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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1545)

[*Translation*]

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

I call this meeting to order.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number six 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 November 25, 2021, and members may attend in person or remotely use the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. For your information, the screen 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 from 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 a mask be worn at all times, including when seated. Proper hand hygiene must be maintained by using the provided hand sanitizer in the room.

[*Translation*]

As the chair, I will enforce these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank the members in advance for their cooperation.

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either “Floor”, “English” or “French”. Please inform me immediately if interpretation is lost, and I will ensure that it is promptly restored before resuming the proceedings.

Members participating in person may 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 participating in the meeting via videoconference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For the members

in the room, your microphone will be controlled, as usual, by the proceedings and verification officer.

We remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

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

Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain an order of speaking that is fair 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 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 resuming its study of government measures to protect and promote French in Quebec and Canada.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

In the first hour of the meeting, the following persons will appear by videoconference: Lily Crist, chair of the board of directors of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, Robert Laplante, director of L'Action nationale, as well as Mark Power and Darius Bossé, lawyers with the Power Law firm.

You will have a maximum of five minutes for each of your presentations, after which we will proceed with questions.

I will let you know when you have one minute left.

Welcome to the witnesses for the first hour.

Ms. Crist, go ahead for five minutes.

Ms. Lily Crist (Chair, Board of Directors, Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique): First of all, we would like to thank you for inviting us to outline the reality and challenges of francophones of British Columbia.

Members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we are counting on you to promote our rights and support the development of the francophone minority communities.

Today we would like to talk to you about the modernization of the Official Languages Act on two levels. At the national level, we have many priorities in common with our national representative, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, respecting the modernization of the Official Languages Act. We suggest that four essential changes be made to Bill C-32.

First, we recommend that a single central agency, the Treasury Board in this instance, be made responsible for coordinating administration of the act across the entire federal government with the authority to compel other government bodies to provide results.

Second, we seek clarification of part VII of the act. The concept of positive measures that are necessary to enhance the vitality of the official language minority communities must be clarified, especially by specifying the way in which institutions must consult the minorities on policies and programs and by adding robust linguistic clauses to the federal-provincial-territorial agreements.

Third, we would like there to be an obligation for the government to develop a francophone immigration policy expressly designed to restore the francophonie's demographic weight.

Fourth, we would like the government to grant the Commissioner of Official Languages authority to impose sanctions and make orders, including authority to impose fines for breaches of language obligations under the act.

With respect to British Columbia more particularly, our request is related to our lawsuit that culminated in the Federal Court of Appeal's judgment rendered on January 28, 2022. Further details are provided in the open letter that we published last Friday, February 11, 2022.

I would also like to discuss the devolution agreements. We have been in court for some 15 years as a result of that type of agreement. They are not conventional agreements respecting the administration of a program or shared jurisdiction. The court held that the province was sovereign in the matter of devolution for the term of the agreement. Under this type of agreement, we systematically lose our services as we have no language legislation or policy respecting French-language services in British Columbia. We would like the act to be more specific about this type of agreement.

We would also like to alert you to certain challenges facing our communities that merit your attention. The 4.4% francophone immigration target has not been reached for nearly 20 years.

Remedial and restorative measures are urgently required. According to a report by the Commissioner of Official Languages released last November, failure to reach that target has resulted in a shortfall of approximately 76,000 francophone immigrants in our communities. That figure could represent the entire francophone population of my province.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Ms. Lily Crist: We're counting on your commitment.

Thank you.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crist.

Our next speaker is Robert Laplante, director of L'Action nationale.

You now have the floor, Mr. Laplante.

Mr. Robert Laplante (Director, L'Action nationale): Good afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

L'Action nationale was founded 105 years ago and is the oldest journal in Canada. It was established to promote and defend the French language across our land. We have always remained faithful to this statement of principle, which enlists all francophones in North America in the same struggle. All French speakers of America share a community of interest.

From the 105 years of work during which we have focused serious attention on the development of minority rights and all aspects of the situation of French speakers, two trends seem undeniable to us today.

The first is demographic erosion, a dynamic whereby French speakers across Canada increasingly find themselves in the minority, in Quebec and elsewhere. This trend naturally does not manifest itself universally in the same way.

In addition to this first trend, which may be explained as the result of demographic pressures and societal preferences driven notably by immigration policies, family policies and various community development support measures, there is a second: the mismatch between legal and constitutional frameworks, both of which, however, are the most powerful instruments in mitigating minority-creating dynamics, a fact recognized in the literature around the world.

French has not yet been recognized as legitimate, and the endless, exhausting struggles of the minorities and Quebecers who must endure the competition between languages and among various authorities attest to a fundamental defect, or a fault in the design of the Official Languages Act. It is sociologically indefensible to suggest that the situation of French in Quebec is perfectly symmetrical with that of English in Canada and, likewise, with the situation of anglophone and francophone minorities. They cannot be viewed as equivalent. There are not two majorities in Canada; there is only one, and it is an anglophone majority, a representative group of which lives in Quebec.

French is declining everywhere, including in Quebec. This is an obvious sign that the Official Languages Act has missed its target and that its design flaws have been exacerbated by the actions of Ottawa, which has created a distorted dynamic through its spending power and interventions in Quebec's anglophone community and institutions by contributing to an overfunding of programs. I won't cite the figures that many experts have established and that common sense tells us are obviously correct. The lot of Quebec's anglophone minority cannot be compared to that of any francophone minority in Canada.

On the one hand, these interventions and design faults, which put Quebec anglophones on the same footing as minority francophones elsewhere in Canada, have expanded the disparities in the way the communities have been treated. On the other hand, Ottawa's interventions have helped fund a privileged status for anglophones.

• (1555)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Robert Laplante: This is a privilege that the anglophone minority should share.

We think the situation should be rectified, that is to say that the overfunding should stop and funding ratios should be adjusted to ensure fair treatment for minorities across Canada.

The government must terminate underfunding and, for that purpose, use the resources afforded by the—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Laplante.

I apologize for the interruption, even though I do it as politely as possible. I have to observe everyone's speaking time. You will be able to continue your remarks in response to the questions put to you later.

We now turn to our next speakers from Power Law.

Mr. Power or Mr. Bossé, you have the floor.

Mr. Mark Power (Lawyer, Power Law): Good afternoon.

My name is Mark Power, and I'm a lawyer. I am here today with my colleague Darius Bossé, who comes from Madawaska.

I grew up in Toronto. My name is English, but my first language learned and still understood is French. I'm more comfortable in French. My mother comes from northern Ontario, from Kapuskasing, more specifically, and my father is from Timmins. My mother's family comes from Shawinigan.

We represent the legal team of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, or FFCB. You just heard from its president, Ms. Crist. We are here to say a few words about the judgment rendered by the Federal Court of Appeal barely a few weeks ago, in late January. The focus of our presentation will really be on part VII of the Official Languages Act. There are other things that could be said, but we want to stick to part VII.

In support of our remarks and to assist in the work of the committee and its analyst, we have provided some documentation. Those of you who aren't here in person received it by email and those who are in the meeting room, in Ottawa, have received a briefing book. For those who have the PDF version, we've included bookmarks to help you find your way through the documentation. At the very start, you'll see a short five-page document, in English and French, of course, summarizing our comments on the Federal Court of Appeal's decision.

Then there are five bookmarks. Bookmark A is the judgment of the Federal Court of Appeal, which we have annotated in part to make it easier for you to read. Certain passages are highlighted in yellow. Bookmark B is an excerpt from the current version of the Official Languages Act. By underlining and striking text, we have shown the effect that Bill C-32, which was tabled last June, would

have had if it had been passed as is and had received royal assent. Bookmarks C and D are the bills that your predecessors previously introduced and considered. Lastly, bookmark E is Bill C-11, which is under consideration. It concerns broadcasting.

Ten years later—it took 10 years—the Federal Court of Appeal has rendered an absolutely fantastic judgment promoting the advancement of French in Canada. At last. It has helped clarify matters pertaining to part VII of the Official Languages Act, particularly as regards the federal-provincial agreements, where the Government of Canada decides to withdraw from an area of shared jurisdiction.

At least two major gains have been made before the Federal Court of Appeal, and we should point them out very briefly. They concern consultation and linguistic clauses. I'll begin at the end. What's significant is that Bill C-32, which was introduced last June, isn't good for French outside Quebec. It's very good for French in Quebec, and it isn't very good for Quebec anglophones. An enormous amount of work remains to be done to reform the federal Official Languages Act so that it helps us live in French, whether we live in or outside Quebec.

• (1600)

The Chair: You have 40 seconds left.

Mr. Mark Power: With regard to consultation, the Federal Court of Appeal found, at page 67 of bookmark A, that consultation is required, that federal institutions must be aware of the needs of the francophone minority and that this is a requirement that stems from part VII of the Official Languages Act. How should they consult? Whom should they consult? When should they consult? All those answers are unknown. Please, let's avoid another decade of litigation—it's ironic to be saying that as a lawyer—and let's clarify the matter in the next version of the Official Languages Act.

The Federal Court of Appeal requires that the Government of Canada establish linguistic clauses as a condition for entering into the federal-provincial agreement.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Power.

We will now begin the first round of questions.

We will start with our beloved first vice-chair, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

Today is Valentine's Day, and your comment is entirely appropriate. I'm happy to see you in the flesh.

I'd like to thank the witnesses who are with us: Ms. Crist, Mr. Bossé, Mr. Power and Mr. Laplante.

My first question is for Mr. Laplante.

Mr. Laplante, in your opening remarks, you referred to an exhausting struggle. I think you're right.

As regards funding, you propose to eliminate overfunding for anglophones and to increase funding for francophones.

I'd like us to discuss some potential solutions that go beyond the funding issue.

We're currently conducting a study on promoting and protecting the French language in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

Could you help us find solutions? I'm not asking you to suggest 20 measures. Instead I'd ask you to suggest three specific measures that would help protect and promote French.

Mr. Robert Laplante: I'm pleased to be able to answer your question, Mr. Godin.

The first thing to do is to set an example. That's particularly appropriate in the current circumstances.

First, the federal government should strive to maintain impeccable conduct in respecting the equality of the two languages in Canada. Recent ministerial appointments and actions have caused consternation in many respects by seeming to run counter to the stated aims of the act and government.

Second, it must put an end to this competition between languages, which is supported by legal action based on a misconception of the minorities in Quebec and Canada, particularly in labour legislation. The federal government should not be challenging the Quebec government's language planning or resistance measures—you can't call them anything else—to the imposition of and compliance with linguistic obligations in federally regulated businesses.

Third, I'd like to address an aspect that's more pervasive but nevertheless very important, and that is the recognition of jurisdictions, particularly in health and education. Action taken to promote the use of English in Quebec results, in the health sector, in tens of millions of dollars being granted literally to impair the expansion of the French language.

● (1605)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Laplante, I must unfortunately interrupt you.

With all due respect, I have some questions for the representatives of Power Law.

Thank you, Mr. Laplante. You've given us a clear overview of the situation, and I find your answers satisfactory.

I have a philosophical question about updating the Official Languages Act.

I'd like to hear the comments of Mr. Power or Mr. Bossé on the idea of putting the two languages on the same equal and symmetrical footing. I think that's a problem. There are two official languages in Canada, but only one is in trouble, and that one is French.

Mr. Bossé or Mr. Power, how can we work to protect both languages when the real problem is the situation of the French language?

Please tell us how you perceive the idea of protecting and promoting the language that's in trouble.

Mr. Mark Power: The best way to protect French using the Official Languages Act, whether in Ottawa, Vancouver, New Brunswick, Quebec City, Montreal or Lévis, is to make a central

agency such as the Treasury Board responsible for administering the act.

Right now, no one is responsible. No one puts his foot down. No one in cabinet pounds the table when necessary. No one is requiring any federal department to adopt a certain type of conduct.

If the Treasury Board becomes responsible for administering the act and compels colleagues and the departments to take action, that will definitely help solve many problems, whether it be signage or the possibility of travelling across Canada in French, whether in Gatineau or Bagotville.

I would ask you please to turn to page 105 in bookmark B of the briefing book. There you will see that Bill C-32 would have enabled the Treasury Board to take certain actions to promote French but that it requires nothing significant. On page 107, the bill provides that Treasury Board would be required to monitor, audit and evaluate, among other things.

We need more than that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Power.

We will now go to Ms. Lattanzio, who is also a lawyer.

Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us today. This is a very important day with regard to the matter at hand.

[*English*]

I'm going to address my questions to Maître Power and Maître Bossé.

First of all, I commend both of you and your colleagues for all the legal work you've done over the years before the courts in having them recognize and uphold the rights of our linguistic minority communities across the country.

I read with great interest the recent Federal Court of Appeal judgment concerning the FFCB and welcome not only the timing of it, but also the essence, and more specifically to the part of the judgment that overturns Justice Gascon's decision.

In your legal opinion, in what way is this recent decision helping or hindering the proposed amendment of the OLA found in, I'm going to call it the old version of Bill C-32 that was first introduced in June 2021?

● (1610)

Mr. Mark Power: The decision shines tremendous light on the major problems with the existing Official Languages Act.

[*Translation*]

The Federal Court of Appeal's decision shows just how far Ottawa's lack of legislative action causes problems for official languages, both English and French.

If you go to bookmark C, you'll see a bill that dates back to 1977 and that died on the Order Paper. On page 109, you'll see that this bill would have enabled Ottawa to require that the money directed to the provinces be spent to aid francophones or assist with official languages. The Bloc Québécois proposed the same thing. There is also bookmark D, which concerns the 1997 bill.

Would you please add details to the Official Languages Act? Ironically, as lawyers, we have enough cases, and we'll be happy to work on other cases. However, please help us protect the language and culture.

For that to happen, the Official Languages Act, including part VII, must be much more detailed.

You know what to do. I implore you to act.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Power, you say there's still a lot of work to do since Bill C-32 isn't good for francophones outside Quebec, Quebec francophones or Quebec anglophones.

Should we make new regulations or further clarify the text of the act to make part VII more robust?

What do you think is the difference between opting for new regulations and making part VII more specific, more robust and more comprehensive in the act?

[English]

Mr. Mark Power: We need an act. We don't need regulations.

[Translation]

We do need regulations. The government promised us regulations in 1988, when your predecessors passed the present Official Languages Act. However, there's only one regulation, and it was revised only once to take the Internet into consideration.

No regulations have ever been made to implement parts II, III or VII. In fact, no regulations have been made to implement any of the parts.

The future of official languages in Canada depends on very clear and precise guidelines being set forth by Parliament. Those guidelines may or may not lead to regulations, but they can't be contingent on the goodwill of those who exercise executive power. They may never make regulations, as the past 40 years have essentially demonstrated.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Earlier you said that perhaps a central agency should be created that would be responsible.

What kind of executive power do you think it should have? Would it have quasi-judicial authority?

How do you think that agency would operate?

What order-making powers would it have?

Mr. Mark Power: The government must ensure that the Treasury Board is required to act, that it intervenes far upstream, long before problems arise and without regard to the work done by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, long before a complaint is litigated in Federal Court.

The Treasury Board must be required to act and be able to compel other departments to do something, or not to do it when it harms us, when it's completely stupid or to require it to be accountable.

If the Canadian government spends money, it should know where that money goes. Otherwise, what's the point of spending?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Power and Ms. Lattanzio.

Our next questioner is our second vice-chair, Mario Beaulieu.

• (1615)

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

Thanks to all our guests.

My first question is for Mr. Laplante.

I'd like to know what you think about the positive measures under part VII of the Official Languages Act that help fund English-language schools, promote institutional bilingualism, fund anglophone pressure groups, in particular, and ensure that there are always more English-language health services.

What you think about that?

Mr. Robert Laplante: That's a series of examples that clearly illustrate the fact that one act can be designed to undo another. The thing about that part of the Official Languages Act is that it actively frustrates some of the legitimate language planning aspirations endorsed by the Quebec National Assembly.

Getting back to the reasons for challenging measures that are funded by pressure groups, the reference points of those reasons are distorted by a misconception of the place of English and anglophone rights in Quebec society. It shouldn't be forgotten that institutional overfunding creates an inequality that undermines social cohesion and inevitably creates two classes of citizens. I believe that's bad for everyone.

That's obviously an extreme view of the disadvantages that francophone minorities face in Canada. The people of British Columbia are a clear illustration of that. For years, they have faced disadvantages, been deprived of their rights and, in particular, suffered declining living conditions that are unacceptable in a democratic society.

We have to correct this conception, which should be based on the asymmetrical, not symmetrical, nature of their conditions. Consequently, if the means to do so must be centralized, they must be designed, seen and implemented with the necessary diligence once it's understood that it's francophone institutions and organizations that need support. It must also be understood that the Quebec National Assembly has and must have every right to conduct language planning within its borders.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You said the act had a design fault. One might even say a democratic deficit, because the anglophone majority has imposed its constitutional law on the francophone minority, which is mainly established in Quebec.

Mr. Robert Laplante: That introduces a more fundamental bias. The law must be liberating. In a society governed by the rule of law, legal relationships must prevail, not power relationships. Since we have a constitutional order that no Quebec government has accepted, the business of the courts is clearly to interpret inadequate instruments based on a framework that can only foster distortion.

It's not just a matter of good faith or setting an example; it's fundamentally a matter of legitimacy, the legitimacy of acting in favour of French, its protection and development. That issue wasn't resolved by repatriating the Constitution and isn't central to the Official Languages Act.

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

Mr. Power, the Official Languages Act is designed to assist the francophone and Acadian communities outside Quebec but contributes to anglicization within Quebec. That's a problem that you raised, and it's why we're seeking an asymmetry.

With regard to education in Quebec, anglophones started off with overfunded schools. I seem to remember that the B&B Commission ranked Quebec francophones as earning the twelfth highest average salaries, whereas the situation was completely reversed outside Quebec. Francophones were in a very tough position.

What do you think of the principle of asymmetry in modernizing the act?

• (1620)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Mr. Mark Power: Part VII is useful for francophone Quebec too. If that part had been drafted better and applied more firmly by the courts, the Netflix issue would have been resolved differently. On a careful reading of section 41 in part VII, even...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Power. Pardon me for interrupting. You'll be able to say more in response to further questions.

We will now wrap up the first round with Ms. Ashton, who will have six minutes. I believe she has a lot of help where she is.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Yes, it's a team effort.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thanks to all our witnesses.

I'm going to go to you, Ms. Crist. First, I want to thank you for your open letter of last Friday. We're meeting today as part of our study on the decline of French in Quebec and Canada and to discuss the case that was heard in court.

I think the federal government has abandoned its responsibility to provide French-language services to minority communities, which will accelerate the decline of French. I want to read an excerpt from your letter:

The court found that, following adoption of the federal-provincial agreement, the federal government did not have an obligation to ensure that employment as-

sistance services were offered in both official languages pursuant to part IV of the act... because... the Government of British Columbia was not acting on behalf of the federal government in implementing the federal program.

That of course illustrates the importance of the amendments to part VII of the act and the urgent need to include linguistic clauses in the federal-provincial agreements.

Do you think it's normal for us still to be waiting for this modernization in 2022?

Ms. Lily Crist: Thank you for your question.

I have lived in British Columbia for 25 years, and, no, it's not normal to have to wait that long. For example, we lost some employment services. It's unacceptable that we had to wait 11 years to try a case.

I worked for La Boussole community centre, which has shut down. It provided employment services and specifically dealt with the problems of homeless persons. So the most vulnerable francophones are being attacked.

Consequently, it's essential that the future act that you adopt truly include clear positive measures and a redefined part VII. I'm not a lawyer, but we lack services here on a daily basis [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] are synonymous with a loss of services related to both employment and homelessness projects.

I think it's essential that part VII be clearly redefined and the act strengthened so we don't have to go to court over every aspect of our lives in British Columbia.

Thank you.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Your testimony was very moving. Thank you for the work you've done over the years and that you continue to do.

Ms. Lily Crist: Thank you.

Ms. Niki Ashton: My next question will be for Mr. Power and Mr. Bossé.

Mr. Power and Mr. Bossé, in 2018, you appeared as witnesses when we were studying the need to modernize the Official Languages Act. Nearly four years later, the act still has not been modernized. Is this long delay contributing to the decline of French in Canada?

Mr. Darius Bossé (Lawyer, Power Law): The day-to-day delays in implementing the modernization of the act obviously causes harm that may at some point become irreparable. Yes, that's unfortunately the case.

We had a chance to see the first version of an attempted modernization of the act at the end of the last Parliament. As my colleague noted, there were many problems with that version. We see now that the communities and organizations have joined forces to inform the government clearly what those problems are and how to solve them.

For example, the Treasury Board's obligations must be more clearly established. Binding directives must be issued precisely to provide a framework for implementing the various parts of the act. The obligation to consult must be clarified. We now know that it's an obligation, as the Court of Appeal stated in its decision. It held that the government had breached its obligation and had to take the needs of the community into account, which it has not done.

In the case of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, the FFCB, the government was also required to adopt a linguistic clause under which it could intervene and ensure that the act was properly implemented by the province. In the Court of Appeal's view, however, that had not been done as the obligation to adopt linguistic clauses was not stated in Bill C-32. These are the kinds of clarifications that the organizations and communities are asking the government to make in order to solve the problems in the next version of the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act. We hope that next version will be introduced shortly.

• (1625)

The Chair: You have 50 seconds left, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right.

My last question is for Ms. Crist.

Ms. Crist, you met with Minister Joly to discuss the modernization of the act when she was Minister of Official Languages. What points were addressed during your conversation? Do you feel that some of them were overlooked in the former Bill C-32?

Ms. Lily Crist: The four points I discussed in my remarks today had previously been addressed. We don't want to discuss anything new. It's all been said. We clearly need a stronger instrument. It's up to legislators to draft a robust act so we don't have to go to court.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crist and Ms. Ashton.

We encroached slightly on the first hour of the meeting as a result of the vote. As the witnesses are here, I will exercise my privilege as chair to allow each party two additional minutes to ask questions. I will follow the order and strictly enforce speaking time.

We will begin with Marilyn Gladu.

Go ahead, Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'd like us to be strict about representation. For the second part of the meeting, the Conservatives have five minutes, the Liberals five minutes, the Bloc québécois two and a half minutes and the NDP two and a half minutes. If you allow the Bloc and the NDP two minutes, I suggest you give the Liberals and Conservatives four minutes each.

The Chair: I think that's a good idea, Mr. Godin.

So we don't encroach too much on the second hour, speaking time in the next round of questions will be allocated as follows: two minutes for the Liberals, two minutes for the Conservatives, one minute for the Bloc québécois and one minute for the NDP. That way, the parties will be duly represented.

Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you very much to the witnesses. I'm happy to see them, especially Ms. Crist.

Ms. Crist, your efforts at the federation, which I believe is celebrating its 75th anniversary, are truly laudable, and I congratulate you on your labours. You work tirelessly for the francophones and francophiles of British Columbia. Padminee Chundunsing testified here last year, and you took up the torch during the pandemic when her term ended.

I little time and many questions. My next question will be for Mr. Power.

Mr. Power, what specific and ongoing measures can we anticipate from the Supreme Court's decision? What exactly will we see that isn't merely a continuation of the present situation.

Mr. Mark Power: The decision of the Federal Court of Appeal will serve as a laboratory for Parliament. It provides a set of ideas and principles that Parliament can test, as it did with the obligation to consult and linguistic clauses, for example. In a way, the Federal Court of Appeal has handed Parliament a roadmap to help it avoid a decade of litigation by adding to the future Official Languages Act whatever it needs to enable people to live in French in Ottawa, in my case, and in Vancouver. You must absolutely read that roadmap if you want to succeed in modernizing the act.

That's why we've submitted a bound set of documents that I strongly recommend you read. They're accessible in English and French.

• (1630)

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much.

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

We will continue with our colleague Arielle Kayabaga.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to direct my question to Mr. Laplante.

Mr. Laplante, what you think are the current deficiencies in the Official Languages Act? How do you think they can be corrected?

Mr. Robert Laplante: The main defect is that it puts Quebec's anglophone minorities and Canada's francophone minorities on an equal footing. That's a major defect that has spawned a succession of measures and provisions that fail to take into account the sociological reality of the communities.

I think that programs that are subject to court challenges often lead to lengthy or interminable struggles essentially as a result of this misunderstanding, particularly when the judgment is ultimately declaratory. No implementation is therefore required. However, the act should include, perhaps in part VII, provisions that would render binding the findings that the courts or the minister might make. Otherwise our friends from British Columbia may have to fight for 10 more years to achieve actual results.

There's a distinction between a legal victory and a societal change.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kayabaga.

The next questioner will be Mario Beaulieu, who will have one minute.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: On the one hand, Mr. Laplante, Quebec is trying to make French the common language within its borders. It tells newcomers to learn French and to fit in. It respects the English-speaking minority, but French is the common language. On the other hand, the federal government asserts that there are two official languages and two common languages, and one may use the language of one's choice.

What do you think of that?

Mr. Robert Laplante: We're in the midst of a conflict of legitimacy.

Who has authority over the Quebec National Assembly for language planning in the province? The competition sustained over this issue by the Canadian government's political choices can only sustain social tensions that are entirely undermine both the future of French and harmony among all of Quebec's decisions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Laplante.

Ms. Ashton is the next and final questioner.

Ms. Ashton, you have one minute.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

I have a comment for Ms. Crist, but I also invite the other witnesses to give us their advice.

It was clear from the consultations with the former minister, among others, that the communities had already identified the problems in the Official Languages Act.

Please tell us how important it is for the new act to reflect the communities' priorities and concerns.

• (1635)

Ms. Lily Crist: Our province has neither language legislation nor a French-language services policy. Consequently, we risk systematically losing French-language services. This new act may afford us the opportunity to establish French-language services in our community.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crist.

Ms. Crist, Mr. Laplante, Mr. Power and Mr. Bossé, thank you for being here.

Should you wish to add any information, please feel free to forward it in writing to our clerk, who will distribute it to all the members of the committee. Don't hesitate especially if you feel you didn't have time to address any particular points.

Thank you for coming and happy Valentine's Day.

We will suspend for a few minutes to allow the next panel of witnesses to arrive.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: We will resume now.

Welcome to the second panel of witnesses.

In the second hour of the meeting, we have, via videoconference, Frédéric Lacroix, Essayist, As an individual; we also have, from the Quebec Council of Employers, Karl Blackburn, President and Chief Executive Officer, as well as Denis Hamel, Vice President, Politics and Labour; and, lastly, from the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, we have Angela Cassie, Chair of the Board of Directors, and Daniel Boucher, Executive Director.

Each of the groups will have a maximum of five minutes for your presentation. I will let you know when you have roughly one minute left.

We'll begin right away, and Frédéric Lacroix will be the first speaker.

Mr. Lacroix, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix (Essayist, As an Individual): Good afternoon.

An unusual linguistic dynamic has taken shape in Quebec in the past 15 years or so. Since 1871, the demographic weight of francophones in Quebec had never fallen below 80%. Now it is 78%, having declined 3.4 percentage points in 15 years, a record. It is also falling quickly with regard to the language spoken in the home. Statistics Canada's demolinguistic projections suggest that the relative weight of francophones in Quebec will continue to decline for the foreseeable future.

Fundamental changes will have to be made to the Official Languages Act in order to halt the decline of French in Quebec.

The act was passed in 1969 and its purpose is to "ensure respect for English and French as the official languages [and to ensure] equality of status" and "support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities." The Official Languages Act declared English and French our official languages and put those two languages on a strict legally equal footing, without however taking into consideration the sociological situation of English and French in Canada, a reality that is actually based on a demographic power relationship, as a result of which English is the dominant language across Canada, even in Quebec.

Book 1 of the Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism states that, according to the 1961 census, English, relatively speaking, was assimilating other languages nearly five times faster than French in Canada. In other words, English was already far more vital than French. The Official Languages Act, which was passed by Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government, did not take that elementary reality into account.

Anglophones in Quebec assimilate approximately half of allophone immigrants, whereas they represent only 8.1% of the population, which means that, all other things being equal, the anglophone group's assimilation power is nearly 10 times that of the francophone group in Quebec.

Thus, contrary to what the Official Languages Act would have us believe, there is no situation of egalitarian bilingualism in Quebec. The situation is more one of inegalitarian or competitive bilingualism.

The Official Languages Act is based on the idea that language is the result of an individual's preference: this is the principle of personality. The personality principle was, and still is, a nonsensical proposition. Language is not an individual characteristic; it is a medium of exchange with others and is, by definition, collective.

Note that the Charter of the French Language is based in large part on the principle of territoriality, the principle that, over a given territory, a single language serves as a language of convergence or common language. There is thus a clear conflict between the federal and Quebec approaches to language planning.

In my view, the principle of personality must be abandoned if we truly want to achieve genuine equality between English and French in Quebec. The Official Languages Act should consider and acknowledge that Quebec is a French-language province. That proposition would have numerous practical consequences. For example, immigrants seeking permanent residence in Quebec would have to demonstrate their knowledge of French, not of French and English.

Now let's consider the double majority.

Within a framework of symmetry, the Official Languages Act institutes a double majority in Canada in which anglophones form the majority outside Quebec and francophones the majority within Quebec. This double majority is real only if one considers that the linguistic dynamic is determined by provincial borders. However, this is false. The linguistic dynamic is determined by the country to which Quebec belongs, which is Canada.

The Official Languages Act thus fosters the development and vitality of Quebec's anglophone minority. However, that minority is not a minority. It is in fact an integral part of the Canadian majority and possesses all its attributes, including linguistic vitality.

This concept of a double majority must be abandoned in the Official Languages Act.

That means abandoning grants in support of the vitality of English in Quebec, such as those made under the Canada-Québec Agreement on Minority-Language Education and Second Languages Instruction, funding that enhances the status and vitality of English in Quebec.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: I would like to make two recommendations.

The discrimination that the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration has shown toward francophone immigrants undermines Quebec's efforts to attract francophone and francotrope immigrants who will integrate well into French-speaking Quebec. In my opinion, temporary immigration authority, which includes foreign students, should be transferred to Quebec.

Furthermore, the grants that the federal government makes to Quebec universities put French-language universities at a definite disadvantage. Nearly 40% of funding that Ottawa provides to Quebec is allocated to English-language universities. Approximately one third of federal funding goes to McGill University alone. Systemic discrimination is exercised against French-language universities in federal funding allocation.

Funding allocation based on so-called excellence criteria in fact rewards past winners and penalizes past losers. In other words, that funding rewards universities that are already the richest, such as McGill. Different criteria should be introduced in federal grant programs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lacroix.

Now we will go to the Quebec Council of Employers, represented by Mr. Blackburn and Mr. Hamel.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Karl Blackburn (President and Chief Executive Officer, Quebec Council of Employers): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to inform you that my colleague seems to be having connection problems. That's unfortunate because he's highly qualified and could have assisted the committee by answering questions. I'll do my best to answer them.

Members of the committee, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Karl Blackburn, and I am the president and chief executive officer of the Quebec Council of Employers, the QCE.

Our organization, which was established in 1969, is a federation of nearly 100 sectoral associations and a number of corporate members that represents the interests of more than 70,000 private and parapublic employers of all sizes from all regions of Quebec.

Like the entire Canadian francophone population, Quebec employers are eager to promote French as a language of work, commerce, business and external business communication.

Our organization actively supports the efforts of Quebec employers striving to make French the language of work, commerce and business within their enterprises. For example, we have worked for many years with the Office québécois de la langue française, the OQLF, to promote French in the business sector. We have assisted in developing tools for employers, now consolidated under the title "Mémo, mon assistant pour la francisation". We distribute those tools to our members with OQLF's help.

The approach that OQLF uses, which is based on self-evaluation, support and the provision of business tools, is consistent with the one we advocate for promoting the French language and encouraging companies to do business in French. We would obviously be pleased to be able to perform a similar role by cooperating with the Department of Canadian Heritage to support federally regulated businesses in their francization efforts both in Quebec and across Canada.

We believe that our language puts us in a privileged position to forge ties with other countries. Last August, QCE signed, on Quebec's behalf, the Paris declaration on strengthening the economic francophonie. The aim of that declaration is to create a privileged space, similar to the Commonwealth, for trade among francophone countries, as there are more than 300 million French speakers in the world. The goal is to increase business opportunities around the globe and to attract foreign businesses to Quebec. The francophonie also has considerable potential as a labour provider, since three quarters of the world's francophones will be less than 30 years old in 2060. In short, we believe that our language can become a springboard for our economic development.

Against this backdrop, QCE wishes to draw the federal government's attention to the support it could provide to the economic space of francophone and Acadian communities by promoting connections with employers in francophone and francophile countries.

We believe that, given the minority situation of the French fact in North America, the vitality of our language relies on stronger economic ties with other countries where French is the language of work. As the sole Canadian employers organization to sign the common Paris declaration, we also wish to offer our full cooperation and to make our expertise and network available to federal agencies and Canadian employers.

In closing, I would like to draw the committee's attention to two specific points.

We recently surveyed our members on the language question. Employers are generally in favour of protecting and promoting French as a language of work. A large majority recognize that our common language is fragile, particularly in Montreal, view French as a distinct cultural attribute and acknowledge that all businesses have a role to play in ensuring the vitality of our language. However, employers fear that statutory or regulatory measures may be introduced, without distinctions being drawn based on the size of businesses, that would increase red tape and be difficult to implement given the lack of resources for that purpose.

The second concern that employers expressed is that federally regulated businesses might eventually be compelled to meet the requirements of both the Official Languages Act and Quebec's Charter of the French Language. Employers should not be subject to two jurisdictions, a situation that would result in confusion and increased administrative processes.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blackburn.

Now we will hear from the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, represented by Angela Cassie and Daniel Boucher.

You have the floor.

Ms. Angela Cassie (Chair, Board of Directors, Société de la francophonie manitobaine): Good afternoon.

I would like to thank you for the invitation to appear before you today.

I am currently on Treaty 1 land, homeland of the Métis nation. The Manitoban francophonie is spread over territory that is subject to several treaties and the ancestral lands of several indigenous peoples.

My name is Angela Cassie, and I am chair of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, the SFM.

As the organization representing the francophone community of Manitoba, SFM is concerned with the advancement of all the community's areas of activity with the help of its network of collaborators and partners.

Today I would like to discuss three major themes: the urgent need to modernize the Official Languages Act, the priorities of the Manitoban francophonie and the efforts required to achieve the French-language immigration target.

First, I would like to mention that SFM supports the claims of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada regarding the act.

The work leading up to Bill C-32, which we have been awaiting for many years, was not done in haste. On the contrary, it is the result of several studies and consultations dating back many years. Any more delays would only further weaken the position of French in our communities. Parliament should therefore begin its work immediately.

Having said that, I agree, as do all francophone communities, that Bill C-32 still exhibits some major deficiencies that must be corrected.

First of all, the Office of the Commissioner of Official languages must be granted expanded powers to make orders and impose penalties. At the moment, the mere recommendations that he makes are not strong enough to protect minority languages.

That brings me to the next deficiency in the bill: it is vitally important to clarify further part VII of the Official Languages Act. Parts of the Federal Court of Appeal's decision in the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique case should serve as a basis for establishing the necessary mechanisms to ensure compliance with part VII and to clarify the government's expectations with regard to "positive measures".

In addition, to guarantee a common and generous interpretation of the act, the government must designate a single central agency to coordinate the act's implementation.

Lastly, Bill C-32 should include a francophone immigration policy in order to restore the demographic weight of the francophonie.

I will now explain the immigration issue at greater length before concluding.

In 2016, Manitoba's francophone community adopted a strategic plan based on a consultation conducted by a research team from the Université de Saint-Boniface. That plan, which was developed for a 20-year horizon, based on 5 lines of action, and projected 33 results, is now being implemented by the network of Manitoba francophone organizations. In our opinion, to achieve the intent of the Official Languages Act, particularly that of part VII, governments must consider this action plan in developing and evaluating programs. The government must act as a partner in enhancing the vitality of our communities.

Accueil francophone, an SFM initiative introduced to facilitate the intake and settlement of francophone newcomers to Manitoba, has provided services to the vast majority of those newcomers. In spite of our efforts in this initiative and Accueil francophone's ability to act, only 4.3% of immigrants had French as a spoken language in 2019. We must have specific and bold francophone immigration targets.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cassie. You will definitely have a chance to say more during the questions.

We will now begin the first round of questions. Questioners from each party will have six minutes to ask their questions and hear the answers.

Ms. Gladu, you have the floor for six minutes.

● (1655)

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us.

First I'll go to Ms. Cassie.

We also spoke with the Commissioner of Official Languages, who told us that there are few consequences for those who breach the act. He added that there are no consequences for individuals, just organizations. For example, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship won't receive a warning or suffer any consequences for sending an English-only email.

What do you think we can do to improve that situation?

Ms. Angela Cassie: That's why we want the commissioner to have the authority to make orders and impose penalties. We need more teeth. We've seen in recent years that the current approach doesn't work. It doesn't compel people to act and recognize language rights.

I also want to note that I'm here with Daniel Boucher, the executive director of SFM. I invite him to speak if he'd like to support me and add something.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: That's excellent.

I have another question for you.

You have a program for immigrants that's very successful because you have targets.

Are there targets across Canada?

Ms. Angela Cassie: Yes, there are targets across Canada because no one's hitting them. That's why we want to highlight the work being done by Accueil francophone. From 2010 to 2019, more than 4,800 immigrants arriving in Manitoba were able to communicate in French. Despite our efforts, and although we have an initiative to attract them, we took in only 301 immigrants and 109 refugees in 2020-2021.

So we have the capacity and the will to take them in, but approvals are lagging. We really need to step up the process and set even bolder targets.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you.

I have a question for Mr. Lacroix.

When I was chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we looked into the cancellation of the midwifery program at Laurentian University in northern Ontario. All the francophones and indigenous people who speak French here in Ontario now have no access to a midwifery program. There's one in Quebec, but you have to live in Quebec to have access to it.

Would it be possible to get funding from the federal government to expand Quebec's programs so other Canadian francophones could use them?

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: Postsecondary programs for francophones outside Quebec are seriously underfunded in all Canadian provinces. Current investment represents only a fraction of the money that should be invested in them. The situation is reversed in Quebec, where English-language universities and cégeps receive two or three times more funding based on the anglophone community's demographic weight.

Funding for postsecondary educational institutions is absolutely critical for the vitality of francophones outside Quebec. Since that sector is largely controlled by the provinces, they should increase funding for it.

The Quebec government's Bill 96, which is currently under consideration, includes a clause providing that francophones outside Quebec who do not have French-language programs available to them may enjoy Quebec education rights to come and study in French in Quebec. That clause will probably be adopted. That's good news, but it's also bad news in the sense that those francophones will be absorbed by Quebec and may stay there. So it's a double-edged sword.

The ideal would be to provide much more generous funding to French-language universities and colleges. We need French-language universities and colleges, not bilingual institutions.

● (1700)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: My final question is for Mr. Blackburn.

Mr. Blackburn, you discussed competition and the possibility of doing business with other francophone countries.

Please give us a few examples.

Mr. Karl Blackburn: As I mentioned, I'm very proud to have signed that agreement to promote the economic francophonie around the world.

What we anticipate for Quebec is that it will be a North American gateway for businesses wanting to come and do business in French in Canada or Quebec. We also want Quebec to be a springboard for businesses here to expand through the global francophonie should they so wish. That's extremely important for us. When we look at the potential this represents in terms of population and economic creation...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blackburn. I apologize for interrupting. I tried to do it as politely as possible.

Before we go any further, I would like to welcome Mr. Hamel, Mr. Blackburn's colleague, as well as Mr. Boucher. Both have joined us through the magic of the Internet.

So welcome, gentlemen.

Our colleague Patricia Lattanzio will be the next questioner.

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

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for anyone who can answer it.

We discussed the immigration issue. What more can we do to attract people to come here and enhance the quality of French in this country?

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, is your question for Mr. Lacroix, Mr. Blackburn, or Ms. Cassie?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Let's start with Mr. Blackburn.

Mr. Karl Blackburn: Thank you very much for your question.

Before answering it, allow me to introduce my colleague, who has just joined us. Denis Hamel is vice-president for politics and labour. He has advanced expertise in the field.

The answer that I can give you off the top, Ms. Lattanzio, is that we have to ensure that the French language can attract companies from around the world to come and do business in French in Quebec and Canada. It's possible to do economic development in French.

From a demographic standpoint, the francophone population will be growing in the coming years. We view that as an economic development opportunity. That's why we don't want our borders used as ramparts to repel the invader. Instead we want them to be used as a springboard to expand the economic francophonie around the world.

Now I'll ask my colleague Denis Hamel to clarify a few points in answer to your question.

Mr. Denis Hamel (Vice President of Workforce Development Policies, Quebec Council of Employers): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

You raised two important points, Ms. Lattanzio.

You began by talking about language quality. We believe that this aspect is often neglected. It's true that it's extremely important to keep the French language strong, by which I mean the vitality of French in Canada, but we strive to place a heavy emphasis on the quality of the language. From this standpoint, immigration helps us enormously. The bigger the pool of francophones and francophiles in Canada, the more the language will prosper.

The Canadian government needs to be aware of one thing with respect to the immigration targets it shares with Quebec, and that is that francophone immigration needs to be a priority not only in Quebec, but also outside Quebec. If we want to maintain the vitality of francophone and Acadian communities, it's extremely important for francophone immigration not to be concentrated only in Quebec.

As Mr. Blackburn explained, our objective is to maximize francophone economic space in Canada. That's really the way that we will be able to succeed in transmitting this expertise.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: How much speaking time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have just under three minutes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I will continue in the same vein, that is to say with the immigration issue.

We heard several witnesses last week, one of whom was a demographer who told us that the decline in French in Quebec was attributable to the lower fertility rate. Immigration can be one way of countering this factor.

Apart from immigration, are there other options to envisage to counteract the decline of French in Quebec?

• (1705)

The Chair: For whom is your question, Ms. Lattanzio?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: It's for Mr. Blackburn once again.

Mr. Karl Blackburn: Thank you very much for the excellent question.

The best way to get there is to find a way of enhancing our French.

Over the past few months, we have had the opportunity, as did the Literacy Foundation here in Quebec, to identify an extremely disquieting fact about our population, by which I mean the very low level of literacy and numeracy. Unfortunately, one out of every two persons in the 15- to 64-year age group in Quebec has literacy and numeracy shortcomings.

We are therefore suggesting that tools be acquired to enable people to learn French or improve their French every day in our organizations and businesses. Companies that take part in this effort and that are willing to buy into the concept should receive tax initiatives to do so, and employees should be given opportunities in these organizations to improve their language, thus contributing to enhancing the quality of French. That would enable us to be able to raise the level of literacy and numeracy, and...

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Blackburn.

I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I'd like to have enough time to ask my next question.

You would no doubt agree that anglophones and allophones in Quebec have made extraordinary efforts over the past few years by introducing French immersion programs and bilingual schools.

Don't you feel that these efforts, which are also being made by other language minorities, might help to counteract the decline of French in Quebec?

The Chair: There are 10 seconds left.

Mr. Denis Hamel: Yes, I believe so. Moreover the message that ought to be sent out to the communities...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hamel.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, would it be possible for me to have Mr. Hamel's answer in writing?

The Chair: Yes. I'll remind him at the end of the meeting, Ms. Lattanzio.

The next speaker is the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, Mr. Beaulieu.

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

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

Mr. Lacroix, you ended your presentation by saying that for federal government grants to universities there ought to be different criteria based on language of instruction.

Can you tell us more about this?

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: Currently, grant programs are based on criteria for excellence, meaning that they are based on [*Editor's Note: Technical difficulty*]. There's a historical effect there, to the effect that those who were good in the past are good today. The disproportion, in my view, increases over time.

I believe that there ought to be a criterion based on language of instruction in allocating grants, because 40% of federal grants go to anglophone universities, whereas anglophones represent only 8.1% of the population. It's unfair.

If the allocation criterion was based on language of instruction, then 90% of the grants would be to francophone institutions and 10% to anglophone institutions, which would be equitable.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Why do you say 90% and 10%?

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: We rounded the 8% to 10%. Strictly speaking, the figures should be 92% and 8%.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Can you tell us a bit more about the concept of institutional completeness?

Why does this overfunding have an impact on the status of French?

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: Institutional completeness is a concept that was invented by Raymond Breton, a sociologist at the University of Toronto. He had found that the vitality of a community's language was tied to the breadth of its institutional network.

If this concept is applied to francophones outside Quebec, the fact that they have few French language high schools and almost no French language universities—apart from in Moncton—has a very negative impact on their vitality. Assimilation occurs when francophones leave high school and decide upon a program of studies. Many choose English as a language of instruction and the process of assimilation begins.

This can apply to Quebec as well, where the anglophone community has an institutional network funded at a level that exceeds their demographic weight by a factor of three. This enables them to assimilate a large number of allophones. Indeed, anglophones in Quebec assimilate approximately half of allophones, even though the community accounts for only 8.1% of the population.

Institutional completeness is a key concept for understanding how a community's linguistic vitality is related to money, which is to say funding.

• (1710)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: At a previous meeting, we received the Vice-President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada - Quebec, who told us that even in Quebec, systemic discrimination was deeply rooted in the federal system, which means that we can take it for granted that everything happens in English first and only then in French.

How do you see it?

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: I am not an expert on the federal public service in Quebec, but from what I've heard, English is the language of work used most often, which ought not to be the case in Quebec. For many francophones, the freedom to choose their language of work in the federal public service in Quebec is an illusion.

The federal public service is also subject to unequal or competitive bilingualism. For me, this is a very serious problem for the vitality of French in Quebec. The federal government is therefore actively contributing to diminishing the vitality of French in Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier on, Mr. Blackburn spoke about some problems related to the modernization of the act. Among other things, he mentioned that the Quebec bill to strengthen Bill 101 would apply to federally regulated organizations, but that Bill C-32 would give companies the option to comply with Bill 101 or with the Official Languages Act, which will also create confusion.

How is that supposed to work?

I'd like to hear your comments first, Mr. Lacroix, and then Mr. Blackburn's.

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: I think that companies can already choose whether or not to comply with the Charter of the French Language. In my view, the problem is that it's a option. Bill 101 should apply to federally regulated undertakings, period. It shouldn't be a matter of choice.

The Chair: You have a minute left, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Karl Blackburn: I'll make a brief comment and then give the floor to my colleague Mr. Hamel.

In a recent survey that we conducted with our members, federally regulated businesses were already mostly complying with the French-language requirements under the Quebec act. That being the case, they had no problem with continuing to do so. Most of the problems were for small businesses, because of the administrative burden and the complexity of doing things in specific ways in Quebec and federally, which could make the process more complex.

Perhaps Mr. Hamel could contribute some additional statistically based details.

Mr. Denis Hamel: I'll be brief.

We do indeed have concerns about the two jurisdictions, particularly with respect to annual reports and complaints.

In more than 80% of cases, federally regulated businesses already comply with the Official Languages Act. The legislation of both levels of government needs to be harmonized to keep businesses from feeling squeezed between two different administrative burdens, neither of which takes precedence over the other.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hamel.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but those are the rules.

The next speaker is Ms. Niki Ashton of Manitoba.

Ms. Ashton, over to you for six minutes.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for their testimony.

I would particularly like to thank the representatives of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, an organization we are very proud of here in Manitoba.

Ms. Cassie, the Société de la francophonie manitobaine criticized the calculation method used to determine the number francophones living in minority communities.

As part of the modernization of the Official Languages Act, should the definition of what constitutes a francophone be reviewed, along with the calculation method, with a view to coming up with statistics that better reflect reality?

• (1715)

Ms. Angela Cassie: I'll give a brief overview, and then let Mr. Boucher handle the details.

As a francophile, I believe that the definition of the term "francophone" is a very important aspect of our identity. It strengthens the vitality of our community.

I believe that the definition of the term "francophone" requires a rethink as it relates to the language spoken at home. The importance of, and interest in, immersion programs should also be recognized, and we have to determine how we can continue to contribute to the vitality of individuals and families who choose French as their second language and their language of instruction. We also

need to make sure that they can have access to support services and programs.

Do you have anything to add, Mr. Boucher?

Mr. Daniel Boucher (Executive Director, Société de la francophonie manitobaine): This has always been a major problem for us. We would like Canada to recognize communities for what they are in terms of identity. Over the years, the community in Manitoba has developed significantly with newcomers, francophiles, if we can use that term, people who really have an identity and a sense of belonging to the community.

A few years ago, we even took the federal government to court over a number of Official Languages Act regulations. The purpose was specifically to clarify this issue and enlarge the pool of francophones and the definition of "francophone". We even succeeded in introducing a regulation that will greatly help to improve the provision of services in French and expand the concept of francophone identity.

The people who decide to settle in our province come from just about everywhere around the world. We have had presidents from Africa, who were not acknowledged as members of our community in a way that I would call legal. For us, that's unacceptable.

We went to battle to change the definition of francophone identity in censuses and to make improvements to the delivery of services in our francophone communities throughout Manitoba.

I hope that our efforts have been positive and that all these initiatives will be reflected in the new version of the Official Languages Act, a modernized version.

My hope is that we will have moved this dialogue forward.

Ms. Niki Ashton: My next question is for both of you.

We know that there is a shortage of French-language teaching staff in Manitoba, from early childhood onward. I'm basing that on my own experience here in Thompson.

And if there isn't a staff shortage, then it's the number of spaces available that is problematic in French schools, and it becomes difficult to enrol all the children.

The federal government has not indexed transfers for French education for years, and funds are hard to access.

What role could educational institutions play in slowing the decline of French in the communities?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I could give a partial answer to this question.

As it happens, last week the province of Manitoba took another step forward by implementing a project we had been requesting for a long time. The province agreed to add a significant amount of funding to the French immersion program and to the francophone education system to train teachers. It's a step in the right direction, even though it's only one step.

I believe that we are all responsible for taking concrete action if we want to have the infrastructures required to give courses in French, and I'm pleased to be able to say a few words about the French-language school here in Thompson. For those who are not familiar with Manitoba's geography, I can tell you that's quite an achievement for the province.

Our goal has always been to ensure that we have the resources required, and to work together. In Manitoba, we have an education continuum, from early childhood to postsecondary education. That's important.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boucher and Ms. Ashton.

We are now starting the next round of questions.

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

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

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their testimony. It's truly interesting.

Mr. Blackburn, I'm very interested in the issue of the economic Francophonie. You mentioned that you had signed an agreement to promote the economic Francophonie around the world and spoke at length about the potential this represents.

With which countries have you signed this agreement?

With which countries or continents are we likely to be moving forward in the near future.

How can our companies know which sectors will be most prosperous in the future: primary, secondary or tertiary?

If you could give us some guidance, it could prove to be interesting for our entrepreneurs.

• (1720)

Mr. Karl Blackburn: Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Gourde.

It allows me to make a further point about just how keen the Conseil du patronat du Québec is on the economic Francophonie.

To begin with, we signed a development agreement for the economic Francophonie with 29 other francophone areas around the world, including France and Brussels, of course, but also with countries in Africa, the Maghreb, and Morocco. We got several countries from North Africa, East Africa and southern Africa to come on board with the economic Francophonie, which is an economic leveraging mechanism that, as I mentioned in my presentation, resembles the Commonwealth, but for the Francophonie.

There are at the moment approximately 300 million francophones around the world. In 2060, the number of francophones will be over 500 million, with an average age of under 30 years. That, I'm sure you'll agree, represents enormous growth potential.

In Canada, we are facing demographic issues, particularly in Quebec.

There are people here from various parts of Canada, but in Quebec, we have an extremely serious problem, the curve for our aging

population. In 2011, one of every six people were 65 years of age or older. In 2031, only a few years from now, it will be one in four. The labour shortages that we all know about will be amplified, in keeping with our demographic curve.

In what sectors can the potential of the Francophonie help us? Well, it can help us in various ways, in fields like information technology, video games, health care, the manufacturing industry, education, and health training. All of these sectors Mr. Gourde, have strong potential.

For example, we could forge strong and interesting ties with francophone countries whose population curve is younger than ours, to address training needs. Trainers in these countries could come here, and ours could go elsewhere. Thus there are societal challenges which, when linked to their younger demographic curve, could represent opportunities for us in Quebec and Canada. And our societal challenges resulting from our older demographic curve could represent opportunities for these countries.

There is real and extremely interesting growth potential. But something needs to be done about it, and that is what the Conseil du patronat intends to do. We have already made extremely strong commitments in terms of demographic growth and the economic Francophonie, and that's only the beginning. I'm convinced that the potential of the Francophonie is extremely important to all the technology sectors, whatever they may be, and in every region of Quebec, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you very much. You're very inspiring.

I'd like to speak to the witnesses from Manitoba about something that saddens me.

A great deal of effort has been made in elementary, postsecondary, college and university education to promote French-language instruction. However, once students enter the workforce they lose their proficiency in French after three, four, or five years.

Would there be a way of offering French-language workshops or otherwise motivating these young workers to continue to practise their French? What's happened is that we have invested enormously in the francophone regions in the West, because lots of people wanted to learn French. But unfortunately, it doesn't take long for them to lose their proficiency in the language.

Ms. Angela Cassie: That, in fact, is the reason why we have cultural institutions like the Centre culturel franco-manitobain, Théâtre Cercle Molière, and other similar organizations. We established them so that people could live in French when the work day is done.

And then there are the courses available at the Université de Saint-Boniface and the Alliance française du Manitoba. They too are important for the francophone communities. We believe that investment in French-language programming and in our cultural and francophone institutions is very important if we are to live in French once our work day is done.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cassie.

Over to Ms. Arielle Kayabaga now, for the next questions.

Ms. Kayabaga, you have five minutes.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking the witnesses and sending my regards to Ms. Cassie. I'm happy to see her again.

My first question is for all the witnesses.

Mr. Lacroix spoke about immigration and its contribution to the growth of the francophone community in Quebec and across Canada.

Given that 60% of francophones are in Africa, and especially West Africa, what would you suggest the committee could do to change the context of discrimination surrounding the immigration of African francophones?

• (1725)

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: Can I be the first to answer?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Yes, Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: Okay.

Some newspapers recently published interesting data. I am thinking in particular of an article from the newspaper *Le Devoir* in November.

The article said that people who came to study French in Quebec were discriminated against. In fact, the federal refusal rate for them was higher than for people from the same countries who wanted to come to Canada to study in English.

The language of instruction chosen is what appeared to be the problem. That's true in Quebec and across Canada. It seems to me to be a huge problem.

I think that it's important to understand what's happening at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in Ottawa.

What's going on that would allow a thing like that to happen? Is there active discrimination against francophones...

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Lacroix, but I don't think you've understood my question.

My question is rather the following. What would you suggest the committee could do to stimulate growth and give greater consideration to the countries that have little biggest pools of francophones?

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: Can the committee make recommendations to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: No, I am asking you the question. What would you suggest to the committee?

Mr. Frédéric Lacroix: I believe that the committee should demand answers from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration about the treatment of francophones. The committee should ask the department why the refusal rate is so high.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

I'll continue with a question for Mr. Blackburn.

Mr. Blackburn, what do you think about the idea of raising the francophone immigration rate to Canada by 4.4%? What impact might this have on Quebec and francophone minority communities?

Mr. Karl Blackburn: Thank you for your question. I'll try to give a brief answer based on statistical data.

Earlier, I mentioned that the labour shortages were greater in Quebec than elsewhere, and that this is linked to our demographic curve. For months, we have been asking the Quebec government to increase the pools of foreign workers.

You mentioned the countries of West Africa. They were party to the agreement we signed in Paris last summer. In a few weeks, there will be the worldwide launch of a new organization designed to promote the economic Francophonie. This new organization will give Quebec a leading role to play on the world stage with the economic Francophonie, if I can put it that way, and enable us to do much more in this area.

There is a lot of talk of maximum integration, capacity and reach. The Conseil du patronat du Québec is convinced that the best way to achieve successful integration is through work, the communities, the stakeholders and the businesses. If everyone agrees on the objectives to be met, the collective challenge will be a collective success.

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Kayabaga.

The witnesses were very interesting, but time is getting short. In fact, as it's now 5:30 p.m. I need to have the unanimous consent of the committee to prolong the meeting.

• (1730)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Unfortunately, I can't stay.

The Chair: In that case, and I'm sorry about this, we'll have to wrap up the meeting.

Before concluding, I'd like to thank our witnesses, Mr. Hamel, Mr. Blackburn, Ms. Cassie, Mr. Boucher and Mr. Lacroix. Their testimony was truly interesting and heartfelt.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would ask you to complete your responses by sending them in writing to the clerk of the committee, who will distribute them to all members of the committee so that they can look them over. Don't hesitate to do so.

I would now like to hear what Mr. Godin has to say.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, there is something specific I'd like to ask the Conseil du patronat du Québec.

We discussed the study on francophone countries. I don't know whether this international agreement is public, but I would like Mr. Blackburn to send a copy to the committee if that's possible.

The Chair: You can do that through the clerk, Mr. Blackburn.

Mr. Karl Blackburn: We'll make it available as soon the official launch has taken place, within the next few weeks.

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blackburn.

I'd like to wish everyone a happy Valentine's Day.

[*English*]

Members, stay tuned for just a second before you leave.

[*Translation*]

On Wednesday, we will conclude this study. After that, there's going to be a week off.

Before the break, the clerk would like a list of witnesses members would like to invite to testify during the immigration study.

So could all the committee members send their list to the clerk before Friday noon. That would give us a head start.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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