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—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Order, please.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are proceeding to a briefing on the current roadmap for official languages. I remind you that this meeting is televised.

We are pleased to welcome the Honourable Scott Brison, President of the Treasury Board. Welcome, Minister.

Accompanying him are Anne Marie Smart, Chief Human Resources Officer, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, and Marc Tremblay, Executive Director, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer. Welcome.

We will follow the normal procedure. Minister, you have about ten minutes to make your presentation. Afterwards, the committee members will be able to make comments or ask questions. Minister, we are happy to have you. The floor is now yours.

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure for me to be joining you today. Thank you for the invitation.

I'm happy to be here to speak about our government's commitment to official languages and, in particular, my role as President of the Treasury Board.

As the members of this committee know, our Prime Minister holds both official languages very close to his heart. He has lived across Canada and across our linguistic duality.

I grew up in Nova Scotia in an anglophone community. I did not have to think too much about bilingualism back then. I did not listen to Robert Charlebois much or watch *La Soirée du hockey*. Like many others, I learned my French in Ottawa.

[English]

However, today I have two lovely bilingual daughters, and I often spend holidays with my in-laws who live in the countryside outside Drummondville.

[Translation]

My daughters are named Rose and Claire. We chose names that are easily pronounced in both official languages. We actually speak to them in both languages, but I fear they might inherit my accent in French.

[English]

Being married to a Quebecker has made me part of a francophone family and given me the gift of their language and culture.

[Translation]

Nowadays, I like the music of Trois Accords and I like to watch movies such as *C.R.A.Z.Y.* or *La grande séduction*.

[English]

It's with this mindset in part that I take on my responsibilities as President of the Treasury Board with regard to the Official Languages Act. These responsibilities were made clear to me and also to the Minister of Heritage in our mandate letters, which you've all seen.

Of course, my mandate letter, which is public—as are all the mandate letters—designates official languages as one of my priorities. More specifically, I've been mandated to “Ensure that all federal services are delivered in full compliance with the Official Languages Act, supported by the Minister of Canadian Heritage”.

My responsibilities fall principally within the scope of three parts of the act. Part IV concerns communications with and services to the public. Part V is about the language of work. Within reason federal public servants should be able to work in the official language of their choice. Part VI concerns the employment of both French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians in federal institutions to ensure their full participation.

[Translation]

As President of the Treasury Board, I also report annually to Parliament, outlining the progress made by federal institutions with regards to the application of the Official Languages Act.

I would like to share with you some of the highlights from the latest annual report.

[English]

The Government of Canada offers services to the public through more than 11,000 offices and points of service in nearly 200 federal institutions across the country and abroad, and 35% of these offices offer services in both French and English.

The latest report for 2014-15 demonstrates that over 95% of employees who provide front-line services to Canadians, and supervisors across the public service, meet the language requirements of their positions. When it comes to the participation rates of anglophones and francophones, they've remained relatively stable over the past 10 years.

[Translation]

As of March 31, 2015, the participation of anglophones in all federal institutions was approximately 73%, and 25% for francophones.

[English]

That closely resembles the 2011 census data where over 75% of Canadians reported English as their first spoken language and 23% reported French.

It tells us that the official language groups continue to have reasonable representation within the public service, and that there are fair and equitable opportunities for both anglophones and francophones to obtain employment within the public service.

•(1535)

The annual report also highlights measures being undertaken by federal institutions to create and maintain a bilingual work environment in addition to ensuring that all services and communications to the public are done in compliance with the act.

[Translation]

Institutions have also established clear performance objectives related to parts IV, V and VI of the act and included these in public servants' performance agreements where appropriate.

[English]

Another important step is the establishment of official languages champions, and persons responsible for official languages in their organizations. These people meet regularly to share best practices as they are responsible for the promotion and respect of official languages in their institutions. They discuss performance and develop strategies to maintain and monitor progress.

[Translation]

These are all important steps, but we have to do more. We know that federal departments and agencies face challenges when it comes to implementing the act. For example, best practices and shared knowledge can be lost in the turnover among official languages champions and those responsible for official languages. There is a need to ensure that effective social networks are in place to share and build on good practices and advice.

We are fortunate to have a bilingual public service. It is essential that language skills remain valued at work and that new employees take measures to acquire the necessary language skills early in their careers. Institutions must continue to promote a workplace that encourages the use of both official languages and the maintenance of acquired language skills.

[English]

Adapting to the evolution of technology and social media presents a challenge for federal institutions, but also an opportunity. Social media is one of the most effective and popular communication methods, as we all know, to reach the public, and it's important that communications be done in compliance with the act.

[Translation]

Golden opportunities are also available to us. I think about that often when my in-laws use Skype to talk to my daughters. If my

francophone in-laws can talk to my daughters across the country, why are we not deriving more benefits from those technologies to build bridges among all Canadians in minority settings? The tools available to us should help us make unprecedented bilingual services accessible.

Not only is our government committed to making all federal services available in strict compliance with the law, but there are also opportunities to go beyond our obligations.

[English]

I'm happy to be here with you today to discuss this because I have great respect for, and value, the work of parliamentary committees. I'm hoping that we can collaborate and continue to work together on these important issues. I want to congratulate the committee on its work so far.

[Translation]

I'm very happy to engage in discussion with you and to be able to count on your ongoing commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will immediately begin the first question period.

Ms. Boucher, go ahead.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you, Minister. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I notice a number of things. Over the past few years, under our Stephen Harper government, we saw the titles of Canadian heritage and official languages everywhere. Even under Paul Martin's government, which you were part of from 2004 to 2006, there was a minister responsible for official languages.

Official languages are now no longer part of any department's official title. They have disappeared as if by magic. How will you ensure that all federal services are provided in compliance with the Official Languages Act if there is no minister responsible for official languages?

•(1540)

Hon. Scott Brison: Thank you for the question.

In the mandate letter of the Minister of the Canadian Heritage and in my own mandate letter, it is very clear that compliance with the Official Languages Act is a priority for our government. It is of the utmost importance for our Prime Minister, and no one thinks otherwise. We will implement policies to ensure the promotion of our two official languages in Ottawa and across Canada. We will take every opportunity to develop services across Canada in both official languages. That is of the utmost importance to us.

Our cabinet is smaller than that of the previous government, but believe me, the respect and the development of services in both official languages are priorities for our government.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: If that is so important to your government, why is there no minister responsible for official languages?

Hon. Scott Brison: The situation is better, as two ministers are responsible for this issue. We have Ms. Joly, who is the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and myself, as President of the Treasury Board. She can also count on an amazing parliamentary secretary. It's better this way, Ms. Boucher, as two ministers are responsible for this matter. That's a good thing. We have doubled the personnel in order to show our respect for official languages.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I remain very sceptical. This may be clear to you, but Canadians are watching us. If the words "official languages" are removed, it's not clear for anyone.

I would now like to talk to you about the translation bureau, which your government has provided with very little assistance. A loss of 138 jobs at the bureau is forecast within the next two years and, according to an article in *Le Devoir*, you don't intend to do anything about that situation. Do you have a plan to ensure the translation bureau's future?

Hon. Scott Brison: Thank you once again for your question.

I think that the decision to cut jobs at the translation bureau was made by the previous government. It's clear that it is very important to invest in the translation bureau. We have a great deal of respect for the work they do. It's very important to support the bureau and make investments.

We also recognize the fact that it is necessary to use technology to increase its capacity to serve public servants and Canadians. So we will continue to use technology.

I think the previous government made the decision to cut jobs, but it is our priority to support the work of the translation bureau, and we will continue to do so.

• (1545)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You have been in power for seven months. Stop bashing the previous government. We don't want to know what others did not do, but rather what you will do. According to what I am reading in *Le Devoir* newspaper, you have no plans to ensure the translation bureau's future.

In the Speech from the Throne, the words "official languages" came up only once. The following was stated:

The government will support CBC/Radio-Canada, encourage and promote the use of Canada's official languages, and invest in Canada's cultural and creative industries.

Even as we are learning that the CBC sale process will be done only in English, I would like you to explain to us how official languages are being applied.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, I really appreciate Ms. Boucher's question again. It is a bit ironic for her, as a Conservative member, to be asking for more support for CBC/Radio-Canada.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: My question is about official languages.

Hon. Scott Brison: Our government recently invested a lot of money in issues related to the two official languages. I really appreciate its support and the investments that are part of the budget. After 10 years of cuts imposed by the Conservatives to CBC/Radio-Canada, it is important to reinvest in those organizations

[English]

It's a priority for our government to ensure that both Radio-Canada and CBC continue to have the resources they need to provide services across Canada in both languages. I wasn't aware of her party's passion for Radio-Canada and CBC, but we welcome the support for—

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I am mostly talking about official languages.

The Chair: Ms. Boucher, you have gone a bit over your time for asking questions.

Minister, if I may, I will now give the floor to Paul Lefebvre.

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

Welcome, Minister. I am very happy to have you with us. I am also very happy about the money the government has invested in CBC/Radio-Canada. Last weekend, people came to see us in Winnipeg to thank us for that development. I was very humbled by those people's support.

Your appearance before us is very timely. We are currently preparing a report on the translation bureau. Before we address that issue, I would like to point out that the previous government made cuts to the budgets of a number of programs. I am also a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. It is clear, according to all the reports, that all programs have undergone cuts.

Since I am worried by this situation, I would like to know how the Treasury Board could ensure the equality of the two official languages, given the cuts made over the past few years that have complicated matters.

What does the Treasury Board intend to do to remedy the situation? Will the cuts affect the services provided under various programs?

Hon. Scott Brison: Thank you for the question.

The Treasury Board, along with the Department of Canadian Heritage, is responsible for ensuring that, in the public service and as part of services provided to Canadians, all departments and agencies comply with the legislation and comprehensive policies. It is important for the necessary resources to be available and for investments to be made. It is also important to ensure that the policy is applied across the board.

• (1550)

[English]

There has been progress over the years. We have to continue this progress. The financial resources are part of the equation, and we need to make sure we have the right level of financial resources to deliver services in French and English. I also think we can take a more robust approach to the utilization of technology as well. I think that's important.

I said earlier that my mother-in-law outside of Drummondville uses Skype to talk to her grandchildren, but if she's in, say, Nova Scotia in an anglophone community and she goes to a Service Canada office, for instance, in Kentville, Nova Scotia, she can maybe find a francophone there or maybe not. Perhaps she could use technology to speak to a francophone or to Skype with an audio-visual capacity with a francophone public servant.

These are things that I genuinely want the committee's engagement on as we move forward to find ways to expand, not just to maintain, services in both languages across the country. With a combination of financial resources, technology, and innovation, I think we can actually expand, not just protect what we have but do better.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We heard from a number of witnesses from the translation bureau. It became clear that, over the past 10 years, under the previous government's policies, the translation bureau was treated as a business and had to be profitable. That forced several departments and programs to provide translation services internally. Rather than using the translation bureau, departments used people who were part of what is referred to as "phantom translation services".

Could you tell me how the Treasury Board will consider those internal translation services in the future?

Hon. Scott Brison: It is very important to maintain the quality of translation in government. That is why we encourage all public servants, as well as all departments and agencies, to use the translation bureau's services.

We have to ensure that the translation bureau has the necessary resources—in terms of public servants and technology—to provide its services effectively. Across the Government of Canada, public servants use a translation or comprehension tool a million times a week. That tool is often Google Translate. I would personally prefer them using a Government of Canada comprehension tool and government vocabulary, which is safer than Google Translate, for instance.

I know flexibility is needed, but our priority is to ensure that the quality of translation is sufficiently high. We always get quality translations, and that is why we encourage all public servants from all agencies and departments to use the translation bureau's services.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I now give the floor to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I want to thank you and your colleagues for joining us today.

My first question is of a general nature, but it is nevertheless important. In the 2016-17 Report on Plans and Priorities of the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Treasury Board is mentioned. The following is stated:

Continue the review of the pan-governmental governance for official languages, in collaboration with the Treasury Board Secretariat and Justice Canada.

We talked about this a bit earlier. We are wondering who is in charge when it comes to official languages. We are looking for them, but we unfortunately still don't know who they are. We don't know whether it's you or the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Moreover, if there are two people in charge, whom should we talk to?

There is currently a study on governance. I understand that there is a preliminary report. Will you make it public? When do you think you will complete that study and will you send it to the committee?

Hon. Scott Brison: Thank you very much for your question.

[English]

I'll repeat what I said earlier that in terms of the delineation between my responsibilities and those of the Minister of Heritage, my responsibilities fall principally within the scope of three parts of the act: part IV concerning communications with and services to the public; part V, which is about the language of work and that within reason federal public servants should be able to work in the official language of their choice; and part VI concerning the employment of both French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians in federal institutions to ensure their full participation.

We are working, and what is very clear by the words and actions of the Minister of Heritage and me...and I can tell you this is a priority for our Prime Minister.

Mr. François Choquette: Very well, Mr. Brison. I don't want to interfere. I just want to know what is going on with the government's study right now. Where is it and what's going on with that?

Hon. Scott Brison: For the next report...?

Mr. François Choquette: Yes. When will we have this, because there is a study going on right now so where is it? What's going on with that? When will it become public?

[Translation]

Hon. Scott Brison: I will ask Mr. Tremblay to answer the question.

Mr. Marc Tremblay (Executive Director, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): A study was announced in response to the assessment of the latest roadmap. In fact, the roadmap recommended that the Department of Canadian Heritage conduct a study to review governance. During the assessment, it became apparent that some public servants and individuals asked to comment on the roadmap were wondering who was making the decisions, on what issues and when. The Department of Canadian Heritage is carrying out the study, and the Treasury Board Secretariat participated in a task force's discussions. Information on the issue was identified, and a draft report is currently being studied by the Committee of Assistant Deputy Ministers on Official Languages.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Tremblay, can you tell us with whom this committee has met and what has been done? We will consider the roadmap, but since a worthwhile study has already been carried out on governance, we would like to know more about it. Can you tell the committee about that study?

Mr. Marc Tremblay: Since I did not conduct the study myself, it is difficult for me to answer in a comprehensive way. The Department of Canadian Heritage carried out the study. I can tell you that we participated in it. We consulted the stakeholders in charge of parts IV, V and VI the President of the Treasury Board referred to. So there are people responsible for official languages in the departments, and there are official language champions. Consultations took place and we participated in them, but that was only one part of the work done by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Brison, I wrote to the Honourable Judy Foote concerning what is now being called a “comprehension tool”. It is a good name and that's what it should have been called from the beginning. I asked her to reverse her decision about putting this tool in place, until the committee has completed its report on the subject. In fact, I sent you a copy of my letter.

We learned one or two weeks ago that the Portage tool had been made available although the committee is still working on its report on the matter. What are your thoughts about that?

• (1600)

Hon. Scott Brison: As I mentioned, public servants frequently use various translation tools, among them the one you are speaking about. When they use Google Translate, which is often, the quality is not guaranteed. Nor has government vocabulary been integrated into that tool. I think it is better to have a comprehension tool, and that it is very important to have access to one.

We are waiting on the committee's report and we will consider its recommendations. In the meantime, it is very important to continue to provide public servants with a tool that will help them. In fact, translation bureau translators use different tools, and technology, every day in their work. So it makes sense to me to continue to offer them a tool like the comprehension tool until we have received your report.

[English]

A million times per week across the federal public service public servants use a technology for translation or comprehension. Within the translation bureau the translators use these.

We have made changes, as have Ms. Foote's department, in terms of encouraging the use of the tool more for comprehension than translation of external messages. But are you suggesting we stop providing any of these tools so that everybody uses Google Translate? I don't think that would make very—

Mr. François Choquette: What I was asking.... I know that I don't have time, but I'll just answer you because you're asking me a question.

Hon. Scott Brison: Yes, that's fine.

Mr. François Choquette: I was just asking you, Mr. Minister, if you should not have waited until the end of the report.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, your time is up.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Choquette, believe me, we are waiting for your committee's report and we are going to consider your recommendations. However, in the meantime, public servants must

be able to use a comprehension tool. I respect the decision of my colleague the Minister of Public Services and Procurement. At the time, it was the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

In short, I think it makes sense to use that tool.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I thank you and your colleagues for being here with the committee today.

Like you, I am a Nova Scotia MP. I am extremely pleased that you are here and that you occupy a very important position in our government.

Before asking my questions, I would like to say a few things.

First, as opposed to you, I lived in a bilingual environment and was exposed to both official languages. You are in a similar situation today, and I congratulate you. Your two children Claire and Rose can go to French schools in Nova Scotia or here in Ottawa. As you know, students obtain excellent results in French schools, and we are very happy about that. Over the past 10 years in the province, there has been a 22% increase in the student population of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, and a 15% decrease in English-language school boards. You are certainly welcome, and we welcome you with open arms.

Secondly, I find it a bit ironic that my colleagues across the way, the Conservatives, are troubled by the fact that there will be fewer positions over the next two years in the translation bureau, when they eliminated 400 over the past three or four years. That is what caused the problem that exists today, in large measure. To be honest with you, that saddens me.

To conclude, may I say that there is no doubt at all that the translation tool is only a comprehension tool. It is not an official tool, as you just mentioned. It is simply a work tool.

My question is very important, Minister. As you know, Senator Maria Chaput introduced Bill S-209, which is now being sponsored by Senator Claudette Tardif. What is your opinion on that? Could some measures in the bill be implemented by Treasury Board, even though the bill will not be studied by both Houses? It would be very important to know whether Treasury Board could implement certain elements of the bill through regulations or other measures.

• (1605)

Hon. Scott Brison: Thank you very much for your question.

It should be said that the current regulations were put in place in 1991. There have been significant changes since that time. As I said recently to Senator Tardif, I am open to changes that would lead to modernizing the regulations and to reaching some of the objectives of Bill S-209. We can make a lot of progress by changing the regulations. This afternoon, I am going to meet with the Senate committee to discuss this same topic.

A lot of things have changed since 1991, such as technology, for instance. In my opinion it is clear that we must update the regulations. I would very much appreciate the committee's contributions to this.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much. It is very important for us to go forward quickly—I am thinking of immigration and refugees, particularly—in order to see to it that French-speaking immigrants can live in a francophone environment.

My second question concerns the bilingualism of Supreme Court judges. In his report, Commissioner of Official Languages Graham Fraser recommends that the judges of the Supreme Court be bilingual. This is one of your responsibilities in terms of services.

Could you enlighten us on this matter?

Hon. Scott Brison: Our government is going to honour its promise to appoint bilingual judges to the Supreme Court. We believe that Canadians should be able to be heard in the official language of their choice. This is very important for Canadians and for our government.

We have also committed to ensuring greater diversity in our judicial system. We are going to work with all parties in the House and all stakeholders to make the Supreme Court appointment process more transparent, inclusive and responsible.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I will conclude by congratulating the minister again on the quality of his French, which continues to improve. Bravo!

Hon. Scott Brison: Honestly, I don't feel entirely confident in French, and that is always...

The Chair: It's going very well.

Hon. Scott Brison: I really appreciate your patience with me.

My spouse is not patient. He refuses to speak French with me. Every now and then he says "Be quiet, I'm not Berlitz!" According to him, I speak too slowly. And then I answer: "Don't be mean, I'm sensitive."

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here with us.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Samson, you are kinder than my husband.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's always nice for me to hear that I am kind. I appreciate that.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: We agree with you on the fact that Mr. Samson is very nice.

I find it very admirable and good that you have named your girls Claire and Rose, the idea being that they have names that can be said easily in both languages. My children are named Sarah, William, Simon and Victoria for the same reasons, that is to say that their names can be pronounced as easily in French as in English. My children went to a French school. They are bilingual and even

trilingual. The more languages one speaks, the better. In any case, I wanted to congratulate you.

Earlier you spoke about the champions in the organization, and of the fact that you try to adopt best practices and transfer them. How does this work? I would like you to tell us about the official languages champions. How did you manage to transfer the best practices? How did you go about it?

Hon. Scott Brison: In certain departments and agencies, there are official languages champions to promote the use of both official languages and share best practices everywhere. Frankly, we have to do more, and I would like to increase our efforts to improve services in government, in departments, agencies and among public servants, to improve the services we provide to citizens. That is a part of our efforts in this area.

[English]

The role of the official languages champions as a policy has only existed since 2012. It's a fairly short period of time.

I very much like the idea and I think they're doing good work. I want to strengthen the roles of the official languages champions. Even during our briefings it's important to encourage public servants to speak in the language of their choice, not just in my department or agency but elsewhere.

I don't want to miss anything. You may notice that in a committee sometimes, but even in cabinet meetings or in caucus meetings, I don't use the earpiece because it helps to improve my ability. This is a tool. It's important in an official capacity, sometimes, to have this so I don't miss anything and I don't disrespect any nuance in a question.

We want to ensure that people are encouraged to utilize their language of choice, but also to learn actively within the public service. Good progress has been made in the official languages champions but I want to make sure that we're giving them the resources and support they need to increase the value and capacity of their work.

•(1615)

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much.

We know that our Prime Minister experienced linguistic duality and was raised in both official languages. In fact, he always uses both languages when he talks to us.

At Treasury Board, have people felt a new climate of openness regarding official languages? Have any changes been noticed? The previous government has been referred to repeatedly, but I would like to know if over the past seven months, people have been satisfied with the openness of our new government with regard to official languages.

Hon. Scott Brison: Ms. Lapointe, I think that Ms. Smart or Mr. Tremblay can answer your question if they want to. It is up to them. That said, it is difficult for public servants or government officials to answer that type of question.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Yes.

Hon. Scott Brison: It is up to them, but they might be made to seem partisan. I understand why it is difficult for them to answer that question.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It's a difficult question for them.

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, perhaps I can settle the issue, since your time is up.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Your smiles were sufficient.

The Chair: Ms. Smart, you have a few seconds.

Ms. Anne Marie Smart (Chief Human Resources Officer, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can confirm that official languages are an inherent part of daily activities at Treasury Board. When we were preparing our meeting today with the minister, things took place entirely in French.

The Chair: Very well, madam. Thank you very much.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Hon. Scott Brison: That must have been tiring for the public servants.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today.

[*English*]

Talking about our spouses and partners, my wife is an anglophone Montrealer so I have been having lessons. I laugh about it because I would say that I learn on the pillow, which is the best place to learn English, and she was in the best place to learn French as well.

[*Translation*]

We both make a lot of mistakes. I've been married for 27 years to an anglophone and I've been making mistakes for 27 years. I could call her Ms. Berlitz or Rosetta Stone, because she is starting to get fed up. Nevertheless, I think we have to make those efforts. Our children were raised in French and in English. In fact, the Committee on Official Languages should propose that Canadians in future be made to marry persons who speak the other official language. That way, they would become bilingual quite quickly.

But seriously, Minister, your government has some big ambitions with regard to the public service and to hiring, especially young people. That is what we understood, in any case based, on what has been said over the past few months.

How are you going to implement equity, in that the Canadian men and women who are hired by the public service, especially young people, respect our official languages?

As Ms. Lapointe was saying earlier, our young people now are very inclined to learn other languages. Consequently, I think that there are surely Canadian men and women who are equipped to work in our public service. More specifically, is it a top priority to hire these young people?

Hon. Scott Brison: One of our government's priorities is to hire more millennials. The average age of new employees in the public service is 36. We have to do more to attract them to the public service.

The percentage of bilingual employees in the central public administration has gone from 35% in 2000 to 41% in 2010. There has been some progress, but we have to do more.

We have to give public servants even more opportunities to become bilingual earlier in their careers. There are the traditional schools in Saint-Jean, Montreal or Chicoutimi. People can also use technology, which is more advanced than it used to be. That's very important.

But the problem persists. Our country has to do more to increase bilingualism everywhere in the country, and not only in the public service. We have to work on this with the other levels of government and the Department of Canadian Heritage. It is very important to continue our efforts to make the public service more bilingual. That is one part of the solution, but we have to do more throughout the country to increase and promote bilingualism.

I'm sorry, Mr. Généreux, that we don't have more time to talk about it.

• (1620)

[*English*]

It's a subject I'd like to have a longer discussion on with you as well.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: No problem.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and thank you very much, Mr. Brison.

As the representative of a minority francophone community in Winnipeg, I very much appreciate your efforts to promote French. Your leadership in the country is truly exemplary in this regard.

I read the report that is before us.

[*English*]

I'm wondering if you knew that in 2010 we had 1,715 employees, full time, and by 2013, we were down to 1,397 for a loss of about 315 employees. I'm wondering, Mr. Brison, if you were aware of that and if you could offer any insight or comment on that.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Scott Brison: I was aware of the decrease in the number of positions in the translation bureau. Once again, I have a lot of respect for the important work the bureau does. Our government will ensure that it has the necessary resources to maintain its services.

Our government's objective is to broaden the services of the bureau and its capacity to serve the public with traditional means and with the help of technology. All departments have to be open to using modern technology.

I was aware of the changes and of the reduction in the number of positions. My priority is to ensure that the quality of services is excellent and will continue to be.

Moreover, we are open to the use, at the translation bureau, of technology as a comprehension tool, for instance.

•(1625)

We are open to the idea that technology be used everywhere to increase bilingualism in the public service. I think that everyone understands the phenomenon of technological change. However, we must recognize the role of professional translators, which is very important. We have to ensure that we have enough of those translators in the public service.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Do I have any time left Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Dan Vandal: We have often heard it said that the Portage translation tool is in fact a comprehension tool and that it is not adequate for communication.

[*English*]

It's a comprehension tool and not a communication tool. Can you comment on that briefly in the time we have?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Scott Brison: I agree with the fact that it is a comprehension tool. It's also important for us to recognize that public servants use tools like Google Translate. But I don't trust Google Translate. In my opinion, it's a tool that is not dependable since it does not use government vocabulary. We have to see to it, consequently, that the work gets done in close cooperation with the translation bureau and that it be given the tools it needs to fulfil its obligations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This marks the end of interventions.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I would like to know whether the minister might have 15 or 20 minutes to spare so that we can go around the table one last time.

The Chair: I think Mr. Brison is expected in the Senate.

Hon. Scott Brison: I do, in fact, have to appear before another committee.

Mr. François Choquette: You are too popular.

Hon. Scott Brison: That said, I look forward to meeting with you again.

I respect the work committees do. I have been a member of Parliament since 1997 and was a minister for two years. As a committee member, I worked very hard for 17 years. Needless to say, I recognize the importance of committees. I would very much like to come back and meet with you.

I'd like to tell you a short anecdote. I know that I make little mistakes in French. My mother-in-law, Ms. St-Pierre, who is from Drummondville, speaks only French. When I speak with her or Mr. St-Pierre, I try to speak in French only. I think this story is important for Mr. Paradis, who has a vineyard in Quebec. I, too, have a small vineyard, but I also have apple trees.

I remember one summer evening when we were at my place and I mistakenly asked my mother-in-law, Ms. St-Pierre, in French, whether she had seen a certain part of my anatomy—*mon verger*—when I had meant to say "orchard" or *verger*.

•(1630)

[*English*]

I meant to say *verger*. You have to have courage when you're venturing into new languages, but I wanted to let you know that I continued even after that foray into French, and I continue to progress. She was, like you have been, very patient with me.

[*Translation*]

My partner was not very patient under the circumstances.

Thank you once again for your patience and your passion for both official languages. I share that passion, and I'm eager to continue working with you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Minister, I just want to tell you that I am very happy that I have a vineyard rather than an orchard.

It was a great pleasure for all of us to have you, as well as Mr. Tremblay and Ms. Smart. I thank all three of you.

Hon. Scott Brison: I thank the public servants.

The Chair: You are welcome at our committee anytime.

We will now break for a few minutes.

•(1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1635)

The Chair: We will resume proceedings.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study of the translation bureau.

Before we begin, we will hear from Mr. Choquette.

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

I would like to thank all of the representatives of the translation bureau for being here with us again.

The committee's recommendation was to have representatives from Public Services and Procurement Canada appear to answer our questions on behalf of the Honourable Judy Foote. This is what we had requested. I understand that she cannot be here because she is travelling or has other commitments at this time. We would have therefore liked to have the deputy minister appear in order to ask her more general questions on governance and find out the department's role in relation to the translation bureau?

Mr. Chair, I don't know whether the other committee members would like you to find out what happened and why no one is appearing on behalf of the Honourable Judy Foote today, as we had requested.

•(1640)

The Chair: Thank you for your comments.

First of all, I think committee members had made it clear that they wished to have Ms. Achimov appear to discuss certain specific points, as they had a number of questions. We can therefore take advantage of her presence here this afternoon to hear her talk about the specific points on which committee members sought clarification.

Furthermore, Ms. Foote is not in Ottawa this week. We would therefore be able to invite her again at a later date. We have no objections to that.

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

The Chair: When the Commissioner of Official Languages tables a report, our committee has a tradition. Mr. Choquette brought forward a motion to that end. It reads as follows:

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages invite Graham Fraser, Commissioner of Official Languages, to appear before a televised session of the Committee by June 1 to provide clarification on the report.

In my view, the wording “by June 1” poses a problem. Normally, we invite the Commissioner of Official Languages following the publication of a report. By order of priority, we need to finish the report on the translation bureau and, right after that, according to our standard practice, the committee should have the Commissioner of Official Languages appear following the tabling of his latest report. I will check with the clerk for possible dates.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I absolutely agree with you. Of course, I introduced a motion, and it is indeed a tradition to show respect for our commissioner, who is doing solid work. He tabled his report recently. He also tabled a report on justice, and on June 7, he will be tabling a special report on Air Canada. It would therefore be better to hear from him after June 7 for us to ask him questions about the three reports he had produced within a short timeframe. If the committee agrees to proceed in this way, that would be my recommendation.

The Chair: That is an excellent suggestion. June 7 is a Tuesday. Would you like us to plan that meeting for June 8?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: If it's on June 7, when will we meet next after that?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: June 7 is a Tuesday

The Chair: It would be the following day, Wednesday, June 8.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No problem.

The Chair: So Wednesday, June 8, works then, is that right?

We will hear from the Commissioner of Official Languages on Wednesday, June 8. Then it's settled.

I would now like to welcome Ms. Achimov. She is accompanied by the following individuals from the translation bureau: Adam Gibson, vice-president, linguistic services, Nancy Gauthier, vice-

president, business strategies and partnerships, and Lucie Séguin, vice-president, corporate services.

Some committee members wanted clarification on certain points. I will therefore proceed more quickly than usual so as to be able to obtain answers to our questions in the next half-hour, while sticking to the regular speaking order. Ms. Achimov has already appeared before the committee. It is a question of clarifying certain points.

We will start with Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Ms. Achimov, and the other witnesses.

I will begin by explaining the reason why we wanted to see you again and also meet the people who designed the Portage tool.

At an earlier meeting, a witness emphasized the software's corpus. From what I understand, the corpus includes expressions that are entered into the system so that, once the translation has been completed, there is a match in both languages. I would like to understand how the corpus is created. This inevitably comes with costs attached, since you need people to put it together. Can a simple user contribute to building the corpus, or are people paid to add data? The committee wasn't able to grasp exactly how it works, and so I am providing an opportunity to all four of you to enlighten us on the matter. How are the data entered into the corpus, and what kind of results have you obtained?

In addition, I have already voiced my financial concerns, namely, how much it will cost to maintain the tool. It's all well and good to create an application or software, but who is putting the data in and how is it being done?

Ms. Achimov, you have the floor.

•(1645)

Ms. Donna Achimov (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you for the question—it will allow us to provide a better understanding of the tool.

I will let Ms. Gauthier field the question. She is responsible for client relations, and innovation as well.

Ms. Nancy Gauthier (Vice-President, Business Strategies and Partnerships, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you.

Thank you for the question.

The software's corpus is supplied with phrases and terminology from the government. These are drawn from current government websites. The corpus was developed by the National Research Council of Canada.

In terms of assessing content, I believe you want to find out what kind of results we obtain once the data has been entered. It's really all about looking at the statistical recurrence of data. If a match in content, for example "dog means *le chien*" comes up quite frequently, that is the result that's going to appear. The content has to be re-worked and validated by professional language experts, who will also ensure quality control. After that, the corpus is sent to the National Research Council, which does what's known as retraining of the engine to search for those reoccurrences. We can add the content we want to the corpus so as to obtain the best results possible.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: If I take, for example, the following phrase: "The dog is under the rain", or in French "*Le chien est sous la pluie*", if this is considered to be a good translation, it will then be added to the corpus and validated, but will it be there permanently? Are any other checks done? If a wrong translation is entered into the corpus, won't it constantly be repeated?

Ms. Nancy Gauthier: Statistically speaking, yes, you are correct, except that the bureau is committed to continually improving the content. So, if an error keeps reappearing, we will notify the National Research Council so that it can be corrected.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Have I already used up all my time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: This round will be shorter. You will be able to continue later if we have enough time.

We will go immediately to Mr. Lefebvre.

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

The Chair: This round of questions will be four minutes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I only have four minutes, I'll be brief.

Some of the individuals from the translation bureau who appeared before the committee expressed concerns about succession planning. I would like to know how many new hires are expected at the translation bureau over the next five years.

Mr. Adam Gibson (Vice-President, Linguistic Services, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services): I'll take the question.

We don't have exact figures for our recruitment plans. We are focused on assessing our volume of work, on meeting our clients' needs, and, at the same time, on finding the ideal balance between our internal and external resources. At the moment, we are getting closer to that ideal balance, the sweet spot, between the use of our internal and external resources. We are committed to examining factors that could have an influence on the type of work done internally, including factors such as security, that require that the work be done in-house. We are on the verge of hiring staff in a number of specific areas in which we identified a need.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: If I understand correctly, you are identifying or studying various ways of working.

Mr. Adam Gibson: Yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Has demand for the translation bureau's services increased or fallen over the last few years?

• (1650)

Ms. Donna Achimov: We've noticed a change in the manner clients are communicating. That's the best way to explain it. We're seeing a stronger trend within a number of departments towards communicating via social media.

Over the last few years, press releases, reference documents, and background information were printed out on paper. It now appears more efficient to use social media.

Demand is changing thanks to new technologies and new trends in communications with Canadians.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

The reason I am asking the question is that witnesses have reported that many departments were doing their own translations. They hire people to do the work. They, too, are entitled to outsource work.

We were even told that there are ghost translation services. The people working in these ghost services are perhaps not qualified to do translation or are not professional translators like the ones you have at the translation bureau.

I would like to know your opinion about these ghost translation services.

Ms. Donna Achimov: We often hear talk of this idea of ghost services. Ms. Gauthier's team has been marketing our services very aggressively. It is more effective to rely on professionals.

However, it's also a good thing that departments take advantage of bilingual staff when they need memos and other communications written at the last minute. After all, we have some public servants who are perfectly bilingual. We work in both official languages.

We promote our services with passion. We believe in the importance of having professionals provide translation services.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, you may go ahead.

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

Hello again, Ms. Achimov.

I would like to begin by asking you why the translation tool has become a comprehension tool.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Thank you for the question.

At first, we decided to use a known term, namely, "machine translation". However, following all the feedback this committee has heard and reports in the media, we thought it would be a good idea to clarify how best to use this tool. To us, it is truly a comprehension tool. It was designed to help the person using it understand the text in their language and in their second official language.

In English, we say that we need to get the gist, that is to say, to have a good summary of the text or a part of the text. We think the name change is a good improvement. I must also thank the committee for its recommendation to that effect.

Mr. François Choquette: In addition, Ms. Achimov, I had requested that you hold off on implementing the Portage comprehension tool. Its implementation was postponed for a while. However, you have decided to make it available when the committee is in the middle of putting the finishing touches on its report, which will be tabled in the House in a week or two.

Why did you not wait another week or two?

Ms. Donna Achimov: We decided to launch the tool after having improved it. It was always our intention to launch the tool. It's in [English]

our report on plans and priorities for 2016-17.
[Translation]

The tool was made more effective. It was also suggested that we better describe it. We've added pages and explanatory notes, and suggested the best ways of using it, in other words, the dos and don'ts of machine translation, or what to do and what not to do with the tool.

We also had many consultations with official languages champions on the best ways to use the tool.

• (1655)

Mr. François Choquette: The translation bureau obviously provides translation services, but I would like to better understand its role. Does the bureau play a role in compliance with the Official Languages Act?

Ms. Donna Achimov: Thank you for the question.

Yes, absolutely. Our mandate is specifically to help the public service and the Government of Canada communicate in both official languages. We provide interpretation, terminology, and translation services in both official languages. We are also able to provide, with the help of the private sector, services in 110 other languages.

Mr. François Choquette: In that case, Ms. Achimov—

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Choquette, but we need to move on to the next member.

Mr. François Choquette: Fine, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, go ahead.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the witnesses, and thank you for being here with us today.

I am happy that you took into consideration the comments we received from witnesses and that you chose the word "comprehension" rather than "translation". I believe that it's very fitting.

Earlier we talked about whether it would be better to use the tool that is already available rather than wait for our report, which should be tabled soon. What do you think?

Ms. Donna Achimov: The public service is actually in need of modern tools. This need exists and will continue to exist. We think it's a good thing to have tools that are well adapted to the public service, not only to help with comprehension, but also to maintain language skills in the future.

I am also the chair of the Council of the Network on Official Languages Champions. We are working very hard to change the culture in the federal government and to make sure that people are genuinely eager to explore and use new tools such as the comprehension tool to improve and to preserve the two official languages.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: The comprehension tool has been in place for a few weeks. Up to this point, have things been going well?

Ms. Donna Achimov: Yes.

Ms. Gauthier, would you like to speak to that?

[English]

Ms. Nancy Gauthier: The latest numbers we have are that, since the launch, we've had approximately 98,000 requests through the tool.

[Translation]

Most people who used the tool said that it met their needs.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

Are the users told that it's a comprehension tool? Was there a notice to that effect?

Ms. Donna Achimov: We worked hard to emphasize that it's actually a comprehension tool. We spoke with all the directors general of corporate communications. We shared information with the official languages champions and with all the human resources authorities, who are part of most of the organizations responsible for official languages.

[English]

We engaged quite robustly with the existing communities that were very much key to ensuring that we send out the appropriate messaging. Also, when we did message, we went to not only the deputies in each department but to the champions of official languages, as well as the heads of communication.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Vandal, go ahead.

Mr. Dan Vandal: A number of people mentioned that the tool was a comprehension tool and not a communication tool.

Do you have any comments? What do you think?

Ms. Donna Achimov: Thank you for the question.

It is clear to us that professional translators are responsible for translating official documents. We tried very hard to provide a better understanding of what the tool should be used for, and professional translators are still responsible for translating official documents. The tool is really meant to help with comprehension.

• (1700)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Which means that—

Ms. Lucie Séguin (Vice-President, Corporate Services, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services): If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to clarify a point raised by Ms. Lapointe and Mr. Vandal.

When using the language comprehension tool, people are asked to check a box to certify that they read the terms of use. The terms explicitly state that the service does not replace translation services and that the tool is designed for comprehension.

We also provide links to professional language services. We hope that, with all these enhancement measures, including the acceptance of the terms of use, the users will be well-informed.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay. There is always some form of control for all communications.

Your 2016-17 report on plans and priorities includes a crowdsourcing objective. What does this involve?

Ms. Nancy Gauthier: Crowdsourcing refers to a collaborative effort to find content through a specific community. For example, crowdsourcing is done for projects. This entails looking for ideas. You have already heard of crowdfunding, which involves finding funding for certain projects.

[English]

Crowdsourcing is not necessarily specific to the translation industry, but it has been seen in the industry to be included in their workflow.

[Translation]

First, we send a document to a community of language experts. Professional translators then do post-editing as part of their workflow. It's a way to look for help with terminology, translation, or another area requiring expertise. It's collaborative.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Are they people outside the government?

Ms. Nancy Gauthier: Yes, absolutely.

The communities may be very large or very small. For translated texts or texts requiring a specific expertise, we must ensure that the communities have the expertise.

[English]

We would have a community that is particularly certified in a certain area to contribute to a task of that type of collaborative nature.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Boucher, go ahead.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

You just spoke of post-editing, a subject often raised in the comments that we have heard.

Can you explain what post-editing is? Is there specific training for post-editing, and who is qualified to do it? It's important for us to understand what post-editing is.

Mr. Adam Gibson: Good question. Thank you.

Roughly speaking, post-editing is a form of quality assurance.

There are freelancers who work on contract for us. We post-edit their texts to make sure that the texts meet our quality standards. We do the same for a text translated using a technological tool. We review or post-edit the texts. It's a type of quality assurance. We determine which of our employees are qualified to post-edit. They are often more experienced translators.

It's a challenge faced by our sector. We are talking with the universities and with our colleagues in the private sector or from professional associations. We are focusing more on universities and other centres to establish formal post-editing training. At this time, post-editing training is more often done through mentoring. We pair the less experienced translators with the much more experienced translators—

[English]

to make them more aware of what to look for so they catch the right things.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: What I understand, then, is that there is not necessarily post-editing training. Through mentoring, qualified people, translators who are much more experienced, are able to post-edit. Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Gibson: There are a few examples. The market is not completely lacking. Instead, we are currently identifying the best models out there and developing something with a university. At this point, most of the time, it's a mix. Training is provided in the form of courses, and the expertise of our translators, who are very experienced in the field, is used.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Post-editing is done in both official languages. It must be done properly in both official languages, correct?

Mr. Adam Gibson: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The quality of the post-editing is therefore verified in both official languages.

Mr. Adam Gibson: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's what I wanted to ask.

The Chair: There are four or five minutes left. If committee members would like to ask other questions, they must be very quick.

We have a few minutes, starting with Mr. Généreux, followed by Mr. Choquette and Ms. Romanado.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like to briefly follow up on the matter of the corpus. My understanding is that the corpus is an integral part of the tool and that it's fed content.

For post-editing, you do the verification.

Mr. Adam Gibson: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Who is paying for the service?

Ms. Nancy Gauthier: Thank you for the question.

You would like to know who is paying for the corpus, correct?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Was that part of the tool development exercise?

Ms. Nancy Gauthier: Officials from the National Research Council of Canada would probably be better able to talk to you about the tool's development. The translation bureau is in charge of verifying the existing corpus. Professional translators work on quality assurance.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Mr. Chair, I don't know if you remember, but I had asked for a table explaining the tool's development, use, and corpus, and what goes in and out of the tool. I am a visual learner, and I would like to be able to see at a glance the tool's development or what it can help do. Can we be sent documents of that nature?

The Chair: Can you do that, Ms. Achimov?

[English]

Ms. Donna Achimov: A workflow for the corpus...?

[Translation]

Yes we can.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would appreciate that.

The Chair: You can send it to the clerk of the committee, and he will hand it out to the members.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Okay. That's what we'll do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Choquette, go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: My first question is very simple, although I know you can't answer it right away.

Can you tell us how many people are currently working on the Portage tool and what financial resources are used for it? Can you send the information to the committee in the next few weeks?

Ms. Donna Achimov: Yes.

The Chair: You can send the information to the clerk.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Okay, Mr. Chair.

Mr. François Choquette: You can send the information directly to the clerk.

I know that you have done surveys to determine how people would use the tool. Are the results public? Can you send them to the committee to give us a basic idea of how people responded? I received information indicating that people may use the translation tool rather than the established translation services.

Ms. Donna Achimov: We can share the results with you. We have only just implemented the tool in a number of departments. It will take some time to obtain the results.

However, this summer we will start a pilot project for the tool with 350 to 400 public servants. The types of sentences processed are not normally those sent to the bureau. Instead, we receive excerpts from documents for comprehension purposes and shorts texts such as answering machine messages informing callers that someone is absent or on vacation for a few days. It's really for short texts that would never otherwise be sent to the translation bureau.

●(1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Romanado, go ahead.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was not here when the officials from the translation bureau appeared recently, so I didn't hear their presentation. That's why I may ask a question that they have already answered.

The maximum turnover time is currently 48 hours for a translation request. My office has already used your services, and I was very satisfied with your work. Thank you very much. Do you have a plan to reduce turnover times and meet the needs of constituency offices?

Mr. Adam Gibson: There are a certain number of services, and normally we are able to meet needs—

Ms. Lucie Séguin: —82% of the time.

Mr. Adam Gibson: We are able to meet needs 82% of the time. That's a normal percentage. However, for urgent requests, we negotiate with the client. We sometimes receive requests that must be completed the same day within a few hours. It always depends on the case and on various considerations, but we are always ready to negotiate. At the same time, we are currently considering a number of other factors that will affect the service, and we want to properly identify those factors for the clients. I believe that we could provide an even better service, but urgent requests and events always come up. That is when we negotiate with the clients. We have employees who can meet needs.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

Can we know how many translations are from English into French and vice versa?

Mr. Adam Gibson: Yes, we can give you the data. I don't have the numbers with me.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Most translations are from English to French.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Fine.

Ms. Nancy Gauthier: If you would like, I can give you more specific data.

We translate about 754 million words a year, and there are obviously more texts translated from English into French. We can tell you the exact percentage.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay. Since we are the official languages committee, I will ask the question in English.

[English]

In terms of quality control, you mention that you do a verification of the translation that's been done. If you see with a supplier or an internal person that the quality is not there, is there some training that is provided, or will you look for another supplier?

Mr. Adam Gibson: Thank you for the question.

I think, as it relates to our external contracts, it's similar with almost any contracting vehicle. We have a quality assurance process, and we do take a look at the different providers, especially if there's one where we're seeing a consistency and there's a concern with the level of quality we're getting out of them. You would usually start out with a conversation and work your way down to see if this is something that's a bit more permanent, in which case we do have the ability to knock off suppliers if they're not responding to our needs.

Internally it becomes a human resource issue. Is the person not well trained or simply performing poorly? You investigate and then you respond accordingly.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Romanado.

Mr. Généreux, please be brief.

[English]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Is this tool available for MPs?

Ms. Donna Achimov: Not yet. We decided to manage it for the core public service. We are looking at plans in terms of further expansion to other organizations, but right now we just focus on the 33 core government departments.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Will it be this year that it will be available for MPs?

Ms. Donna Achimov: We have to look at what the costs are and how the tool is performing.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What do you mean the cost? We already paid the CNRC.

Ms. Donna Achimov: We are looking at maintenance and upgrading. We just launched the tool. We launched it small, we're seeing how it performs, and then we are looking at how to expand it across other organizations, including Parliament and the House of Commons.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Thank you.

[Translation]

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

Thank you as well to your colleagues for their responses.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Thank you.

The Chair: I would like to remind committee members that we are meeting in camera on Wednesday.

Do you have anything to add, Mr. Lefebvre?

• (1715)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I little birdie told me the Commissioner of Official Languages will not be available on June 8. We need to choose another date.

The Chair: We will try to determine the next closest date.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: It would be the 13th.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That's a smart birdie.

Mr. François Choquette: It sure is, and it's fast.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes it's fast.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Achimov.

Thank you very much everyone.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Thank you.

The Chair: On Wednesday, we will complete our report.

Enjoy the rest of your day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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