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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): Good afternoon.

I call the meeting to order.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of Thursday, November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person, in the room, and remotely using the Zoom application.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

[*English*]

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations of health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on Friday, January 28, 2022, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. Third, they must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer provided in the room.

[*Translation*]

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. If you are in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

A reminder that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated speaking order for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

[*English*]

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me. Please note that we may need to suspend for a few minutes as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 31, 2022, the committee is undertaking a study of government measures to protect and promote French in Quebec and in Canada.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

Joining us by video conference, from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, we have Lynn Brouillette, president and chief executive officer, and Martin Normand, director of strategic research and international relations, and as an individual, Roger Lepage, an associate lawyer at Miller Thomson.

Please note that you will have a maximum of five minutes for your opening statements, after which, we will move into questions and answers. I will let you know when you have a minute left.

Starting off the first hour is Lynn Brouillette.

Ms. Brouillette, please go ahead. You have five minutes.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette (President and Chief Executive Officer, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in your study on federal measures to protect and promote French in Quebec and in Canada.

The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, brings together 22 French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions across eight provinces. We work to expand access to French-language post-secondary education in support of a true continuum of French-language education, from early childhood to university, in francophone minority communities. Through these efforts, the ACUFC and its members contribute to the protection and promotion of French.

The ACUFC and its membership work with a number of federal institutions, including Canadian Heritage, of course. Our focus today is on just one of the measures affecting the post-secondary sector, the official languages in education program, or OLEP.

Created in 1970, OLEP supports provincial and territorial governments by contributing to the additional costs of providing education to official language minority communities. A portion of the funding is earmarked for post-secondary institutions in the form of special projects. Institutions do not receive the money directly from the federal government. It goes through the provincial and territorial governments.

The overall funding amounts set out by the federal government for OLEP have long been frozen. However, in budget 2021, the federal government announced \$121.3 million in new funding over three years for post-secondary minority-language education, meaning education for francophones outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec. To my knowledge, that is the first time the federal government has set aside funding specifically for post-secondary education in minority-language communities. The new funding will be distributed through the existing mechanism under OLEP.

I want to draw your attention to two major problems with this mechanism, problems that impede the efforts of our member institutions.

First, the mechanism requires that provinces and territories make a matching contribution in relation to the funding provided by the federal government. Provinces already make huge investments in post-secondary institutions and so often ask francophone minority institutions to draw the matching contribution from the funding already being provided. Consequently, the province's contribution does not constitute additional funding. What that means, in practical terms, is that institutions often have to rely solely on the federal funding they receive to carry out proposed projects. That funding, however, accounts for just 50% or so of the actual money needed to complete those projects.

Second, the mechanism allows only for the funding of non-recurring projects. In terms of the objectives tied to the \$121.3 million, it is worth noting that the government is aiming to strengthen the institutional capacity of post-secondary institutions and stabilize the post-secondary sector, as per the applicant's guide. In our view, the objectives tied to the funding and the mechanism to distribute the funding are very much at odds. It is impossible to put in place a system-wide corrective approach that will have a meaningful and lasting impact on the post-secondary sector's institutional capacity and stability, and allow only for non-recurring projects.

While we realize that post-secondary education is an area of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, this new funding for post-sec-

ondary education signals that the federal government recognizes its responsibility to support the vitality of francophone minority communities. It also recognizes that post-secondary institutions are crucial pillars of the institutional completeness of minority communities. Consequently, the federal government has a responsibility to make sure that the mechanism to distribute the funding will actually have a long-term stabilizing effect on the post-secondary sector in francophone minority communities.

During the election campaign, the Liberal Party of Canada pledged to double the funding announced in budget 2021 on a permanent basis. Although we applaud this commitment, we must raise a red flag.

● (1540)

That is why we recommend that, in co-operation with the provinces and territories, Canadian Heritage completely overhaul its mechanism for distributing the funding earmarked for post-secondary education in francophone minority communities, and that it do so before the funding is set out permanently. We also recommend that the mechanism give post-secondary institutions access to enhanced core funding in order to truly stabilize the sector.

We are ready and willing to participate in that effort.

My colleague Martin Normand and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: We'll go to the first round of questions. I remind all of my colleagues who are participating in the meeting in person and virtually that they will each have a total of six minutes for questions and answers.

We begin with our vice-chair, Mr. Joel Godin, from the Conservative Party.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for six minutes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Gagné-Frégeau): I am sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Chair, but we are supposed to hear Mr. Lepage's presentation for five minutes.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I thought Mr. Lepage was going to appear in the second hour. I misunderstood the notes.

Mr. Lepage, you have the floor.

● (1545)

Mr. Roger Lepage (Lawyer, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee. I am going to talk to you about the education sector.

I want to start by talking to you about the wrongs of the past that need to be righted using section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Official Languages Act, or OLA.

You can follow me during my speech by consulting the document I have tabled. I will follow the order of the paragraphs. I'm on the first page and I'm going to summarize some of the points.

1. For a long time, it was illegal to teach in French outside Quebec. Parliamentarian Dalton McCarthy, the ideology behind the slogan “One language, one flag, one country” and the hanging of Louis Riel in 1885 were factors that contributed to erasing the French language from education.

2. The rate of assimilation and exogamy in western Canada is around 80%. In 75 years, the number of francophone villages in Saskatchewan has dropped from 80 down to 12.

3. It is difficult to obtain from Statistics Canada the number of children of rights holders before 2021. We should receive the information by November 2022.

4. The network of francophone schools is not complete. The number of community schools is insufficient. Pupils have to travel long distances to get to school. There is a lack of real equality. Many French schools are overcrowded and lack space.

5. Francophone school boards are underfunded. Funding formulas do not recognize certain minority factors such as francization needs, recruitment difficulties, distance, insufficient population density.

6. Funding for full-day preschool and full-day kindergarten is insufficient and therefore does not allow for the francization of children aged 3 to 5 before primary school.

7. Federal government funding for French-language day care centres is insufficient.

8. Provincial and territorial governments are lagging behind when it comes to enforcing section 23 of the charter.

9. There is a constant need to use the courts to enforce section 23 of the charter, and there is insufficient funding to pay for the costs of doing so.

10. Binding language clauses and obligations to comply with part VII of the OLA are insufficient in the documents used by the federal government to transfer funds and responsibilities to the provinces and territories.

11. The OLA must be modernized to reflect the needs of the minority.

I will now list my 12 recommendations, which are found on page 2 of my brief.

1. That the federal government use its spending power to immediately increase its financial support to the provinces and territories to build French-language community schools. This is necessary to complete the school system and to meet the growing enrolment. I suggest that a subsection (3) be added to section 43 of the OLA to reflect all my recommendations.

2. That the OLA be amended to require federal funding of at least 50% of the construction cost of francophone schools and educational institutions from day care to post-secondary education.

3. That the federal government develop a massive funding initiative in co-operation with the provinces and territories to update and complete the construction of schools and educational institutions ranging from day care to post-secondary education. This is in keep-

ing with the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision in a British Columbia case heard in 2020 involving section 23. The need for additional schools is not limited to British Columbia.

4. That the OLA be amended to require the federal government to offer its properties for sale to school boards on a priority basis for school construction.

5. That the OLA be amended to make it mandatory to index funding for the Official Languages in Education Program, or OLEP, to the cost of living and to enrolment growth in French-language schools.

6. That the OLA be amended to require Statistics Canada to determine the number of student right holders annually, and to provide school boards with this information free of charge.

7. That the OLA be amended to make it mandatory to include binding language clauses and obligations to respect part VII of the OLA when the federal government transfers funds or responsibilities. This is to comply with the most recent Federal Court of Appeal decision of January 28, 2022.

8. We must adopt an independent tribunal to adjudicate OLA violations.

• (1550)

I invite you to read the rest yourself; articles 9, 10, 11 and 12.

This is a list of recommendations that would solve a lot of problems in western Canada and outside Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lepage.

In any case, during this meeting you will be asked many questions. You will then be able to expand on your ideas.

Mr. Godin, vice-chair of the committee, I apologize for interrupting you earlier. You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Ms. Brouillette and Mr. Lepage for their opening remarks.

I will address Ms. Brouillette first.

Ms. Brouillette, you talked about the \$121.3-million fund in the 2021 budget, which was a one-time thing. I understand that the OLEP would not be able to take advantage of that fund because the OLEP is recurring.

Could you tell us what this \$121.3 million could add temporarily?

Wouldn't it be better to maximize these investments in the OLEP?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: The OLEP has been around for a long time, but the funds have been frozen for several years. Last spring, the government announced \$121.3 million for minority institutions. This amount is part of the OLEP. So this is another envelope, which is specifically for post-secondary institutions in the OLEP.

This fund is going to be rolled out over three years, this year and the next two. The plan is to double these funds thereafter. In fact, the \$121.3 million over three years is about \$40 million a year, which would be doubled to about \$80 million a year. So that's the background related to the fund.

When we talked about one-time projects, we were referring to the mechanism in the applicant's guide for this \$121.3 million fund. So far, the mechanism allows for ad hoc annual projects, which is clearly not aligned with the purpose for which we put this fund in place. The purpose was to solidify the network and support institutions to increase their operating capacity.

What we are saying is that the mechanism used for this new \$121.3-million envelope is the same mechanism that has been used for the OLEP for several years and has been problematic all this time. There are problems with this mechanism and this is not new. We have been flagging it for a long time, since it does not allow for sustained funding that can bring about structuring changes to our institutions and allow for core funding.

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, what I understand from your answer is that it's a Greek gift, in the sense that the province has to match one hundred per cent of the federal contribution. To get the \$40 million, the provinces have to match it.

What happens if the provinces do not invest the \$40 million?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: So far, that's kind of the problem.

Education is a provincial jurisdiction. The provinces already invest money in colleges and universities. In fact, every time the federal government announces an initiative, like the \$121.3-million fund, it asks for matching funds from the provinces.

Mr. Joël Godin: Excuse me for interrupting you, Ms. Brouillette.

In the program agreement, are the provinces obliged to match the federal government offer?

The issue is that while we are in the midst of doing a study to promote and protect French, the federal government is telling you that it will give you some money—to calm everyone down—but that if the provincial government does not invest, you will not be entitled to it.

How can the CEGEPs and universities that you represent plan for the future and organize themselves to achieve their goals and develop?

Currently, you are in survival mode. Isn't that right?

• (1555)

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: You are absolutely right. We often hear that we are in survival mode. We know that some of our institutions are in a precarious situation, and they say so publicly.

Actually, the issue of provincial matching can be problematic. The provinces already provide funding to our colleges and universities. The federal government has its own funding process, and when a program is proposed, there is not always a match with the provinces. This is problematic because the matching funds required from the provinces cause them to dip into the funding they already provide to post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Joël Godin: So there is no automatic process on the part of the provinces and territories.

Unfortunately, time is running out and I would now like to ask Mr. Lepage a question.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Lepage, I would like you to talk to us about righting past wrongs. In point 4, you talk about the network of francophone schools not being complete. You are entirely right, except that this is a provincial jurisdiction.

Help us to help you. Can you help us find solutions?

The Chair: Mr. Lepage, it will not be possible for you to answer this question now, as there is no time left. You can come back to it in the next few rounds.

Ms. Lattanzio, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Brouillette and Mr. Lepage, for your testimony.

My first questions will be to Mr. Lepage.

Mr. Lepage, you have worked in the legal field and in the school system. I would like to talk to you about Quebec.

In your opinion, do the linguistic regime and the Charter of the French Language of the Government of Quebec allow it to achieve its objectives, more particularly with regard to the use of French in the public sphere and as a language of work and business?

Mr. Roger Lepage: You are asking me to express an opinion on what is happening in Quebec with regard to the Charter of the French Language and whether it is achieving its objectives.

I was born and raised in Saskatchewan. I follow with interest what is happening in Quebec, as I should. I have read recent books by sociologists and demographers, who say that, despite all the efforts resulting from Bill 101, the French language is still very much under threat in Quebec, especially in Montreal. Moreover, there seems to be a huge attraction to English-language institutions, especially English-language post-secondary institutions.

As an individual from outside Quebec, I observe that the French language in Quebec is still in a precarious situation and that it would be only natural for the federal government and the Quebec government to do what is necessary to protect it. From what I observe, the English-language post-secondary education system in Quebec has been in existence for almost 200 years. So it has a head start on what is happening outside Quebec for the French-speaking minority.

Since French is still a minority language in North America, and English seems to be becoming more and more the language of business around the world, I think it's only right that the federal and provincial governments take further steps to better protect the French language and francophone culture, even in Quebec.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: As I understand it, you consider that the powers given to the Commissioner of Official Languages should be greater and that an independent tribunal should be established.

I would like you to elaborate on this. What remedies would Canadians be entitled to with respect to the delivery of services, which is what part IV of the act deals with, and with respect to language of work, which is what part V of the act deals with?

You consider this independent tribunal and this expansion of the commissioner's powers to be necessary tools. Would these be judicial or quasi-judicial powers? What would be the mode of control and oversight? Would there be an opportunity to appeal these decisions?

• (1600)

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you for the question.

In my eighth recommendation, I mention that the OLA should be amended to mandate the establishment of an independent tribunal to adjudicate violations of the OLA and to provide the power to impose remedies and financial penalties. I suggest following the model of human rights tribunals.

I make such a recommendation because in the past I have found that citizens file complaints with the Commissioner of Official Languages, and then the commissioner investigates and files a report with recommendations; then there are very few subsequent results.

There are results only when, subsequently, the commissioner himself or the complainant takes the case to the Federal Court and it is handled at the judicial level.

In my view, the current process lacks teeth. I think the commissioner can continue to have the same powers. However, when he makes a report that the complaint has merit and the respondent is not prepared to resolve the case through negotiations and agreements, the complaint should automatically be filed with an independent tribunal. This would be a Canadian language rights tribunal. It would have the same powers as a human rights tribunal.

It would act as an independent tribunal and, indeed, there would be a right of appeal. A party who disagrees with the decision of the language rights tribunal would have the right to appeal to the Federal Court and, if necessary, to the Federal Court of Appeal.

It is important that this tribunal be able to act quickly. Three people, who would be independently appointed, could act one at a time. So there would only be one judge at a time, and that person could make decisions.

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

The next question will be asked by our second vice-president, Mr. Mario Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Lepage.

Mr. Lepage, I read a Radio-Canada report about you. In Quebec and, to some extent, elsewhere in Canada, very few people know the history of the language issue. You say you were born in Saskatchewan and experienced the time when teaching French was illegal.

Could you tell us more about that time and the context in which you experienced it?

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you for that question, Mr. Beaulieu.

Actually, beginning in 1917, in Saskatchewan, the School Act was amended to prohibit the teaching of French in French, except for, roughly, the first half hour of the day. In 1929, a new government was elected with the help of the Ku Klux Klan. At that time they abolished the right to teach French in French in its entirety.

So the French-speaking community set up the equivalent of an independent school board funded only by the francophones themselves. French was taught at the end of the school day. There was no funding and no books were provided by the state. This was provided by volunteers, and the teachers gave the exams on Saturday. After that, you had to read the local newspaper to find out whether you had got a mark of 82% or 62%. So it was a parallel structure provided by volunteers from 1912 until 1969. It was from that date that the School Act was finally changed to allow bilingual programs where you could study in French and English.

As for me, I was able to take these French classes at school for one hour a day. English soon became my dominant language. It was only when I got to university that I relearned my language. In other words, French was the spoken language on the farm, but at school it was English. We were assimilated quite quickly that way.

It should not be forgotten that children were brought up in an environment where French was not valued at all. They were told to "speak white". Francophones were treated, unfortunately, like the First Nations were treated in the west, where their language and culture were abolished. More or less the same thing was done to francophones. Independent high schools had to be set up, and it was mainly the Catholic Church that helped set up this system. So there's a reason the number of French-speaking villages went from 80 to 12 in Saskatchewan.

Today, the rate of assimilation is so high that there are only 2,000 students in 15 francophone schools in the province. In fact, our situation is not so different from that in Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba. We have all been through this wave of assimilation due to politician McCarthy, who made it illegal to teach French. So we've come a long way. That's why we're saying that even though section 23 was passed in 1982, in Saskatchewan we didn't see the result until 1995, when the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises was established and they started opening schools.

The federal government helped us by providing about \$17 million. We had to buy outdated schools from English school boards, and that's where we started. We had to renovate those schools. We never had a new school in the Conseil des écoles francosaskoises. We're renovating old schools, and we're still waiting for new ones. So it's very difficult to live and have pride as a Fransaskois.

• (1605)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: When we consider all the steps you were forced to take to gain control of the school boards, we get the impression that there was no real recognition of the wrongs done to francophones, and that this continues. As little as possible is given, and there seems to be no guilt over what could easily be called an ethnocide.

What are your thoughts?

Mr. Roger Lepage: That's exactly right.

Currently, in Saskatchewan, there are still four courts in place. We're trying to get four new schools in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert. The government promised us this, but it has been slow to act on this issue. Francophones no longer have the funds to go back to court. There is the Court Challenges Program, but \$125,000 per court case is not much when it now costs \$1 million to process a case.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Lepage.

Is my time up, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, your time is up, Mr. Beaulieu.

Thank you, Mr. Lepage.

Ms. Ashton, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Hello.

I thank the witnesses who are with us today.

Ms. Brouillette, the closure of the French-language programs and the Native Studies program at Laurentian University in Sudbury, and the closure of Campus Saint-Jean in Alberta, have shown that post-secondary education in French is in jeopardy.

The OLEP addresses one-time needs, but my impression is that these funds will not necessarily save the educational institutions that are in peril. So the OLEP is insufficient to ensure the sustainability of post-secondary institutions.

I would like to hear your views on this.

• (1610)

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Thank you for the question.

The announcement of this \$12-million package is still good news. The problem is mainly that the mechanism only funds one-time projects, whereas the outcome of such an exercise should be to provide core funding to support institutions.

I speak regularly with our rectors and college presidents. They tell me they no longer have the capacity to support so many projects. Sometimes there are even funds available to them, but they don't have the capacity to go out and get them. We applaud this \$121-million investment, especially since it will be doubled

and made permanent. The problem is with the mechanism, which only allows for one-time projects. That's what's problematic about this envelope.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. Lepage.

Mr. Lepage, thank you for sharing your recommendations with us. I note that some of them, such as those relating to language clauses, were not in the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act proposed in 2021. I have spoken about this in previous meetings and I echo your comment about child care: supply is not keeping up with demand.

Do you think that the failure to include language clauses when the government negotiated agreements for child care was a missed opportunity by the federal government?

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you, Ms. Ashton, for the question.

That's absolutely right. On the one hand, we're very happy to see that the federal government has created \$10-a-day child care spaces and transferred money to the provinces for that. On the other hand, with no language clause or obligation to respect part VII of the Official Languages Act, this money ends up in the provinces' budgets, where it is distributed as they see fit, without any consideration of the past wrongs that have been done to the francophone minority, wrongs which they must repair.

In our school system, for example, it is essential to have day care centres, because you have to understand that in several provinces besides Quebec, the little francophones—the little rights holders—who come to school do not speak French. Raised in a family where the predominant language is English, they come to school to learn French as their first language. It is therefore very important to have this network of day care centres so that the child, from the age of six months, can learn French; once they arrive at primary school, they will be at the same level as their little anglophone colleague who arrives at an anglophone school at the primary level, ready to learn. Without these day cares and guaranteed funding, we are at a disadvantage.

My recommendation is therefore to include these language clauses and the obligation to respect part VII of the OLA in every transfer of money from the federal government to a province or territory intended for a particular project. This transfer from the federal government to the provinces and territories must include the obligation to positively promote the minority language. If the money is put into a global budget, it will be impossible to know what it was used for.

It is very important that these clauses be included in all agreements. In British Columbia, we saw this problem with the federal transfer of this obligation and employability to the province. The province abolished all French-language services organized by francophones in the area of employability. We had to go to the Court of Appeal to get a favourable decision on January 28, 2022, the decision being that the federal government had failed in its obligation to ensure compliance with part VII of the OLA. This is important.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lepage. That is very interesting, but we have to move on to another round of questions.

According to our agreement with the parties, everyone will be able to ask questions for two and a half or five minutes, depending on the political party.

[English]

We will start the second round of questioning with Ms. Marilyn Gladu for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also thank our witnesses for being with us today.

My first question is about funds.

[English]

Let's talk about funding, because I've heard comments about how it doesn't work today. When the federal government gives funding, the province has to match it, but they've already given their money, so if they don't double up, then you really are short by 50%. Also, the federal government hates to fund anything that's an ongoing program. They always want it to be a project, and a lot of times they restrict capital spending or maintenance spending.

I wonder, building on what Mr. Lepage said, if it would be possible to maybe have the federal government transfer the money directly to the province with some kind of constraint for the improvement of French in the province, but with greater flexibility to spend it on capital maintenance programs and ongoing projects.

I will start with Ms. Brouillette.

[Translation]

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Thank you very much for the question.

You have put your finger on the problem. In order to be able to build capacity and stability in the post-secondary sector, we really need funding that allows us to look ahead, that allows us to plan for five or ten years. That's why it's so important to establish a mechanism that will allow programs to be planned and put in place.

In universities or colleges, it takes a number of years to put programs in place, whether they are undergraduate or graduate programs. It takes that long to plan.

So we're recommending that the mechanism be reviewed from top to bottom, and because these are federal-provincial agreements, that the two levels of government work together to review the mechanism entirely. There is currently money on the table, but the mechanism is not working.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Do you think the provincial action plans are relevant?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Provincial action plans are usually made in collaboration with communities and institutions. Usually they reflect the needs of these communities or institutions. The problem is in the way it works, the mechanism used.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Lepage, what do you think about this?

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you for the question, Ms. Gladu.

In my opinion, one of the problems is that the provinces and territories are not well aware of the needs of their official francophone minority. In their view, it is the responsibility of the federal government to fund schools or post-secondary institutions for francophone minorities.

As a taxpayer, I don't really care whether the funding comes from the federal or provincial government. The only thing I care about is that my children have access to school services. That's why I mention in the third recommendation that the federal government should develop a massive education funding initiative in co-operation with the provinces and territories. This would bring schools up to date, as well as allow for the construction of schools and educational facilities, from day care to post-secondary education.

In 2020, the Supreme Court of Canada highlighted the fact that British Columbia needed 17 new schools. Let me say that it's not just British Columbia that needs them. It's also Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and the maritime provinces.

Personally, I would like to see the federal government develop an initiative to work with the provinces and territories to develop an agreement that addresses the need for new schools.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lepage.

I apologize for interrupting you, but time is limited. You may have the opportunity to complete your answer in the next round of questions.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome our witnesses.

Ms. Brouillette, it's a pleasure to see you again.

I would be remiss if I did not mention one of my colleagues from the municipality of Hawkesbury, Mr. Martin Normand. Personally, I chose to follow the path of politics. As for him, he chose the path of intelligence.

Mr. Normand, it is also a pleasure to see you again.

Ms. Brouillette, you talked about the new budget envelope and the problems associated with the lack of core funding. Personally, I see it in a different light.

The federal government has invested \$121 million. In my opinion, this creates leverage. We're inviting the provinces to match it.

Can you help me understand why this isn't working? Is this a multi-province problem? Should we just review the funding envelope, the way the funding works?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: I thank you very much for the question, Mr. Drouin.

We welcome the announcement of the funds, as this is the first time, to our knowledge, that a budget envelope has been dedicated to post-secondary institutions. In our view, the federal and provincial governments need to negotiate how these funds are distributed. Since education is a provincial jurisdiction, the provinces initially invest very large amounts of money to support post-secondary institutions, but we know that this is not enough. In fact, many of our members have testified before this committee and they have not hesitated to say that we need to stabilize post-secondary institutions; we need to give them the capacity to act while being pillars in their communities and supporting the vitality of their communities.

However, it is not the funds that are the problem at present, as there is a promise of funds specifically for post-secondary institutions. Instead, the mechanism needs to be overhauled because it is not working. Our members have been telling us this for years, and we've seen it. I think even Canadian Heritage realizes that many elements of this mechanism do not work. So it's a well-known fact.

We recommend that both levels of government have a good discussion about this and thoroughly review this mechanism so that it can work properly. Some members have already told me that they would have liked to apply for a particular project or for funding, but were told by the province that it did not have a match to offer as it had already paid one.

It should be noted that our member institutions use the provincial matching funds to cover their operating costs. The provinces tell the institutions to use the money they give them. This means that when an institution wants to do a \$400,000 project, it only gets \$200,000 from the federal government, and it doesn't necessarily get any other money from the province. They're always caught in this bind, which makes it really difficult. Also, the funds are given for one-time projects. These are the two things that make the mechanism inadequate to stabilize the post-secondary system and to strengthen the capacity of each of our institutions to support communities, which are very fragile right now.

• (1625)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Is this a coordination issue?

I know it's not the federal government's job to approve college and university programs, because that's a provincial jurisdiction.

Are your members telling you that they go to the ministries to get programs approved, but they don't know if the programs will be funded or where the funding will come from?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: If I may, I will let my colleague Mr. Normand answer this question.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Normand.

Mr. Martin Normand (Director, Strategic Research and International Relations, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne): That budget envelope is not actually

used to create new programs but rather to initiate one-off projects. Speaking of leverage, that's where leverage doesn't necessarily work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Normand.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Lepage, I would like to come back to something you said earlier in your answer to a question from Ms. Lattanzio. You said that anglophone schools in Quebec had a 200-year head start. Until the 1960s, funding for elementary, secondary and post-secondary education was really lopsided. Anglophone post-secondary learning institutions were overfunded.

The Canadian government considered the francophone majority in Quebec equivalent to the anglophone majority in Canada and that all federal government language funding should go to anglophone Quebecers.

Do you think that makes sense?

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you for the question, Mr. Beaulieu.

I'm speaking to you as an individual. It's quite obvious to me that the francophone community is a minority within North America. I understand that, under the Canadian Constitution, the provinces have their own areas of jurisdiction, such as education. However, in my opinion, in a federation, it must also be recognized that the francophone minority across Canada needs support.

In other words, the federal government must support French in Quebec, not only English. I understand that English is in a minority in Quebec, but the anglophone minority is nothing like the francophone minority outside Quebec. It's much better served than the francophone minority.

In my opinion, if you look at the statistics, it's only natural that the federal government also support French in Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

I would like to very quickly ask another question.

In Bill C-32 sponsored by Ms. Joly, the official languages minister at the time, an increase in funding was announced for French immersion schools, but not necessarily for schools designed by and for francophones.

Don't you think it would make sense to start by increasing funding for schools designed by and for francophones?

The Chair: We'll come back to that later, Mr. Beaulieu. Your time is up.

[English]

The next questioner is Ms. Ashton, for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Brouillette, if I understand you correctly, there are problems with the \$121 million budget allocation over three years. First, it's non-recurring, and second, you need to match amounts to access the funding. So the establishments struggling most will not be able to use this assistance.

These issues can be found across the federal government. Project-based funding is very touchy in general, especially for institutions that have a public mandate and need funding to carry it out.

Did I understand you correctly?

Do you have any further comments on this?

• (1630)

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: That pretty much sums up what I said.

The problem is often about matching the funding. Sometimes it happens, but generally, from what our members have told me, the provinces do not necessarily match funding. They have to take money that is already being used for something else, for example to cover operating costs. The project then doesn't turn out the way the establishment wants.

I do not know if there were other aspects to your question. Perhaps my colleague Mr. Normand can add something.

Mr. Martin Normand: To come back to the question of leverage that was raised earlier, because you appear to be moving a little towards that, Ms. Ashton, in some cases the opportunity to match can be leveraged, but as Ms. Brouillette said, sometimes provinces ask establishments to go get their matching funds from somewhere else other than new funds for their project.

Then you end up with one-off projects that are not renewable and are only partially rather than fully funded. Establishments then tread water, that is, they repeatedly apply for funding for one-off projects rather than getting the core funding they need to fulfill their mission of supporting community development.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for clearing that up.

In your opinion, do changes need to happen as soon as possible?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton. I'm sorry, but your time is up. Perhaps we can back to your question later.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also like to thank all the witnesses for being with us today.

On that same note, I find it unfortunate that one-off non-recurring projects are only funded at 50%. If these projects under provincial jurisdiction became renewable and were funded year after year, I tend to think that the province would ask the federal government to simply send them the money. The provinces could then use those funds as they see fit, with no further accountability if that money is invested in promoting French in other provinces.

Is it the federal-provincial education agreement that's keeping us from having recurring rather than one-off projects?

If anyone can shed some light on this, I will be happy to hear it.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: I will say a few things in response and then give the floor to my colleague if he has anything to add.

In my opinion, yes, these agreements do need to be reviewed. I am talking about the federal-provincial OLEP agreements. As mentioned earlier, it's really about the funding mechanism. I believe there are solutions and we can reach the objective, which is stabilization. In fact, we want to do much more than stabilize. We want to establish a broader program base in our establishments.

So we will have to agree to revisit this agreement and how things work between the federal and provincial governments so that we can reinforce our members' capacities. We're talking about core funding here.

I'm going to share some numbers with you. Our establishments offer a total of about 1,200 college and university training programs. However, that's equivalent to only about 10% of the programs being offered in English. You can see that there's a very wide gap. We talk about real quality, in particular, but clearly we are nowhere near that.

Of course, we can't offer the same number of programs as they do in English. We talk about our establishments' capacity to accommodate francophones, but to make it easier for them to do that, we need to offer a wider range of interesting programs.

So, we will need to do some groundwork involving both levels of government to support our institutions. They want to enhance and build their capacity and then introduce programs that will be supported by the provinces.

Mr. Normand, would you like to add anything?

• (1635)

Mr. Martin Normand: Thank you, no.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Lepage, would you like to add something?

Mr. Roger Lepage: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

In my view, one of the gaps is that federal government partially funds construction of new schools, for example, but under the Constitution, that area is a provincial jurisdiction. Subsequently, the francophone minority inherits the responsibility of playing the middleman between the two levels of government to ensure that they both contribute to completing a project.

I suggest that when the federal government wants to step in where education is concerned, it should meet with provincial representatives. They can then work out a comprehensive 10- to 20-year agreement for building schools so that the wrongs of the past can be corrected. A small minority must not be forced to inherit the job of liaison between the federal government and the provinces. We have neither the energy nor the skills to do it.

I would like to see the federal government take a leadership role here. That would involve a full assessment of how many schools would be needed within 20 years. If the federal government works with the provinces and they have a 20-year agreement to build schools in all the provinces, we won't have to go to court every time to make our case. It's not our job to be the middleman between the federal and provincial governments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lepage.

That's all the time we have to address this issue.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses here with us today.

Ms. Brouillette, what can the federal government do to support post-secondary education in a minority language without infringing on provincial jurisdiction?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: That's an excellent question.

I will let my colleague Martin Normand answer it.

Mr. Martin Normand: Thank you.

Of course, we understand that post-secondary education is a provincial jurisdiction, but the fact remains that the federal government has set goals in terms of demographics, community development and welcoming immigrants. Our establishments have a crucial role to play in some of these areas. For example, to support second-language acquisition, our institutions offer post-secondary immersion programs or they welcome many immersion students who want to acquire technical and professional language skills in French.

Where immigration is concerned, our institutions welcome many international students, and they often apply for permanent residency, which can help the federal government meet its francophone immigration targets, for example. Many of our institutions' mandates are aligned with the federal government's self-imposed responsibilities to promote and protect French.

By invoking part VII of the Official Languages Act, which sets out the federal government's obligations to enhance the vitality of French linguistic minority communities, we believe that the federal government can use its spending power to ensure that post-secondary institutions, which are essential pillars of these communities, have the funding they need to carry out the various missions that help the federal government achieve its own objectives on certain issues.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Normand.

Ms. Brouillette, bilingualism in schools can be a good tool for promoting French to young people in predominantly English-speaking provinces.

In your opinion, what can be done to encourage these young people to speak French outside school?

• (1640)

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Thank you for the question. It's an excellent one.

Our college and university establishments train professionals for the labour market in a French linguistic minority context. College and university graduates usually have a solid command of both official languages. These individuals study in French, but they also know all the terminology in English, for example. They are being prepared for the workplace, which means being able to function in both official languages. The challenge is to support French more, because the minority setting affords fewer opportunities to speak French and perfect, or at least maintain, one's language skills.

That's why we were truly overjoyed with the concept of asymmetry put forward by Ms. Joly. We need more support for French in activities and workplaces. It's the reason why our colleges and universities are francophone living environments. That's very valuable and it turns our institutions into beacons that can help not only students, but also communities to protect their language.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

To your knowledge, what efforts are being made by learning centres or the provinces to attract francophone international students to francophone post-secondary institutions in predominantly English-speaking provinces?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: I will let my colleague answer that question.

Mr. Martin Normand: Thank you.

Our establishments, or I should say our network of establishments, have been promoting study programs in French outside of Quebec at francophone establishments across Canada. The problem is, IRCC will often use intent to remain in Canada after one's studies as a reason to refuse a study permit application.

In addition, some feel that attending a francophone institution in a minority setting is not a credible pathway for these students. So, we need to do a great deal of coordination to align messages promoting studies in French to an international clientele.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Normand.

We will now begin the third round of questions. Times allotted will once again be five minutes or two and a half minutes, depending on the political party.

Our first questions will be from Marc Dalton, who is from Western Canada.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for their testimony, which is fascinating.

Last week, one of our witnesses spoke to the importance of the territoriality principle in protecting a language.

Mr. Lepage, earlier you said that the number of towns in Saskatchewan had gone from 80 to around 12. My family is from northern Alberta, which also has many towns, farms and large families. These days, families are not as big because fewer people are needed in the farming community than before.

More students want to learn French and continue to live in a francophone setting, but that's more in urban areas.

You've already mentioned this, but could you elaborate on the importance of protecting the language in educational institutions? I am not talking about churches and small committees, but educational institutions at various levels.

• (1645)

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you for the question, Mr. Dalton.

It's true that francophones in western Canada, especially, have become increasingly urbanized. As you said, there were large families and small farms, whereas now there are large farms and small families. Francophones had to move to the cities, where there wasn't the homogeneity to preserve the language. The only place left to preserve it was school, which is why the school became so important. It's the cornerstone of language preservation, as recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada.

If there aren't any francophone educational institutions, from day care to post-secondary, the French language is doomed in western Canada. The number of francophones is so small that the situation is becoming critical. That's why it's urgent to immediately build a complete network of francophone schools.

As the Supreme Court of Canada said in 2020, the fact that the assimilation rate is so high in British Columbia doesn't mean that we have to throw in the towel and say it's too late. On the contrary, we must work harder.

The situation is so critical for francophones outside Quebec that if the federal government, and the provinces and territories don't work together to sign a 20-year agreement to build 100 schools, our language is doomed. Many of our schools are already overcrowded. In many villages or towns, there is only one French-language school. Children in all households have to ride the bus for an hour and a half to get to school. This discourages parents, who move their children to the local school.

It has become very important that the provinces and the federal government to agree, in consultation with francophone communities, on where francophone schools or day care centres should be built, and how much money will be needed to do so within 20 years.

Right now, small francophone communities are left with the burden of demanding a school on their own. It's simply a waste of en-

ergy. Then, it's a matter of coordinating provincial funding with federal funding.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Let me add that the provinces, which pay teachers' salaries, are not really inclined to build schools for just a few students. It's really a big challenge. In British Columbia, for example, there's—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Is my time up already, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, it is, Mr. Dalton.

I admit that we all have interesting questions and that the answers are just as interesting.

The next speaker represents the next generation of francophone youth outside Quebec.

Arielle Kayabaga, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start by thanking the witnesses, who have taken the time to meet with us today.

My first question is for Ms. Brouillette.

Ms. Brouillette, my question concerns the investments the government has already made, that is to say the \$121.3 million, as well as the \$80 million that has already been allocated. What impact has this money already had on our francophone minority post-secondary institutions?

You also talked about money that has been frozen. Do you think that a catch-up is currently taking place or that it should take place, knowing that the number of your schools is growing?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: To answer your first question, we don't know yet what the impact of the \$121.3 million has been, simply because the money has only just been released.

This funding was announced in the 2021 budget, and members of our association recently submitted proposals. They are waiting for answers about this funding, which is for this year and the next two years. I think the members of our association will have answers soon, in the coming days or even weeks.

Could you remind me of the second part of your question?

• (1650)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Let me rephrase my question, which is about the current situation. What impact will this funding have on these institutions?

Given the growth in the number of schools, if you applied for funding three or four years ago, do you need to play catch-up now?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: As for the notion of catching up, I will echo what Mr. Lepage mentioned earlier. There is indeed some catching up to do. There is a reason why we are currently seeing this fragility in our network, and that's why some of our institutions are sounding the alarm. Several of their representatives came to testify before this committee.

There is a certain amount of chipping away that has taken place over time. We are at a critical point when we absolutely have to get adequate funding to support our institutions, not just for one-time annual projects. We need core funding, which will allow institutions to solidify and then have the capacity to act in a minority context to support communities and meet their needs, especially as we emerge from the pandemic.

There has been a lot of upheaval in the labour market. We really want our institutions to have the capacity to put in place programs that will meet the needs of the labour market. We don't want to be in survival mode all the time. A conveyor belt was mentioned in terms of project funding. Core funding is needed to allow institutions to focus on a vision for the coming decades.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you very much for your answer.

As a mother living in a predominantly English-speaking city, with a child attending a French-language school, I would say that there is a lot of work to be done.

I would like to come back to the question that my colleague Mr. Iacono asked earlier.

Ms. Brouillette, what is the exact role of the provinces in all this?

This is a provincial issue. We have stepped up to provide funding. If there's catching up to do, it will take a lot of money to do it.

What is the role of the provinces in all this to support francophone schools in minority settings?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: We're talking about schools, but it's kind of the same principle for colleges and universities. It must be understood that this is really a provincial jurisdiction, and that it's the provinces that have to free up funds for schools, colleges and universities.

The federal government can provide support through what could be called leveraged funds. This is more within its jurisdiction, which includes support for minority communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brouillette.

Next up will be our second vice-chair.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll quickly come back to my last question.

I've been told that immersion schools promote the assimilation of francophone students, in general.

Is it a good strategy to focus on increasing funding for immersion schools?

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you for the question.

We Franco-Saskatchewanians are saying that we will be on the brink of extinction if a major project isn't set up by the federal government and the provinces to build more schools.

At the same time, as francophones in minority situations, we recognize that second-language learning by the anglophone majority is very important. It creates allies, which can help us.

We must first ensure the survival and development of the francophone community. There isn't much point in someone speaking French as a second language if they can't speak it with anyone else. I think priority must certainly be given to French as a first language.

● (1655)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Exactly.

I think one of the big problems is the principle of "where numbers warrant". Because of this principle, when there is a decline in French, funding is reduced rather than the opposite.

I think that, as part of the major agreement you were talking about, the initial situation should be recognized and some form of redress should be offered. So funding should be calculated on that basis, not on the basis of "where numbers warrant".

I would now like to ask Ms. Brouillette a question.

Ms. Brouillette, we saw what happened with Campus Saint-Jean, the University of Sudbury and Laurentian University. The University of Sudbury is trying to become a university by and for francophones.

Do you think we should try to encourage francophone universities in terms of funding?

The Chair: Ms. Brouillette, you have 15 seconds to answer the question.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: I think it is important that these decisions be made with communities that are able to express their needs and aspirations well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next question will be asked by an MP from western Canada.

Ms. Ashton, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to make a comment related to the question my colleague asked.

I learned French through an immersion program, and I think those programs need to be adequately funded. We must recognize that this funding is not only for language learning, but also for creating a Canadian identity. It also helps support francophone rights and francophone communities across the country.

That's why I'm a member of this committee. I'm one of those who believes that we must act as quickly as possible to protect the French language. All of this was made possible by my education in an immersion program.

Mr. Lepage, my question is on another topic. I want to focus on the lack of coercive powers to deal with violators of the Official Languages Act. For example, within the government, this is part of the mandate of Canadian Heritage, a department with minimal power to influence other departments. I would also like to add the problem related to the complaints process by the Commissioner of Official Languages, who lacks the means to act.

This is a picture of how important it is that the federal government respect the Official Languages Act.

What solutions would make it possible to show that the federal government takes official languages complaints seriously?

Mr. Roger Lepage: Thank you for the question.

I think the Official Languages Act should be amended to create a language rights tribunal that could rule on complaints about violations of the act.

The commissioner's role in investigating, reporting and making recommendations can be retained. However, if a solution isn't reached, there must be the possibility of recourse to an entity with teeth. We need to be able to go to this language rights tribunal, which could make very well-articulated decisions and have the means to order forms of redress for complainants. This tribunal would also have the power to impose penalties on respondents who often end up in court, such as Air Canada and others.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lepage.

We'll now begin a five-minute round of questions, starting with our first vice-chair.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lepage, I'd like to come back to your last comment, when you suggested that there be recourse with a little more teeth. I recognize that there's a problem with financial assistance programs, both at the federal and provincial levels. We're in decline when it comes to minority languages. There is no sense of will on the part of parliamentarians and society.

Regarding the extension of the 100-day deadline for the tabling of the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act, you said the following in a Radio-Canada report: "This reiterates the fact that the federal government does not take seriously the whole principle of two official languages in Canada and its obligation to take positive measures to enhance the vitality of the minority".

That's also my reading of the current situation in Canada, and it has been for a number of years. You talked about the fact that in

Saskatchewan, it was volunteers who preserved the French language. So you have to be determined to protect one of the two official languages.

I don't mind your idea of a constructive meeting between the provinces to reach a 10- to 20-year agreement. Instead of opting for recourse with teeth and using the courts to advance the case, we must reach out to ensure that we can really decide whether we want Canada to have two official languages, that we give a place to both French and English. In minority situations, we must help the minority language. Canadian society needs to reflect on what we want for our country. Do we want to be constructive?

Ms. Brouillette, you're the backbone of colleges and universities. There was Laurentian University, then Campus Saint-Jean. You don't have the means.

We need commitments from all decision-makers.

I'd like to hear your comments on this, Mr. Lepage.

• (1700)

Mr. Roger Lepage: The federal government must take the lead with both official languages. It must work with the provinces and territories because, in a federation, there are two levels of government with responsibilities for education, particularly post-secondary education. The federal government's spending power means that it can come to our assistance.

The Official Languages Act requires the federal government to take positive measures to enhance the vitality of the official languages. Clearly, when it is partly funding education for the francophone minority and for immersion schools, it must therefore work with the provinces.

I feel that those two levels of government must come to an agreement on a plan, lasting from 10 to 20 years, to refine the program of primary, secondary and post-secondary schools, as well as daycares. As I said, taxpayers don't give a hoot whether the federal level or the provincial level pays for it, because, in one way or another, all the money comes out of their pockets anyway. We just want it to be effective. We don't want to be taking one step at a time or doing one thing at a time.

Currently, to a considerable extent, the provinces and territories have no intention of supporting their minority francophone communities. I can say that this is the case in Saskatchewan, in Alberta and in British Columbia, where there is great reluctance to come to the assistance of the francophone minority. They are trying to hand that responsibility over to the federal government.

I am asking the Liberal government to show some leadership, to bring together all the provinces and territories and then to hold a conference dealing specifically with francophone minorities outside Quebec, in order to see what must be done to solve this problem.

• (1705)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Lepage.

I feel that the issue goes further than that: do we want a bilingual country or a unilingual one? If we want a unilingual country, let's do what needs to be done. But as long as this is a bilingual country, I personally will be standing up and defending the minorities and the French fact.

As you mentioned, the English language is not in difficulty. The French language is. So I feel that the responsibility—

The Chair: I am sorry for interrupting you, Mr. Godin.

We are going to move on to the final participant in this third round, which will bring the time for questions to a close. Then, my dear colleagues, we are going to have to deal with the budget.

The final questions will be from our favourite Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Marc Serré.

Mr. Serré, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): I am the only Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Mr. Chair, but thank you for saying that I am your favourite one.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us today. It was very interesting.

I understand their frustrations about post-secondary education, especially in terms of provinces like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and even Ontario. They are not living up to their constitutional obligations to their minority francophone communities. I understand that and I agree that they always turn to the federal government to snap our fingers and fix everything.

Ms. Brouillette, you mentioned earlier that the funding has not worked in the past and that your members have confirmed that for you. Then, you said that the funding had increased by \$121 million and, for the first time, the funding was permanent. How can you say that it is not working? The funding has increased and it is permanent.

I hear from the Government of Alberta that the Campus Saint-Jean will be able to use that funding. I hear from the province of Ontario that it is going to be able to use the funding.

So I would like your comments on the matter, because what I am hearing from those two provinces does not coincide with what you are saying.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Thank you for the question.

I would like to clarify that what is not working at the moment is the mechanism by which the funding is distributed. The funding for post-secondary educational institutions under the OLEP have been frozen for a number of years, at least two decades. However, some of that funding still provides support for schools and for post-secondary educational institutions.

As I said, the problem really lies with the distribution mechanism, which is why I am happy to be able to talk to you today. Before the program became permanent, doubling in value and providing \$121 million over three years, or \$40 million per year, we were promised that it would be \$80 million per year.

Before the program actually becomes permanent, we are asking for an in-depth review of the funding distribution mechanism, because it is causing a lot of problems. Consequently, the institutions are not able to do any long-term planning because the funding is only project-based. That's one of the important factors to keep in mind.

Mr. Marc Serré: Excellent.

The work is being done and we will continue to work on that issue.

Ms. Brouillette and Mr. Lepage, you have been talking about catching up and about promoting French, about the role and the leadership of the federal government. But do you have any figures for us? Currently, when the provinces want to play the federal government's role, they want the money but they don't want any agreements or any criteria. That causes difficulties in terms of the way in which the provinces spend the money.

When you talk about catching up and promoting French in minority situations, how much would be necessary to reach parity in a bilingual country, as Mr. Godin was saying? Are we talking about \$1 billion, \$5 billion, \$10 billion?

Have you looked at the statistics? Currently, with the provinces playing the federal government's role, but not being at the table for any discussions, the federal government has to pay for everything, as certain provinces want us to do.

How much are we talking about? We certainly have a role to play, but the provinces do not seem to want to play theirs.

• (1710)

Mr. Roger Lepage: In my opinion, we are talking about billions of dollars, because the Supreme Court of Canada has acknowledged that, for the 17 primary and secondary schools that we have to build in British Columbia, we would need about \$350 million.

If we count the schools that are needed in all provinces, we could easily exceed \$1 billion. In addition, if we have to spend money for primary and secondary schools, there's no doubt that we will also have to do so for post-secondary institutions. If we don't, people will simply go and study in English.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Lepage, the Government of Ontario has made us spend money for new schools. The other provinces should also be playing an important role.

Mr. Roger Lepage: I agree completely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré and Mr. Lepage.

That is all the time we have in this third round of questions.

We have a little time left, but we have to discuss the budget.

Let me close by thanking our witnesses.

Mr. Lepage, this is the first time in six years that we have welcomed you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Thank you for your contribution as an individual.

Ms. Brouillette and Mr. Normand, it is always interesting to hear you give your detailed and factual updates. The quality of your testimony, and of the answers to the questions you were asked, was amazing.

Thank you all for joining us today.

We now have to move on to issues in the committee's budget, I would ask committee members to stay online.

Before our guests leave us, I would like to tell them that we are able to hold our meetings in this hybrid format because of a whole team of technicians. So I want to thank them as well.

Goodbye to all our witnesses: Mr. Lepage, Ms. Brouillette and Mr. Normand.

Colleagues, we are now going to approve the budget for the current study. For your information, this morning, the clerk sent you a budget with the details of the expenditures we anticipate for headsets. Are there any questions?

Do you all agree that this budget be approved?

Ms. Gladu, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Yes, I think I was the fastest.

I love this budget, and I move that we approve it.

The Chair: That's short and sweet.

[*Translation*]

Are there any further questions?

Madam Clerk, is everything in order? With the budget approved, can you proceed?

I know that I cut the debate short. There was to be a fourth round of questions, but it would have been impossible to do it in a way that was fair for the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, who only have half the time available to the other parties. My preference therefore was to end the debate. *Mea culpa*, but it's my decision.

With that said, do we have anything else on the agenda, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: No, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Next week, we are going to hear from the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The Clerk: Next Wednesday, actually.

The Chair: Right. We will have the commissioner with us at our next meeting.

Thank you, everyone. We are a fine, well-disciplined team.

I am sorry that I had to interrupt you. I know it's not pleasant, but I have to do it so that everyone can ask their questions in their allotted time.

Ms. Gladu, do you have another question?

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Yes, and it's fun for you: I move that we adjourn.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I second the motion.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Have a good evening, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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