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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are continuing our study on access to early childhood services in the minority language.

Today, we have the pleasure of welcoming Minister Jean-Yves Duclos.

Welcome, Minister.

We are also hearing from Doug Murphy, special advisor at the Department of Employment and Social Development.

I want to remind everyone that today's meeting is televised.

The minister will have about 10 minutes to make his presentation. We will then go around the table, so that committee members can ask questions, hear answers and make comments.

Minister, we are very happy to have you with us.

Go ahead.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair and committee members, I am very pleased to be appearing today. I am joined by Doug Murphy, one of the department's senior officials. He will make sure to provide you with the right answers to the excellent questions I'm sure you will want to ask in a little while.

This is my first appearance before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I have been looking forward to this invitation for a long time. I know that the standards for an invitation are very high, so I have been working very hard over the past few months to meet them. I am very pleased that I have finally been given the opportunity to join you today to discuss the very important issue of early learning and child care in the country.

As Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, this cause is particularly close to my heart. I am happy to see such a nice alliance when it comes to all the important work you have been doing for several weeks.

Early learning and child care are at the heart of the government's commitment to working on ensuring a prosperous and just future for all our children. This is mainly why, in our last two budgets—those for 2016 and 2017—we jointly proposed to invest \$7.5 billion over

11 years beginning in 2017-2018 to help our children get the best possible start in life.

We believe that, by creating and supporting affordable, high-quality child care services across the country, especially for the families that need it most, we are investing in our most precious resource—our children.

In June, for the first time in Canada's history, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for early learning and child care reached an agreement on a multilateral early learning and child care framework.

This framework sets the foundation for governments to work toward a shared long-term vision where all children across Canada can experience quality, inclusive, simple and affordable early learning and child care.

The framework also supports the development of early learning and child care systems that respect our great country's different languages and cultures, and in particular, recognize the needs of English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada.

Child literacy and learning have a major effect on the development and survival of our official language communities, especially those in minority situations.

The importance of official languages is enshrined in the multilateral framework signed in June.

The framework also provides the flexibility required to enable us to take into account the specific needs of each province and territory with which we have a bilateral agreement or are about to conclude one.

These agreements set out the specific early learning and child care needs to be addressed, as well as the allocation of funds for each province and territory.

Under these bilateral agreements, which are being signed or have already been signed, the government of Canada will allocate \$1.2 billion to the provinces and territories over the next three years.

So far, bilateral agreements have been signed with Ontario, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nunavut, and we are in active negotiations with the remaining provinces and territories.

In addition, an indigenous early learning and child care framework is being co-developed in collaboration with our indigenous partners, with full respect for them, to address the needs and priorities of Inuit, Métis and first nations children and families.

A number of key themes have emerged from this engagement with our indigenous peoples, including the critical importance of indigenous cultures and languages in the design and content of early childhood programs.

Strengthened early learning and child care opportunities also support self-determination, reconciliation and cultural revitalization for our indigenous peoples.

• (1540)

So I look forward to finalizing the framework with our indigenous partners in the coming months.

[*English*]

Our official languages approach is also consistent with the overall vision of our government; it is unifying and engaging.

Our government has promised to develop a brand new multi-year action plan on official languages, spanning five years, starting from 2018 and lasting until 2023. That plan will be a renewed vision for official languages, aimed at supporting official language minority communities across our vast country.

To develop this plan in an informed and thoughtful way, we held consultations across the country from June through December of 2016. These consultations took place not only with numerous official languages stakeholders and experts, but also with many Canadians, with the aim of launching the plan by the end of 2017-2018. We wanted to broaden our perspective to better establish our priorities and to invest wisely in our new action plan.

Dear colleagues, know that our government fully intends to propose this new action plan to Canadians by the end of 2017-2018.

[*Translation*]

At the same time, our government recognizes the importance of providing Canadians with employment training and support programs, in both official languages. The labour market development agreements we are signing with the provinces and territories also help employment insurance claimants and Canadians looking for work access employment training and support in the official language of their choice.

In closing, I would like to remind you that by working hand-in-hand with all our partners—provinces, territories, municipalities and our indigenous peoples—we will be able to find and implement solutions to improve an important part of our wealth—our linguistic duality—and make our greater diversity a source of strength and pride.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my presentation. I will gladly answer any questions or hear any comments you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will go to questions and comments right away.

Mr. Gagné, go ahead.

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

Mr. Duclos, thank you very much for being here. I also want to thank you, Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Duclos, I think you will find some pretty clear consensus around this table on the importance of taking an interest in early childhood in the context of official language learning in the country, especially in official language minority communities. Everyone undoubtedly agrees that investments must be made in this area.

We have listened carefully to all the testimony before the committee and have analyzed the situation. We have met with a number of witnesses, particularly from community groups, who have repeatedly told us that learning a language from a very young age was a determining factor in the continued learning of the language in a minority situation. That is an important element.

That said, we have previously seen agreements signed with the provinces and municipalities—multi-party, bilateral or trilateral agreements—where accountability was an issue. Witnesses have been fairly clear on that, as well. Despite agreements signed with those various jurisdictions, the government was sending the provinces money that was not necessarily being spent where it should have been.

Do the agreements you have signed or those that are being negotiated contain any requirements for lighter or reduced accountability mechanisms? I am not talking about accountability as such, but about an accountability mechanism. More importantly, can it be ensured that the money given to a province will really go to communities or areas where it is supposed to be spent, as per the agreements that have been signed?

• (1545)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you for your excellent question, Mr. Gagné.

As you said so well, we all agree that everything starts in early childhood for minority language families and communities. Many intellectual, social and emotional developments happen early in our children's lives. People's attachment to their community and the ability to participate in its development also begin at a young age, in early childhood. That is the first fact that should be emphasized, as you have done so well.

Here is the second fact. Since the provinces and territories have the primary responsibility for providing educational child care services, it is important for the relationship with them to be transparent and responsible, as you pointed out.

I will quickly explain how bilateral agreements work. There is a detailed action plan. You can look at the plans that have been developed with the provinces that have already signed bilateral agreements. Those action plans clearly set out how investments in educational child care services will be made over the next three years. In addition, the component of support for minority language families and communities is very well defined. Not only do we know it in advance, but it is also developed in advance with partners and stakeholders, who are often very happy to work with us to let us know how they think the investments should be made. Then, of course, over the next three years and until the end of the agreement, accountability is provided based on common indicators, but also indicators that are specific to provinces and territories.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'm not completely satisfied with your answer, as we have heard from a number of witnesses, especially community representatives, who have told us otherwise. Perhaps you could explain the process to me better.

Services in minority communities are very often provided by community groups. They are funded either directly by the federal department or through tripartite agreements with the department and the provinces. When provinces obtain funding, the money intended for a specific program often does not make it to the organizations and is unfortunately used elsewhere. That is what we were told, and I think that everyone here witnessed it.

What guarantees have you obtained, in the agreements you have signed, to ensure that the provinces will really send this money where it was supposed to go, especially in communities?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Two elements support that guarantee.

First, associations and stakeholders in each province have participated in the discussions that led to the development of action plans. So they themselves helped facilitate that work between the provinces and the federal government by expressing how much investments in educational child care services would help minority language families and communities.

Second, those action plans are known. The process is transparent. The plans are published on websites. Provincial governments cannot hide the strategy, as it is known to everyone. As a result, it is easier for community groups on the ground to get the support promised to them in action plans.

The Chair: Minister, we will now go to Nova Scotia, with Darrell Samson.

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

Thank you very much, Minister and Mr. Murphy.

Minister, I must say that you are very good at recognizing the work of people on the ground and congratulating them. We are pleased to hear from you.

I would like to highlight the work you are doing. You did extraordinary work in the consultations you held on poverty reduction. The national housing strategy is also extremely important. The topic we are focusing on here, early childhood, is a very special issue.

I would like to mention that, about 12 years ago, Nova Scotia started a program in French for four-year-old children, so that they could enrol in francophone schools. That was an extremely successful initiative. Statistics show that, over the past 10 years, the student population in the province's francophone schools has increased by 25%. That's tremendous. It clearly shows the need to have day care and programs in French for children under the age of five.

This agreement will change the world, if I may put it that way. It's extraordinary. I would like to draw the committee's attention to an extremely important point stemming from a crucial principle of the multilateral framework: we have to recognize the specific needs of francophone and anglophone minorities. This is the first time in its

history that Canada has had a bilateral agreement with the provinces that stresses the importance of ensuring that francophone and anglophone minorities are taken into consideration. It's incredible. Thank you so much for your leadership, as it will help the provinces move forward on this crucial issue.

I would like you to tell us how you managed to get this approved by the cabinet and the provinces. Four provinces have already signed the agreement. Nova Scotia was supposed to sign on Monday, but no agreement could be reached. That said, they will figure it out.

● (1550)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Samson, what you just said gives us the first part of the answer. How did we manage? We managed through the energy, enthusiasm and vision of people like you. You tipped your hat to me, and now I tip mine to you.

As you know, I had an opportunity to spend some time with you in Nova Scotia, and I could see the preparation work you had done within Nova Scotia's Acadian community. That community is modest in size compared with the one in New Brunswick, but it is very proud, very strong and very willing to work on this issue. I also congratulate you on everything you have done.

Do you remember how touched we were, when we visited your daughter's school, by the vigour and pride the children showed in having lived in French from early childhood? There is the answer to your important question: this energy comes from the vigour of minority language communities.

In my opinion, that has two results. The first result translates into action. This is the first time we have had multilateral and bilateral agreements with the provinces on educational child care services. That is a major element. In addition, as you said, there is also the fact that the objectives of supporting our francophone and anglophone minority families and communities are explicitly stated in those agreements, which is a major victory.

However, it is not just a matter of actions, but also of education. I am talking about all the work of openness, listening and encouragement that goes along with those results. It carries a lot of value, as it strengthens communities' ability to then work with the provinces and territories to achieve such important results.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you so much for your leadership. You have broken the ice, and other ministers will now be able to continue this extraordinary work.

There are still some concerns on the ground, especially on Prince Edward Island. Bilateral agreements that recognize specific needs were just signed, but provincial action plans on child care don't really contain that clause right now.

How do you view this integration to ensure the reaching of your objectives?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: There is of course an emulation effect. The first province to sign was Ontario, and it has a solid plan. Then the provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island said that they wanted to do as well as Ontario. This is excellent, because Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are good models. In addition, we are also doing good work with Nova Scotia. We are not supposed to know that an agreement is going to be signed, but we have every hope that that will occur. Things are moving forward very well with other provinces also. What makes things progress is that one province compares itself to the others. If one does well, the other wants to do just as well. So there are very important comparison and encouragement effects at work throughout the country.

• (1555)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

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

Minister, thank you for being with us today.

Early childhood education is beyond important. It is essential to the survival, vitality and development of our minority communities. If we fail to squarely address early childhood issues, we are heading for certain assimilation.

In his 2016 study on early childhood, the former Commissioner of Official Languages Graham Fraser mentioned that several francophone communities, particularly in New Brunswick and Ontario, were resorting to bilingual immersion programs because of the shortage of access to French-language early childhood services, which has very serious consequences. Recently, the newspaper *Le Droit* published an article entitled “Services à la petite enfance en français: faire face à la pénurie sans précédent”. It discussed access to early childhood services in French.

What work have you done with Minister Joly, through the action plan, to solve this problem? The action plan does not mention early childhood.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: One thing may have been misunderstood, and I thank you for emphasizing this point, Mr. Choquette. All of us around this table understand the importance of investing in early childhood, for a host of reasons that are valid for all families and all children. These services also further gender equality. Of course, the availability of affordable quality child care services is especially helpful to women who want to develop fully. It is also important for the development of children, including those that are most vulnerable. It may be...

Mr. François Choquette: Forgive me for interrupting you, Mr. Duclos, but I really don't have much time. I'd like you to discuss the action plan. Otherwise, our chair is going to interrupt me, even though I have a lot of questions left for you.

So, please tell me what work you are doing with Ms. Joly in the context of the action plan.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I thought I already provided answers earlier when I spoke about the action plans. The action plans of the provinces we are working with...

Mr. François Choquette: That is not what I am talking about, Mr. Duclos. I am talking about the action plan for minority official language communities which Ms. Joly is preparing.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I see.

That action plan is directed by Ms. Joly. It is her department that is responsible for it, naturally.

Mr. François Choquette: However, you must work with her.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Of course.

Mr. François Choquette: Early childhood services are extremely important for our communities. That is why I would like to know what you have done in this regard with Ms. Joly. Will early childhood be a part of the new action plan?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Yes, indeed. I'm sure you will understand that even though Ms. Joly is playing a leadership role with regard to the action plan, which she does very well in fact, today's topic will be at the heart of this broader action plan. This plan will work because we are going to tackle this important challenge from several angles and in different ways.

Mr. François Choquette: I would have a lot of questions but I want to talk to you about an urgent situation. It concerns RESDAC, the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences. I know that there are three ministers who are responsible for this matter, but you are one of those three ministers who deal with RESDAC. You even spoke today at the end of your presentation about the importance of investing in employment and adult training. RESDAC has run out of funds. It had to lay off its staff and close its offices. It can no longer provide services to the country. And yet, the organization had informed your department of the situation long ago.

What are you going to do to resolve this situation, which is urgent?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That is an excellent question. This concerns a department other than mine, but we have the good fortune of having Mr. Murphy with us. Since he has the requisite experience to answer your question correctly, I am going to give him the floor.

[English]

Mr. Doug Murphy (Special Advisor to the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister and Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Service Policy Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the question, sir.

We did hear from the official languages commissioner. We're actively reviewing that and we will respond. We're on track to respond early in the new year, but we are very aware of the situation with RESDAC.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Murphy, I'm sure you are aware of the situation. You read the commissioner's report. However, before that, the people from RESDAC had contacted you and let you know that they were at the end of their rope.

So, why did you let the situation deteriorate to the point where this organization is having to shut down? It has lost one employee; that person will find another job elsewhere. So we are talking about a loss of expertise; this is something we cannot afford in our official language communities.

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Doug Murphy: I can't speak to the specifics of the program, other than to note that this is something the department is focused on now, and we're on track to respond within the prescribed timelines.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Are the deadlines coming up soon?

[English]

Mr. Doug Murphy: It will be on January 12.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Just like you, we deplore this unfortunate situation.

We just published a press release in which we quote the FCFA: "For many organizations and institutions in our communities, it is one minute to midnight." This was in fact the case with RESDAC, and we saw what happened.

The Chair: It may be one minute to midnight, but you only have 10 seconds left, Mr. Choquette.

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

I will quote the FCFA later.

The Chair: We will now hear from the next speaker.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

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

Minister Duclos, thank you, and welcome to our committee.

Like my colleague Mr. Samson, I am very happy and very proud of the work you and your department have done.

In fact, we knew that early childhood would be a part of the action plan. As you know, last year in its report to Parliament, the committee noted that early childhood needed to be made a government priority, and your statement has confirmed that this is indeed the case.

I will speak about my personal experience. When my family and I moved to Sudbury, we had to register our daughter in advance on a waiting list in order to obtain a spot in a French-language day care. We had to do this one year in advance or we would not have had a space. I can also give you the example of my sister-in-law and my nephew, who was unfortunately unable to obtain a day care spot. Even though my sister-in-law made the request six months ahead of time, she did not obtain a space in a day care in her area. Of course, no one wants to drive 45 minutes to go to the day care before driving to work. So we can conclude that there is a shortage of day care spaces in Sudbury, even though this is a very important location for the francophonie.

You spoke about the agreements you concluded. My colleague Mr. Samson is anxious to see Nova Scotia follow the path taken by

Ontario. As we know, it is often Ontario that leads the way. That said, I commend my colleagues from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): After having followed the lead of the Atlantic provinces.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Things are sometimes done elsewhere after they are done in the Atlantic provinces, but often the reverse is true.

Be that as it may, you know that insofar as Ontario and the AFO is concerned, we asked that in the agreement between Ontario and Canada, a percentage of the funding be earmarked for the francophonie. For the time being, we have heard nothing.

Can you assure us that this will be the case?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Very well.

First of all, Mr. Lefebvre, I congratulate you for being a part of this very enthusiastic group. I am happy to see that people want to do as well as Nova Scotia and that Nova Scotia wants to do as well as Ontario. If this continues, all of the provinces will do very well. This is very good news.

The agreement with Ontario was signed in June. If you read it attentively—we will make sure that everyone has a copy—you will see that it recognizes the importance of investing in educational day care services, for the reasons Mr. Lefebvre clearly explained. In a minority francophone environment like Sudbury, it is difficult not only to have access to services that are sufficient, but also to quality services. The issue is not only to have access to day care; it has to be high-quality day care.

That is why the Ontario plan, for instance, contains a provision to support educators—there are some men, but they are mostly women—so that they feel they have everything they need to do their work well. They have been asking for this for a long time. Things are going well in Ontario, and there is good support from the province. So, the Ontario plan supports the availability, affordability and quality of day care services.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Excellent.

One of the points we alluded to in our report is provincial accountability.

You said that the agreement was public, but I am sure that there are quantifiable objectives that can be measured. It is all well and good to say that there will be an agreement, but if objectives can't be measured, you could say that the agreement has been respected even though only 1% of the needs were met, whereas the demand was far greater.

How can we ensure accountability if the objectives in the agreement are broad and can be open to interpretation?

• (1605)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That is a very important comment.

Provinces and territories would often like to use rather vague language in order to have as much flexibility as possible in the use of resources from the Canadian government. In this case, we are continuing to work very hard to have specific data, percentages, exact numbers of spaces, in order to properly translate the efforts devoted to educational day care services in minority linguistic communities. That is the best way of working together. And so, we are committing to quantified action plans *ex ante*, ahead of time, and then we will also expect the results to be quantified and quantifiable.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Excellent.

I have one last question.

There is something we have heard from several witnesses over the passed two years, since I have been on this committee. That is the notion of services that are managed for and by the main parties concerned. I know you're asking the province to play a role in the management of day cares, but we wonder whether the community could also play a role. Often in small villages, these services are managed for and by the official language minority. In Ontario, for instance, there are services managed by francophones for francophones.

What role should the community play to ensure services are managed by and for the communities concerned?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That is another very good question.

There are two things.

First, the community and the associations that represent the community groups are consulted before we agree, and before we sign the action plans. We conduct a broad consultation exercise in each of the provinces and territories to ensure that the organizations that represent minority francophone or anglophone communities are involved in the preparation of these action plans.

Second, in every case I can remember, a large part of the work is done through these community organizations, which are sometimes national in scale. That is the case in Ontario, since it is a vast province. Things are somewhat more concentrated, however, in Nova Scotia. So, we work with the associations that represent francophone educational day care services in Ontario. Afterwards, most of the time francophone school boards do the work to ensure that early childhood services are well integrated into the educational services that follow early childhood. It depends on the circumstances, but that is often where the best work is done, that is to say when early childhood education services are integrated into the educational services that oversee them, and when this goes through existing structures. As we were saying earlier, this allows us to avoid situations where children in minority communities are sent to bilingual or immersion day cares. These services do not offer the quality we are seeking. It is preferable that things be done another way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are going to go from Ontario to Manitoba by yielding the floor to Mr. Vandal.

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

Minister, thank you very much for your presence here today.

First of all, I want to thank you again for your visit to the riding of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital this summer on the occasion of the Habitat for Humanity project. It was very good to see you in the field.

The issue of day cares is extremely important for Manitoba. I know that there is a 13,000-person waiting list, that includes francophones and anglophones. Not one week goes without calls or visits to my office from community groups or individuals telling me that they are looking for a spot in a francophone day care.

We know that in Manitoba, only 17% of the population has the right to access French-language day cares, whereas the national average is 33%, I believe. Too often, in the riding of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital, parents have to register their children in anglophone day cares.

In the provinces where bilateral agreements have already been signed, the spaces are guaranteed. However, the Province of Manitoba does not seem to be in a hurry to sign such an agreement on day cares, just as it does not seem to be in a hurry to do so on other issues, such as the environment, health, or cannabis.

In negotiating these agreements, how can we ensure that day care spaces will be created for children? What should I say to the parents I represent to reassure them that there will be day care spaces?

• (1610)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

It does seem to be taking longer in Manitoba. We would like things to be done fast and well, but in the case of Manitoba, it is taking longer than elsewhere. I think that things will nevertheless eventually come to fruition. But since things are not yet quite in place, your question is relevant, Mr. Vandal.

As to how the Franco-Manitoban community can support proceedings between the Canadian government and the Manitoba government, you need to call on the associations that are already active on the ground. You know these associations very well. You must exercise positive pressure on the Manitoba government and on the Canadian government so that they work expeditiously in the interest of Franco-Manitobans. The francophone communities of Manitoba represent extraordinary historic and cultural wealth. This wealth is precious, but it needs to be supported, as you know.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Yes, absolutely.

Since early childhood educators in Manitoba are often bilingual, French language day cares compete with English language day cares, which are often bigger and better. French language day cares have more trouble retaining their employees.

Is the issue of human resources raised in these agreements? How can we be sure that qualified personnel will be there when these spaces are created?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: In the interest of transparency, we must specify that the working conditions of educators, including their salary and work schedules, as well as the important management of service delivery, are matters that are under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. These decisions fall to them. However, the Canadian government can provide considerable support to educators to help them provide even better services. It does so in the context of the bilateral agreements.

Educators appreciate the support they receive to allow them to do good work. If they feel well supported, and have access to help and to the means to develop their skills, they will be more inclined to stay longer with their employer, and as you said so well, at the service of our children.

The entire work environment is important. Things are going well in most provinces. We need to develop a range of support mechanisms so that these people will be more interested in continuing to work, and so that they receive support in developing their skills, support which they greatly need.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

The Chair: I will now give the floor to Ms. Wagantall from Saskatchewan, who will share her speaking time with Mr. Généreux.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you.

I'm very pleased to be here today as possibly the one and only around the table who is English-speaking only. French was taught in my school when I was in junior high, but there was nowhere to practise the language. I'm from Saskatchewan, and at the time.... I can tell you that I can still say "*je suis dans la salle de classe*" and "*fermez la bouche*".

However, I am hoping to learn.

Learning when you are very young is very important. I appreciate that this is about protection of official language minority communities, not necessarily in thinking to broaden those who can speak both languages. Believe me, being on the Hill now, I appreciate this as something that is very important.

I would like to say at least that in Saskatchewan we have a very strong immersion program. As well, my daughter's four children, who are taught at home, are learning Latin, Hebrew, and French. Again, it's that young age that makes such a difference.

I have two very brief questions. The first is around the \$1.2 billion over three years to the provinces. Is it around \$400 million per year? Anyway, I just wonder how this is determined when you see that there are one, two, three, four already in bilateral agreements. Are they already receiving this funding, or is this new funding that's going to be sent out?

Then when you look at \$1.2 billion and the number of provinces—of course, Saskatchewan and Quebec are not part of this either—how are you determining how much money is going to be protected to go where?

• (1615)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's a good question.

Unfortunately, I wouldn't be very good in Hebrew or Latin or any of the languages your family is learning. However, I'm better at numbers.

When it comes to numbers, it's \$1.2 billion over three years, as you correctly stated. That starts in 2017-18, and that's why we are working so hard with all the remaining provinces and territories to make sure these agreements are signed.

There are carry-over provisions, which means that not all the dollars need to be 100% spent over each of the three years. The first year can be below 100%. That's why we have a little flexibility. It means that for Saskatchewan, Quebec, Manitoba, and all the other provinces and territories, we need to proceed at a quick pace.

In addition to the \$1.2 billion, there is \$300 million for indigenous early learning and child care funding and the framework. We are also working with the Métis, first nations, and Inuit to have indigenous early learning and child care arrangements with them so they can use these resources to develop those services for their families and communities.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I know Quebec has a very strong child care program. At the same time, it is very expensive, with long wait-lists. What portion of the province would the English official language minority communities be? If Quebec is struggling with that side of things, how realistic is it that we would see this kind of program implemented there? The funding requires the work of the province as well.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Very good.

However, something you said is not exactly right. The waiting lists in Quebec used to be quite long a few years ago, but with the maturation, the development of its system, the waiting lists are now considerably shorter. In some cases, there are no more waiting lists. It's accessible and still affordable, although the rates have changed slightly, and there's a considerable investment in quality early learning and child care.

Because of this considerable asymmetry between Quebec and the other provinces and territories when it comes to early learning and child care services, Quebec will have its own bilateral agreement, as with all the other provinces and territories, which gives Quebec more flexibility. Resources will have to be targeted for direct services to children and families, but not necessarily to early learning and child care, at least not in the way in which it's understood in other provinces and territories.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, you have time for a single question.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Minister, do I understand that Quebec will receive full compensation? Is that what you are saying?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: As is the case for the other provinces and territories, the federal government cannot send a cheque without an agreement. That is absolutely necessary. And so, there must be a bilateral agreement with Quebec also, but it will be an asymmetrical agreement for the obvious reason that the day care services in Quebec are very different from elsewhere in the country.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: And most importantly, they are already in place.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Généreux.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Arseneault, from New Brunswick.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have one question, and then I will give the rest of my time to our early childhood and education expert from Nova Scotia, Darrell Samson.

First of all, thank you for being here, Mr. Minister and Mr. Murphy. Congratulations on your initiatives.

I have a really practical question about the negotiation of those bilateral agreements. I do not want to know any state secrets, if there are any. However, we have heard a lot of testimony, here and in other contexts, from organizations representing minority communities. They have often talked about services run by and for the people involved. In other words, the money from the federal government must truly be used to meet the real needs, and must truly be managed by the stakeholders, the people who really need it.

I know that we are talking about agreements between the provinces and territories and the federal government, so we are talking about the ministries of education, early childhood and the family. In your negotiations with the provinces, do you feel that organizations representing minority communities have been able to share their side of the story with their provincial or territorial governments as part of those negotiations?

•(1620)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Arseneault.

It is actually a joint responsibility. On the federal government's side, we have made sure to listen to organizations with experience on the ground. Those organizations are well versed in how educational child care services can support minority language communities. This consultation and listening exercise has been conducted very carefully and will continue over the next few years because the agreements are for three years. Everyone knows that we will be back at the bargaining table in three years. We can then see how things went and, if they could have gone better, we will correct the situation. It's an ongoing commitment, because we know full well that things improve over time.

Furthermore, the provinces and territories have all acted in good faith. We ensured that the symmetrical exercise was done and that the provinces and territories were also listening to their minority communities. Most of the time, it had already been done. In some cases, we had to do a little better than what has been done before,

given the tripartite nature of those agreements, which require the participation of the federal government, the provinces and all those on the ground. I would say that it went well. That said, it's just starting as an exercise. This is the first time in Canadian history that the Canadian government has committed to supporting this work with the provinces and territories, and I think it will continue to improve in the coming years.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you very much.

I will now give the floor to our friend Darrell Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you once again for being here, Mr. Minister.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have three minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's excellent.

I would like to point out how crucial the start is in the education system. Like me, you have worked in education, so you know that, in this area, the sooner the better. Learning is easier when it starts early. It's really crucial. It can help curb the assimilation we have been facing for a long time. I know that a lot of people, at the beginning, were not comfortable with the idea of children attending French school at the age of five, because that was the official curriculum and they were afraid that the children would fall behind because they had to learn the language. The fact that we introduced a program for 4-year-olds helped to better prepare children before they started school and to gain the parents' trust. The sooner this can be done, the better.

I remember that, in 2004, Ken Dryden, who was the minister at the time, promised to invest \$5 billion over five years in early childhood. I'm sorry to say it, but we then lost 10 years with the party that came to power. It is unfortunate that we made no progress during that time. That said, we must start from where we are at today. I think this will slow down assimilation and truly make francophone schools more successful.

With respect to agreements, four provinces and territories have signed one to date. Can you tell me, without disclosing confidential information, how the negotiations are going? In your opinion, do the provinces seem interested in signing agreements like that soon?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you for the question, Mr. Samson.

I think what you said was very good. You said that an early start was a better start. The sooner we start, the more likely we are to be in a better position in the end. Yes, this is the reality in our communities.

The provinces and territories are also happy with what is happening. I do not want to be partisan, but for the sake of transparency, I will say it anyway. The first federal, provincial and territorial meeting on social services, the culmination of the discussions on educational child care, took place in January 2016. I entered the room, I did not have time to say a single word and the officials of the provinces and territories all stood up and applauded me. I told them that I had not done or said anything yet. They told me that it had been 10 years since they had seen a federal minister responsible for social services and that they were so happy to see one again, because they would now be able to look toward the future and intelligently discuss an issue they consider important.

It is important because the provinces and territories also need political support. I am not talking about partisan support, but about political support. We do not want to be partisan. It is about providing political support so that the provinces and territories can tell their people that it is important for them to invest in early childhood and that they have the support of the Canadian government to help them do so. All the provinces and territories welcome the fact that the Canadian government is a partner. We get along well, we work together and it is well regarded. Canadians want to see that governments are able to work together.

Of course, officials have some work to do to get things right, but surprisingly—in any case, I was personally surprised in January 2016—the fact that the Canadian government is back is in itself very good news.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are back to the Quebec City area with Mr. Généreux.

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

Minister, one aspect has changed a lot in the past 10 years, and it has to do with immersion programs. Between 2003 and 2013, enrolment in immersion programs increased by almost 40%. I have a niece who teaches immersion. My sister also taught immersion in Vancouver for a number of years. They saw people standing outside schools for almost 48 hours to get a place for their children. In my opinion, that's excellent news, as there have been almost 400,000 students in recent years. It's really remarkable. The fact that there is so much passion for French in the English-speaking Canadian provinces is increasingly showing the relevance of bilingualism in Canada. We just have to look at some of our colleagues here who regularly take English or French classes to improve their language skills.

In the next 2018-23 roadmap, is any money earmarked for immersion schools under the agreements?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Before I answer the question directly, I would like to say that learning a second language is always a very good thing for a child, since it stimulates intellectual development, opens the mind and allows all kinds of contacts afterwards. However, it is important that the mother tongue can also be preserved and developed, so that the child feels able to work, live and grow in his or her mother tongue.

In the case of immersion schools, that is not the goal. The federal plan is not to support immersion schools, but rather to support families and communities in minority language settings.

We were asked the question. Some provinces asked us whether they could use the investment for English-speaking children in a majority setting. The answer is no, because it is not the purpose of the plan.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about a minute left.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like to come back to one of the important issues we talked about earlier, the initial issue of accountability. A number of organizations, such as RESDAC, an organization that helps francophones living in minority communities across Canada, are in a financial predicament. In my opinion, those organizations are essential to the development of community organizations.

The plan you are presenting is inevitably connected to young people. However, in general, are there any special amounts set aside for those community organizations?

Perhaps Mr. Murphy could answer the question.

• (1630)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: The answer is yes. In the plans that are already available and in those that we are developing, the provinces determine exactly which local organizations they will work with.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will end this round with Mr. Choquette.

You have the floor for three minutes.

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

I would like to come back to the FCFA, which I started quoting earlier because I would like to honour them. Let me read the article:

For many organizations and institutions in our communities, it is the eleventh hour. If we want to give fresh impetus to the francophonie in minority settings, stop the decline in population and slow down assimilation, we need \$575 million in additional investments for our communities in the next action plan for official languages...

That's what the FCFA said. Further on, the article states:

Francophone organizations and institutions received only \$0.25 from each dollar invested in the Roadmap, and \$0.07 from transfer payments...

Earlier, we talked about transfer payments under early childhood agreements, for example. This is an extremely serious situation.

My colleagues mentioned that your agreements do not have percentages, which is concerning to us. They also mentioned the importance of services managed by and for the people involved. In fact, it is important that the money be given to the organizations so that they invest it in the communities, rather than wasting money on administration. The organizations only received \$0.25 and \$0.07 from each dollar. It makes no sense.

What are you going to do to ensure that the money goes to agencies and institutions that directly provide early childhood services in the official language of the minority?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: First of all, I have already answered those questions at length when we talked about the action plans and the reports that will have to be made on the common indicators and the specific indicators for each province and territory.

Second, the \$0.07 cannot be applied to previous Government of Canada investments in educational child care, since the Canadian government has never invested in educational child care services, and certainly not in support of francophone or anglophone communities in a minority language environment.

Third, it is precisely because the needs are so great that it is also important to have this type of action plan for educational child care services.

More generally speaking, since you are also quite rightly concerned about Ms. Joly's action plan, I think it would be important for her to come here to talk to you and to listen to you as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That's the end of our discussion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister and Mr. Murphy. We were very pleased to welcome you this afternoon. A big thank you on behalf of everyone.

We will suspend for a few minutes to prepare for committee business in camera.

● (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1635)

The Chair: We are resuming the meeting, which is now public, to discuss committee business.

We have some motions to address.

Mr. Arseneault, the floor is yours.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, my motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to the Order of Reference of Thursday, November 30, 2017, and to Standing Order 111.1(1), Raymond Thériault, nominee for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, be invited to appear on Tuesday, December 5, 2017, for one (1) hour in relation to his proposed appointment.

The Chair: Do you want to debate the motion?

Mr. Bernier, the floor is yours.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): I am pleased that this motion has been moved, but given how important the official languages are, I wonder why you have not planned for two hours.

Mr. René Arseneault: I suggested one hour, but if you want two hours, you can ask to amend the motion.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Why not specify that, if two hours are necessary, we will use two hours?

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Okay.

If the motion proposes a maximum of two hours, it will remain open. If we have no more questions for Mr. Thériault before the end of the two hours, he can leave.

The Chair: So we are going to indicate that it will be for up to two hours instead of one hour.

Does everyone agree?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I would like to come back to the motion I introduced with respect to subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act.

● (1640)

The Chair: Can you read your motion again, Mr. Choquette?

Mr. François Choquette: I can't remember if I gave notice of this motion during the public meeting or in camera. Either way, the motion is as follows:

That the committee denounce the non-compliance with subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act regarding consultation with the official opposition leaders on the appointment of the new Commissioner of Official Languages; and that it report this to the House before the end of the year.

I'll explain the motion quickly, because we may have something else on the agenda.

As you know, we have already discussed it. This is subsection 49 (1) of the Official Languages Act, which requires the government to consult the leaders of the opposition parties, not just to notify them. Several court decisions have made it clear that a consultation is not limited to a simple notice. We have to take the time to ask the leaders of the opposition parties what they think about it.

I learned that only one name had been given to the leaders of the opposition parties. They did not receive the names of the last successful candidates and therefore could not be consulted about these applications. So we are talking about a simple opinion and not a consultation. That is why I'm moving this motion.

The Chair: Would one of you like to say something?

Mr. Bernier, you have the floor.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: You argue that there was no consultation. You said that you were informed but that you were not consulted. I would like to know what your distinction is between being consulted and being informed.

Mr. François Choquette: The court decisions on this issue do indicate that there is a distinction between notifying individuals that a particular candidate will be the next Commissioner of Official Languages and submitting to them the name of the selected candidates, giving them the name of the preferred one and then asking them what they think about it. That's the difference.

In the case of Supreme Court justices, for example, the three successful candidates are presented, the favoured one is indicated and people are asked what they think. We should use the same process for the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Prime Minister should call the leaders of the opposition parties to tell them the names of the successful candidates, tell them which he favours and ask them what they think. Then we'd be talking about a consultation.

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

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, what I know is that the leader of the opposition was informed of the name of the next person who was going to be the commissioner. I have to agree with Mr. Choquette: there is a distinction between someone informing another person and someone consulting another person. There is a fundamental difference between the two.

This time again, as we experienced in the spring in the case of Ms. Meilleur, there was no consultation. Based on what I knew, our leader was informed of the name of the future commissioner; he was not consulted.

Mr. Choquette, you will be able to fill me in on this, but I wonder if there isn't a meeting scheduled between the various party leaders to discuss the issue. Doesn't the act set out that a discussion must take place? I'll remind you that the concept of consultation implies that there is an exchange, and there has not been one this time.

The Chair: Does anyone else have anything to say about this?

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: I absolutely agree with Mr. Généreux. When we talk about consultation, it means that we ask for an opinion and that there is an exchange. We expect at least a phone call, rather than just receiving a letter presenting the person who has been chosen as Commissioner of Official Languages.

No doubt I will have to once again file a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages regarding this lack of consultation, which is happening again. The Office of the Commissioner will have to deal with this issue and settle this matter. In the meantime, I wondered whether the committee could not adopt a clear position on the issue.

• (1645)

The Chair: As chair, I have a little problem. We are talking about processes here. Does our committee exist to deal with process issues? It doesn't just apply to the Commissioner of Official Languages. If I'm not mistaken, there will soon be other commissioner positions, including the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. Isn't it the House or a similar entity that is responsible for the process itself? As far as we're concerned, the name comes to our committee, and we have to look at the candidate's skills. We've had this discussion in the past.

As far as I'm concerned, I'm ambivalent. If anyone else wants to talk about it, I invite them to do so.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I have a brief comment to make.

The Chair: Right. Then it will be Mr. Samson.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What I understand is that the opposition wants a veto over appointments. If one of the opposition parties

comes to form the government, be it the Conservative Party or the NDP, do you think it will want to give us a veto? Thank you very much. That was my comment.

At the moment, these aren't the rules of the game. As for us, we'll follow the rules as they are.

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

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I move that we vote, please.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to add anything?

Is it clear for everyone?

Mr. François Choquette: Can we hold a recorded vote?

The Chair: A recorded vote is requested. I will let Madam Clerk proceed with the vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: I would like to go back over the agenda items for next week.

Given the first motion we have adopted, Tuesday's meeting will be reserved for Mr. Thériault's appearance. As I already mentioned to Mr. Clarke, he will be chairing the meeting next Tuesday, since I won't be able to attend.

Would you like the commissioner's appearance to be televised?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Very good. Madam Clerk, you can make the provisions to that effect.

The other news I want to share with you is that I appeared before the Subcommittee on Committee Budgets of the Liaison Committee earlier today, and they adopted the budget for our travel in February and March 2018 to British Columbia, Alberta and Yukon. The House will then have to endorse the decision. As you know, there are several requests from various committees, and the House must endorse these requests. I must admit that it went very well. Presenting a request for a budget for the Standing Committee on Official Languages before this subcommittee is quite something. Everyone around the table said congratulations. I just wanted to share it with you.

Go ahead, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal: You didn't mention Winnipeg. Does that mean that our budget for Winnipeg wasn't approved?

The Chair: It includes our trip to Winnipeg.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

The Chair: You were right to mention it, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: If all goes well, Mr. Chair, it's thanks to the clerk and analyst of the committee. I want to point that out.

The Chair: Absolutely. And I sincerely thank them. You're right to point that out, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Don't forget that they'll be on the trip, too.

The Chair: Super.

Next Thursday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage will be here, and the meeting will be televised.

Between now and the Holidays, we'll have a lot of visits: on Tuesday, the commissioner will be here and, on Thursday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage will join us.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's a lot of guests: Minister Duclos, the commissioner, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Mr. Bernier, you should visit us more often.

• (1650)

Hon. Maxime Bernier: I almost voted with you.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You wanted to. The will was in the right place.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I saw you; I saw it in your eyes.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to add anything?

Mr. Choquette, go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, first of all, I would like to say that it is true that our committee works very hard. We were fortunate to have Minister Duclos here today, and it was really interesting. The work that was done is a step forward, but it needs to

continue, of course. The person appointed to the position of Commissioner of Official Languages will appear before us. We will also have Minister Joly here. These are all good things.

That said, I would like to give a notice of motion that follows on what I mentioned today:

That the Committee invite the President of the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC) to appear before the Committee in February 2018 to update the Committee on the organization's current status

It's just a notice. We can discuss the motion later.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have received your motion.

I will remind you that the following week we will table in the House our report on official languages and justice. We will hold our press briefing at that time, as agreed.

Does that suit everyone?

Mr. René Arseneault: That's perfect.

The Chair: Well, thank you everyone. Have a good weekend.

The meeting was adjourned.

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