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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Welcome, everyone, to this session of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to Standing Order 111.1(1), we are studying the certificate of nomination of Madeleine Meilleur to the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, referred to the committee on Monday, May 15, 2017.

We welcome the nominee for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages.

Welcome, Ms. Meilleur.

Here is how we will proceed. Ms. Meilleur, I understand that you are going to talk to us for 20 minutes or so. Thereafter, as is our custom, we will move to a round of questions, answers and comments from committee members.

Ms. Meilleur, please go ahead.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur (Nominee for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, distinguished members of the Standing Commons Committee on Official Languages, thank you for giving me this opportunity to meet with you and to introduce myself.

I first want to express how appreciative I am for being selected as a candidate for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada. It is a sign of confidence that touches me greatly, because, throughout my public life, the country's linguistic duality has been a source of inspiration and commitment for me.

I applied for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada with a great deal of interest and enthusiasm. I believe I have the recognized relevant knowledge, professional qualifications and personal skills to fulfil this role competently and effectively.

[English]

My professional career has enabled me to evolve and succeed in three different fields of competency: first as a nurse, then as a lawyer, and more recently as a provincial member of Parliament and minister. At the beginning of my career, I worked as a nurse in a hospital environment, in various specialized services, and I performed clinical teaching duties. After going back to school, I practised as a lawyer specializing in labour and employment law. I worked with both the union and employer communities, thus acquiring experience in mediation and conciliation. During my legal career, I also served as a municipal councillor for the City of Ottawa.

[Translation]

I served as a provincial member of Parliament and Ontario government minister for a period of 12 years. Throughout that period, I served as the minister responsible for francophone affairs. In that capacity I spearheaded important initiatives to ensure the development of the Franco-Ontarian community. Those initiatives included the establishment of the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner, the adoption of a more inclusive definition of francophones, the adoption of regulations on the delivery of French-language services by third parties on behalf of governmental organizations, the autonomy of the TFO television channel, and more recently, the setting of a 5% target for francophone immigration.

I can assure you that all the work I carried out in that capacity went beyond party politics and was always dedicated to the needs and interests of Ontario's francophone community.

[English]

During this time period, I also held a variety of other ministerial mandates. I served successively as the Minister of Culture, Minister of Community and Social Services, Minister of Safety and Correctional Services, and finally as Attorney General of Ontario. I served on the Treasury Board and the management board of the Government of Ontario for a number of years. I promoted a rigorous approach to fiscal control. Coming from a small business family, I treated public expenditure files with the same sense of prudence and foresight that I learned from my parents, recognizing first and foremost that these were financial resources entrusted to us by all Ontarians.

• (1105)

[Translation]

I also fulfilled ministerial duties that required a high degree of professional responsibility and public accountability. At the ministries of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Community and Social Services, and the Attorney General, I dealt with highly confidential and sensitive complex files.

As the Attorney General of Ontario, it was my responsibility to ensure that all bills and all legal decisions by the government complied with the letter and spirit of the Canadian Constitution. In that capacity, I also ensured that the rule of law was upheld in the exercise of authority. In my role as the legal advisor to cabinet, I always had to act in an objective and non-partisan manner.

[English]

In terms of official languages in Canada, I believe I offer unique expertise. Over my 12 years as Ontario's Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs, I created and maintained collaborative relationships throughout Canada's francophone community, and I developed close relations with my colleagues from other provinces. Nationally, from 2003 to 2015, I participated in every single federal, provincial, and territorial Francophonie conference. Internationally, I attended three Francophonie summits. As part of the Canadian delegation, I contributed to the discussions and to the consensus that was reached by bringing to the table the unique and positive experience of Ontario, which is home to more than 600,000 francophones, an official language minority community that is increasingly diverse and dynamic. I am originally from Quebec, so I am also familiar with Quebec's English-speaking community, its challenges, and its aspirations.

[Translation]

Throughout my career I have made integrity and transparency the core values of my commitment to public life. My actions and decisions have been analyzed and scrutinized by the media, the public, and various political stakeholders. At all times, I have been able to publicly demonstrate my integrity. In my 25 years of public life, I have always adhered to the strictest rules of ethics and accountability associated with the positions I have held.

In closing, if I have the privilege of holding the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, my priorities will include: making Canadians aware of the Commissioner's role, their rights and privileges under the Official Languages Act and of the remedies available to them to ensure their rights are respected; promoting and protecting the objective nature of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages; and promoting the active offer of services to Canadians in both languages.

[English]

Official languages minority communities grow through immigration. The federal government has set some goals related to the recruitment of French-speaking immigrants in provinces and territories other than Quebec, including their reception, their integration, their training, and their retention. The Office of the Commissioner will monitor how this file evolves to ensure that the department meets the objectives that it has set for itself.

This year, Canada is celebrating the 150th anniversary of Confederation. While the celebrations are expected to reflect both official languages and the history of our country's two founding peoples, the Office of the Commissioner must ensure that departments and agencies take their language obligations fully into account in the activities and services they offer to the public.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Official Languages Act will turn 50 soon, in 2019. It will be very important for the office of the commissioner to collaborate fully with the President of the Treasury Board and with the Minister of Canadian Heritage to modernize the act and use new technologies to extend government services to a broader public in both official languages.

Access to justice in both official languages, early childhood development, and bilingualism in the public service will be other subjects that will command the attention of the office of the commissioner.

I have just discussed the key areas of focus that lie ahead for the office of the commissioner and that will require leadership, experience, openness and impartiality. Therefore, it is with confidence, fully aware of the challenges but resolutely focused on the future, that I am prepared to assume the role of commissioner of official languages.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation, Ms. Meilleur.

Let us immediately move to the period for questions, answers and comments.

You have the floor, Mr. Généreux.

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

Good morning, Ms. Meilleur. Thank you for joining us this morning.

With your long experience as a politician and a lawyer, you certainly have the skills necessary to hold this position. But that is not the question on everyone's lips at the moment; it is rather about the process that led to your appointment.

You must be aware that the contributions you made to the Liberal Party of Canada, in the past, during the party's leadership race, and in the election that Mr. Trudeau won, are publicly known. The amounts you have contributed to the Liberal Party have somewhat cast a shadow on your application, in the sense that they can be seen to be partisan.

In your remarks, you said the following:

In my 25 years of public life, I have always adhered to the strictest rules of ethics and accountability associated with the positions I have held.

Do you consider that the accountability and the ethics associated with the voluntary political contributions you have made are acceptable?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Those financial contributions were made when I was a member of the legislature and a minister. In my new position, if I become commissioner, it goes without saying that I will be non-partisan.

I would prefer people to evaluate me on what I will do. I cannot erase my 13 years of politics, of partisan politics, as a minister. That said, I feel that it is been very clearly demonstrated that my objective and my passion, as Minister of Francophone Affairs, has always been to stand up for francophones.

Since that was the objective that was always foremost in my mind, it never was about being partisan. Moreover, I was the only francophone in cabinet and I stood up for the rights of francophones. I never let my affiliation to a political party blind me to the reason for my presence in cabinet. I spoke for francophones.

I understand that this issue bothers some people, but, as I told you, I am passionate about the official languages. For 25 years, I have worked for the advancement of the francophonie, in Ontario, in the city of Ottawa, and later, inside the Government of Ontario. That is what I commit to do. I certainly recognize that the position demands the utmost integrity, I commit myself to never be partisan. I am perfectly comfortable with that.

• (1115)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Meilleur, in your speech, you spoke of “the recognized professional qualifications and personal skills to fulfil this role competently and effectively.” I might have expected you to add independence. It would have been useful to include that in your speech.

In an interview with TFO this week, in response to opposition critics who found your appointment too partisan for an officer of Parliament you said: “I understand the reservations, but I am not the first politician to occupy a position like that.”

Do you know of other politicians who were appointed to position of this nature?

We are talking about an appointment as an officer of Parliament, of course.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I believe that former minister Victor Goldbloom was once appointed to the position.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You left provincial politics about a year ago, I think.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It will be one year at the end of June.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So you gave up your seat. It certainly seems like you had your eye on other things.

In the same interview, you told Benjamin Vachet of TFO: “I am passionate about the area of official languages. I thought I might be able to contribute to it as a senator, but the Prime Minister has been clear that he does not want politicians in the upper chamber.” You did well to wait, because, in a way, you have just doubled your salary overnight.

The Prime Minister does not want politicians in the upper chamber, you believe—I assume that you did not invent that—but he does want politicians as officers of Parliament. Do you see a contradiction there?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I left politics after 25 years. I was very clear, I was leaving political life, but not public life. I wanted to continue to serve Canadians and give them the benefit of my experience, my energy, and my commitment to official languages. Yes, I was interested in the Senate, but I very quickly found out that no one wants to appoint politicians who have just left their positions.

Anyway, Frances Larkin was appointed; she is a former New Democrat and was in the Government of Ontario, but she left politics a long time ago.

So I accepted the situation. At that time, I did not know that the commissioner's position was open. When I found out...

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Are you quite sure that you did not know that the position was open?

The Chair: I am sorry, Mr. Généreux, but your time is up.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: When I found out that the position was open, I asked to meet the commissioner—he was meeting those who were interested—so that he could answer my questions on the position and on his legacy. I wanted to discuss that with him. Then I thought about it. In November, when the position came open, I applied.

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

We now move to Paul Lefebvre.

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

Welcome, Ms. Meilleur. I am very happy to welcome you. As a Franco-Ontarian, I have seen your career and the important role you have played for the francophonie in Ontario.

I reread some articles that appeared when you resigned a year ago. Let me tell you about some of the comments that were made.

On June 12, 2016, Gilles LeVasseur wrote in *Le Droit*:

However, we have had an excellent representative of francophone reality in the Government of Ontario and a channel for francophones and francophiles.

In an article that appeared in *Le Droit* on June 10, 2016, François Pierre Dufault wrote about Madeleine Meilleur's legacy. He wrote:

Today, francophones have a French language services commissioner who has complete political independence and can advocate for their causes in the provincial legislature. They have a public broadcaster, TFO, that is completely independent from its English-language sister station TVO.

I have been on the TFO board. The broadcaster has the wind in its sails, precisely as a result of that decision about its independence.

• (1120)

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I would like to ask you for your comments afterwards.

On another topic, an article by Huguette Young appeared in *Le Droit* on June 11, 2016. In it, we read:

Madeleine Meilleur's political opponents agree that the minister's departure leaves a gap that will be hard to fill.

Kind words came from France Gélinas, the New Democrat MLA for Nickel Belt, for whom the announcement came as a surprise. She had spoken to the minister every day this week, the last time at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday. Ms. Meilleur did not breathe a word to her.

“Madeleine was a francophone first, then a Liberal”, she said. “She was an ally in francophone matters. She would come to see me and say: “France, it would be good if you could ask me a question about this. It would help me.” That was because it was sometimes difficult to sell an idea benefitting francophones to the Liberal caucus and to the government.”

I have another quotation. In an article written by Benjamin Vachet in *L'Express d'Orléans* in 2012—this goes back a while—we read: “As the minister for francophone affairs since 2003, Ms. Meilleur considers the creation of the position of French language services commissioner to be one of the greatest accomplishments of her career.”

He also quotes you: “The creation of the position is a source of great pride for me because it marks a new stage in Franco-Ontarian rights.”

Can you make a few comments on these accomplishments? I refer to the importance of the independence of TFO, and of services to the Franco-Ontarian community. Also can you say a few words about the independence of the French language services commissioner?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much.

I am really very proud of everything we have accomplished in Ontario in the area of francophone affairs. But I want this to be very clear; I did not do this alone. I did it with Franco-Ontarians, with members of the opposition, and with my community. I was alone in cabinet, but I felt the presence of 600,000 Franco-Ontarian men and women behind me. That gave me the strength.

You mentioned France Gélinas, with whom I have always worked in close cooperation. She is also a great defender of francophone rights in Ontario and she chairs the Ontario section of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie*. Recently, I received the Order of the Pléiade. She sent me a lovely card that I wish I had brought for you today. I want to publicly thank her for the work she has done.

When I began work as a minister of francophone affairs, of course, I did not have a whole list of tasks to accomplish. Even though I had been active in the area of francophone affairs, I was new to government. It was the people who helped me to accomplish what was on my agenda, the things I wanted to get done.

The creation of the position of French language services commissioner was the biggest step forward in ensuring the permanence of services in French. It was established in two stages. Recently, I gave a speech about the creation of the position. Not everyone is in favour of the appointment of an independent and unelected officer of Parliament.

There were objections; they did not just come from the opposition but from a good number of my colleagues as well. So we set about reassuring them. In the first stage, the position was not independent. It reported to me. I was not very happy with that. I actually wanted it to be independent from the start. But a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, as they say. Although he reported to me, Commissioner Boileau always had all the independence he needed. He said so regularly in his addresses. The second stage consisted in handing over that independence to the commissioner.

TFO is a superb achievement, whose impact is felt not only in Canada, but also in the United States and elsewhere in the world. At the moment, the CEO of TFO is in South Africa to promote the channel. It is a model not only in Ontario but also for the world.

• (1125)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

As I understand it, Mr. Choquette is giving up his time for Mr. Mulcair.

Mr. Mulcair, please go ahead.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Meilleur.

I am going back to the remarks that my colleague, Mr. Gagnéux quoted. You say that you thought you might be able to make a contribution as a senator, but the Prime Minister clearly said that he did not want politicians in the upper chamber.

I would like to know who told you that the Prime Minister did not want politicians in the upper chamber.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: The chair of the committee warned me about it. The people involved in recruiting senators subsequently confirmed it.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Have you met Mathieu Bouchard?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I met with him at his request. He wanted to talk about bilingualism in the city of Ottawa.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Should the city of Ottawa be bilingual, in your opinion?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It should.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes? That is interesting.

I want to go back to the remarks you made earlier in an attempt to justify your own appointment. Let me say at the outset that our objection to your appointment is because of the formalities. It is based on the institutions, but has nothing to do with your personal qualities.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand that.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You used the appointment of Victor Goldbloom to the position of commissioner as an argument in your favour. Just for the record, I have been deeply involved in official languages for 35 years. I sat on the Commission of Appeals on Language of Instruction; I was a lawyer with the *Conseil supérieur de la langue française*; I was the director of legal affairs at Alliance Québec, where I had the pleasure of working on matters of access to and oversight of francophone school boards; I advised Claude Ryan on the Charter of the French Language; and I was in charge of revising the translation of all the statutes of Manitoba as the result of a Supreme Court decision. I know the field very well.

In my opinion, it is of prime importance that the person in this position not be partisan. You tried to use the appointment of Victor Goldbloom to your advantage, but may I suggest to you that the example is not valid. Victor Goldbloom was appointed by Brian Mulroney. A Conservative appointed a former provincial Liberal minister. You see the difference. It was the antithesis of partisanship; it was a non-partisan appointment because two different parties were involved. In Victor Goldbloom, who was certainly an excellent commissioner of official languages, everyone could see someone who was not tied to the government that had just appointed him. Do you understand the difference between your situation and Victor Goldbloom's?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I understand the difference.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: So why do you not understand the importance of not accepting the underlying argument?

Let me quote Rémi Léger, a professor from British Columbia. You are smiling; are you familiar with the text?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No, I am not familiar with the text.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'll quote the text that he has just published: "However, partisanship has no place in the positions of senior officers of Parliament. Their responsibilities require them to rise above political posturing." I would like to digress for a moment to say that your colleagues who are constantly reporting what you said when you left your position as minister have only politician's quotes to offer.

Mr. Léger goes on to say, "In the case we're interested in [yours], a partisan appointment contributes to greater politicization of official languages at a time when their defence needs to be based on a vision and principles." That is our position as well.

We think it is a monumental mistake by Prime Minister Trudeau to choose someone from his own party but, more than that, someone who contributed to his own leadership race and who contributed to the federal Liberal Party. You don't have the distance necessary to judge the actions of this same Justin Trudeau, this same Prime Minister. You don't have the critical distance required for this job.

Is realizing this making you hesitate today? You're trying to cite cases that have no relationship in order to justify your appointment, because it is highly partisan. You're too stuck to the Liberals. The way we see it, Mr. Trudeau made a mistake.

• (1130)

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand your concerns.

The position was open, and I applied. I went through a very rigorous process. I strongly believe that I have the competencies for this position. I know that I will be impartial in carrying out my duties, if I have the privilege of being appointed. If so, I would like to be judged by my behaviour and achievements, and not by the political party I represented for almost a year before taking the job.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Have you expressed your interest in becoming a senator or commissioner to anyone in the Liberal Party? If so, who was it and when did you two speak?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, as you know, I applied to become a senator.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Who in the Liberal Party did you speak to about wanting to become a senator or commissioner?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I spoke to Gerald Butts.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Gerald Butts, right.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I know him well because he worked for Mr. McGuinty, in Toronto, and I worked with him.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, of course.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I expressed my interest and was told that now there was a process—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: —an open and transparent process.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, that's what they keep telling us.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I was told that I had to go through the process. That's what I did. As I said earlier, I can't erase 13 years of active political life.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That, there, is the problem, Ms. Meilleur.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Very well.

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

We'll move on to Mr. Samson.

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

Ms. Meilleur, it's a great pleasure to have you here.

I'll go back to what you said last. You say you can't wipe out 13 years of political life. Please don't erase the effectiveness: the work you did to defend the French minority in Ontario was exceptional.

I was so touched by your application. I see that your work in defence of the Francophonie in Ontario will now extend to the whole country. How lucky to have someone who has worked so hard, who has defended the francophone and Acadian cause in Canada, and who will now be able to continue this work, but across the country. This is an exceptional thing, and I am extremely pleased that you have applied. It was a very transparent, open process, and if you had not done it, it would have been a loss to us, in my view.

There is something else I'd like to raise. I always say that the quality of a leader is not measured by political stripes. The quality of a leader is measured by the state of the situation that person is leaving and not by the situation as it was when the person arrived. That's why I'm so happy. I think that for five or seven years—I believe the mandate is seven years—if you are the successful candidate, the influence you will have on the Francophonie and in a minority setting in Canada can be very interesting.

I have two questions for you. First, what priorities do you think a Commissioner of Official Languages should have at the national level? Second, I would like to touch on education. I spent 30 years in that environment, including the past 11 years as executive director of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial de la Nouvelle-Écosse. These are schools that have emerged from the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and continue to try to improve their service offerings. How can minority education systems continue to progress with our help, even if they fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces? How important is our government to education? Could you provide a few comments on that?

• (1135)

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much.

I am a great admirer of the Acadians. I always say that it is easier to speak French in Kiamika, a small village of about 250 people near Mont-Laurier, in the Laurentians, than in Acadia. If you're not familiar with Kiamika, know that no one spoke English there when I was born there or in all the years I was growing up and studying there. I came to Ontario only to study nursing and learn English, because my father thought that bilingualism was important. Because he only spoke French, it was difficult for him to conduct his activities in the business world.

That being said, the act clearly sets out the commissioner's role. However, I want to talk to you today about a very important issue: education. Minorities, both anglophones in Quebec and francophones in the rest of the country, must have a strong and accessible education system because it's the only way for them to slow down assimilation and to be able to continue speaking their language, which justifies all the investment and work that the office can do, in collaboration of course with the federal government and the Department of Canadian Heritage, both of which have a great role to play in helping minority communities.

The role of the Commissioner of Official Languages is to promote access to education and encourage the development of a good education system for all, even for minority communities where the challenges are much higher than anywhere else. This can be achieved by targeting francophone immigration, for instance, which is why Ontario has set itself a target of 5%.

When I was a minister in Ontario, I always worked very closely with the government and with the Commissioner of Official Languages to ensure not only the survival of the minority language and the promotion of linguistic duality, but also the increase in the number of francophones. There are more than 600,000 francophones, and there are different ways to increase this number.

Take, for instance, newcomers to Canada whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, but who speak French at home. We were frustrated that they weren't counted in the census. We have changed the definition of "francophone" in Ontario. The number of francophones in Ontario then rose to 50,000 because these newcomers wanted to be part of the francophone community. They did not want to be excluded because their mother tongue was not French.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Go ahead, Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Good morning, Ms. Meilleur, and welcome. We are pleased to have you here today.

You said earlier that you're from Kiamika, in the Upper Laurentians. I proudly represent the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, in the Lower Laurentians, which includes Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand and Rosemère. I would point out that Deux-Montagnes and Rosemère both have a minority anglophone community.

I have a question for you that has more to do with anglophones. I understand very well that there is a lot of talk about francophones, but in Quebec, there is a mirror effect when it comes to the anglophone community, which represents 14% of the population, or about a million anglophones in Quebec.

I talked about my riding, and my colleague Mr. Samson talked a lot about francophones. Based on your experience in Ontario with respect to the challenges of francophone minorities—I'm thinking in particular of the health issues you have identified with respect to the Montfort Hospital—would there be practices in Ontario that could be applied in Quebec in terms of health care or access to justice? What is your view on this for the English-speaking minority in Quebec, given that there are still differences in Quebec?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I'll start with the last ministry where I worked. Access to justice in both languages was a priority for me. When I was the Attorney General, I appointed bilingual judges because I wanted to fill that gap in Ontario.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Indeed, justice delayed is justice denied.

[*Translation*]

I tried to get this process started.

I also appointed, for the first time, a Franco-Ontarian woman chief justice of the busiest court in Canada, the Ontario Court of Justice.

First of all, I want to tell you that I know the English-speaking community of Quebec, but I would like to know it better. We have a house in Gaspésie, and I know the anglophones in that region. Nevertheless, I will book my first visit to Quebec anglophones because I know they want to meet the new commissioner.

Furthermore, I was invited to a gala where we presented the Goldbloom award. I was told that people wanted to see Ontario adopt a 5% immigration goal. People would like to see the same thing in Quebec. The decline in the demographic weight of anglophones in Quebec is of concern to them.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Indeed, that's one of the problems. I would invite you to meet with the citizens of my riding, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It would be my pleasure.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It is different from urban centres. Outside the urban centre of Montreal, the reality of the anglophone minority is different.

You talked about access to health and justice. As soon as you get out of urban centres, there are different challenges, including what you said earlier, but still in the context where Quebec is still different from other provinces.

I would like to hear you speak a little more about that.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Health is a challenge in Ontario, as well. I'm not claiming that we've established a magic formula because recruiting French-speaking health care professionals isn't easy. That's why we designated Montfort Hospital a teaching hospital; it will help fill this gap.

Of course, people are being recruited in other provinces. There's also a good population of immigrants who are very qualified when they arrive. That's why we have adopted measures so that their qualifications can be recognized as quickly as possible, and they can practise and offer their services. It's a challenge we must meet. It's the provincial government's responsibility, but we worked at length with the Commissioner of Official Languages when we set the 5% francophone immigration target.

I don't intend to work in isolation, but rather to work together to promote language and services in both official languages, and to meet the needs of Canadians in official language minority communities.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

My colleague has a question for you.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Welcome, Ms. Meilleur. Congratulations on your background, which I had little knowledge of.

I'm an Acadian from New Brunswick, and I live as a minority, if you like, in a majority environment. I had the opportunity to do my studies, from kindergarten to law school, in my maternal language, the language of Antonine Maillet, thanks to dedicated people like you in New Brunswick, who, in the past, had understood that education was the first thing that enabled official language minority communities to be vibrant and promote themselves.

I'm not asking a trick question, but let's look at the Official Languages Act that you had to study. As you say, you met with the previous commissioner to see how it worked, what the framework was. I'm sure you've looked at all the parameters of the position, even though your duties have yet to be confirmed.

Section 52 of the act allows you to surround yourself with experts. Darrell Samson often refers to education. Since the francophone immigration objectives are pitiful and since minority communities in majority environments should be more vibrant, do you think a change could be initiated? I know you haven't yet taken office, but is there a role you could play as a new commissioner? Could you go and listen to experts who come from elsewhere, perhaps more than those who have been traditionally consulted?

• (1145)

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm not the commissioner yet, so I'm trying to read as much as possible and equip myself as much as I can before I do, if I have the privilege of holding it. I'll do it by consulting the recommendations, by reading reviews.

The commissioner has some flexibility. I can assure you that I will do everything possible to collaborate and contribute to the development of education services. It is through education that we can avoid assimilation and the community can continue to speak its language and not become anglicized.

There is already a challenge in the form of exogamous families. That's quite a challenge. We always say that French is the mother tongue, so we have to look at how it can be valued in our schools. Practises exist in Ontario. There are, for example, courses that take place in the summer to prepare the children from exogamous environments so that they can enter school ready to learn. There are different methods, and I will inquire about all the measures I can take to support the Acadians.

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

Thank you very much, Ms. Lapointe.

[English]

We'll go now to John Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Madame Meilleur.

My first question is to clarify some information you provided to Mr. Mulcair. You mentioned that someone informed you that you wouldn't be appropriate as a senator, and you mentioned the chair of the committee. Could you confirm who that was and what committee you were referring to?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was the chair of the... Madame Labelle was responsible for selections and appointments to the Senate.

Mr. John Nater: Is it common for prospective senators to meet privately with an independent chair of an independent commission to appoint independent senators?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Mind you, I had invited her before I resigned as a member of the provincial parliament. I had invited her to come to a presentation on *la Journée internationale de la femme*, and she was there, and we asked that question. However, I went forward and applied anyway.

Mr. John Nater: So you were actively considering alternative employment before leaving as an MPP?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, it was because I was resigning as an MPP, but not from public life, so I wanted to continue to work in public life.

Mr. John Nater: Who informed you that you would be nominated as the official languages commissioner?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Who informed me?

Mr. John Nater: Who informed you that you would be the successful nominee?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I got a telephone call that my name was going to be put forward to the Prime Minister.

Mr. John Nater: Who called you?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was staff from the Minister of Justice.

Mr. John Nater: On what date was that?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was late April, I think. I don't have the exact date.

Mr. John Nater: But in the April time frame?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I think so, yes...that my name was going to be put forward. They didn't tell me that I was going to be appointed.

Mr. John Nater: Your name would be going forward.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand that there is a process.

Mr. John Nater: During the months since you left the provincial legislature, you mentioned that you had conversations with Gerald Butts. Were there others you had conversations with, such as Katie Telford or Matthew Mendelsohn?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No.

Mr. John Nater: Neither of those people?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No.

Yes, I had a coffee with Katie and I was asking her if I could offer my service to serve Canadians. There was no retroaction about what...but just that I'd like to continue to serve.

•(1150)

Mr. John Nater: Do you know if most candidates for the official languages commissioner had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Butts and Ms. Telford?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I don't know because I don't know who else applied.

Mr. John Nater: How many interviews did you go through leading up to the appointment?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I went through two interviews.

Mr. John Nater: Who was on the panels when you were being interviewed?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: On the first panel, there were 10 people. I think most of them were civil servants. There was a representative from the Department of Canadian Heritage and one representative from the office of the *premier ministre*.

Mr. John Nater: In the days and weeks since you've officially been nominated, has there been someone at the Prime Minister's Office who has been advising you on the process?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: *Le Conseil privé*. They advised me on the process, that I would need to come before this committee and then the Senate before my appointment would be confirmed.

Mr. John Nater: You mentioned that you'd like to make your first visit to Quebec after you're appointed. Do you plan to take a number of trips across Canada?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, indeed. I know the francophone communities outside of Quebec, but I cannot say that I know every one. I met them when I was the minister and we had these FPT meetings across the provinces, changing provinces every time. I am so impressed to see that though they are a small percentage of the community, they're so vibrant. I know less of the core of the anglophone community, which is in Montreal, in Quebec. I know that there is, *monsieur le président*, a large anglophone community in your area, so I want to make sure that I get to know them.

Mr. John Nater: I guess my follow-up to that is this. Do you consider this to be a full-time position? Will you be undertaking this as a full-time position?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Of course.

Mr. John Nater: I know that when you resigned as an MPP, you said you wanted to spend more time with your family and to be closer to home. That seems at odds with undertaking a seven-year appointment as an active Commissioner of Official Languages. On the one hand, you're saying that you want to spend more time with your family. On the other hand, you're undertaking a very exciting position. Can you reconcile that for me?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: When I resigned, yes, I wanted to spend more time with my family, especially since my husband was going through a difficult and challenging health situation. He has recovered fully now, so I'm very pleased. It's going to be full time, and you will see. I always had three jobs. I was an MPP, I was Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs, and I always had another ministry. I think I have fulfilled all these responsibilities. I was often out visiting communities, especially the francophone community. It's a small community, and it's not as easy as going to Montreal or to Toronto because of the flights and all of that. I spent a

lot of time travelling to small communities. I miss that, and I want it to continue.

The Chair: Thank you very much, John. We might come back to you later.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to share my speaking time with my colleague, Mr. Vandal.

Ms. Meilleur, you are aware of the work that commissioners have done in the past. In my opinion, they have always done good work. If your nomination were to be confirmed—it remains hypothetical for the moment—do you think you might work in a different way, or do you see elements that might become a part of your new position eventually?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Do you mean outside of the work of commissioner?

•(1155)

Mr. René Arseneault: No. As commissioner, would you consider a new approach?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: First, let me say I feel I have some big shoes to fill. The previous commissioner did extraordinary work. I appreciated working with him very much, for instance on the creation of the position of French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario, as well as all of the good advice he gave me, or, as I was saying, our work in setting a 5% target for francophone immigration. We cooperated to determine the best approaches to adopt.

There is no doubt that I have my own personality and my own way of doing things. However, I will be open to suggestions, because I listen well. I listen more than I speak when I meet with people from the communities. They are the ones who tell me about their needs, their aspirations and their challenges. First, you have to determine whether their request falls under the purview of the commissioner. If not, their requests can be conveyed to the responsible authorities.

I would also like to see a dialogue, while maintaining the independence of the Office of the Commissioner, in order to make progress on behalf of official language minority communities.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you very much.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Vandal.

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

Ms. Meilleur, it's a pleasure to meet you. I represent the riding of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital. I am of Métis origin.

This is what I want to ask you. In his tenth and last report, Commissioner Graham Fraser indicated that the way in which federal services are provided to official language minority communities has to be better defined.

In Manitoba, there are a lot of villages in a minority situation. There is Saint-Boniface, Saint-Vital, Saint-Malo, Saint-Eustache and Saint-Pierre.

I would like to hear about your perspective and your priorities with regard to services for official language minority communities.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to commend Senator Chaput, who introduced a very ambitious bill. I hope it will be adopted one day, but it already represents a step forward.

We must not only consider the number of people in a community, but its vitality. We all have a role to play in ensuring the vitality of communities, where culture, education and health care are concerned. There are some greater challenges in this last field, because it is difficult to recruit francophone health professionals. However, we have to work at it.

I also know the communities and small villages of Ontario. I do not know the small villages of Manitoba well, with the exception of Fisher Branch, but I do know those in Ontario.

Most of the francophones in Ontario live in small villages. How can we help them to preserve their language, through funding programs or studies? I know that Mr. Fraser also carried out a study on the francophone media, more specifically on community newspapers.

We have to continue in this direction, and see to it that his recommendations are acted upon.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Did you ever visit Manitoba when you were in your previous position?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, quite often. We were privileged in that one of the members of our group, the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie, was Mr. Selinger, the former Premier of Manitoba, who was then Minister of Francophone Affairs. He was the dean of Ministers of Francophone Affairs. I had the opportunity of visiting Manitoba several times. In fact, I travelled there to announce the collaboration agreement between TFO and Manitoba. It was an excellent partnership.

After having developed tools in Ontario, we tried to share them or sell them to other communities, such as New Brunswick. The Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie promoted an exchange of best practices, even if each province was then free to decide what to do next.

• (1200)

Mr. Dan Vandal: I have another question for you.

Ms. France Gélinas, the New Democrat member for Nickel Belt, said something that struck me; she said that Madeleine Meilleur was a francophone first, and a Liberal second.

Could you give us your thoughts on that comment, which has a certain depth?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: As I said in the beginning, I was the only francophone in cabinet. That was the situation for 12 and a half years. I was the advocate for francophones, and also their commissioner before there was one. When the opposition asked a question, it was music to my ears, as it allowed me to move our files forward.

For instance, I suggested to Ms. Dyane Adam, who was the commissioner before Mr. Fraser, that she chair a committee on a

potential francophone university. She just sent me an email this morning.

Ms. Gélinas asked a lot of questions on the francophone university so as to move this file forward. I see that she is continuing her efforts. It helps the Minister of Francophone Affairs to move things forward. Having someone ask a question is not negative. She would sometimes ask me if I agreed with such and such a question, and I answered that she should not hesitate, because I found it useful.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

[English]

We'll go now to Randy Hoback.

Or, are you coming back, John?

Okay, John.

Mr. John Nater: I have a question.

First of all, I was remiss the first time in not thanking you for your many years of service. We don't have a problem with you as a person. I think you've done an exceptional job in a number of files. I do want to put that on the record. This is about process; it's not about you as an individual, in most circumstances.

I just want to follow up quickly. Subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act requires consultation. In response to an earlier question, you mentioned that you were informed in April that your name would be going forward. Our leader Madame Ambrose was informed on May 8 about this nomination and the request for consultation. I find it at odds with the requirement in the Official Languages Act for consultation that you were informed in April and the consultation didn't happen till May 8. I'm not sure about the New Democratic leader, but I assume it's the same timeframe. Do you have a comment on that?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Listen, I don't want to answer on the process. I'm not responsible for the process. There was a position that was open. I applied for the position. I went through a rigorous process. I have been selected because of my competence and my *feuille de route*.

I'm excited about working in official languages. I cannot wait to start if I'm the successful candidate. I hope I will be able to go into your community to speak to the francophones. I know your provincial colleague is a wonderful, wonderful supporter of *les affaires francophones* also.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I'll pass it now to Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Actually, I'll build on that, because that's where the problems start to come into play. Again, with your service and stuff—it's not personal. Put yourself in my shoes. I'm looking at you coming in as a former Liberal MPP. I'm looking at this as something in which the government didn't even follow the appropriate process. If it had come to us maybe in May or April and said, "We're considering this person. What do you think?" then we would have had input into that whole process and we probably would not be here, with this type of tone at this point in time. But it didn't do that.

Now, let's say you take on the role of official languages commissioner, and you're in a scenario in which you have to make a decision. Since the process wasn't properly followed, how do I have confidence that the decision to nominate you was made based on your expertise? How do I not, in the background, think there's some Liberal partisanship going on here? It's always going to hang over any decision you make, even if it's the correct decision. How do we handle that scenario? That's what makes this very difficult.

• (1205)

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Listen, I understand your point. I understand Monsieur Mulcair's point. There have been other persons—not the Official Languages Commissioner—whose appointments were very controversial, and they ended up doing a good job, and people are very happy. We appointed judges who had come from a political background. Our former attorney general in Ontario was—

Mr. Randy Hoback: You can even use the example of Gary Doer. Mr. Harper appointed him to the ambassadorship in the U.S., but in that scenario it was an NDP premier and a Conservative Prime Minister. You could see that it made sense. There was actually a left-leaning president in the U.S., so that made a lot of sense.

The issue I have here is just because of your history with the Liberal Party. Take the scenario where you're the commissioner and Katie Telford phones you up and says, "Let's go for coffee." Do you take the phone call? Do you go for coffee? How do you recuse yourself from what that conversation during coffee may involve? Just a general "How's your day going?" could lead into a conversation about one of your investigations, or something that she's saying could.

How do you put that wall in place to stay away from those types of conflicts of interest?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I recognize that I will have to be very prudent—very, very prudent—because to be objective is not just to say it but to have the appearance of it also. I will make sure that I am very prudent in terms of making sure that people see that in my new function I'm very impartial and very neutral. I hope I will be judged by my *comportement* and my results.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I use the example of when the Prime Minister had an investigation under Official Languages in January because of an answer he gave in French in Quebec. Would you recuse yourself from all your Liberal friends in that scenario? Would you say, "Guys, I can't talk to any of you until I'm done this investigation"? The reality is that it will come into the conversation, whether we like it or not. We're humans. That's what happens. If you came back with a decision and said, no, he wasn't in conflict, then how do I not wonder if you were influenced by a conversation you had with a former Liberal senator or with a former Liberal Party member?

There will always be a cloud of doubt in that judgment, even though it might have been the correct judgment. How do I overcome that? How do I get over that? I just look at the process they followed here. They made it impossible for us to get over that type of scenario.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, but I'll repeat it again: I'm not going to erase 13 years. I'm very proud of what I did and of the work I did. I went through a process. There was an opening and I put my

name forward. It was rigorous. I knew I would have a difficult path to become the commissioner, not because I questioned myself but—

Mr. Randy Hoback: If you knew the process wasn't going to be followed properly, if you knew that in the process they weren't going to consult, like it requires in legislation, with the opposition parties, would you still have let your name stand?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm not talking about this process—

Mr. Randy Hoback: But you were talking about the process.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No, no, I'm not going to comment—

Mr. Randy Hoback: You said you went through a process.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm not going to comment about this part. I'm just saying—

Mr. Randy Hoback: But you're using the process to justify taking on the job. I'm saying if you're doing that, then you're also saying the process is legitimate. We're saying we have a problem with the process, because the Liberal Party didn't follow the appropriate process. Again, how do I square a decision you make in the future and not think it's a partisan decision?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Listen, I cannot say more than what I've just said, that it will be by my *comportement*. Of course, there are the employees at the commission. There are 160 or more employees. I know that at the end of the day, the buck stops here. I recognize that.

Mr. Randy Hoback: So if you—

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: But I will always do that with the respect and the integrity and the independence that the position requires.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Randy.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Mulcair for six minutes.

• (1210)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Madam Meilleur, if another investigation opens up around the Prime Minister, will you recuse yourself because of the fact that you donated to his leadership campaign?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I don't even know if the commissioner can recuse himself or herself. I will get advice. I think it's a unique situation. If the situation occurs, I will look for advice.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, you know—

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: But my position as a commissioner is independent and neutral.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, you see, that's the whole point, isn't it? If you contributed to the campaign to elect Justin Trudeau Prime Minister, you contributed to the campaign to elect Justin Trudeau leader of the Liberal Party, and you are yourself a lifelong Liberal. That's the very problem, you see?

You talk about it being an independent decision, but how can a decision be independent with someone whom you were cheerleading for, somebody whom you wanted to be in that job? Can you have the independence necessary to judge him and his government? That's the job.

That's why it's called a commissioner. It's not the director general of an agency; it's not a deputy minister. It's a commissioner, an officer of Parliament, someone above the fray. That's why this can't work. Do you understand our position?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand your position, but I'll say that I'm confident that I can fill the role of Commissioner of Official Languages with all the integrity and the independence the position requires.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That's a nice formula, and no one is questioning your personal integrity. I want to be very clear on that, but what I'm also saying is that the facts are against a credible argument that you can do this independently.

[Translation]

Earlier, you spoke of the moment when you learned that the position was open.

I would like to know who told you that the position was open.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was the commissioner.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Graham Fraser?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: He phoned you to tell you that his position was open?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No, he did not phone me. When he found out I had resigned, he told me his position was open.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: In what context did he tell you that, Ms. Meilleur?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: In the street.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Graham Fraser told you in the street that his position was open?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: He also told me at the same time that others were interested. Later, when the position was advertised, I think...

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Fine.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: ... that he sent an email...

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Our time is limited.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: ... to all those he knew were interested.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Oh yes? Mr. Fraser sent an email to all those he knew were interested?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Well...

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: He sent you an email.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, but he sent it to others as well.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You know this?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, because he is very impartial.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Fine.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: He told me that he was willing to meet with anyone who asked to meet with him.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Fine.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Fraser was impartial in this regard.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Fine.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Consequently, I would not like to make him seem biased.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: No. I know him very well, and have for a long time.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: He is very neutral.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Indeed he is, and no one will make him seem biased; do not worry.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Okay.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: He does not fly any flag.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: When was the last time you spoke to Mr. Justin Trudeau?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I have not spoken to him once since I resigned.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: So when was the last time you spoke to him?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I think it was at an event in Toronto. Some lawyers had organized a reception for Mr. Trudeau, and I was invited.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: What kind of reception was it?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was a dinner.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: A dinner attended by lawyers?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: And you were present?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Was this the type of dinner that is sometimes known as "a fundraising dinner", in this case for the Liberal Party?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I could not tell you if it was a fundraising dinner.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: No?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I was a guest.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: It is not fair to ask you that question, since you don't have your agenda in hand, but could you kindly check to see what kind of dinner this was, this event attended by lawyers and Mr. Trudeau in Toronto, and send that information to the committee?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: They were persons from the Indo-Canadian community.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was an Indo-Canadian evening.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Very well. We will wait for your reply to see whether it was a fundraising activity.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Very well.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Are you still a member of the Liberal Party?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: When did you stop being a member?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: At the end of the year, I think.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You think?

That too is information that can be verified easily.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Would you kindly confirm to the chair of our parliamentary committee when you ceased being a member of the Liberal Party?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I now have two substantive questions.

You once said that you would like the city of Ottawa to be bilingual. Personally, I am very anxious to see some bilingual signage here in my native city. I was born here in Ottawa, and like you, I am always surprised to see that the capital of a bilingual country has no bilingual commercial signage. So I look forward to seeing you begin to exert pressure to obtain bilingual signage here in Ottawa.

I'll ask my two questions. We have already submitted two highly important things to you. First of all, there is the legal requirement for judges to be bilingual. For the time being, it is not mandatory because it is not mandated by law. Are you in favour of that?

• (1215)

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Do you mean all judges?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I mean the justices of the Supreme Court.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I am, completely.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Secondly, 40 years ago, we introduced a bill, on August 26, 1977, which stated that Quebec workers had the right to receive written communications from their employer in French. Someone who works for a credit union has that right pursuant to Bill 101, but another person who works in a federally regulated bank does not have that right to receive his documents in French. Do you agree with us? Should that same right be extended to someone who works for a federally regulated employer, like a chartered bank?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: You are putting something to me I have never had a chance to think about. You say there is a bill in this regard?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, I introduced it during the previous Parliament.

Let's talk about the principle. Should a person who works for a bank also have the right to receive documents from his employer in French, like the worker in a credit union?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I can't answer you at this time. It's difficult to answer without having had an opportunity to examine the situation closely and obtain legal advice.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We all spoke before about the constitutional guarantees that have been extended and interpreted as applying to school commissions of the linguistic minority. That was the Mahé decision. There have been a series of court decisions that have extended that, including, of course, to the English-speaking community of Quebec. Last year the Quebec government put forward a bill that would have eliminated school boards, including English-language school boards.

What would be your position if that bill were to be put forward? As official languages commissioner, how would you situate yourself with regard to the constitutional right of the English-speaking minority in Quebec to have care and control of school boards of the linguistic minority?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: What I can say is that in Ontario the francophone community has control of their schools and their school boards.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'm talking about a province that put forward legislation to eliminate all school boards, including the minority school boards.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I cannot answer this right now.

I would be very interested in looking into it. To ask me, as I appear here, to give you a legal opinion from the *Commissariat aux services en français*, I cannot.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Actually, in both cases it wasn't a legal opinion so much as a feeling for your reflexes.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

We are going to have three-minute rounds now.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Meilleur, let's recapitulate.

You met Mr. Butts, or you spoke with him. You had a coffee with Ms. Telford from the Prime Minister's Office. You spoke to the Commissioner of Official Languages. You went to an evening held for the benefit of the Prime Minister, in one way or another.

Do you think that all of the candidates have had the same privileges to help them obtain this position?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Absolutely not.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'll repeat my question: do you think that all of the candidates have had the same privileges as you had before obtaining this position? Your answer is "no"?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I thought you were talking about having access to these people.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: My question is clear, but I could ask it again.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I will correct myself, and the answer is no.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do you think that all of the candidates who applied for the position had the same privileges as you did to help in obtaining this position?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Absolutely, because this is a rigorous process.

The position was open, and I applied. I have a roadmap that does not mention what I will do, but what I have done.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Excuse me, Ms. Meilleur, but I only have three minutes.

You donated \$5,000 to the Liberal Party of Canada, and \$500 to Mr. Trudeau's leadership campaign. I don't think all of the candidates did that. I don't know the other candidates, but I expect that they did not all do that. You are telling me that donating these funds, meeting Mr. Butts, having a coffee with Ms. Telford, meeting the Commissioner of Official Languages, attending an evening with the Prime Minister, all of that provides a certain advantage or visibility with regard to a position that is open in government.

• (1220)

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: As I said, I applied. I submitted a resume; I went to a first interview, and a second one, I went through all of the steps and was finally chosen as the nominee for the position. I am not the commissioner yet. I am passionate about official languages. If the position is offered to me, I will get down to work with a lot of enthusiasm.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I am going to give my last minute to Mr. Mulcair.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What are the names of the two people on the selection committee which you said were from the Office of the Prime Minister and the Department of Canadian Heritage?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I don't have their names.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You don't have their names?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: One of them was Mr. Martin Bouchard.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Isn't it Mathieu Bouchard?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Bouchard is from the Prime Minister's Office. We spoke about him. You said that he was on the selection committee and that you had talked to him.

Who is the other person, the one from Canadian Heritage?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I don't know his name.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You have no record of those who were members of the selection committee?

You did not write that down somewhere?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No, I don't know the names of the persons who were present. I know there were three deputy ministers.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Fine.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I think there were also people from the Privy Council.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Did anyone explain why the Department of Justice advised you that your name had been chosen as a candidate for this important position?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I was not given an explanation, but I was told that two ministers had to recommend the candidate for the position.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lefebvre for three minutes.

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

It is being implied here that there is some partisanship in official languages. I would like to see the roadmap you spoke of that goes back to the time when you were the Minister of Francophone Affairs of Ontario.

Did you contribute to making the role of the commissioner independent?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Quite so. I wanted that position to be created, and I knew that as long as I was there, the commissioner would have all the independence he needed.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Did you have to fight for that?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: At the second stage, I did indeed have to fight. However, the battle was a little easier because people had been able to see, based on the commissioner's experience and the relationship we had, that he had all the independence he needed.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Very well.

Did you have a role to play in the independence of TFO?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I did.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: In what way?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: TFO was affiliated with TVO, and francophones were not really being served well.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That also was done under your leadership?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes. We thought that the funds...

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Did you also play a role in setting the 5% target for immigration?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: And what was your role?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I had to convince the minister of the need to set a target for francophone immigration, since Ontario francophones were losing ground demographically. Because of immigration, the anglophone population was growing more rapidly.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: So you played a key role in that.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Did you also play a role in the SOS Montfort campaign, and were you instrumental in helping the Montfort Hospital become a university hospital?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I did. The Montfort Hospital is my alma mater. That is where I did my nursing course. At the time, that course was given in hospitals.

Of course I was in the front row of the demonstrations when the government wanted to close the Montfort Hospital. It was a big victory. I was also very happy when the expansion of the Montfort Hospital and its new status as a university hospital was announced, as this allows health professionals to be trained in French.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Your resume and your leadership have demonstrated your commitment to official languages, especially for minority communities in Ontario, but I would like to know what led you to apply for this position, and why you feel you are the best candidate.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: My objective was to continue to work in the field of official languages. I had thought to do this in the Senate, but that proved impossible.

I never thought I would have the opportunity to top off my 25-year career in this way. When I worked at the City of Ottawa, I was one of four municipal councillors who fought to have the city adopt a bilingual services policy.

• (1225)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That is true. At the same time, I would like to reiterate to all the parties represented here that it is 100% clear that you have the skills to do the job.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

We have two more blocks of three minutes each. I had offered one of them to Mr. Choquette, but he would rather give the time to Mr. Mulcair.

Mr. Mulcair, you have the floor.

We will then finish with Mr. Hoback.

[English]

We'll have him for a few minutes after that.

Tom.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Gerald Butts, Katie Telford, and Mathieu Bouchard from the Prime Minister's Office, with whom you had contact prior and who was on your own selection committee, that for us is a source of real concern. That's political. That's partisan. That's not neutral. That's not transparent. That's not open. That's political.

[Translation]

There is something else that I am concerned about. It is the presence of that person and others from the justice department who contacted you to tell you that you had been...

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was not the department that contacted me, but the minister.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The Minister of Justice called you herself. I see absolutely no reason for the Minister of Justice to be involved in the appointment of the commissioner of official languages, on the contrary, in fact. The commissioner has to go to court to defend the rights of francophones outside Quebec and the

English-speaking minority in Quebec against the government, against the justice department.

So it is very worrisome for us to learn that the Minister of Justice herself informed you of your new position, when she is not your ally. She is a person you will be required to hold to account.

I would like to end with a quote that I consider extremely important. It is from a decision by Justice Martineau, of the Federal Court of Canada. He repeated the words of the commissioner at the time, Mr. Fraser, who described his role as follows:

"As an officer of Parliament, I provide parliamentarians with unbiased advice based on objective and factual information to help them fulfill one of their important roles—that of holding the federal government accountable for its stewardship of the equal status of English and French in Canada."

This requirement to hold the government to account is the commissioner's primary responsibility. With all we have heard today, far from being reassured, we are more convinced than ever that, based on both the form—as at the lack of consultation so clearly laid out by my Conservative colleagues—and the substance of this supposed consultation, that it would be a mistake and would undermine the credibility of the role of the commissioner of official languages to approve this appointment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair.

[English]

Randy.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I have one question. You mentioned that you had talked to the former official languages commissioner about universities and colleges for post-employment. What were those colleges again?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: *Université francophone* in Ontario. We have started on that, as you know. A few years ago, we decided that we would like to have a francophone university in Ontario, a completely francophone one, and—

Mr. Randy Hoback: When did you talk to him about that?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: We have appointed her. I recommended her name just before I left to be—

Mr. Randy Hoback: While you were an MPP?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Pardon me?

Mr. Randy Hoback: While you were still an MPP you recommended her?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, when I was Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: It was to review and make recommendations to the government on the structure that this new university should have.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Were you aware at the time, then, that that person would not be seeking their own renomination to this post when you recommended her to that proposed university?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I recommended her as the chair of the committee that gives recommendations to the government for the creation of this *université francophone*.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Oh, so it's just the chair of the committee that's going to develop—

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Mr. Randy Hoback: —and this is a—

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, because she was the president at Glendon and had quite a lot of experience, including as a former Commissioner of Official Languages. She's very militant for francophones in Ontario in minority situations, so I thought she would be a good person to be in that position.

• (1230)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

Bernard, do you have another question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: If I may.

Was the minister present at the meeting you said you had in Toronto, at an evening with some lawyers?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: No, it was during the election campaign, not after it.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: The minister was not there because she did not know that she would become the minister. She was in British Columbia.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: No doubt it was a fundraising evening.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I could not say because I was a guest.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Was there an entry fee, Ms. Meilleur? Was there a cost to attend that meeting?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I don't think it was a fundraising event because departmental officials were there.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Would it be possible to provide that information, as Mr. Mulcair also requested?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We would need to know the date.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: I could not tell you because I attended with people from the department.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Were you a minister at that time?

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I was the attorney general.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Very well.

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

Thank you, Ms. Meilleur, for answering the members' questions.

Next week, we will be in our ridings. Upon our return after the break week, we will have to provide a report to Parliament.

Thank you very much for being here.

Ms. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for welcoming me.

I understand the concerns that have been raised, but I would like to reassure you of my integrity, impartiality, and independence. I cannot erase 13 years of political life that I am very pleased with. I am very happy about what I have achieved for francophones of Ontario, who I salute once again.

The Chair: You have reason to be proud. Thank you very much, Ms. Meilleur.

We will take a break for five minutes and then resume the meeting in camera.

[*The committee continued in camera.*]

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