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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 11 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.

[*English*]

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person should follow the directives of the Board of Internal Economy.

[*Translation*]

I thank members in advance for their cooperation.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

When those participating virtually are not speaking, their mic should be on mute.

[*English*]

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me immediately. Please know 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 its study entitled Mandate, Priorities and Pressing Issues for the Minister of Official Languages.

I would now like to welcome today's witnesses.

First of all, we have Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor, who is appearing before our committee for the first time as Minister of Official Languages. I am very pleased to have you here, Minister.

She is accompanied by Isabelle Mondou, Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage; Julie Boyer, Assistant Deputy Min-

ister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions; and Sarah Boily, Director General, Official Languages.

As you know, Minister, you will have a maximum of five minutes for your remarks, after which we will go to a series of questions. I will signal to you when you have about one minute left. The floor is yours.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to start by acknowledging that we are joining you from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg nation.

It's a pleasure for me to meet with the Standing Committee on Official Languages for the first time in my capacity as Minister of Official Languages. When the Prime Minister gave me this mandate, I was deeply touched.

As you know, I'm Acadian—the first Acadian to hold the position of Minister of Official Languages. So, I personally know how important it is to be able to speak your first official language every day. To study. To work. To live.

I know how important it is to live in a thriving community. And a thriving community is, above all, a community that can freely speak its first official language. This is true for Francophones and Anglophones in minority situations, and for everyone who supports our official languages. It's a responsibility that I take to heart, and a responsibility that is at the heart of my mandate.

On March 1st in Grand-Pré, I was proud to fulfill one of the most important parts of my mandate letter by introducing Bill C-13, our legislation to modernize the Official Languages Act. I chose to introduce the bill in Grand-Pré because it is a place that reminds us of the fragility of our official language minority communities and the battles we have fought to protect the French language. The protection and promotion of French throughout Canada, including Quebec, and defending our official-language minority communities remain a challenge today, and we will seize every opportunity to respond to it with Bill C-13.

However, that responsibility goes beyond just introducing a bill. Our government is committed to implementing the measures outlined in our reform document, English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada. Across the country, we're helping to build and support institutions that help official-language minority communities grow and prosper. We're improving access to French immersion and French second-language programs, from early childhood learning to post-secondary education. We're working to increase the demographic weight of Francophones.

In this work, I have been fortunate to be supported by a Prime Minister and cabinet colleagues who share the same goal, and a parliamentary secretary, Marc Serré, as well as many parliamentarians, some of whom are here today, and members of this committee who are doing an incredible job.

As I have always said, we wanted a bill that reflected the linguistic realities of all Canadians, both Anglophone and Francophone. We wanted a bill that would meet the needs of official-language minority communities from coast to coast to coast and help them thrive. And we wanted a bill with more teeth. Bill C-13 meets those objectives.

I know I have a lot of work to do, but I also know I can count on your support and your advice. I look forward to working with you and with all those who love our official languages and the minority communities that enrich our lives so much.

Once again, I'm happy to be here with you today and happy to answer your questions.

Mr. Chair, thank you for reminding us not to speak quickly as I tend to do just that. Don't hesitate to remind me if I do though, and I'll slow down.

• (1550)

The Chair: Never fear, Minister. I'm not really used to people speaking quickly. You made your remarks in three and a half minutes, which proves that Acadians are very efficient.

However, let's get down to serious matters. In the first round, each party will have six minutes to ask questions and hear the answers.

To start off, I give the floor to our colleague the first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

You have six minutes, Mr. Godin.

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

Minister, thank you for being here today.

You made your remarks efficiently. I hope we can be just as efficient in protecting the French language. We agree that the Official Languages Act should be modernized. However, French is the more fragile of the two official languages.

My first question is very straightforward. Do you acknowledge that French is currently in decline across Canada?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: That's a very important question, and I thank you for asking it.

Once again, I'm pleased to see you.

The bill is very clear: we recognize that French is in decline in Canada and Quebec. Statistics show that 6.6% of the population outside Quebec was francophone in 1971. According to the projections, that will fall to 3% by 2036. So that's a decline of 3.6 percentage points.

I repeat that we acknowledge that French is in decline in Quebec as well.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Minister.

Since you're used to testifying in committee, you know that our speaking time is limited. I don't mean to be rude, but I have more questions for you and plan to ask them in quick succession.

If Bill C-13 came into force tomorrow morning, exactly how would it help halt the decline, flatten the curve and improve the situation of French in Canada?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: As you know, there will still be work to do, including regulatory work, once the bill receives royal assent.

We have to keep conducting consultations to ensure we can make the right regulations. Then there's the whole issue of positive measures. We have to make sure we clearly define what a region with a strong francophone presence is. Lastly, there's the matter of regulations respecting monetary penalties. That's the first step, once the bill has received royal assent.

I look forward to the bill receiving royal assent because that will enable us to move forward and begin the very important work of designing regulations.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Minister.

You said in your opening remarks that you were counting on our support. I would invite you to do the same, to be very open. I hope we can count on your support to improve the bill. You said it had teeth, but we don't think it's robust enough. Rest assured we'll cooperate with you in the hope you'll be as open as we are.

I have another question for you.

Why isn't the central agency, the Treasury Board, defined in Bill C-13, as many organizations have requested. There are still grey areas between the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board. Why haven't all the powers been centralized in the same place?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you for that question.

I'm glad you raised it because I believe there's still some confusion over the Treasury Board's role.

I've read the bill many times. Many stakeholders told us they want to ensure there's one central agency. Then the Treasury Board's role was clarified to assure us it would take on a central agency's responsibilities.

It's all well and good that the bill has teeth, but we have to make sure it's actually implemented. That's exactly what the Treasury Board will do. The Treasury Board's role will be clear: it will be responsible for implementing, evaluating, coordinating and verifying all work.

I'd like to say something else, if I may. Supplementary funding has been allocated to the Treasury Board under the budget so it has the necessary resources to do its work.

Lastly, there's the matter of the Department of Canadian Heritage. In my capacity as Minister of Official Languages, all my responsibilities are delegated to me by the Department of Canadian Heritage. I believe there's some confusion over the words "Canadian Heritage". In actual fact, the work is delegated to the minister responsible, but the central agency role nevertheless falls to the Treasury Board.

• (1555)

Mr. Joël Godin: You haven't convinced me, Minister, but I respect your answer.

The new subsection 2.1(1.1) introduced by the bill states:

2.1 (1) The Minister of Canadian Heritage is responsible for exercising leadership within the Government...

You say the agency would report to the Treasury Board, that the minister would report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and that the latter would have a principal role to play in implementing the act. There's some confusion here, so and I'll ask you question once again.

Why have so many language rights advocacy organizations in Canada so convincingly made this request?

The Chair: You have 50 seconds left.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I've spoken to many stakeholders who are very satisfied with our bill, which clearly outlines the Treasury Board's central agency role. I've also spoken to lawyers, who are very pleased...

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me, Minister, but, as you heard, I had 50 seconds left.

I don't have the same take on the situation, and I'm not hearing the same comments from the organizations.

I'll ask a final question.

Why has the act respecting the use of French in federally regulated private businesses been separated from this act, which is quasi-constitutional? I think it weakens the act.

Would you please explain why you've done that?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Perhaps I can defend myself in the next round of questions. I'll be pleased to answer your question.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Godin.

Our next speaker will be Angelo Iacono.

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

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

Welcome, Minister. It's always a pleasure to see our Acadian friends. I have to say that Quebec does things its own way. Oh, oh!

Minister, the work involved in modernizing the Official Languages Act has been ongoing for many years. You've been responsible for this portfolio since last October. Would you please tell us about your interactions with stakeholders representing official language minority communities and how those interactions have influenced the differences between Bill C-32 from the last Parliament and Bill C-13?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: It's always a pleasure to see you, Mr. Iacono. Thank you for that question.

I was appointed Minister of Official Languages about five months ago. From the start of my mandate, I've been privileged to meet many of my colleagues who are around this table, members of the opposition parties, senators and many stakeholders. I wanted to hear their comments on Bill C-32 and find out what they'd like to see in its new version.

I've met many national and provincial groups. I met with the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick, or SANB, because it's in my riding. I met with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, or AFO, the Quebec Community Groups Network, the QCGN, and others. All those conversations gave me a lot of food for thought, and my thoughts were included in Bill C-13, which we introduced three weeks ago.

I heard a number of people say that Bill C-13 didn't include all the aspects that were in Bill C-32. I want to state clearly that that's absolutely false. All the elements that were in Bill C-32 are in Bill C-13. However, we've gone even further. Stakeholders told me they wanted a more robust bill, and that's exactly what we introduced. I'd like to say I've met the expectations expressed in the comments we received from stakeholders. Here are a few examples.

I'd like to address the matter of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Commissioner asked us for more powers and tools to do his job. We all acknowledge that the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Thériault, is doing extremely important work to protect our official languages. However, the only power Mr. Thériault currently has is the power to conduct investigations and issue reports. So he wanted better tools to do his job, and that's precisely what we've given him.

We added tools in Bill C-32, and, in Bill C-13, we've also added administrative monetary penalties, which could be imposed on some federal institutions. In short, we want to ensure that our bill has teeth. We wanted to create a central agency, as was mentioned, since many stakeholders I spoke to raised the issue. That's precisely what we've done.

I genuinely hope we can work closely together to adopt Bill C-13 as soon as possible since I'm really looking forward to continuing work on the regulatory framework. We definitely want to forge ahead.

• (1600)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you for those clarifications, Minister.

As you just mentioned, powers would be granted to the Commissioner of Official Languages. We gained a clear understanding of why they're necessary at our last meeting, with the Air Canada representatives, who weren't entirely in favour of the idea of administrative monetary penalties.

My next question is this. The government has made reconciliation with indigenous peoples the centrepiece of its agenda. A key part of that effort has included the protection of indigenous languages. In 2019, the government passed the Indigenous Languages Act, and I would emphasize that nothing in Bill C-13 repeals the rights associated with indigenous languages. Would you please elaborate on that subject?

Have you discussed your modernization of the Official Languages Act with the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you for that very important question.

As Minister of Official Languages, I wanted to be sure I did nothing to undermine Bill C-91, which was introduced to protect indigenous languages and has now become law. You can see very clearly at a number of places in Bill C-13 that we would be doing nothing to undermine indigenous languages. We recognize that we have 70 indigenous languages in Canada, and we want to be sure they can thrive too.

I had the good fortune to meet the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, Ronald E. Ignace, and we had a very constructive conversation. We agreed to meet again because we want to work together. If there's anything that we can pass on to him, advice or details on the work the Commissioner of Official Languages is doing, or if he wants to learn from our experience or draw on our strategies, we're prepared to work with him. He left with a clear understanding of our approach, and it was a very good meeting.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll yield my time to the next person.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Our next speaker is the second vice-chair of the committee, Mario Beaulieu.

You have six minutes, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Good afternoon, Minister. Thank you for being with us.

The Quebec government has made its demands regarding the modernization of the Official Languages Act. The first of those demands was that the act recognize that only one of the two official languages, French, is in the minority. That's not what appears in Bill C-13. There's a statement of principle, but you still consider that anglophones in Quebec constitute the official language minority. I'd like to hear your comments on that subject.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Beaulieu. I'm always glad to see you as well.

We state very clearly that French is in decline in Quebec and Canada. We haven't downplayed that fact in our bill's provisions. We acknowledge that we must do more to protect and promote French in Quebec and Canada. When you look at our reform document, Bill C-32 and Bill C-13, the common denominator is that we want substantive equality. We have to take further measures to ensure we make a difference for the greater francophone community. That's very clear in our bill.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Even the UN Human Rights Committee doesn't recognize Quebec anglophones as a minority because they're part of the English Canadian majority. You nevertheless view Quebec anglophones as the minority.

• (1605)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: On the French language issue, we recognize that French is in decline in Quebec and Canada. We're still committed to introducing measures for substantive equality of the two official languages.

As an Acadian in New Brunswick, I live in an official language minority community. That's my everyday life, Mr. Beaulieu. So modernizing the act is a personal issue for me; it isn't a political matter. I want to change things in Quebec and Canada. I want to ensure that we promote and protect our beautiful language.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: There have to be measures, not just fine-sounding words. Quebec's language planning model is based on the principle of territoriality. Its aim is to make French the only common and official language in its territory. That's essential if we want to francize enough newcomers to maintain our demographic weight. However, that's not at all what we see in your bill; you still want to impose institutional bilingualism on Quebec.

In overall terms, we know that the only effective language planning models for protecting official language minorities are territoriality-based models. What the Official Languages Act has proven is that other models don't work. The assimilation rate of francophones outside Quebec is constantly rising, and the official bilingualism that has been imposed on Quebec has caused French to decline there as well.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: The specificity of the provinces and territories is definitely included in our bill. We acknowledge Quebec's specificity and that of New Brunswick. We've been very clear on that point, Mr. Beaulieu.

Once again, as a federal minister, I want to ensure that the government shoulders its responsibilities, that we do our job, because we can see that French is in decline in Canada. We all need to help attack this problem, which is of enormous concern to me.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Let's talk about concrete measures. To date, for example, 100% of the positive measures for Quebec have supported the anglophone side. They're mainly designed to increase the offer of English-language services. They even support organizations that attempt to anglicize newcomers to Quebec.

Are we going to continue devoting 100% of the positive measures taken in Quebec under the official languages support programs to English, including the development of official language communities program, the enhancement of official languages program and the official languages health program?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Once again, as Minister of Official Languages, I will ensure our government makes every effort to protect and promote our language.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're not answering my question.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: That's precisely what we're doing by putting our measures in place, Mr. Beaulieu.

As I said, I personally recognize the situation of French in this country. I don't deny it at all. The government must do more.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What triggers our scepticism is that, until very recently, the federal government and the Liberal Party denied that French was in decline, even though for a very long time all the indicators had clearly suggested the contrary.

A change occurred, but no measures followed. Recognizing the decline of French without taking measures to provide any real support for the language is just an attempt to fool Quebecers.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Through our action plan, our reform document and the investments we're making in French second language learning, we want to be sure we improve all that. The federal government is making specific investments to improve our situation. If we invest today, more people will be able to communicate in French in future.

Once again, that's very important for us. We don't want assimilation. On the contrary, we want to prevent it. We want to ensure that people can speak their beautiful French language.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In that case, why not leave Quebec in sole control of its language planning?

The Chair: You're speaking time is up, Mr. Beaulieu.

Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Beaulieu, get back to me on that and I'll answer your question.

The Chair: I tried to interrupt you as politely as possible, but I have to play my role.

We will now go to Niki Ashton, who joins us directly from Manitoba.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Good afternoon, Minister.

I'll begin with a question on the modernization of the Official Languages Act that reflects the concerns of stakeholders and francophone communities, particularly those outside Quebec.

Why aren't the language clauses in the federal-provincial agreements included in the bill?

We know that, without those clauses, language minorities will be systematically forgotten, as is clear from the shortage of spaces in francophone child care facilities here at home and elsewhere in Canada.

Why aren't the language clauses included in this bill?

• (1610)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much for your question, Ms. Ashton.

I also recently read your tweet in which you said you were looking for day care spaces for your children. I understand you because people here at home are in the same situation.

I have to go back in time to answer your question on language clauses in bilateral agreements.

After Bill C-32 was introduced, stakeholders said they wanted the definition of positive measures in part VII of the Official Languages Act to have more teeth. When Bill C-13 was drafted, we paid special attention to the terms used to define positive measures. That was necessary because part VII is closely related to the question you just asked.

We did that to ensure that, when the bill receives royal assent, all the decisions the government makes regarding bilateral agreements or anything else are subsequently analyzed to assess their impact on official language minority communities.

As I said, we want substantive equality, and we need to ensure that the measures we introduce help to achieve it. Consequently, we want to make sure all the analyses are done. I often compare this to gender-based analysis.

When we formed the government in 2015, we didn't discuss this at length, but now all decisions presented to cabinet are analyzed with respect to their gender impact. The Minister for Women and Gender Equality isn't the only one considering this matter; now all ministers do so, and we debate it.

So as regards the definition of positive measures and the work we've done on that, stakeholders are very pleased to see that we genuinely want to resolve the issue.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I appreciate your feedback, but positive measures are clearly not enough. The federal-provincial agreements must contain language clauses to ensure that funding and services are also provided in French.

I've told my personal story, and I think we all agree this is a missed opportunity. I obviously have a voice and can tell that story, but many people stay on waiting lists for child care facilities that provide their services in French. They won't have access to them, partly because we've missed the opportunity to ensure language clauses are included. Let's hope that stakeholders' concerns and those of francophone communities can be heard.

Moving on to another question, why did you decide to restrict the commissioner's new powers solely to crown corporations that operate in the transportation sector and provide services and communicate with travellers? Why not extend them to all businesses concerned by part VII of the act?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you for that important question.

As I said at the outset, I spoke with many stakeholders, including the Commissioner of Official Languages. The decision to impose monetary penalties was made at the request of the commissioner himself. As we all know, many companies such as Air Canada, which I'll use as an example, are subject to numerous complaints, as the commissioner told us. The commissioner wanted another tool at his disposal: the power to impose monetary penalties. He expressly asked that we choose a sector where companies have contact with the travelling public.

I worked with the Minister of Transport, Mr. Alghabra, in the course of our deliberations. We looked at which companies were already affected by the issue and already subject to the Official Languages Act. We examined specific companies such as Air Canada, VIA Rail and Marine Atlantic, as well as the airport authorities, because they were viewed as having contact with travellers.

However, I want to make it clear that the tools we gave the Commissioner of Official Languages include more than monetary penalties. There's the whole matter of informal mediation...

• (1615)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Minister. I'll move on to another question.

The Chair: You barely have five seconds left, Ms. Ashton. Your question will have to wait until your next turn.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Six minutes goes by quickly.

We now move on to the second round. The first speaker will be Jacques Gourde.

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

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

Minister, thank you for being with us today. It will be a real pleasure to work with you.

I believe you're very sensitive to the idea of modernizing the Official Languages Act, and since the issue falls within your purview and concerns you personally, it may be that much easier for the committee as a whole to improve the bill when it comes back to us.

You said you had met with stakeholders, companies. Was Air Canada one of the businesses that you or the department met in order to develop the bill?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I met one stakeholder, whose name escapes me. I met him during my second week as Minister of Official Languages in connection with Mr. Rousseau's gaffe, as his comments had been a source of frustration for me.

We discussed the subject, but not the bill.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

You didn't discuss the monetary penalties included in the bill.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Air Canada generates annual revenue of \$5.8 billion. If the Commissioner levies a maximum penalty of \$25,000—penalties may amount to as little as \$5,000 or \$1,000—do you really think a company such as Air Canada would be rattled by a fine of \$10,000 or even \$25,000?

It might decide to pay the fine and not comply with the act.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Don't forget that administrative monetary penalties are an additional tool. I don't think they're the biggest deterrent.

We've given the commissioner five additional powers. First, there's informal mediation. Second, the commissioner may make his decisions public, something he could not previously do. Third, he may impose administrative monetary penalties, which, as you mentioned, range to a maximum of \$25,000. However, I believe the two remaining powers are more consequential: they are compliance agreements and the authority to make orders.

I think people often view monetary penalties as something tangible because they can understand them. However, the authority to make orders will have a more powerful effect on companies such as Air Canada.

That being said, the commissioner asked us to impose penalties, and we did. The commissioner will now have the toolbox he needs to do his job, and his job is to protect our official languages.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You mentioned the power to make orders that's being granted to the commissioner.

Here's a specific example. Air Canada representatives who testified before the committee on Monday told us that 130,000 training hours had been given to 10,000 employees over 7 years. If you do the calculation, that means a few minutes of training per employee per year.

Could the commissioner use his authority to make orders to require Air Canada to increase training from a few minutes to 10 hours a year?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: The power to make orders will enable the commissioner to impose measures. I'm not aware of all the possible situations, but I must say monetary penalties won't necessarily change anything at Air Canada.

The authority to make orders is a powerful tool. We are very pleased with the tools we've provided the commissioner. Incidentally, I spoke to him on the phone after the bill was tabled in the House of Commons, that same day. He was very pleased with the work we had done and the tools we were providing him because they would now help him carry out his mandate.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I have a final question on a technical point.

Minister, \$121.3 million was earmarked in the 2021 budget for post-secondary educational institutions. I've learned from various sources that approximately \$40 million has not yet been issued to those institutions for the first part of the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

Would you please check to see whether that money will be paid soon or confirm for me that it will be?

• (1620)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Perhaps no official announcements were made, but the post-secondary educational institutions got a call from the minister informing them that announcements were coming soon.

The announcements have not yet been made, but many universities have received funding. You'll be receiving the official information sooner rather than later.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you on behalf of the institutions, Minister, but, between you and me, March 31 is coming soon. The institutions must need that money in their budgets for the current year because, in some instances, they're using their lines of credit to meet their needs.

So you will confirm for me that they have all received the funds before March 31?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I can confirm that, when I phoned them, they were very pleased with the information they got from the minister.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Minister, we're always pleased when it comes to money.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Gourde.

Ms. Kayabaga, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

First, I'd like to thank our minister for being with us today and for presenting Bill C-13 to us. I think it's a good thing for francophones across Canada.

Minister, earlier the Bloc Québécois asked a question about the principle of territoriality. I'd like to go back to that question. Some witnesses suggested by the Bloc Québécois told us in previous meetings that the best way to protect the French language was to adopt an approach based on the principle of territoriality.

As a francophone from outside Quebec, I feel that approach is very concerning, and I believe you'll share that opinion, knowing that you are Acadian.

Why must the government use its legislative authority to protect and promote French across Canada?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much for that very important question.

As you know, being a proud Acadian who lives in an official language minority community, I experience that reality on a daily basis, as I said earlier.

As the federal government, we must discharge our responsibility to protect and promote our beautiful languages in Canada. That's why we'll be moving ahead with Bill C-13, which will be much more robust than the present legislation. We definitely want to make our contribution toward protecting our beautiful languages. That's something we must do both in and outside Quebec.

I'm very pleased with the work we've managed to do. I hope the bill sails through the committee stage and the House of Commons and receives royal assent because we'll still have a lot of work to do to develop its regulatory framework.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: One of the interesting aspects of Bill C-13 is the way it reinforces positive measures by encouraging the government to take into consideration the impact its decisions have on official language minority communities. That impact study is similar to the one the government conducts as part of its gender-based analysis.

Is that an accurate comparison?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much for that question.

Once again, we drafted the provisions in part VII of the proposed act to ensure that all government decisions are ultimately justified based on that study. We want to see what impacts our decisions have on official language minority communities. Since we know we haven't achieved substantive equality between the official languages, sometimes we have to take additional measures. It's important for us to ensure this impact study is always done.

I hope one day I won't be the only Minister of Official Languages to conduct impact studies. I genuinely hope all departments will automatically do them with respect to the official language minority communities. That's really my dream.

I'm also going to champion this cause, but we have to ensure that our act is very clear so impact studies are conducted in all cases.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I like that answer, which leads me to my last question.

We know that French is in decline in Canada. We must spare no effort to ensure that francophones and the French language are protected across Canada.

From what other witnesses who have appeared before our committee have told us, 60% of francophones live in Africa. If we want to expand our francophone community here in Canada, both in and outside Quebec, we really must recruit francophones where they live. Unfortunately, we've also learned that they would encounter many obstacles, such as the French test. The level of difficulty of that test is too high for francophones who are born francophones and who have studied and worked in French.

What could our department do, together with other departments, to solve those problems so we can continue meeting our targets for francophones in Canada, particularly in minority settings such as here at home in London?

• (1625)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Stakeholders have told us they want to ensure that Bill C-13 addresses francophone immigration. I'm very pleased to have worked closely with Minister Fraser, who I believe will be meeting with you next week to discuss francophone immigration. We want to ensure that our bill includes an ambitious immigration strategy with objectives, targets indicators...

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Minister, but time is up.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: There's a very broad consensus in Quebec. All cities and unions, former premiers and all parties in the Quebec National Assembly want Bill 101 to apply to federally regulated businesses. However, you'll be passing new legislation that will interfere with that and you'll be letting businesses choose between the two acts.

Why aren't you listening to Quebec's demands?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First, Mr. Beaulieu, I want to be clear. Our new act largely draws on Quebec's Bill 101. We want to be sure that our federal act is also broad in scope. We also want to ensure...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Pardon me, but that's not all the same thing. Bill 101 is designed to make French the common language in the workplace, whereas the Official Languages Act enables people to work in French. The two acts aren't at all the same.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Federally regulated businesses will have the option of choosing Bill 101, and I would note that 40% of federally regulated businesses do so. However, they'll have the option of choosing the federal regime, but our federal regime isn't more permissive. We want to make sure Quebecers have a choice...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The federal regime is much less binding.

You talked about helping enhance francophone immigration outside Quebec, but there isn't enough francophone immigration in Quebec. That's one of the factors that has been most helpful.

Would you be prepared to have the Official Languages Act provide for measures to enhance francophone immigration in Quebec, not just outside Quebec?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I believe that it's essential to increase the Canadian rate of immigration in Acadia and Quebec. We want to ensure that we contribute to increasing the demographic weight and achieving the target francophone immigration rate. It's therefore important to work with the provinces and territories, because we acknowledge that we all have a role to play. The communities must also play a role.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

My question is about comments made by the Commissioner of Official Languages, who mentioned in his reports that the application of language rights in the public service was problematic. In his 2018-19 report, he said that: "...it is worrisome to note that between 2008 and 2017, the results of the Public Service Employee Survey show that there was no significant progress on any of the issues pertaining to official languages."

We think that the source of the problem is a lack of leadership with respect to official languages in our federal institutions. In view of the systemic problems we have often discussed, it would appear that the Department of Canadian Heritage is not succeeding in upholding official languages rights in the public service.

Do you feel that we should take more concrete action on this, not only by means of this act, but also in general?

• (1630)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much for that very important question.

Our public servants have the right to work in the official language of their choice. It's very important for the government to make its contribution to this. By making the Treasury Board's role more concrete, the minister will do her work to ensure that an evaluation is carried out. She will also assess the working tools used in all matters of French and English as a second language. She will also ensure that people in managerial positions have the required level of language training. We want to make sure that our employees can choose the language in which they wish to work. It's a choice, and it's a right. We want to ensure that it is upheld.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I believe that the commissioner was clear. The government is failing in its role to ensure that public servants can work in French. That's the point we want to underscore.

Do you have any comments on that?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I fully agree with the commissioner. We definitely have to ensure that our public servants can work in the official language of their choice.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

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

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): I have several questions for you, Minister. I would appreciate it if you could be brief.

How many people in a region constitute a strong francophone presence?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you for that question.

I was speaking about the regulatory framework that we still need to finish. As soon as the bill has received royal assent, a definition of what constitutes a strong francophone presence will be given. That's precisely the work that we need to get done.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So there is no definition.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We are going to begin the consultation process as soon as royal assent has been received. For us in New Brunswick, it's a very important question. We want to make sure that we get a proper definition.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

How many airline companies are subject to the Official Languages Act?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I can't give you the exact number of companies that will be subject to the new act.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I guess that means that it will be more than one.

Are you telling me that a number of airline companies will be subject to the new act?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: What's confusing is—

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Sorry, but it's an important question.

To my knowledge, only Air Canada and its subsidiary companies are subject to the Official Languages Act. Are you telling me that the new act will apply to other airline companies?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Absolutely.

But for monetary and administrative penalties, only the four entities that I mentioned, Air Canada, Via Rail, the airport authorities and Marine Atlantic, will be subject to this part of the act.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: When you say airport authorities, does that include the airports and their employees?

Does that mean that employees who are found guilty could be fined \$25,000?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: It's important to know that.

For francophone immigration, we had—and have always had, I believe—an objective of approximately 4.4% for Canada. I was on the committee in 2009—12 years ago—and it was the target at the time. It's still the target now, I think. We have just welcomed approximately 400,000 immigrants to Canada, meaning that there would have been 17,600 francophone immigrants if we had reached that target.

Do you know how many of these 400,000 immigrants to Canada were francophones?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I couldn't tell you.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Why can't you tell me?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Because I don't know.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Does anyone have the answer?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We could certainly give you the answer later.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: It would be useful for the committee to obtain this number. It's important.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We'll be happy to get it for you.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: All right.

In 2019, before the pandemic, Air Canada had sales of \$8 billion. Mr. Gourde touched upon the question earlier. It could be fined \$25,000.

Do you think it's possible to shake the foundations of Air Canada with penalties like these?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I heard comments about the testimony given here on Monday. I don't think the Air Canada people were very happy about the additional powers we gave to the Commissioner of Official Languages.

As I mentioned, the power to make orders and the fact that the commissioner could sign compliance agreements are more important than the fines. It can't be downplayed. I want to emphasize it. When we talk about sanctions and fines, it's tangible and it's something the public can understand. But we mustn't forget that the other powers have more teeth.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Is the government and its new ally, the NDP, planning to make amendments to the bill?

• (1635)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Once again, I'm eager to see Bill C-13 make its way through the House of Commons and the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I should mention in passing that it would be very helpful if the committee could begin a preliminary study. I'm keen to begin drawing up the application regulations because we really want to see the final outcome of this act, which will genuinely change things in the lives of Canadians and Quebecers.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Several studies were also conducted on the previous bill.

Earlier, you mentioned powers to make orders. As Mr. Gourde said earlier, the Commissioner of Official Languages could do things like require airports or even companies like Air Transat to give their employees French courses.

Do you think that the companies that will become subject to the act might challenge it in the Supreme Court?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I'm not a legal expert, and the deputy minister could perhaps answer the question. But anybody can appeal to the court.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We agree on that. However, the power to make orders means that—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Généreux. Your speaking time is up.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We'll see you again in committee, Mr. Généreux.

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, it's over to you now for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for your testimony and for presenting this excellent bill.

[*English*]

I'm going to ask you a question with regard to the court challenges program, if I may.

We know that program is a valuable tool for the official language minority communities to protect their linguistic rights, whether we're talking about the francophones outside of Quebec or the English-speaking community in Quebec. However, both the Bloc and the Conservatives have called for the program to be eliminated.

Can you tell us why the court challenges program is so important to protecting Canada's linguistic duality?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you so much for that very, very important question.

The court challenges program is really important to me. It's been very important in our province in Atlantic Canada, in New Brunswick, in order to bring forward matters when they affect our minority rights. As a result, we've been very clear that the court challenges program needs to remain, and that's why we mention it in our legislation. We recognize that many groups need access to these services in order to bring matters before the courts to protect and to promote our rights.

I can only speak for myself as an Acadian in New Brunswick. The court challenges program has been there to help us protect and promote our duality. That is why it's extremely important to make sure that we preserve this program, again, in order to do exactly what it's meant to do.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Minister.

Like you, I come from a minority linguistic community, the anglophone English-speaking community in Quebec. I read the pro-

posed bill, and I noted that although you say you've included it, I see the word “may”. To me, the word “may” is not obligatory. The court challenges program exists, but why does the bill not make it mandatory if it's so important?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: It is extremely important, and we certainly want to ensure that program is maintained. As I said, it's very important to me, because I know the importance of it and the difference it has made in my province and for groups that I have contact with.

Again, we certainly want to make sure that it underlines the importance of it all, and we'll do all that we can to make sure that is stipulated very clearly.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Again, being in Quebec, we have many schools in the province that privilege and recognize that French is very important and that students learn French. We have one of the highest success rates on the Island of Montreal with one particular school board that I'm very familiar with, the EMSB, which graduates students who are practically fluently bilingual at the end of their studies. We do understand and appreciate learning French.

That being said, we have the anglophone community who, with the introduction of this new modernization of the law, seem to feel there are parts to this law that no longer protect them, or at least feel that the new law does not protect them sufficiently.

What is your reaction to that?

● (1640)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First of all, thank you so much for that question.

I've had the opportunity to meet with different groups across the country and also groups within Quebec, like QCGN. I certainly recognize that anglophones in Quebec perhaps feel a bit squeezed, if you will, but my message to anglophones in Quebec has been that we will not do anything to infringe on their rights. The Official Languages Act is there to protect and to promote and I've made it clear to them.

However, we also have to recognize that French is in decline in this country. It is in decline in Canada and in Quebec. We certainly want to indicate—and I made it very clear to English-speaking Quebecers—that we will always be there to protect their rights. Again, however, we have to recognize that French is in decline in Quebec and also outside of Quebec.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have 25 seconds left, Ms. Lattanzio.

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

[*English*]

I'm going to try to speak as quickly as you do.

With regard to the powers that are going to be attributed to the commissioner—maybe going back to the question of the power to execute judgments—how strict will that be for the commissioner to be able to implement and execute—

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, I need to interrupt you. I'm sorry. Five minutes is quick.

[Translation]

Thank you, Minister, for your generosity, and for agreeing to stay here longer because of the vote that was held.

We are going to suspend the meeting so that the minister can leave us, but the members of her team will remain with us for the next hour.

The meeting is suspended for a few minutes.

• (1640) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: We will now resume our work.

Good afternoon to Ms. Boyer, Ms. Mondou and Ms. Boily, who are members of the minister's team.

We have enough time for a complete round of questions of six minutes each. We'll begin with questions from our first vice-chair, Mr. Joël Godin.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Boyer, Ms. Mondou and Ms. Boily, thank you for remaining with us to present your testimony in the second hour of this meeting.

I would like you to explain the following to me. Based on my reading of the current Official Languages Act, there is some confusion between the powers and responsibilities of each of the departments. Could you describe for me the responsibilities of the Department of Canadian Heritage with respect to the application of the act? How far can your department go and where does the role of the Treasury Board begin?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou (Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To begin with, the Treasury Board, which is the central agency, will have its powers enhanced by the act. How? As the minister mentioned, some powers will no longer be discretionary. From the moment the Treasury Board adopts policies and regulations and has verified the organizations' compliance, many of its powers will henceforth require it to take action, whereas before, it could choose whether or not to act. The directive is no longer that it "may", but rather "must" act. The Treasury Board's role has therefore been strengthened. It will fully perform its role with the aid of new resources. That, after all, is the role of a central agency.

Secondly, many departments, including the Department of Canadian Heritage, have important roles to play with respect to official languages. I think someone asked a question about that earlier. The department provides funds to postsecondary institutions and others through contribution programs. The department has the proper authorities. Granting project contributions constitutes 90% of its mandate. It will therefore continue to perform this role in close cooperation with the communities, because it needs to maintain a dialogue with them to know what their needs are. It is going to continue to do that. It will still be the intermediary with the communities to ensure that the programs offered to them meet their needs.

Mr. Joël Godin: Deputy Minister Mondou, having read the bill, I understand that the Treasury Board can transfer its responsibilities to these institutions. Is that or is that not the case?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: I don't think that the Treasury Board can do that. You would have to specify which clause in the bill you mean for me to be able to give you an answer. The Treasury Board will be plenipotentiary and will be exercising its powers. It is now required exercise these powers, whereas before, it could choose whether or not to do so. It will have to adopt regulations, provide guidelines, prepare updates and monitor everything, which is an important power for the communities.

• (1655)

Mr. Joël Godin: As for the leading role played by the Department of Canadian Heritage, does it involve simply administering transfers of funds to help institutions and organizations?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Its role also includes working closely with the communities. The minister talked about part VII of the act. It's important to be aware of what the communities want to say to us. Our decisions have a major impact on the communities. The Department of Canadian Heritage will therefore continue to have this direct link with the communities to ensure that they are well informed about what they are saying so that they can pass on the information to all the other responsible departments, such as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

I have another question. The minister indicated that the \$123 million would be transferred within the next eight days, because the budget year-end is March 31. Why was there such a long wait? Why this stress on the organizations?

The organizations were aware of the amount, because it was announced in the 2021 budget. Now we learn that the transfer will happen between now and March 31. In any event, we assume that the institutions were informed and that they will receive the funds. Are the funds transferable and applicable to next year, or must they be spent by March 31?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: I'll answer the first part of your question and then ask my colleague to answer the second, because she is really the programs specialist.

When a budget is tabled, the Treasury Board is told how the money is to be spent. That's the first phase. Then, a program needs to be launched and people are asked to submit an application for it, which takes them a few weeks. After that, the applications need to be analyzed. Once that is done and they are accepted, the funds can be transferred.

Ms. Boily can now provide you with further details about the program.

Ms. Sarah Boily (Director General, Official Languages, Department of Canadian Heritage): I have only one thing to add to my colleague's response.

At the moment, we are talking about postsecondary education, a jurisdiction that is exclusively provincial. To spend this money, we therefore need to make sure that we work closely with the provinces. Postsecondary educational institutions that have needs and want to submit an application, have to work through the provinces, meaning that...

Mr. Joël Godin: You'll have to stop there, Ms. Boily, because I have only a minute left.

Ms. Sarah Boily: ... a little more time is required.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, but why end up like that only eight days away from the end of the fiscal year?

I think everything was a little bit sloppy and that someone, somewhere, dragged their feet. It's true, on the one hand, that education is an area of provincial jurisdiction, but on the other hand, why be in that position eight days from the end of the fiscal year?

Something in the process is not working. That's what I'm wondering about.

I have another question. I'd like to return to the particulars about the airline companies, because I believe that's an important matter.

My understanding is that Air Canada and the other three air carriers will have to comply with the Official Languages Act. However, the minister said that all the other transportation firms that provide services to travellers will have to comply with the new act on the use of French in federally-regulated private companies because federally-regulated private companies were removed from the Official Languages Act.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Yes.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's where the difference lies. Not only that, but there will be a two-year waiting period before the act becomes applicable in Quebec and outside Quebec. That's my understanding of it.

Can you confirm all of that?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Yes.

You're right that some existing obligations in the act will be strengthened by means of new powers and tools that the minister mentioned. That's the first thing.

The second thing is that when a new act that places obligations on federally-regulated companies comes into force, it is accompanied by a set of standards, in the form of regulations.

Why the two-year gap? Because it's essential to consult the companies to ensure they are ready. What these companies and communities have told us is that if obligations were imposed without any assistance for them, they would find themselves immediately in violation of the act, which is of no use to anyone.

The two-year period will enable us to work with these companies to help them prepare.

Mr. Joël Godin: Will the commissioner be able to fine these companies \$25,000?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. Six minutes can go by really quickly.

It's Mr. Francis Drouin's turn to speak now.

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

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here. When we sent out the invitations, we wanted to have a general discussion, but then Bill C-13 was introduced, and so we happen to be here, we can get down to the meat of the subject.

The wording of the Official Languages Act was changed from "positive measures" to "the positive measures" because it was thought that it was important to add the word "the" for clarity, particularly in court.

What cultural shift will there be in your department and other federal departments as a result of this change in wording?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What's important in the changes being made to the act is that we want to introduce positive measures that really have an impact on the community. We don't want a string of minor measures that might turn out to be useful. Adding the word "the" also stems from the obligation to consult the communities. That's the first thing.

Secondly, it's important to make sure that the measures taken have a positive impact and remedy any negative aspects that our analyses may have identified in our policy.

Not only are positive measures needed to improve the situation, but we must also ensure that our policy does not have a negative impact on the community. That might turn out to mean a new set of positive measures to fully counter these negative impacts.

● (1700)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Under normal circumstances, for example, the Department of Canadian Heritage could fund the St-Albert Curd Festival in my riding. That could be put forward as a positive measure to support franco-Ontarian culture where I live.

How is your department going to go about analyzing all of the positive measures taken by other entities, like FedDev Ontario, which sometimes funds francophone companies in our region in support of the minority?

How are you going to analyze all the positive measures? Will we have to go and obtain information from the other departments?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: It's not really the Department of Canadian Heritage that will be monitoring all the positive measures, because this obligation applies to all the departments.

If Natural Resources Canada takes a positive measure, for example, it will have to do an analysis, with due regard, of course, to other government programs to ensure that the measure is genuinely beneficial to the community.

But the Department of Canadian Heritage will continue to assist the other departments. The expertise we have acquired and the tools we have developed can help them with this analysis. But ultimately, as the minister mentioned, every time they submit a memorandum to cabinet or take a measure, they will need to carry out this analysis and make sure that they have taken the appropriate steps. That's how the bill strengthens the process.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We know now that the Treasury Board will be playing an enhanced role in strengthening the application of the act. Will it be the usual back-and-forth procedures that often occur between it and the departments for all kinds of projects?

For example, when it asked them how they will implement the positive measures presented in their programs?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: The Treasury Board will have increased monitoring powers. It will therefore be able to adopt policies and guidelines to set some guideposts.

The minister mentioned a regulation in part VII. That's step one. The departments will be given an explanation about how to do the analysis and we will strengthen the process by basing it on the act. Then, the Treasury Board will also be able to check whether the guidelines have been followed.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay.

If the Treasury Board has a monitoring role, it will be able to prevent the introduction of a program or policy if, for example, it deems that the directive with respect to subsection 41(5) has not been complied with.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: We have been having ongoing discussions with the Treasury Board, even now, to ensure that the measures are complied with and that the analysis is carried out. For example, if the analysis were to show that something was missing, the Treasury Board would raise it by saying that the policy and the act are not being complied with. The Treasury Board would of course react that way if the directives had not been applied because there were no consultations or no positive measures, or if certain negative impacts had not been corrected.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

I'm sure that we will have other opportunities for further discussion the next time the bill is being studied by the committee.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It will be hard to say very much about the francophonie when we only have a minute left.

The Chair: Would you like to give the time that remains to one of your colleagues? No? Okay.

Mr. Beaulieu, it's over to you now for six minutes.

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

I'm looking in the public accounts at the so-called positive measures, which are indeed positive for English in Quebec.

Would you agree that, under the Official Languages Act, the objective of all of the grants to Quebec under the Development of Official-Language Communities Program, the Enhancement of Official Languages Program and the Official Languages Health Program is to strengthen English and institutional bilingualism?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: I'd like to make a distinction here, but will allow my colleague to do so.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right.

Ms. Sarah Boily: I wouldn't say that it's true of all the programs.

Let's take the Young Canada Works program, for example, to which you referred the last time we spoke. The Official Languages Branch transfers funds to the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec to create internships for young anglophones who want to practise French in a real-life situation, and for young francophone Quebecers who want to learn English.

Over the past three years, we transferred \$3 million to the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec to fund internships like these. We paid approximately 50% of these funds to young francophone Quebecers and 50% to young anglophone Quebecers. These programs therefore also contribute to the Quebec francophonie.

• (1705)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Let's say that it enables young anglophones to learn French.

Does it allow young anglophones from Quebec to have internships in English settings outside Quebec or internationally?

Ms. Sarah Boily: For a while, we were able to offer interprovincial internships, but with the pandemic, our team is restricting it for the time being to internships in the province.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Nevertheless, almost all of the programs promote English in Quebec. The Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec's program has two components, but I don't know the details. We could talk about it again, because it's difficult to know about all the programs. But the rest of the money is primarily paid to groups like anglophone schools. I think that a very small portion of the funding...

Ms. Sarah Boily: Currently, 50% of the funding from Young Canada Works goes to French-language instruction. And it wouldn't do to forget the Ministers' Council on the Canadian Francophonie's initiative, in which Quebec is participating. It's an initiative we fund that is very beneficial to the Quebec francophonie and the Canadian francophonie. The Department of Canadian Heritage also supports a number of cultural and media organizations that make a strong contribution to Quebec's francophonie.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: On the other hand, based on what I've seen, in Quebec it's the anglophone organizations in the QCGM that are receiving the funding. It's only every now and then that it has to do with French.

Normally, in matters pertaining to the Official Languages Act, does the Department of Canadian Heritage consult Quebec groups that defend French?

Ms. Sarah Boily: Yes. I was in charge of the consultations held in 2019, in which these groups participated...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Which Quebec groups?

Ms. Sarah Boily: There is Impératif français...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That organization also works in Ontario, but in Quebec, there is the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and the Mouvement Québec français.

Ms. Sarah Boily: In the course of our consultations, we generally discuss things with the representatives of these movements.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's not what they told me.

I've already been a member of these groups and I was never consulted by you. In the consultations conducted by Minister Mélanie Jolie on the Official Languages Act, almost none of these groups had been invited.

For Bill C-13, will there be any changes that affect the positive measures?

Ms. Sarah Boily: Definitely.

I'll answer the question, Ms. Mondou.

You've read Bill C-13, and you've seen the added attention we are paying to the promotion and protection of French everywhere in Canada, including Quebec.

We can accordingly expect that these measures will be addressed in the renewed action plan to support Quebec's francophonie, but all the work remains to be done. It's all very positive.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: One of the things that the Quebec government has asked for is to be consulted and to have its say on positive measures rather than having so-called positive measures that strengthen the anglicization of Quebec imposed unilaterally.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: I'll respond to that observation.

In all our programs, we have always worked with our provincial partners, because we have bilateral agreements with them on these programs. By definition, therefore, we work under these agreements with the Government of Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's true for the Canada-Quebec Agreement for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction, but it's also the case for all the granting programs.

It's therefore peculiar that for the modernization of the act, the Government of Quebec is asking not only to be consulted and informed, but also to have a say about it.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Yes.

The Chair: There are 30 seconds left.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: The province has already been consulted on the bill. I could perhaps say something about this.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Please do.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Can I go ahead, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: There are 20 seconds left.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Okay.

We held consultations on the bill with the province. It initially asked us, of course, to respect the jurisdictions, and secondly, to invest whatever funds were needed to move the bill forward.

We really were in contact with the province on a regular basis.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Mondou.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

I like to talk about the definition of "regions with a strong francophone presence".

What criteria do you intend to take into consideration to define "regions with a strong francophone presence"?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To begin with, it was decided not to specify these criteria in the bill, but rather in a regulation, because it will require consultations on matters that were not addressed in the consultations on the bill.

It is therefore during these consultations that communities will be able to help decide what criteria should be used in the definition. A committee of experts also addressed the matter and has begun to ponder the various approaches. Needless to say, we will be taking this committee's report into account, in addition, of course, to holding consultations.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Who is going to be consulted with a view to making the definition fairer and when are these consultations going to begin?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: The minister mentioned that as soon as the bill has received royal assent, assuming that it will, she will be ready to begin the consultations.

Ms. Niki Ashton: With whom will these consultations be held?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: They will be held with the stakeholders that we are already familiar with, meaning minority language community organizations, as well as towns and cities. All interested parties will be asked to give their comments.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Moving on to francophone immigration, it has not been meeting the targets set by the government in the rest of Canada.

Why not put these targets in the act, or at least the francophone immigration objective that could maintain a specific threshold of francophones in certain communities?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: There are two important factors in the section on francophone immigration, in addition to what is provided in the interpretive clause, which specifies how important it is to contribute to maintaining or increasing the francophone presence.

It is unusual to include a policy in an act, but there will be one in the section on immigration, in which two criteria are mentioned: first of all the requirement to set specific immigration targets to achieve the objective, and secondly, factoring in the importance of immigration to maintain the demographic weight.

That needs to be part of the thinking that goes into the policy and be reflected in the policy eventually adopted by the Minister of Immigration.

Ms. Niki Ashton: In Bill C-13, The Department of Canadian Heritage continues its coordination and implementation role for the act, while not having any authority over other federal institutions.

Why was the Treasury Board not made the one and only central agency responsible for implementation?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: The Treasury Board will have a very important implementation role to play. It will adopt guidelines, regulations, and in fact everything that provides a legal framework for the departments. It's really the Treasury Board that will be establishing the obligations to which departments are subject, and also afterwards verify that the departments are fulfilling these obligations. It therefore has an essential role to play in the implementation of the act.

Ms. Niki Ashton: We, like many of the people who spoke here, find that the act does not go far enough to ensure that the Treasury Board is responsible for this implementation. We have the same crucial concern.

I'd like to return to one of the questions asked by one of my colleagues and it is a rather specific one. Under the modernized act, will the commissioner be able to impose \$25,000 fines on other companies that provide passenger service?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: The monetary penalties will apply only in the context of the Official Languages Act, and will be applicable to companies named by the minister, like Air Canada, Marine Atlantic, the airport authorities, etc.

However, I would like to say something about the \$25,000 amount that has been prominent in our discussions. That's not the maximum fine that can be imposed on a company. In fact, there could be three different violations on the same day, three complaints for which the commissioner could impose fines of \$25,000 each. So on a given day, a company, let's say Air Canada for instance, could be fined a total of \$75,000. The \$25,000 is only the limit per violation, and not per company. I just wanted to point that out.

• (1715)

Ms. Niki Ashton: There's another matter of concern to us, namely the federal-provincial agreements. We questioned the minister about this. This was clearly a missed opportunity to support francophone communities by means of agreements covering the main issues of everyday life.

Why wasn't this included in the act?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: The minister answered this question very thoroughly, and I'm not sure I can do any better.

I nevertheless would like to add an item of information. You can't judge the past, because new measures will be implemented to strengthen part VII of the act. This addition will apply not only to bilateral agreements, but also, generally speaking, to all government decisions. It's difficult to judge past results, because the obligation will be strengthened by this measure.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mondou.

We still have a little time left for questions.

We have a new colleague with us today, Mr. Lehoux.

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

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for joining us today.

This is in fact my first time with the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Joël Godin: Bravo!

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I've come at the right time, when you're analyzing Bill C-13.

As it happens, the following appears in the Commissioner of Official Languages' report:

Canadian Heritage, as part of its Official Languages Support Programs, adapted its management rules to maintain funding to recipient organizations despite delays in delivering promised results or the refocusing of their activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

That's understandable. Can you comment, Deputy Minister, on the delays being alluded to by the commissioner?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: I'm going to ask my colleague, Sarah Boily, to answer your question. However, I'd like to add that when funds are not delivered in the specific month, they are often carried over to the next fiscal year. In other words, the money is not lost.

So, over to my colleague.

Ms. Sarah Boily: I can confirm what Ms. Mondou just said.

Many of the supports and programs are for education. As you know, some schools closed during the pandemic. There were also some exchange programs that we normally funded to give young people immersion opportunities in the communities, and language-learning opportunities, that were put on hold because it was impossible to travel.

For the programs that were affected, we adjusted things to carry over the funds to the following fiscal year in the hope that the rules would become more flexible, that travel could resume and that schools would open again.

And that, in fact, is what is happening.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you.

I am still somewhat apprehensive. One of my daughters lived in Edmonton, Alberta, for 14 years. She was on my grandchildren's elementary school parents committee, and the fact that the committee had not received the expected funds was creating anxiety. It seems a bit onerous. My questions are about how we could streamline the process. I hope we will be able to emphasize this in our discussions about the bill.

I have another question about the Treasury Board's committee of ministers. It consists of five or six ministers, including Ms. Fortier, Ms. Freeland, Ms. Lebouthillier, and Ms. Murray as well as Mr. Hussen.

Does the minister of Canadian Heritage sit on this committee?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: If my memory serves me correctly, I don't think Minister Petitpas Taylor sits on the Treasury Board's committee of ministers. However, this committee is not the only one to deal with official languages. Several cabinet committees deal with matters of policy, economics and other areas. Official languages is therefore not exclusively with the Treasury Board. I wanted to point that out.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: What is the percentage of bilingual officials at the Department of Canadian Heritage?

Can you give us a number? If not, could you forward it to us?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: We can get that to you, because we have it somewhere. There is a very high level of bilingualism at the Department of Canadian Heritage. We're lucky.

• (1720)

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I'd be grateful if you could provide that to the committee. It would be interesting to see that information.

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Yes, of course.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Could you also provide the committee with the list of organizations that were consulted in connection with Bill C-13?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Yes, certainly.

There were 50 consultations, including some roundtable discussions and a summit. We'd be happy to send you the list of people and organizations consulted.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Okay.

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr. Lehoux.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, my colleague is giving me the rest of her speaking time, so I will avail myself of it and carry on.

Ms. Mondou, earlier, you told me that according to the act, the Treasury Board could not transfer its responsibilities and you asked me to quote from the bill. We can read the following in section 25:

25 (1) Subsection 46(1) of the Act is replaced by the following:

...

(3) Subsection 46(2) ...by replacing paragraphs (c) to (g) with the following:

(c) delegate any of its powers and duties under this section in respect of another federal institution to the deputy head or other administrative head of that institution.

What I want to demonstrate, Ms. Mondou, is that it's extremely burdensome. You just answered my colleague by saying that there were several committees discussing official languages in addition to the Treasury Board committee of ministers. It's complicated and difficult, and that's the problem with respect to the Official Languages Act.

The Chair: Mr. Vice-Chair, that's all the time we have.

Mr. Joël Godin: Oh no!

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I warned you.

The next person to speak is Mr. Iacono, who will share his speaking time with Ms. Kayabaga.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's right.

I'd like to clarify something for my colleague Mr. Beaulieu, who was speaking earlier about consultations with Quebec organizations. I remember that the Mouvement Québec français had come to testify. The Quebec organizations were there.

Ms. Mondou, Bill C-13 includes a provision about the right to work and to be served in French in Quebec and in other regions with a strong francophone presence.

Can you give us the definition of "strong francophone presence", and tell us whether it's the same in Quebec and outside Quebec?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: Thank you for your question.

The regulations that are going to be adopted—and we are hoping that the bill will be adopted, of course—will address this matter and establish parameters to define what constitutes a region with a strong francophone presence. It's not in the bill itself because there are going to be consultations to make sure that the definition is appropriate and that it will meet the needs of the communities.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Will a single definition apply to Quebec and the other provinces?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: I'll let Ms. Boyer answer that question.

Ms. Julie Boyer (Assistant Deputy Minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, Department of Canadian Heritage): It will apply to all federally-regulated private companies in Quebec. Outside Quebec, it will apply to regions where there is a strong concentration of francophones, as defined in the regulations.

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

I'll give the floor to my colleague now.

The Chair: Over to you now, Ms. Kayabaga.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I have two questions, which will be brief because I don't want to take up much of your time.

First, are funds set aside for the support and assistance of francophones who immigrate to mainly anglophone regions?

I am thinking mainly of newcomers and immigrant women who move to places where there is no access to medical care in French and who have to figure things out for themselves as best they can.

Also, have funds been earmarked for the support of organizations that provide assistance to racialized immigrant women settling in francophone communities outside Quebec?

Ms. Isabelle Mondou: I'll ask my colleague Ms. Boily to answer that.

Ms. Sarah Boily: Our colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada could give you all the details about their programs. They do in fact have programs to support reception and integration services in francophone regions outside Quebec. I know that they fund a series of networks called RIF, or Francophone Immigration Networks, whose mandate is to help francophone immigrants settle in these regions and to inform them about where to go to find services.

• (1725)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: London is not a bilingual city, but it has the francophone designation because a certain percentage of francophones live there. How can your department support cities like London so that they can be in a position to retain francophones? What kind of investments do you think could be made to achieve that?

Ms. Sarah Boily: That's an excellent question.

We definitely have programs to encourage this, such as French courses for residents of London. The focus here is on young elementary and high school students. Some tools have also been developed for adults. You have no doubt heard of the Mauril app, which is free and accessible to all Canadians. The application focuses on Canadian cultural products in connection with second official language instruction. After that, I would encourage every city in the same situation as London to build bridges with francophone cities in Quebec, or with other Canadian cities interested in the francophonie.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you for your answer.

I think that...

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Kayabaga. You have 15 seconds left.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Okay.

We could also give consideration to a program that might encourage other cities where francophones live to obtain this designation, because it's useful for education, medical care and many other things.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us to the end of this meeting.

On behalf of all the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I'd like to thank Ms. Petitpas Taylor's team, which is very knowledgeable in its field.

Thank you for the details you were able to provide us with in your testimony. You agreed to send us some documents concerning a number of questions that were asked. If you think of other information that could help us as part of this study, don't hesitate to provide us with additional documentation through our clerk. We are truly grateful.

And thank you for coming, Mr. Lehoux.

The meeting is adjourned.

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