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The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Hello, everyone. Welcome to the meeting, the committee's first meeting of the fall session. I hope you all had an enjoyable summer.

First of all, I would like to officially introduce our new clerk, Mrs. Christine Holke. Ms. Holke might like to say a few words to introduce herself.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke): We're off to a good start. Thank you, Mr. Paradis.

I am very happy to be here.

I have been a committee clerk for the past nine years, so I do have a fair amount of experience. Twenty years ago, I started working on the Hill as a parliamentary guide. Then I worked for an MP, and then for the Speaker of the Senate. In 2004, I became a committee clerk.

I am really looking forward to working with you. I am here to serve the committee, of course, so I am very pleased to see you this morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much and welcome.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Paradis, we could go around the table and introduce ourselves as we will be working with the new clerk over the coming months.

The Chair: Of course, we will start with you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Excellent, even better.

I also have a great deal of experience. You have nine years of experience; I have nine months. We learn fast here.

My name is Darrell Samson. I am the only Acadian elected in Nova Scotia. I am pleased to meet you and work with you.

The Chair: You're next, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): My name is Daniel Vandal and I am the member from Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital. I have nine months of experience, like Mr. Samson. I am a French-speaking Métis from Saint-Boniface, Winnipeg. I am pleased to be here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Boissonnault, please go ahead.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Randy Boissonnault and I am the member for Edmonton-Centre and parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. I am very pleased to be here.

In 1991, I spent the summer as a parliamentary guide here when I was 20. It was very hectic, but not as hectic as this past summer. So I have a bit more experience than my colleagues.

Thank you for being here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

Mr. Lefebvre, please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Hello.

My name is Paul Lefebvre and I am the member for Sudbury. I am a Franco-Ontarian. Like my colleagues, I have nine months of experience.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Not to worry, that is a lot of experience in politics.

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, please go ahead.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Hello and welcome.

My name is Linda Lapointe and I am the member for Rivière-des-Milles-Îles. My riding includes the cities of Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand, Rosemère, and Montreal's north shore. I am a francophone in a riding with an anglophone minority.

I am very happy to be here.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to officially welcome you, Mr. Arsenault.

Mr. Arsenault previously served as a substitute member. He is now officially a member of the committee.

Mr. Arsenault, please go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): My name is René Arsenault. I am an Acadian member from New Brunswick, representing the riding of Madawaska—Restigouche.

This is my first day as an official member of the committee. Last season, I had the tough job of replacing Mauril Bélanger. I will do my best.

I am delighted to meet you.

To all our permanent staff here, I am very pleased to work with you. Your work last year was truly remarkable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arsenault.

Mr. Godin, please go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): I have to say, the atmosphere is very pleasant here.

Welcome.

Unfortunately, I will not have the privilege of working with you on a regular basis. I am replacing another MP this morning, and hope to come back. As Mr. Arseneault said, he is starting out so he does not have as much experience as the others. I hope to come back to the committee and catch up with his experience.

I am the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, in the Quebec City area.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

You have the floor, Mrs. Boucher.

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

My name is Sylvie Boucher and I am the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. This is my second time here. I served as parliamentary secretary on the status of women, parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister for La Francophonie and for Official Languages, in the former Conservative government. I lost the election in 2011 but came back in 2015.

I am always very pleased to be part of this committee. I consider the official languages to be very important in Canada today.

•(0855)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

Mr. Généreux, please go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): My name is Bernard Généreux and I am the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. I have 27 months of experience on this committee. I was an MP from 2009 to 2011. I am back and very pleased to be here.

I said jokingly earlier that this past summer made me feel 20 years younger. Usually we feel older, but now I feel younger. I am very happy for that.

I am very pleased to be here with you. As Mr. Godin said, we have camaraderie and get along well on this committee, which is positive and conducive to good discussions. We also have an excellent chairman. Flattery gets you everywhere.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Choquette, please go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): The clerk knows me already. We worked together on the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. We had a great deal of pleasure working very hard, and we will continue doing so.

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

Thank you all for your introductions.

We had set aside the morning to set up our schedule for the coming weeks, to know where we are going and what the key files

are. You have in front of you a calendar for September, November and December. We will try to plan out our work as much as possible.

I have some important information to share first. There is a chance that the minister could appear before the committee in October with regard to the 2014-15 official languages annual report. The minister will also be meeting the Senate at that time. We don't have a date yet, but she might pay us a visit in October.

That is what I had to say. I will not interfere with your choice of priorities.

Today, we will begin planning our work. Mr. Choquette had asked me when there would be any public meetings or in camera meetings. As a rule, we always prefer public meetings, except when we decide together to go in camera. We decided to do that once last year, while discussing the committee's budgets. Our meetings are usually public. These are the rules of the game, unless you decide to change them as our work progresses.

In the past, we have discussed files that have greater priority than others. We have had a number of discussions about which files should take priority over others. I will now open up the discussion as to the order of business. Which business do you think should come first? Let us take this meeting to agree on the committee's future business and to decide what should have priority or not, and we will proceed from there.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

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

As I recall, we had a motion from Mr. Samson regarding immigration. So perhaps we should check with Mr. Samson as to how he would like to proceed with this motion. How many meetings does he think it will take?

During this session, do we expect to travel or book trips for consultations on the future action plan?

I think we should also talk about Mr. Boissonnault's cross-country tour with Minister of Canadian Heritage Mélanie Joly, which also pertained to immigration. These are the two main topics. Aside from that, other topics might arise from time to time.

Earlier I submitted a motion to the clerk. It cannot be received at this time. I might tell you about it but I will get back to that after we discuss our schedule.

•(0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Before I give the floor to Mrs. Boucher, I have something to say regarding your question about travel. I have been told that many committees will be travelling this fall. I understand that it will not be possible for the Standing Committee on Official Languages to leave Ottawa for now, this fall. It seems that too many committees will be travelling.

Please go ahead, Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: As you know, health services in French, in one's own language, are extremely important. As I have always said, if you are sick, you want to express yourself in your own language, whether you are bilingual or not. I think we will have to address this topic because there are problems everywhere.

So I think health should be one of our key priorities. When you are sick, you need all your energy and often you don't have the help of an interpreter to describe your ailment. So I think health should be one of the committee's priorities.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, please go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault: I am new here so I will follow along with the discussion. I don't have anything to add right now.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Vandal, please go ahead.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Four or five months ago, I put forward a motion that was adopted. It pertained to the review of last two roadmaps, with a view to improving our next strategic plan on the official languages. I hope we can start on that soon because it is very important to the community I represent, Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital. It is also very important to minority communities throughout Canada. I hope we can start work on these initial challenges.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lefebvre, please go ahead.

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

I would like to return to Mr. Choquette's comments. He said the parliamentary secretary and the minister travelled over the summer and that the roadmap has to be reviewed.

I would like the parliamentary secretary to tell us whether he would like the committee to present its report before Christmas. He will have to tell us because I don't want to miss out on this. I want to make sure that our recommendations are in the report and then in the roadmap.

I would like to know what schedule Mr. Boissonnault would suggest in order to comply with the decision made.

The Chair: Mr. Boissonnault, please go ahead regarding the schedule.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

The question is not so much what I expect of you but rather whether you want to influence the process. Regarding the next action plan, there have already been consultations in 20 locations. Two more are scheduled, in Gatineau and Iqaluit. Then there will be a big roundtable. So work on developing the action plan will begin behind the scenes. I would really like parliamentarians and witnesses to have their say as well.

No later than the end of November or December 1, a report will have to be tabled about the last roadmaps and your thoughts on the subject. That includes the motion on immigration that Mr. Samson put forward and that Mr. Choquette mentioned earlier. This is an important topic that has been discussed across the country. This morning, we have already touched on immigration and the roadmap.

If we could receive the reports on these topics, we could consider them while the action plan is being developed.

The Chair: Mr. Lefebvre, please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I would like to go back to what Mrs. Boucher said. Health is a topic that is included in the roadmap. There is funding for health. It would be advisable to look at that at the same time. Let us say until mid-November or the end of November for that. Then there will be a report. Regarding the roadmap, I don't want you to miss out. We have to review the whole thing.

As to the schedule, I recommend leaving some time to discuss the roadmap, which includes immigration, health and education. The cultural vitality of minority communities is another topic. These are the topics I would like us to consider up until Christmas.

• (0905)

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: First, I would like to thank Mr. Choquette for not forgetting about me over the summer, well done.

I will answer his question about immigration, which is the topic the committee members had decided to focus on when we left off in June. The committee members had submitted names to the chair and to the clerk, Georges Etoke. Based on the witness list suggested by the committee, we had decided that four meetings, and then a fifth one to discuss the report, should be enough for us to meet our objective.

That said, we must remember that the report will provide some material for the roadmap, which will have to be discussed sooner or later, as mentioned. That certainly gives us a good overview.

Other topics have been suggested as well. I would be very happy for the committee to approve them. We will review the list, but I think four meetings and another one to review the report should be enough to meet our objective.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before the next person speaks, perhaps the committee should thank our former clerk, Georges Etoke, for his work for our committee.

Would someone like to move that?

Mr. Généreux moves the motion, seconded by Mr. Lefebvre.

Motion adopted, thank you.

Mr. Généreux now has the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We will recall that the president of Air Canada appeared before the committee last spring. As I recall, we really pushed to meet him soon after the Commissioner of Official Languages released his report.

How will the committee follow up on that? Should we make a recommendation? By the way, I think we tabled a motion for the government to act quickly to impose new official languages rules on Air Canada. Does the committee need to consider the case of Air Canada again this fall?

The Chair: I will leave that up to the committee members. Today we want to come up with a schedule. If it fits into the schedule, I don't see a problem. This morning, we are trying to plan our work up to the holiday season. If we can fit that in somewhere, I don't see a problem.

I do not want to interfere or influence your choice of priorities. I think the committee members should decide on the priorities up to the holiday season.

By the way, you are right, this is an extremely important topic.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: In any case, we have all made a tremendous effort, including yourself, Mr. Chair, to get the president of Air Canada to appear before the committee. He agreed. As I remember, the discussions were quite difficult. In his view, there was no problem or he did not think it would cause a lot of problems.

To close the loop, I think this topic should be a priority and then we can turn to the subject of immigration quickly and produce our reports on the new roadmap, which the minister needs. Of course, we also have to consider the roadmap quickly. That is clear.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I agree with you, Mr. Généreux.

Given the schedule suggested for the roadmap, we should look at immigration first and then the roadmap. That does not mean that we are dismissing what you said. Immigration to minority communities is an important issue though, as is the roadmap, which will help the government set its priorities. I think I would take that approach.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to add anything?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like to add that the Air Canada file will not take a great deal of time. I think the committee should make a recommendation to the government, if it has not already done so, I'm not sure. We could spend on meeting on it and if necessary hear from a few witnesses to conclude, wrap it up and move on to something else.

In my opinion, the committee's reputation is at stake. We have made considerable efforts. Let us not forget that that was the first time the president of Air Canada had appeared before the committee. He came reluctantly, to be sure. The committee has to be taken seriously. If we want it to be taken seriously, we have to complete this study very quickly, and we could do that as soon as this Thursday. We have to see where things stand with respect to Air Canada and then move on to the next thing.

• (0910)

The Chair: I have some information to share about Air Canada. This summer, Air Canada officials contacted me to see if we need to hear from the president again this fall. It was certainly not to move forward on that.

I must tell you also that I was informed by the chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages that her committee will be considering the Air Canada file. I will keep you posted.

Please go ahead, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We know that we have to address the Air Canada file at some point. The Senate will also be considering it. I am not sure it is a priority right now.

For our part, we have to meet certain deadlines and our priorities are immigration and the roadmap. I'm not saying it is not an important topic, I agree with you. To be honest, I'm not sure though that a single meeting would settle the matter. I think we have to be more strategic on this file. We will have to see what the Senate's intentions are and how it will deal with this file. It was very clear to me in June that immigration and the roadmap would be the priorities.

Our committee is working to provide input for the new roadmap. So we have to spend some time on this or else we will not have any influence on its contents. The roadmap is crucial, in my view.

The Chair: No files have been set aside, on the contrary. We simply must determine the order of priority.

As to what Mr. Boissonnault said earlier, if we want to have an impact on future programs, we have a limited amount of time to address immigration and the roadmap.

Mrs. Boucher, please go ahead.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I fully agree that the roadmap is important. I will be a bit more direct that my colleague here, though. I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for long enough and have heard the testimony of Air Canada officials often enough to know that it was the first time that I have ever seen a committee stand firm when someone was not interested in what we were saying. It was wonderful the way you worked together. Everyone recognized that.

I am a bit bothered that we would not take one day, Thursday for example, to close the loop on Air Canada. At some point, we have to fight for respect. We cannot simply dismiss it because we have other deadlines. We have deadlines now and we have always had them, in committees. If we do not set aside one day, a two-hour meeting, to close the loop, the work we did last year will just be hot air.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

Mr. Lefebvre, please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: In that case, why just one meeting for Air Canada? Why not more?

Of course we looked at the Translation Bureau file. We could give ourselves more time to discuss Air Canada. I agree with you, Mrs. Boucher: I do not think we can do it in just one meeting. As you said, I think we have to make sure that we submit our recommendations on the roadmap and then move on to Air Canada. We are not dismissing the matter at all. We will come back to it but, for my part, I would like us to focus on the roadmap.

• (0915)

The Chair: Mr. Boissonnault, what is the deadline for our study of the roadmap to ensure that our recommendations carry a certain amount of weight?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: If we are here until December 16—although we could break on December 9, you never know—, the committee's final report on the roadmap and immigration has to be completed by November 29 or December 1 at the very latest .

The Chair: So the report would have to be completed and adopted on December 1?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Yes. Given all the back and forth on this report—I have seen you write reports before—, you will need at least two meetings. We need time to call witnesses and so forth. Combined with the immigration file, that will make up most of our work for the session.

The Chair: Okay.

So in short, we are not putting anything aside.

Mr. Choquette, please go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you.

I am favourable to the proposals to allow the committee a maximum of four weeks to discuss the immigration issue, so that we can draft the plan as quickly as possible. That is now referred to as the roadmap and will probably become an action plan later on. I absolutely agree.

That said, we can still keep a very watchful eye on Air Canada. In that regard, the committee could draft a motion—my colleagues here may be in a better position than me to do so—that would ask the officials to consider the possibility of adopting the recommendations issued by the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The commissioner's report contained three key recommendations, including imposing sanctions and conferring more powers on the commissioner.

Why wouldn't we ask the officials in question to assess those three recommendations? We would not be asking them for anything more than to assess the recommendations and see what the consequences might be.

Once we have finished our study on the action plan, the officials will have made their assessment and will be able to come see us. They could then tell us, if the commissioner's recommendations were to be implemented, which one would be the most important to adopt, which would not really be applicable, and so on.

I don't know whether this seems like a sensible plan to you. I think it would give the government a straightforward signal, without imposing anything on it. It would just be an assessment of the recommendations. Afterwards, government officials could come see us with their assessment of the recommendations, but without any obligation on the part of the government.

It would show that the committee is really serious about the Air Canada file. I think this is a good compromise.

Of course, we would then come back to the Air Canada matter, as Mr. Généreux and Ms. Boucher said.

The Chair: Who would be the officials in question?

Mr. François Choquette: That's a good question from the government. Would they be Canadian Heritage officials? We would have to check that. We should ask the Commissioner of Official Languages. I am sure he knows. I think that Canadian Heritage is responsible for the Commissioner of Official Languages.

An hon. member: Or a legal counsel.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, we could also ask a legal counsel.

The Chair: He is an independent officer of Parliament.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes. We can think about it.

We can draft a motion together and move it at a future meeting. I don't know whether my Conservative colleagues are interested. That is my suggestion.

The Chair: Who wants to take the floor?

Mr. Lefebvre, go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Do we have the authority to draft a motion to tell officials what to do? I don't think we have that authority.

Mr. Chair, I will let you decide on this issue, but I don't think we have that authority.

The Chair: What you want to ask for is some sort of a study—

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Can a committee ask officials to carry out a study? We have our own team.

• (0920)

The Clerk: We can invite them to appear before us.

The Chair: Madam Clerk is telling me that we can still invite them to appear, if necessary.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We will look into this later.

The Chair: Once again, let us please come back to our agenda. I'm okay with this, but let's prioritize.

I understand what Mr. Choquette was saying. We don't want to waste time with Air Canada. Let's do something that will move this further, even if it means hearing from Air Canada representatives afterwards, once we have discussed immigration and the roadmap. Let's do something in the meantime. That's what I want in order to to move forward on this matter right now.

Are there any comments?

Ms. Boucher, you don't want to say anything?

Mr. Généreux, go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I don't want to be a spoilsport. I completely agree that we should deal with the immigration and the roadmap files, on which we absolutely must submit a report. There is no doubt that we will put in the efforts to do so, and we must meet the deadline.

I repeat what I said earlier. After what happened in the spring, we have to take action. I don't know exactly how, but I could consider the issue with my assistant. I don't know whether you remember, but we decided sort of suddenly to look into the Air Canada file after the Commissioner of Official Languages released his report. It is not insignificant that we invited the president of Air Canada to meet with us. I repeat that he came here reluctantly.

Our committee must be taken seriously. To an extent, Canadians are watching our work. They are telling themselves that we are working on something that we will eventually sweep under the rug and move on to something else, that we do not finish what we start. In a way, we have a reputation to protect. At the very least, let's finish the work we begin.

We have been talking about Air Canada for 30 years, and two months won't make a difference. I completely agree with you on this, but the process we began in the spring should not come back on the agenda only in January or after the holidays. I think that the folks at Air Canada will laugh at us if we decide to do that.

I believe that Mr. Choquette's proposal is somewhat ambiguous. I am not sure we can ask officials to do the work, even if we table a resolution in order to hear from witnesses. That's our job. However, one of the commissioner's recommendations has to do with potential fines for Air Canada. I am not a legal expert. Aside from Mr. Arseneault, who is a lawyer, I don't know of any others within our group. So it may be important to get the opinion of people who could tell us whether this is applicable, or at least to get advice from some witnesses.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Lefebvre is also a lawyer.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Oh yes, sorry. Mr. Lefebvre is also a lawyer.

And you too?

If there are any other lawyers, raise your hand.

I think it is important for us to resolve this issue and make recommendations to the government, which will decide whether or not to apply them. I agree that a single meeting may not suffice. I'm no longer sure whether Mr. Lefebvre or Mr. Samson said this earlier. If we want to receive a few witnesses who will help us make a decision on what we will propose to the government, one meeting may not be enough. Usually, one meeting is enough for us to discuss with only one or two witnesses, if we want to really cover all the issues with them.

Once again, if the government were to adopt legislation under which fines could be imposed on Air Canada, that company would clearly not take it lying down. This means we have to plan, so that our proposals to the government would be realistic.

Today is September 20. We definitely need two meetings by December to be able to cover the issue and be done with it. We need two half days—so two afternoons or mornings—to deal with the issue.

I think that it would be important for our committee's image to do that this fall instead of waiting until after the holidays.

The Chair: I now give the floor to Mr. Vandal. He will be followed by Mr. Samson, and then Mr. Godin.

● (0925)

Mr. Dan Vandal: I think we are all talking about the same thing. We have to move forward on the Air Canada issue. It is important, but it's not as important for my constituents as the roadmap and the immigration file are. I think we should take a few days to consider our options.

It may be a good idea to move a motion so as to ask the officials to submit options to us. I suggest that we discuss this on Thursday and, in the meantime, that we move forward on the roadmap and the immigration file, while maintaining the intention to adopt a motion on Thursday that makes sense, so that we can take action with respect to Air Canada, as that is very important.

The Chair: Are you okay with that?

Yes, Mr. Samson?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I will skip my turn. It's rare, but it's not a problem.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Immigration and the roadmap are priorities for my constituents.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Joël Godin: I would just like to add that this is a math issue. It's a matter of time.

Mathematically speaking, can we prioritize immigration and Air Canada while meeting the parliamentary secretary's deadline? That is the question we should ask ourselves. But if the answer is no, we are all wasting our time and, in addition, we are not questioning the Air Canada representatives. The issue is mathematical in nature.

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I completely agree with my colleague Dan Vandal. We could come back to this on Thursday and decide what direction to take.

The Chair: If you agree, we will come back to the Air Canada issue at Thursday's meeting.

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We will probably move a motion to ask for very specific things. We will analyze the file again and will keep you informed. I will send you the motion. It won't be a surprise.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I am a bit worried. We have a list of individuals and organizations that can come talk to us about immigration. In reality, we should be making calls today in order to hear from those people next Thursday. It's complex.

If we move on to something else next Thursday, we should at least be ready to begin our work on immigration on Monday. That is what the committee's plan was last June.

The Chair: In other words, we would be ready next Tuesday?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes. Otherwise, we won't get the job done. It's a matter of math. As for Air Canada, no one wants to talk about it more than me. However, I want to talk about it in depth. I really want this committee to show wisdom by issuing solid recommendations. I don't know whether a single meeting, or even two meetings, will suffice, but it remains to be seen.

The Chair: May I propose that we more or less establish our agenda up to December? On Thursday, we could discuss Air Canada, as proposed, and also talk about the list of witnesses, unless you would like to do that today. You have a full list of witnesses.

Yes, Mr. Lefebvre?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, do we need two full hours to discuss Air Canada? We could already start inviting people who are on the list. We could have a witness during the first part and a discussion on that issue during the second part. I don't want to waste time either.

The Chair: So we would discuss Air Canada during the first hour?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: No, we would have that discussion during the second hour.

The Chair: Is that what you are proposing?

• (0930)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, that is what I am proposing.

The Chair: So the first hour of the Thursday meeting will be devoted to the witnesses and the second hour to Air Canada, if you are okay with that.

My understanding is that we will look at the list of witnesses today. We can start with that.

First, I would like to read to you a note submitted to me. The title given to the study is "immigration in minority francophone communities". However, the list of witnesses includes anglophone groups from Quebec. Their testimony is included in the report. It is important to make a change, so that the title of the study would be "immigration in official language minority communities".

Otherwise, if we invite witnesses from anglophone communities in Quebec, they will ask us how their testimony is relevant in a study on immigration in francophone communities.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, where does that note come from?

The Chair: From our researchers.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Oh, okay.

The Chair: So this is about making the title of the study "immigration in official language minority communities".

Do you agree with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Mr. Choquette?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I am not really an expert on immigration rules and laws, but I think that Quebec has its own rules and laws pertaining to immigration. To my knowledge, it is actually Quebec, and not the federal government, that manages its

immigration. If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Samson's concern has more to do with francophone communities outside Quebec.

So I am wondering what Mr. Samson's objective was when he suggested this study and how it is relevant. It's just something I'm wondering about.

The Chair: In order to continue with other members, I have a second paragraph to read to you as part of those same comments: "The committee seems to want to invite witnesses without having even made a statement explaining [or] specifying the purpose of the study." The witnesses are wondering what our goal is and what we are looking for.

Is there a way to specify, when we ask witnesses to appear before us, what we want to know when it comes to immigration? That is the second statement I wanted to share with you.

Ms. Boucher, go ahead.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I want to understand properly. In other committees, when we would send witnesses invitations to appear in the past, we would not provide explanations. Let's take for example the Réseau de soutien à l'immigration francophone de l'Est de l'Ontario. It has to do with immigration; we are not inviting them for a study on something else.

I'm looking at the list, at the end, and I would like to know why the witnesses we have suggested have not been retained, whether we are talking about my suggestions or Mr. Samson's. I would like to know why the witnesses we suggested have not been retained.

The Chair: That's news to me.

Ms. Lucie Lecomte (Committee Researcher): When the committee first looked at the list, you will remember that a major discussion took place. You prioritized witnesses and categorized them as follows: national, provincial and individual. The list is really just for the committee's needs. I made it off the top of my head yesterday, just to reorganize the work. Perhaps I used the term "not retained" incorrectly. In reality, those names were placed second. That is the explanation behind the list.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay. That's all I wanted to know.

The Chair: Great. That's a nice clarification.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I was just asking for clarifications because I did not understand.

The Chair: The next to take the floor will be Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Ms. Boucher's memory is good. I personally did not notice that some of the names I provided last time were missing. She is forcing me to pay extra attention to this. That was indeed the categorization we had agreed on.

I would like to comment on the issue of immigration.

Refugees and immigrants have arrived in the country. We created strategies to attract as many immigrants as possible, and that's great. Our country needs it, especially the province of Nova Scotia. I know that Quebec has its own rules. For over 20 years, Quebec has had the authority to deal with immigration on its territory. That's not what I am worried about.

We have the responsibility to ensure that francophone communities outside Quebec don't end up in more of a minority situation because immigrants cannot communicate or work in French.

When the representatives of those organizations and associations come before the committee, I think it essential for them to talk to us about the consequences of a shortage or an addition of francophone immigrants in their communities or organizations.

We are talking about inviting representatives of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. Those people will definitely clearly express the need to ensure that francophones, Acadians and others who arrive integrate into schools and communities. This is about the vitality and sustainability of communities. We have a responsibility in that regard. Given that those organizations are on the ground, they can give us an overview of the situation and tell us how we can use that information to avoid missing the boat if we do not act quickly.

Our minister has already considered strategies to facilitate things, but those witnesses could identify the dangers involved very clearly. They could also propose solutions to help us develop our action plan.

When we call those associations' representatives, we should ask them to talk to us about the importance of francophone immigration. That will certainly help them dig deeper and provide us with an overview of what could happen on the ground based on our way of handling the issue or our recommendations.

Those are my thoughts on the issue.

● (0935)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lapointe, go ahead.

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

I agree with my colleague Mr. Samson.

Mr. Choquette, you talked about the uniqueness of immigration in Quebec. The list of witnesses actually includes the Quebec ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion. We will put questions to that department's representatives to understand the peculiarity of immigration in Quebec. We talked about that peculiarity when the witness list was being made. That department's representatives should come before the committee. I know that immigration has a tremendous impact on the francophone minority in Canada, but we have to understand the uniqueness of immigration in Quebec.

I just wanted to follow up on the comments of my colleague Mr. Choquette.

The Chair: Next on my list is Mr. Généreux.

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

I share the opinions that have been voiced so far. If the witnesses want to know why they are invited to testify, we can tell them that we are studying immigrant integration.

I also think that a distinction should be made between what is happening in Quebec and what is happening in the rest of Canada. That's really important. Quebec's reality is different, as our province

is francophone. A number of immigrants have already left Quebec because the language made it difficult for them to integrate. That is a reality.

A distinction really must be made. Minority communities elsewhere in Canada—be it in the Maritimes or in western Canada—are experiencing totally different things from what is happening in Quebec.

I am looking forward to moving on to the list of witnesses. The more witnesses we have, the better it will be. I have said this before, and I repeat that we have to find witnesses among ordinary people, immigrants who have just arrived in Canada, who settled in one province or in a specific region, but who then decided to move elsewhere. It would be nice if we could find them and hear what their experience has been in order to determine what needs have not been properly addressed. We can have experts from governments testify, but hearing what ordinary people have to say is really important. That is what we need to hear in order to make relevant recommendations.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Ms. Boucher, go ahead.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I completely agree with Mr. Généreux. I will tell you about something that happened in my riding. Syrian immigrants have left our region, one for Alberta and the other one for Ontario, and for a good reason—a lack of structures. We were lacking housing and interpreters. The immigrants do not necessarily speak French or English. Often, their language is Arabic. It is pretty difficult to find someone who speaks Arabic in Saint-Irénée.

People who arrived here were telling me about all those things. I told myself that our committee was studying that very issue. The government makes decisions, as do all governments, but there are so many things to consider that, unwittingly, the essential considerations are sometimes lacking. For instance, how will we integrate the immigrants into schools and how will we house them?

There were no structures in place, in my riding or in the Quebec City region. I heard my colleagues say—and not only among the Conservatives—that Ontario had the same problem. Housing and interpreters are often lacking.

I also think it would be important to hear from ordinary people. The major principles are fine, but it would be nice for them to come tell us how they are integrating.

Those people come here out of necessity. We are prepared to integrate them, but are they also willing to do so?

The Chair: Allow me to propose something.

If we want to complete the study on immigration and influence the roadmap, we will have to have finished hearing from witnesses by the end of October. In fact, if we want to spend November gathering our ideas, finalizing the report and making sure we are ready by November 30, we will have to have finished hearing testimony on the roadmap and the immigration file by the end of October.

That means we have eight meetings left to hear from witnesses. We could review the witness list prepared by the analysts and try to familiarize ourselves with it. Afterwards, we could decide how to proceed from now until the end of October. Do you want to proceed this way?

If so, we could take a break of two or three minutes and then continue our meeting with the witness list. Are you favourable to that?

Mr. Samson, the floor is yours.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would like to say something.

We have to be careful. I really like to know what is happening on the ground. That said, that may cover 80% of the study's objectives.

It's good to gather information from people who are going through immigration situations on the ground, but the issue at hand is bigger than that. The objective is to establish a government strategy to ensure francophone immigration to francophone minority communities. That is what I am trying to achieve—the government establishing a strategy to attract francophone immigrants to francophone minority regions in Canada. Otherwise, we are not close to reaching our goal.

I understand that, no matter what, we have the responsibility to ensure that everything goes well for immigrants. Understanding how we treat immigrants when they arrive is a very important issue. That being said, it may not be the most important issue of this study.

• (0945)

The Chair: It is Mr. Arseneault's turn, and then Mr. Lefebvre will have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: We are all saying pretty much the same thing. I think that our main concern would be to determine what the national immigration strategy should be and how it would work at the federal level. Even though there are immigration laws specific to Quebec, New Brunswick or other provinces, the process starts with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. So what is the strategy?

I see the federal government among the witnesses invited to appear before the committee on this issue. But I don't want to just have a witness for a half an hour, as I have a thousand and one questions to ask.

First, is the national strategy regulated? Is the regulation informal or formal? Is linguistic duality being respected, and are the proportions of francophones and anglophones in Canada being maintained? Off the top of my head, these are the kinds of questions I would like to ask.

Second, legally speaking, how is the burden of selecting immigrants transferred to the provinces? Once an immigration application is filed and immigrants enter Canada, they are partially looked after by the provinces. I am very ignorant of the process, but it is important to understand the legal aspect of the issue.

The federal government is being named as a witness, but in my opinion, a number of representatives from various services and departments related to immigration should appear to represent the federal government. The financial aspect is a factor, but off the top of

my head, my first question is the following: does our government have a national strategy to meet the quotas of francophone and anglophone immigrants based on the distribution of francophones and anglophones in Canada? As Mr. Généreux said, we know full well that Quebec is the province with the most francophones in the country. However, there are francophone strongholds across Canada experiencing the same stress and the same concerns, be it in Acadia, among the Franco-Manitobans, among the Franco-Ontarians or elsewhere. It's just as important for us in the rest of Canada.

So here is my first question: are the francophone and anglophone quotas being met in terms of the country's linguistic proportions when immigrants are accepted or when Canada is being promoted?

My second question would be, what are the immigrant selection criteria in Canada? Are the immigrants qualified individuals, people who are already trained? I'm not taking about Syrians or other refugees, as they fall into the humanitarian category. I'm talking about immigrant selection in general. How does the process work? I want to know all that. Perhaps the language of the immigrant arriving in the country influences decisions. English is, of course, often the language of business.

I am also concerned over the legal aspect.

That being said, what I would like to emphasize is the need to have the federal government appear as a witness before the committee, but not only for an hour. I think our discussion with just federal government representatives would take up an entire meeting.

The Chair: Before we continue the discussion, I would like to clarify something. The analyst is asking me whether we wish to publish two reports—one on immigration and another one on the roadmap. If you don't agree, say so, but I just answered that we will produce a comprehensive report encompassing immigration and the roadmap, rather than two reports.

Do you agree with that?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: The immigration portion of the comprehensive report will be significant.

The Chair: Exactly. This way, we will have one report to draft.

Mr. Lefebvre, go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, I agree with my colleague René Arseneault. I think we need to know a bit about what the rules of the game are right now, where we are at, what the rules are in terms of immigration in linguistic minority settings in Canada, what the strategy is, what the statistics are over the past 10 years, and what the challenges we still have to address are.

Immigration came up a lot just in the comments we have heard around the table. We have to ensure that we are in fact talking about immigration in linguistic minority settings. I think this is the responsibility of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Some people in my riding are from Africa. Of course, they are francophones who came to live in a minority region. They have experienced difficulties, as well as successes.

I agree that we want to call witnesses who will share with us their experience on the ground. At the same time, we have to make sure that, when we talk about the situation with immigration, it has to do with minority communities. That is what the work of the Standing Committee on Official Languages is about.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Lefebvre.

It's your turn, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That is why I said earlier that it was important to treat Quebec differently, but equally.

A bit earlier, Mr. Samson said that, when immigrants arrive, they stay in the major cities. They do not really go to the regions. They don't really land in the regions where francophones are in the minority.

The will of the provinces also plays a role. That is why the provinces are also concerned. I agree with Mr. Arseneault. It is the same thing for Quebec. Immigrants all arrive in Montreal. If they spend a year there, I challenge you to get them out of the city, as they won't leave.

Immigrants are not being sent to the regions. They all arrive in one place and remain there, in their community. That has everything to do with the language, but also with the situations of the provinces and with how they try to get the newcomers interested in settling down more in the regions or in areas where francophones are in the minority.

The situation is very complex. It will be very interesting to hear from the witnesses when they appear.

• (0950)

The Chair: But Charlevoix is so beautiful!

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, but if you don't speak French and only speak Arabic, you can't order a poutine.

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, go ahead.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I would like to make a little joke after what Mr. Généreux said. If they get into Montreal, they can no longer get out because of the construction.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Linda Lapointe: If they manage to get into Montreal, they never leave. That was my comment. I have often tried to get into Montreal and I swear that it's impossible to get out.

The Chair: I suggest that we take a break.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I would like to finish my comment. That was just a joke. I have something more serious to say.

An important distinction must be made between immigrants and refugees. I suggest that we bring in federal officials on Thursday. I think they are pretty available. They could come on Thursday and answer our questions, as well as those my colleague Mr. Arseneault has brought up.

The Chair: We are going to suspend our proceedings for a few minutes.

When we return, let's remember what Ms. Lapointe just said, which is that we could hear some federal public servants next Thursday. We will complete the list after the break.

• (0950)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1000)

The Chair: We will resume our meeting.

We were defining our priorities according to the following guidelines. We have until the end of October to hear witnesses on the immigration aspect of the roadmap. Earlier, we concluded by saying that we should perhaps begin with federal government representatives.

Does anyone wish to discuss the witness list at this time? If I remember correctly, we examined this list a few times already. We may also add names to the list; that is why we are here.

We are going to take the next 45 minutes to prepare an agenda that should take us to the end of October, as we are reserving the month of November for the report.

Thursday we will hear the first witnesses during the first hour, and Air Canada during the second. Then we will start to fill out our schedule for the following weeks.

I yield the floor to Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I would like us to discuss the order, or suggestions of a general, national or federal nature.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chair, I suggest that we begin with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. This will allow the committee to get a status report on the situation and obtain information.

The list also mentions the National Community Table on Francophone Immigration. It would be interesting to hear these people as well, because they represent a national organization.

The FCFA could also enlighten us on this matter.

The Chair: Don't go too fast.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I'm suggesting a list.

The Chair: We have to be able to keep up with you. We are trying to fill our schedule on a priority basis, one day after another. That does not mean that the committee cannot be flexible. We are just trying to give a heads up to those who are going to contact the witnesses.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I mentioned Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada at the federal level. Then I suggested the National Community Table on Francophone Immigration, which is the fourth organization on the list you gave us.

Do you see it?

The Chair: Those are the four organizations under "federal government".

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: No, on Thursday we only have the first group, from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

The Clerk: Thursday you will be hearing representatives from Refugees and Citizenship Canada, if they are available.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes.

• (1005)

The Chair: That's on Thursday.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Then I suggest that the committee hear the representatives of the National Community Table on Francophone Immigration.

The Chair: Thursday or Monday?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: No; they would be the next witnesses. It depends on their schedule.

We are here. We can set four or five priorities for the first four meetings. It does not matter to us if we don't know right now which witnesses can come, nor in which order. May I suggest a general order?

The Chair: Fine.

In third place, whom do you suggest?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I suggest we hear the FCFA.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, I'd like to say something.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Généreux, I'd just like to finish my list. You can suggest other names when I've finished.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'm sorry, Mr. Lefebvre. I just have a question, if I may.

In order, we have Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and Canadian Heritage, who together will represent the Government of Canada. Afterwards, we will be hearing from national community organizations.

May we simply hear them in the order in which they appear on the list?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We have to establish an order, but there are meetings where nothing has been scheduled yet. We have to find out who can come and when.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Of course it depends on the availability of witnesses.

It would be interesting to be able to hear them in blocs. In fact, they are already organized in blocs. I don't think we should mix the community organizations and the whole government aspect. Those are two different things.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We want to invite representatives of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada, but we already heard them when they tabled their report in May. Do we want to hear them again? They sent us their report, some data and their comments on immigration. We can hear them again, I wouldn't refuse.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Personally I would hear them again, because it might be good to refresh our memory on this very specific issue. They would only be here for an hour.

The Chair: You said an hour. That is the sort of thing I need to know as well. When you mention the name of one group or another, could you also indicate how much time you would like us to allocate to them?

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Concerning Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada at the federal level, is it the minister we want to see?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: It might be possible on Thursday.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would not begin with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, because it is important to allocate at least two hours for those witnesses.

I am sorry, but I want to talk about Air Canada during the hour that is reserved for them.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, from what I understand, on Thursday we are going to devote one hour to discussing our work, and another hour to Air Canada. After that, we will establish a list of witnesses, giving the priority to the federal government and to the community organizations. However, this would take place next week.

The Chair: Your chairman is confused.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I'm sorry if I threw the ball too fast. I will go over the details.

We will hold between eight and ten meetings. As for the witnesses, it is not certain that any given association can appear during the first week of October. Of course we are sending out invitations according to an order of priorities, but we have to be flexible. We can't expect that a given organization will be able to come and meet with us on a specific date. It might be impossible for them.

We have to determine who we will invite first. Mr. Généreux made a suggestion. For instance, if the FCFA can only come later, that will not be a problem.

The Chair: I would simply like to clarify something. During the first hour on Thursday...

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We already said that Thursday we would deal with immigration and that we would hear federal representatives.

The Chair: Very well. So, as for the witnesses...

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: There will be a federal representative from the field of immigration.

The Chair: That is what we had said.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Concerning Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, it would not matter to me if we divided up the time. We agreed to talk about Air Canada on Thursday. This will be a two-hour meeting, correct?

The Chair: We had agreed that the second hour would be devoted to Air Canada.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: A deputy minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada could set things up. The next week, other people from the department could appear. Since there are various aspects and issues, various people could come and speak. Immigration is one thing, but integrating people in a minority situation and immigrants is another. This might be another component of the department.

I'm not familiar with this department and its hierarchy, but there are certainly several subdivisions. But I imagine that more than one person will come and speak to us about integrating immigrants, Syrians or other immigrants, in a minority situation. The next week, another person could come and speak about the department, possibly for two hours. We could actually dedicate three hours to the department in total.

• (1010)

The Chair: Basically, you're recommending that a deputy minister or senior official of that department appear in the first hour on Thursday.

Is that okay with everyone?

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We're talking about immigration in a minority setting. There's already a committee that deals with immigration. If we limit ourselves to an overview, a comprehensive overview of immigration, this won't be a problem, but then we will have to focus on the issues that concern us.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We can afford to separate it in two.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I agree that we then follow the list, but it must always be related to minority communities.

The Chair: So it's settled for Thursday.

What are we doing next week? Are we continuing with the list and the order it's in?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I think we should spend at least two hours on immigration issues, especially integration in minority communities. Besides we spoke earlier about an action plan.

The Chair: Still with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes. I'm positive we won't have too many two-hour opportunities to ask our questions. I have no doubts about that.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The first hour on Thursday will focus on immigration.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: In general.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, to get an overview. The next two hours will focus on minority communities.

The Chair: Is that acceptable?

What are we going to do after that?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The list indicates the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and Canadian Heritage.

The Chair: Right.

How much time should we give to each group? There should be some kind of pattern.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Taking a quick look at the list, I see that 27 witnesses have been suggested. If we invite four witnesses per meeting, which isn't the case right now, we would need six meetings. In other words, we will never be able to get to the end of this list.

That's why I think that Mr. Lefebvre's idea of setting some priorities is really necessary. The way I understand it, we don't want to spend more than four meetings on this. We especially want to address the roadmap.

The Chair: We have the possibility of setting aside two days of meetings in September, in addition to meetings in October. So we will have eight days of meetings in all.

Mr. François Choquette: Will they be about immigration or the roadmap?

The Chair: They'll be on both the roadmap and immigration.

Mr. François Choquette: That's what I'm saying.

The list has the names of 27 witnesses for immigration. That's why I liked Mr. Lefebvre's idea of favouring some witnesses and, whenever possible, inviting four witnesses per meeting: two witnesses for the first hour and two for the second. If we organize four meetings, we will be able to see about 16 witnesses. That is what I suggest.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That would be 14 witnesses, because we will lose some next Thursday.

Mr. François Choquette: You're right, Mr. Samson.

The Chair: Here's a question for you. When the witnesses appear, we'll discuss immigration with them, but will we also talk about the roadmap? Often we receive the same people for immigration and for the roadmap.

I was asked this question a little earlier. I said that if some witnesses invited to speak to us about immigration felt comfortable talking to us about the roadmap, we would find out when we invite them to appear before the committee. We can do both at the same time. It would be unwise to bring them back to talk about the roadmap after they have already spoken to us about immigration.

Mr. Lefebvre?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I want to be sure about one thing. I'm taking a quick look at the calendar and, after October, I count 12 meetings in November and December. I don't think we'll need 12 meetings to draft and finalize our report on the roadmap and immigration.

The Chair: No, I had only set aside November for that.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Why not give us until December? Let's keep as many meetings as possible to do a proper job on the roadmap and immigration.

The Chair: No, because we need to be done by November 30. The report has to be tabled in the House on November 30.

• (1015)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: So we're planning seven meetings for the report.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I think that's too many.

The Chair: I agree with Mr. Lefebvre. We can set aside two more for witnesses.

Mr. Darrell Samson: What date is that? Are we talking about December 1?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: There are more than seven meetings.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: No.

Whatever number of meetings we've determined, can we keep a few others to study the roadmap and immigration? That's what I'm asking.

The Chair: We can add two meetings.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That's still eight meetings.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I can assure you that we're going to lose time if we listen to four witnesses a meeting and address both topics. It's impossible. Each witness will have 30 minutes: 10 minutes for the presentation, then we will go to questions. The witness won't be able to address francophone immigration and the roadmap at the same time. It's impossible.

If that's our intention, we will need to hold more meetings and not hear from four witnesses per meeting. Otherwise, we won't get any work done.

The Chair: Mr. G n reux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: I agree with Mr. Samson.

Actually, if we set aside four meetings to draft the final report, that adds about two or three meetings where we will speak about both the roadmap and francophone immigration.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: I agree with you, Mr. Chair. For example, if we invite people from FCFA or other people from western Canada, we aren't going to invite them to speak for just half an hour. We will have to give them an hour. There are probably other witnesses we should give an hour to, or at least an hour and a half, so that they can talk about both issues. We have to make the connection.

I think we should go through all the witnesses and choose the ones we are going to keep. We can decide then who to give half an hour or an hour to.

We don't have a choice. We have to give an hour to national organizations. We can't ask these people to travel here for half an hour. That's utterly ridiculous. These people won't have enough time. We'll get through three questions and that will be it.

Let's write down the names of witnesses and keep fewer to give them as much time as possible. After we've finished with the list of witnesses, we will return to the roadmap with another list of witnesses, certainly. However, some witnesses, like the FCFA representatives, will intervene on both issues. We need to give them time to properly answer our questions.

The Chair: According to my quick calculations, we'll have about 20 hours available to us.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Is that for all the committee's work?

The Chair: It will be for the work that will precede the report.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: We only have about 20 hours? Not more than that?

Mr. Jo l Godin: How much time are you calculating to draft the report?

The Chair: We have set aside three meetings for the report.

Remember that it also has to be revised, printed and tabled.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Ms. Lecomte will be working hard.

The Chair: If I'm calculating correctly, we might have 10 two-hour meetings for a total of about 20 hours.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: In that case, we need to reduce the number of witnesses.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We won't have a choice.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We also need to determine whether the testimonies will last 30 minutes or an hour.

The Chair: Exactly.

We can go back to the topics one by one, if you wish.

First, there's immigration in general.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's already been settled. We'll have one hour to discuss it in general on Monday, and two hours to discuss immigration in minority communities. Then it will be done.

The Chair: So there will be three hours for that issue.

Let's move on to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Personally, I would drop it.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

An hon. member: Me, too.

Mr. Darrell Samson: But perhaps the analysts—

Mr. Bernard G n reux: We can set it aside.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Precisely.

The Chair: Right.

There's also Canadian Heritage.

An hon. member: As far as I'm concerned, I'd drop it.

Some hon. members: Me, too.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Perhaps we should invite some representatives from the department because we can't let the department off the hook. It might take about 30 minutes to talk about francophone immigration in official language minority communities. We could check whether the department is involved in this area and to what extent.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Let's see what the people from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada say. Perhaps they will explain what Canadian Heritage is doing or not doing in this area.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We could simply ask Mr. Boissonnault.

• (1020)

The Chair: He's not there.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: He's not there right now, true, but he is the parliamentary secretary. He will agree to meet with us. We could ask him questions for 30 minutes. He could tell us what the situation is.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Let's set this aside.

Mr. Darrell Samson: If Canadian Heritage is preparing a strategy, I'd like to know what it is. If not, why isn't the department preparing one? Perhaps it should be.

The situation that the people from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada are going to describe to us might be useful for us. It would at least give us an indication. Generally speaking, Canadian Heritage should be acting on this. If it isn't and we think it should be, we need to know why.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Pardon me, but Mr. Randy Boissonnault is the parliamentary secretary to the Minister. So if he isn't taking action on this, it's because he is following the minister's orders. The orders don't come from Canadian Heritage, but from the minister.

The Chair: I just want to remind you that our report is submitted to the House to get answers from Canadian Heritage. Basically, we intervene through our recommendations to the minister of Canadian Heritage.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So we need to meet with her.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It might be worthwhile to keep this witness. We should make sure we ask a few questions. I'm not saying that Mr. Boissonnault can't answer us, but Canadian Heritage is the department.

The Chair: I had set the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages aside.

Listen, if we make them all a priority, we won't get to the end of the list.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's true. What did we decide for Canadian Heritage?

Some hon. members: We are going to set them aside.

The Chair: Right. We're setting aside the invitation to Canadian Heritage.

As for the national community table on francophone immigration, is it a yes?

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's mandatory.

The Chair: Are we giving it an hour?

Some hon. members: One hour.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Where is the organization from?

An hon. member: I think it's located in the region.

The Chair: Is the National Community Table on Francophone Immigration in Ottawa?

The Clerk: I'm not sure.

The Chair: We'll give them an hour.

Let's move on to the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think the two groups should have an hour each on the same day. It would give us a good picture of the situation.

The Chair: Okay. We'll spend an hour with the people from the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We'll also give an hour to the people from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Perhaps we should meet with them on the same day because we could make connections between what the different groups have to say.

The Chair: Right.

Let's move on to the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think we could drop them.

The Chair: We'll leave them out.

The next group is the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité Canada.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We have to invite them because we'll be dealing with the issue of the economy as it relates to immigration.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Let's give them two hours.

The Chair: Two hours?

Mr. Darrell Samson: At least an hour.

The Chair: One hour. Fine.

Now we have the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada.

Would one hour be enough?

An hon. member: Yes, one hour.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I don't know if we need to invite them.

Mr. René Arseneault: The colleges and universities are surviving today because of francophone immigration.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, that's true.

Mr. René Arseneault: The ones in Montreal, Ottawa and Moncton aren't immune to this reality.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault is suggesting we give them one hour.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We need to give them one hour.

That's a good argument, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would give them half an hour.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It depends on where the organization is located.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: It's in Ottawa. Claude Harvey is the director general.

I think half an hour would be enough. He'll give us an overview of the situation.

The Chair: Do you all agree on half an hour?

Mr. René Arseneault: Half an hour means only 20 minutes for questions, since 10 minutes will be for the presentation.

Every francophone university in Canada, even in Quebec, is surviving because of immigration.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I don't have a problem with one hour.

The Chair: Let's go with an hour.

What about the Francophone Immigration Networks?

Mr. Dan Vandal: It's a provincial group in Manitoba that arranges francophone immigration.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: A lot of people are interested in the good work that this association has done for francophone immigration in Manitoba. It's a success in various ways. I think it would be worthwhile to listen to these people so they can tell us how they managed it. I would suggest giving the organization's representatives an hour, especially since they're coming from Manitoba.

The Chair: We'll give them an hour.

Now, let's talk about Languages Canada. What about this organization?

Ms. Lucie Lecomte: The organization is partly subsidized by the federal government, but it's not a federal organization. That's why I put it under "other".

The Chair: Are we leaving this organization out for the moment?

Some hon. members: Okay.

The Chair: Let's move on to New Brunswick. We're talking about the Government of New Brunswick and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of New Brunswick.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think we should hear from witnesses from at least one of the two organizations.

The Chair: Are we giving an hour for both organizations?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I suggest we hear from at least one organization per province. Perhaps we could hear from a second one, but we should designate one a priority.

The Chair: Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I agree with this, but I would give priority to the government. In fact, it's the provincial government that makes decisions about immigration. The organizations provide assistance to immigrants, but it's the government, first and foremost, that puts the process in place. I think we should give priority to the provincial governments because it's essentially these governments that we're dealing with.

•(1025)

The Chair: So are we giving one hour to the Government of New Brunswick?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

The Chair: We'll wait on the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of New Brunswick.

Now we're on to the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta.

Mr. Boissonnault, you have the floor.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I think the people from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta and the Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta could appear together.

The ACFA is the voice for the entire province, but the immigrant welcome centre is in a better position to provide us with information.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Actually, the ACFA is the only organization on the list for Alberta.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, just like Mrs. Boucher before the end of the last session, I submitted a list of eight organizations, but they do not appear in this list. My list included organizations, not just from Alberta, but from western Canada as a whole.

The Chair: That is the list prepared by Georges Etoka, the former clerk of the committee.

Mr. Boissonnault, could you submit your list again?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: With pleasure.

The Chair: Thank you. We will give everything to the clerk so that she can include those organizations in the list.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It seemed to me that there were more Alberta organizations, too.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: There were more, in fact, because there are now more francophones in Alberta than in Manitoba. I apologize to you for saying that, Mr. Vandal. After Ontario, Alberta is third among Canadian provinces in terms of the number of francophones.

The Chair: Do we set aside an hour for Alberta?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Let's now move to Manitoba.

Some hon. members: Let's leave that to one side.

The Chair: Okay.

On the next page, we have organizations from Quebec.

Do we give an hour to the ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Maybe 30 minutes?

The Chair: We'll see.

We are now on British Columbia.

Do we give an hour to the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Lucie Lecomte: Did you jump over the other organizations?

The Chair: Let's go back to the other Quebec organizations, like the Quebec Community Groups Network and Action réfugiés Montréal.

Do we give them half an hour each?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Before we do that, let's see how much time we have left.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: We have to be close to Christmas already.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think we should just pick some out of a hat.

The Chair: At the end, we will see if our schedule is too full.

Mr. René Arseneault: One hour seems much too much time for francophone community organizations from various provinces. I would like to spend the time hearing from governments or any organization with decision-making power.

I certainly want to hear from those associations, but Acadians and Québécois and Franco-Ontarians are all going to end up saying the same thing.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Me too. I agree with you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: As a template, Mr. Arseneault's suggestion is a good one, which I see like this: we give an hour to each provincial ministry and a half-hour to all the community organizations. That would be fair in terms of both impartiality and distribution.

Mr. René Arseneault: I am not imposing anything here but I suggest that we set aside an hour to hear from Acadian, Franco-Manitoban and English Quebec organizations. I would put four of them in an hour. They will give a presentation of 10 minutes each and they will all say the same thing. We will have heard from them and it will allow us to have a better idea of the challenges they face.

The Chair: Up to this point, we have been talking about full hours. Now we are at the province of Quebec. We have given an hour to the ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion. Do we give the Quebec Community Groups Network and Action réfugiés Montréal half an hour each?

The Clerk: They could appear together in one hour.

• (1030)

The Chair: So, two times a half-hour.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: One hour for them both.

The Clerk: Yes, exactly.

The Chair: Now we are on the same page.

What's the situation with British Columbia?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: There is only one organization.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Can we wait for Mr. Boissonnault's list? He said that he had suggested other organizations in western Canada.

The Chair: Mr. Boissonnault, do we set aside one hour for British Columbia?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: One hour, yes.

The Chair: Okay. We will wait for proposals for British Columbia to come to us.

For Ontario, there is the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario and the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Did no one think to invite the Ontario Ministry?

The Chair: Especially since the minister is here in Ottawa.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I think that's right.

Mr. René Arseneault: It's never too late to do the right thing.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It would be a lot better to hear from the ministries. I have nothing against the organizations, but I repeat that our work is done with the governments.

The Chair: It's the Ontario Ministry of Francophone Affairs. We will have to find the exact name. We will set aside one hour for them.

What are we doing for the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario and the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: They would have half an hour each.

The Chair: So, half an hour each, but they would come at the same time.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Lefebvre can correct me if I am wrong, but the French Language Services Commissioner in Ontario might make similar remarks to Katherine d'Entremont, our commissioner in New Brunswick.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That's right.

Mr. René Arseneault: So why make them come here? They are protecting language rights in their provinces, according to provincial legislation.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: A bit like an ombudsman for language rights. They don't deal with immigration.

The Chair: So are you dropping Ontario's Office of the French Language Services Commissioner?

Mr. René Arseneault: Unless they have a broader role that includes immigration. I don't know.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I agree, but I still have one concern.

We are making a list of witnesses and we are coming up with our game plan, which is good. However, I am concerned that we do not have a complete list of people that we want to hear from about the roadmap. At the end of all this, we will have heard from a few people about the roadmap, but no one else.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It is not just about the roadmap; it's about immigration.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes, but if we do all this for immigration, there will be no time for the roadmap.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That is what we told you just now, but you weren't listening.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Ha, ha!

The Chair: I would like to clarify one thing for the record, because it is not clear for everyone. This debate is in public. We are not rejecting groups but we have to choose what seems to us to be most relevant for our study. I still want to leave it a little open. At any point, if a group cannot come for any reason, there will perhaps be room to invite another group. This is a message in the public interest that I am sending to those who might be listening to us or reading this.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Chair, did I understand correctly that we are going to invite officials from each provincial government for one hour each? That is what we decided, was it not?

The Chair: That is the proposal. At the end, I would like us to add in half-hours and hours and, if that goes over the time we have set aside, we will drop some of them.

Mr. Dan Vandal: We are already at our limit of 20 hours.

Mr. René Arseneault: I have a suggestion. Can we check with provincial and territorial governments to see whether they have policies on immigration in minority situations, which is the main goal of the study? Perhaps all of them do, but I am not sure about that; I would be surprised. We could then hear from provincial ministries that do have policies on immigration in minority situations.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: What about governments that do not have them? Why don't they?

The Chair: We have to encourage them to get some.

An hon. member: The goal is for them to have some.

Mr. René Arseneault: We only have 20 hours. Our time is limited.

The Chair: Let's move on.

I have put down a half hour for l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario and a half-hour for the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario, but we can look over it again at the end.

What are we doing with the Conseil économique et coopératif de la Saskatchewan?

Mrs. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We had a lot of witnesses in June because we were not too sure what the game plan was. It was also the end of the session. Now, as Mr. Arseneault said, all those organizations have to be similar, in a way. There is the FCFA, which is involved everywhere in minority situations, and there are other groups in Quebec and elsewhere.

Could we not see those groups again together?

The Chair: Although they are similar, if they are focused on a group of francophones in Saskatchewan, they have to be able to come to tell us about it. In my opinion, even though there are significant similarities from one province to the other, it is good for them and good for us that they can express their views to their elected representatives.

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

• (1035)

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, there is not a lot of time left and I feel that we are practically at the end of the list. I think that we could hand over what is left to the clerk and the analysts.

Also, I would like to make the following proposal to the committee, if it helps. The next time we have to choose witnesses, we could perhaps each do it within our parties and then meet together, with the chair and vice-chairs, in order to be quicker and more efficient.

In addition, I have tabled a motion. I am very concerned by one matter and I feel that all organizations working in the area of official languages are concerned as well. The Commissioner of Official Languages was supposed to leave his position next October 16. Fortunately, however, he has agreed to extend his mandate until the end of December. But I believe that it is extremely important for the committee to point out the need to make the transfer of knowledge,

in order to protect bilingualism and our official language minority communities everywhere in Canada.

Mr. Fraser has been the commissioner for 10 years. He has probably held that position for the longest time of anyone. His knowledge, his expertise and his network are really extensive. I have tabled a motion, but the wording can be changed. It reads as follows:

That the Committee invite the Governor in Council to publish the job posting for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages and select a candidate as soon as possible in order to provide for time to transfer files, knowledge and expertise between the new commissioner and the outgoing commissioner, Graham Fraser.

We do not have to vote on this motion today. I will give you time to read it and analyze it. If you want to suggest something else, we can come back to it on Thursday, at the end of the meeting. But, as the Standing Committee on Official Languages, it is important that we pass this message on.

I have something else to submit, but I can do it once the meeting is over.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Vandal, the floor is yours.

Mr. Dan Vandal: It has been suggested that we set aside an hour for Air Canada in the next meeting. In my opinion, that's a long time, given that we will have motions to debate. I don't think it's necessary to discuss the matter again for an hour. So I propose that we deal with Air Canada and our motions in 30 minutes.

The Chair: We could include the Air Canada matter in committee business and use that hour to good effect.

Any other comments?

Yes, Mr. Arseneault?

Mr. René Arseneault: Forgive me for jumping all over the place, but the number is already too high, as I understand it.

Could the clerk ask all the non-governmental associations to submit a summary to us of who they are and what they do, together with their objectives? If they do that, it may not be necessary to have them appear here. We should make the best use of our time when it is possible to do so.

I claim no credit for that idea. My assistant whispered it into my ear.

The Chair: Your turn, Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I think your idea is very good. Mathematically speaking, as my friend Joël Godin said, it would perhaps be a good solution to prioritize our issues efficiently.

• (1040)

The Chair: So we could ask them to send us about five pages.

Some hon. members: A brief.

The Chair: A brief? Okay.

Yes, Mr. Samson?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think you said that we would first hear from government and community officials, and we would then move to the other category.

Mr. René Arseneault: I do not know what you mean by “community”, but if you mean the Acadian, Franco-Manitoban and English Quebec federations—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay, but I am talking about the list of government and community officials.

Mr. René Arseneault: Ah, we are not touching that, no.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay. You scared me.

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

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I would like to add a clarification to Mr. Arseneault’s comments.

In the list, we have prioritized the federal government and all organizations with a national scope. We are inviting them. As for the others, we are going to ask them to send us a report in writing.

Mr. René Arseneault: As someone who has written one, I feel that a brief is something substantial. I don’t know what you understand by “brief” but that is perhaps not what they would like to send to us. We would like to know their goals and objectives and their concerns about immigration in minority situations. Perhaps we might call that a brief, but that is what I see in it.

The Chair: Who are we asking?

Mr. René Arseneault: Everyone to whom we are not sure about giving a half-hour, or whom we could have in groups of four per hour. It is not necessary to hear from them, actually.

The Chair: So, in summary, we are not changing anything for those to whom we have given one hour, unlike those to whom we have given half an hour. I count four to whom we have given half an hour.

I see here that we have set aside an hour for each of the following organizations: the Quebec Community Groups Network, Action réfugiés Montréal, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l’Ontario and the Office of the French Language Commissioner of Ontario.

Mr. René Arseneault: There are others too, like the Francophones of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Conseil économique et coopératif de la Saskatchewan.

The Chair: We had not got to them yet.

Mr. René Arseneault: I know, but we could read the documents from all those organizations rather than ask them to appear before us.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I really agree with that. We should give each of them three or four basic questions. The information would then be structured, helpful and consistent. We could specifically ask them what they are doing or could do to improve the situation.

The Chair: The questions would be about immigration and the roadmap.

Are we okay with that?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I would like to make a point of order, or, actually, to ask for clarification.

Having had discussions with my fellow parliamentary secretaries who sit on other committees, and having held this position for six months, I can tell you that the current practice is not to have more than one meeting with departmental officials. So that’s a maximum of two hours. It will probably be difficult to get them to appear more than once. It is also sometimes difficult to get them to appear with less than two days’ notice.

It would be good to invite representatives from national organizations working on immigration matters and keep them in the wings. Basically, if we ask departmental officials to appear here with two days’ notice, those meetings may well not happen.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

The clerk tells me that we could perhaps try to meet with representatives of the National Community Table on Francophone Immigration. I will let the clerk see what can be done for Thursday, in the light of what Mr. Boissonnault has just said.

Mr. Darrell Samson: During the hour when we are going to work on Immigration, we should give consideration to the questions we want to ask those groups. That is very important. I think that we have to structure the things we are asking.

The Chair: You are absolutely right, Mr. Samson.

Are there any other comments?

That’s good; we are finishing on time.

Meeting adjourned.

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