mr. Denis Racine: Okay.

Mr. Yvan Déry: In the particular case of Quebec, though, there's a difference. The Government of Canada has devolved the selection and integration responsibilities for immigrants to the Government of Quebec through multiple agreements since 1978. With that devolution, Quebec has what they call the *maîtrise d'oeuvre* with respect to the selection and integration of immigrants.

The action plan has measures for francophone immigration outside Quebec, and we have targets for that. The IRCC and the Government of Canada are really hands-on for francophone immigration. In the case of Quebec, it's really the province that is the key player here, so the action plan doesn't go there.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay. Even though it's the provincial government that gets to pick, there are quite a few anglophone immigrants who live in Quebec. I've met a lot of them. Are they at risk of being removed by the Quebec government because they don't speak French? What happens in these cases?

Mr. Yvan Déry: We cannot really comment on the position that the Quebec government, Mr. Legault and la CAQ, has made on that, but it was made clear that, while Quebec has a major role to play vis-à-vis immigration, deportation is a federal responsibility, and discussions would have to be had if they were to move in that direction. Those discussions won't be had with us. There's certainly a federal responsibility there that would be called upon, and those discussions would be with IRCC.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay, thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Rioux, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Thank you.

Ms. Bombardier was on *Tout le monde en parle*.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: My goodness, not here!

Mr. Jean Rioux: No, not here.

I found her comments alarming for you who are promoting bilingualism.

According to the figures, in Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island, there has been an increase in the number of people who speak French. In New Brunswick, the mother tongue of

32% of the population is French. In Ontario, 527,000 people speak French as their mother tongue. There are 2,000 students at the Université de Saint-Boniface, which is a French-language institution. In Alberta, the number of people who speak French at home has increased by 53%, and in Vancouver, it has increased by 21%. The Vancouver area has 40 French-language schools and there is still a shortage.

According to Ms. Bombardier's comments, the francophonie is not significant. Is she wrong?

Mr. Denis Racine: The data you just shared with us and many other data are not necessarily in line with the statements made by Ms. Bombardier. For example, there has been quite a significant increase in enrolment in minority schools across the country.

We can also see a sort of renewal, if I may say so, of francophone artistic expression. We are going through a fairly interesting time in terms of creativity among official language minorities across the country. As you have seen, the communities immediately reacted to Ms. Bombardier's comments. People reacted that very evening. They did not remain indifferent to such a statement, they reacted very strongly. In the days that followed, the intensity of the reactions even increased.

I think it's an unfortunate situation. Fortunately, there are people across the country arguing that this version of the facts is not entirely accurate.

For our part, we continue to promote, provide data and use the tools at our disposal to encourage people to always keep a close eye on all the positive work that is currently being done in communities across Canada.

•(1025)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If there are no further comments from the committee members, we will—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Am I next?

The Chair: Do you want the floor again, Mr. Clarke?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes.

The Chair: We're listening.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I want to come back briefly to the modernization of the act, because I'm not sure I got a concrete answer. This is not a criticism at all, I just want to go deeper.

The mandate letter says there will be an examination. You said there are several steps. Has the first step, whatever it is, been taken? I don't even know what the first step is, but if there is one, has it been taken?

Mr. Yvan Déry: As Mr. Racine said, it is a fairly complex piece of legislation. Just drafting a bill like this takes the Department of Justice 12 months. So we cannot expect to introduce a bill in time for it to be passed before the next election. That seems pretty clear. That is why the mandate letter talks about starting an examination. You mentioned the review exercise.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Has the review started in any way?

Mr. Yvan Déry: Yes, we are working on it. We read all the briefs that are tabled in the Senate. Conversations with various organizations have taken place.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay.

Mr. Yvan Déry: We have proposed options for possible additional and complementary steps. Ms. Joly will want to sort through this and announce what she will add to it. However, it is important to work in a complementary way. She mentioned that, as part of the modernization process, if the committee so wished, it could, for example, work on the definition of the term “positive measure”. This could be a building block.

For now, we are thinking of the groundwork. We are not yet at the stage of drafting a bill.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I understand.

Mr. Denis Racine: The short answer is that the public service is looking at how to proceed. The minister said that she would announce her intentions for the process in the near future.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Do I have much time left?

The Chair: We're trying to adjourn the meeting so we can spend a few minutes on committee business.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay, but could I ask one last question?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Accountability is a concern we've heard a lot about. My colleagues are as aware of this issue as I am. However, you're the one who provides the funding, whether through action plans or recurrent funding.

There is a division of powers and jurisdictions, but as department officials, are you trying to establish some accountability with your provincial counterparts? Do you sometimes call them and tell them that, although they need money for paving, it would be good to spend a little on official languages? Do exchanges like that take place?

Mr. Denis Racine: Accountability is extremely important to the government and to the department's branch. It always has been and

still is. For us, it is important to update our reporting requirements and make them even more relevant.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Oh, well, do you have a list of requirements?

Mr. Denis Racine: It isn't a list, but rather a method we use to help the people we fund to gather information and report on results and the use of funds.

We are always trying to improve the way we obtain this information, whether it is community funding or federal funding allocated to the provinces.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Denis Racine: Accountability applies to all program recipients.

I believe Mr. Déry has something to add.

• (1030)

Mr. Yvan Déry: I simply want to clarify that all our programs are accountable. In 2013, the commissioner conducted a review and found that our accountability in federal-provincial relations was good. Still, we're trying to improve it and improve transparency. This is one of the issues being negotiated with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, for the renewal of our federal-provincial agreements.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Yvan Déry: In short, things are happening. Some of them are federal-provincial negotiations, and we can't talk about them. However, as Mr. Racine mentioned, we are always looking to improve our processes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I'm happy to hear it. Thank you.

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

Mr. Déry, Mr. Racine and Ms. Fortier, thank you very much for appearing before our committee.

We'll now suspend the meeting to continue in camera. I would ask anyone who this does not concern to leave the room. We will resume the meeting in a few minutes to consider committee business.

[*The committee continued in camera.*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>