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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 31st meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to the Standing Order of Monday, May 30, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

Today's meeting is in hybrid format, pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on June 23, 2022. Members may take part in person or through Zoom.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules for the witnesses and members.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the videoconference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. Please mute your mic when you are not speaking.

For interpretation, those participating through Zoom have the choice, at the bottom of their screen, between three channels: floor, English or French. Members attending in person in the room can use their headset after selecting the channel desired.

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

Members in the room who wish to speak need only raise their hands. Members participating via the Zoom application must use the “Raise Hand” function. The clerk of the committee and I will do our best to follow the order. Thank you for your patience and understanding in this regard.

Pursuant to our routine motion, I wish to inform the committee that all witnesses have completed the required login tests prior to the meeting.

I would also like to welcome Mr. Brassard, who is replacing Mr. Gourde on the best committee on Parliament Hill.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): That's what all my colleagues have told me. Thank you.

The Chair: I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

For our first panel, we have with us today Vanessa Herrick, executive director of the English Language Arts Network Quebec, and Donald Barabé, president of the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec.

Ms. Herrick and Mr. Barabé, we usually give the witnesses five minutes for their opening remarks. Once the opening remarks are finished, we move on to the rounds of questions. If you don't have time to finish your presentation, you could do so indirectly through your answers to the various questions you'll be asked.

To begin, I'll give the floor to Vanessa Herrick for five minutes.

Ms. Vanessa Herrick (Executive Director, English Language Arts Network Quebec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you for inviting me. I'm going to be addressing the room in English today.

[*Translation*]

However, I will be able to answer your questions in French or English.

[*English*]

My name is Vanessa Herrick, and I'm the executive director of the English Language Arts Network.

We're a not-for-profit organization that connects, supports and creates opportunities for English-speaking artists and cultural workers of all disciplines in every region of Quebec. We share expertise and resources for career advancement, funding opportunities, employment opportunities and calls for participation in the arts. We advocate for our members' interests and make common cause with the francophone community.

I want to start today by thanking the committee for inviting us to present.

We're joining today to share the experience of our community as English speakers in Quebec and to stand as allies with our French-speaking partners and colleagues across the country. The attention being paid to the issue of protecting French in our country is paramount, and we're ready to support and add our efforts to this work in any way that we can. We believe that one community can be raised and celebrated without there being any negative impact on the other. We greatly commend the work being done by the committee and by so many others in the government to ensure that Canada is a country of at least two official languages.

I'm here to speak about the experience of English-speaking artists in Quebec. I have five minutes. I'm going to do my best. I am going to read a fair amount so that I don't miss things that are important. I hate reading when I'm talking to people, so forgive me as I stare at the desk, but I want to make sure that I get through things.

First, I'll speak a bit about artists in Quebec. Quebec is, of course, a province that celebrates its culture and its art. I will give credit. Despite whatever language tensions may exist and may be increasing under Bill 96, we are living under a government that supports the arts, and I want to make that clear. We feel that support.

What is a unique experience for artists in Quebec is that the linguistic divide impacts artists. In 2016, English-speaking artists in the province earned less than their francophone counterparts, making on average a median income of 85 cents for every dollar made by a francophone artist. To make that clear, an artist in Canada—this includes Quebec—makes on average \$24,000 a year, while the average median income is closer to \$45,000. Already, we're talking about people who are living very precariously.

On the national level, statistics from the 2016 Canadian census show that anglophone artists from Quebec have a lower median income than the rest of the Canadian artists. These findings are especially surprising when considering that nationally, English speakers in Quebec represent a significant portion of Canadian artists. Anglophones in Quebec account for 4.6% of all Canadian artists, despite representing 2.8% of the Canadian labour force. The data indicates that two factors, occupation and language, are related to the discrepancies of income levels of these people.

I want to begin with a bit of a story. This summer, when consultations were being done across the country, I had the great honour to meet and speak with a lot of people who work on this issue. Somebody from the federal government said something to me in conversations around Bill C-13. They said there is no difference between official language minority communities across the country. They face exactly the same thing.

While I recognize that this is a result of the effort for the battle for equity that many official language minority communities have been searching for for years, I don't think that's true. I think the challenges that we face are unique. We both face challenges. However, and I want this to be clear—

• (1110)

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: Okay.

Unfortunately, English speakers in Quebec are the only official language minority community in the country with a provincial government legislating against them using their language. This is a very clear difference. This is a recent difference, but one that I think needs to be considered.

We don't know for sure how Bill 96 will impact the arts directly. We know, of course, that it will, as it impacts all English speakers in Quebec. We are hearing of discrepancies in the way that the bill will be applied. We don't know any of this for sure yet, but we are hearing that large productions coming from other places to Que-

bec—mostly American, to be honest—will not be subject to Bill 96.

The Chair: Can you wrap up, Ms. Herrick, please?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: Yes.

We are a community that is facing great challenges coming, and in Bill C-13 I would like to encourage that those.... I recognize that federal legislation is not where provincial language politics should be played out, but I encourage you to keep them in mind when you are reviewing the language and to make sure that the English-speaking community of Quebec is included in a balanced way.

Thank you.

The Chair: *Merci.* I know it's tricky. Five minutes is too short, I know, but you will have plenty of time to go through your presentation during questions.

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: Yes, because I have more notes.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Barabé. You have five minutes.

Mr. Donald Barabé (President, Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to give you a number of facts this morning.

The first is that translation plays a vital role in applying the Official Languages Act. It's what allows Canadians to exercise their constitutional right not to speak the other official language. It's at the heart of the social contract, the social fabric of Canada.

The second fact is that a user-pay concept for translation was put in place in the federal public service in 1995. In effect, departments, which were entitled to free translation from 1841 to 1995, now have to pay for it.

The third fact is that the user-pay concept has led to major and unforeseen shifts. Departments have stopped translating certain texts, are only doing so on request or are using machine translation or unqualified resources to do so. At the same time, this prevents the Translation Bureau from properly serving Canadians and the federal government.

The fourth fact is that the lack of free funding has resulted in the dispersion of translation budgets across departments. The Government of Canada and Canada are the largest purchasers of translation in the world, proportionately. The dispersion of translation budgets has led to the weakening and fragmentation of the Canadian translation industry, which plays a key role in the application of Canada's official languages policy.

The fifth fact is that the Treasury Board recognizes that the Translation Bureau is no longer able to play its essential stewardship role with respect to the security of the provision of linguistic services to Parliament, courts and the federal government.

The sixth fact is that the Translation Bureau's services are optional and not free of charge, contrary to the Translation Bureau Act, passed in 1934. I will quote the English text of the act because it is clearer.

[*English*]

It says, “The Bureau shall” act for all government departments, agencies, boards and commissions in both Houses of Parliament “in all matters relating to the making and revising of translations”. As well, all the departments, agencies, boards and commissions “shall collaborate with the Bureau”.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

The seventh fact is that the Translation Bureau was created in 1934 to put an end to the anarchy that existed within the federal government regarding the management of translation. Unfortunately, this anarchy has returned, and the situation must absolutely be corrected.

The eighth fact is an anomaly, because the private sector does not often speak in favour of government institutions. In this case, the private sector, both in translation and interpretation, is very much in favour of strengthening the Translation Bureau and making better use of the federal government's purchasing power in translation.

The ninth and final fact concerns the former minister of Public Service and Procurement Canada, Judy Foote, who, in February 2017, made a commitment on behalf of the Government of Canada: “It's a new day for the Translation Bureau. We are restoring this institution's reputation. We are turning things around. We have a plan for new management, for succession and ... for making the Translation Bureau mandatory again.”

I'd now like to make four recommendations to the committee.

My first recommendation is to apply what is in the White Paper released by Canadian Heritage in 2021, namely, “to strengthen the role of the translation and interpretation functions within the federal administrative apparatus, notably the Translation Bureau”. That would mean truly enforcing the Translation Bureau Act by making the use of the bureau mandatory again, rather than optional, and by making its services free to departments.

My second recommendation is to give the bureau the same mandate as NASA, which has two mandates: to send Americans to space—a mandate that everyone knows—and to use its purchasing power to help develop the American aerospace industry.

The federal government's purchasing power in translation is the greatest in the world, proportionally speaking, and—

The Chair: I'd ask you to wrap up quickly, Mr. Barabé.

Mr. Donald Barabé: My last three recommendations are to use the federal government's purchasing power to develop the translation industry, to amend the Official Languages Act to include the importance of translation, and to ensure adequate funding for uni-

versity training programs in translation and interpretation. As you know, there is a shortage of interpreters and that needs to be addressed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barabé.

Thank you both for your opening remarks.

The procedure for the question period is that members will take turns asking you questions, choosing to ask one or the other. During the first round of questions, each member has six minutes, including questions and answers.

We'll begin with the former vice-chair of the committee, Joël Godin, who now has the floor for six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today. It's always nice to see them in person. We're used to virtual, but it will never replace human contact.

My first question is for you, Mr. Barabé.

You said that the Translation Bureau Act had been changed in 1995 to introduce the user-pay concept. Who was Canada's prime minister in 1995?

Mr. Donald Barabé: The act wasn't amended, Mr. Godin. It was just an administrative change. The Translation Bureau Act has been unchanged since it was enacted in 1934.

The federal government simply decided, because that was popular with the government—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Barabé, I need to stop you, because you'll understand that our time is very limited.

My question is simple: who was the prime minister of Canada at the time?

Mr. Donald Barabé: I'm not sure.

Mr. Joël Godin: It was Jean Chrétien.

Mr. Donald Barabé: Okay.

Mr. Joël Godin: So it was the Liberal Party of Canada that was in power.

Mr. Barabé, we're here today to study Bill C-13, which aims to modernize the Official Languages Act.

You had to finish your speech quickly, but your third recommendation was to amend the Official Languages Act to include the importance of translation. Can you speak more to that, give us the tools required, and perhaps even indicate the wording of the amendments that could be made to the new version of the act?

Mr. Donald Barabé: I would be pleased to send the wording of these amendments to you later, because I don't have it with me.

As I stated in the first two facts of my speech, translation plays a crucial role in the application of the Official Languages Act. The word “translation” isn't even in the act and should be. I also believe that the act should enshrine the role of the institution that Canada has established to ensure compliance with the purpose of the act, namely, the Translation Bureau.

Mr. Joël Godin: You also said that the current government made a commitment in 2017 to return to a more accessible—I wouldn't say free because nothing in life is free—use of translation for all federal departments and agencies, in other words, to return to the pre-1995 formula.

Has this commitment been kept?

• (1120)

Mr. Donald Barabé: No.

Mr. Joël Godin: What should be done now to ensure that our constitutional rights are maintained and that Canadians, parliamentarians and public servants have real-time access to bilingual documents?

Mr. Donald Barabé: The indications I have are that the blockage is in the federal government, specifically Treasury Board. So that's where you should intervene.

Mr. Joël Godin: We've also seen in the news recently that there's a problem with accreditation. My understanding is that interpreters are available, but not all of them are necessarily accredited. The federal government claims that it has to turn to the private sector or other groups in order to have access to interpretation services that are less—dare I say—regulated and controlled. This would be detrimental to parliamentarians in particular.

Can you confirm that?

Mr. Donald Barabé: I can confirm that there is currently a shortage of interpreters on Parliament Hill.

Accreditation is done by the Translation Bureau, and there's a problem with this right now. That's why my fourth recommendation is to strengthen translation and interpretation training programs in Canada. There are only two such programs in Canada, and at least one more is needed. What's more, these programs are severely underfunded.

Mr. Joël Godin: Is it accurate to say that accredited interpreters haven't been hired to provide their services in the House of Commons?

Mr. Donald Barabé: Yes, there are accredited interpreters. Interpretation is provided both by people from the private sector and by public servants from the Translation Bureau, a combination that doesn't pose a problem.

We need to work with Parliament, the House and the Senate to create the best possible conditions to attract interpreters.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do we have a problem with quantity and accessibility at this time?

Mr. Donald Barabé: In Canada, there is a looming and growing shortage.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

Ms. Herrick, you said earlier that you didn't know what Bill 96 would change, but that it would certainly have an impact on anglophone artists in Quebec.

Help us help you.

I understand that this is probably a minority in Quebec, but we also have to take into account what francophone artists outside Quebec are experiencing on their end. So I don't think English-speaking artists in Quebec are treated any differently from francophone linguistic minorities outside Quebec.

What do you mean by—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I'm sorry for interrupting you, but your six minutes are up.

Ms. Lattanzio now has the floor for six minutes. Go ahead.

[*English*]

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

This morning I'm going to begin my questions with the representative of ELAN, the English Language Arts Network of Quebec. Perhaps we could start with giving you the opportunity to answer my colleague's question. I too am interested in knowing what challenges you face for your artists in Quebec in terms of financing, perhaps, or whatever it may be. Could you elaborate, please?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: I think English-speaking artists in Quebec face a lot of the same issues that any other English-speaking community would. Again, many people in the Canadian artist community do choose to come to Quebec because it is a province that celebrates its culture and arts. However, once you are within the community, there is a very strong majority of francophone artists. If you are in a discipline where language is not key to your practice—such as a dancer, for example—the restrictions are less there, but there have always been challenges in building bridges between the community.

It manifests itself in different ways. Trying to find performance space is an enormous problem outside of Montreal. Trying to find partnerships with more established companies can be an issue. The challenges are often very specific to the discipline, and often it comes down to how English-speaking artists are welcome to participate as long as they participate in a way that works within the work that is already being produced within the majority's vision. I think that's probably a shared challenge in other areas as well. That's one of the big ones.

Also, then, the pandemic exacerbated a lot of those issues.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: If I could interject, Ms. Lattanzio, the interpreters are telling me that you seem to be using your computer microphone, rather than the one on your headset.

[*English*]

I stopped the timer, so you'll have your full six minutes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Is this better? Is the sound better?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: That's better. Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay. I'm sorry about that.

How does Bill 96 impact your group in a negative way, and what can this committee do at the federal level to be able to help you? That would be my first question.

The second question would be, what do you think about the court challenges program in the proposed reform law being optional? Do you believe that it should be mandatory once we finalize the drafting of this law? How could that be a positive element for the minority English-speaking community in Quebec?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: I think there is a straightforward and simple answer to your question about how this committee can help. Well, we can ensure that the English-speaking minority community of Quebec is not left out of consideration when there is, of course, a needed focus put on the French-speaking minority communities. I think there needs to be a balance there that will help send the signal across the country that despite the fact that our language is not under threat, our community is under threat.

Specifically, under Bill 96, if anything you're doing requires more than 25 people—any kind of production or discipline or work that you're doing—you are potentially under Bill 96, so we're looking at theatre, we're looking at film and we're looking at large dance productions. All your communication will have to be in French. What we have heard is that if you are coming from outside of Quebec, you may be exempted, but English speakers within Quebec will not be allowed that exemption, so we are specifically being targeted.

I'm sorry, but could you repeat the last part of the question?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, we can't hear you. Please unmute your microphone.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The last part of my question deals with the court challenges program. That's a program that's been put in place over the years to be able to help minority English linguistic communities go before the courts and challenge decisions that are being taken against them.

It is an optional prerogative or an option by virtue of the reformed law. In your opinion, should it be mandatory? If so, why?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: I think so. Absolutely. I think we, as a community, are facing a great deal of uncertainty, so any efforts being made at the federal level to show support or give a voice to the English-speaking community of Quebec would be necessary.

Bill 96 has not been laid out. We don't know exactly how it's going to be implemented, but we know it's going to impact our community. That much has been made very clear.

We know that we don't have a lot of recourse at this point, so any efforts that could be made mandatory at any level to assist us would be absolutely necessary and greatly appreciated.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: With regard to financing, can you enlighten this committee and let us know if you have received any funding from the federal government? If so, I imagine it's come from the heritage department.

In the last year, have you received any sums of money?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: We had two major new projects funded by Canadian Heritage in the last year that we're very excited about. One is on the state of the arts with equity, diversity and inclusion. It's a study being done around Quebec to see the situation of diversity, inclusion and equity within the arts, because it's an issue we know that the arts struggle with.

The other is for a community digital hub. We're going to be bringing underprivileged artists into an area where they can access higher-level digital tools to help them begin to put their practice online, because the pandemic obviously impacted artists enormously.

Those are funded by the federal government, and they will have a great impact on our community.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lattanzio. You have less than 10 seconds left—

[*English*]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I have one more question to ask, if I can, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I know you haven't produced a brief. Would you be able to produce something in writing for the committee's consideration?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: Absolutely. It's our intention to have something done, certainly within the next week.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

You cut Mr. Godin off very abruptly, while you just gave Ms. Lattanzio more time. The same criteria need to apply—

The Chair: Mr. Vice-chair, I have the clock in front of me. In fact, I did give Mr. Godin more time, namely, 6 minutes and 10 seconds, while Ms. Lattanzio has only had 5 minutes and 58 seconds so far. Even with her last question, she still wasn't at six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. I'll mind my own business.

The Chair: You can ask your assistants to watch the clock.

Mr. Godin, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Joël Godin: I do, Mr. Chair.

I just want to reiterate what my colleague the second vice-chair said, because I think it's important. That said, I defer to your diligence, and thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your confidence, and I assure you that I'm being very strict about the six minutes for everyone.

The next questions will be from the committee's second vice-chair, Mr. Beaulieu, who will have six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd also like to thank our witnesses for their presentations.

Ms. Herrick, my first question is for you. You talked a bit about your funding. Does it come primarily from the federal government's development of official-language communities program?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: I don't know the exact percentage, but I would say that it provides about 70% of our funding. We don't just work with the federal government, though, and we also have a program funded by the Government of Quebec to help English-speaking artists access Quebec funding.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Do anglophone artists and cultural workers have access to the same programs as all Quebec artists?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: Yes. There are no regulations or laws that prevent this. However, like other minorities—

[*English*]

I'm sorry. I'll say it in English, to make sure I'm clear.

Is there inequity? They are allowed to apply, the same way anyone else is allowed to apply. Absolutely.

Is the funding distributed equally? I have heard from artists that they don't feel that's the case. It's a very difficult thing to answer, because a lot of it is subjective.

Yes, there are English-speaking artists in Quebec funded by the Quebec government, but I would say many feel they have greater success with the federal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's great.

You said earlier that the median income of anglophone artists was lower than that of francophone artists. However, this measure somewhat obscures the relationship between the richest and the poorest. Or do you have figures on average income?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: Are you talking about the average income across Canada?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: No. You said that in Quebec, the median income of anglophone artists was lower. Do you know their average income?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: No. The figure I have is 85% compared to francophones.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Great.

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: I can find the information and send it to you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Are you basing this on the first official language spoken?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: Yes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That still includes 33% of immigrants, which is a lot of people.

What's a bit surprising to someone who's not used to it is that Quebec is steeped in anglophone culture and music. It's hard to even hear a French song on any radio station there.

What do you think about that?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: You're right. English-speaking Quebec artists have the same problem as French-speaking Quebec artists.

[*English*]

They have to compete with American artists and English-speaking Canadian artists.

[*Translation*]

It's a problem for all artists in Quebec, whether they're anglophone or francophone.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Mr. Barabé, I'll now turn to you. You said that, since 1995, the Translation Bureau, which you represent, has been required to recover all of its direct and indirect costs. However, departments do not have the funding.

I quite agree with you that translation is critical to the linguistic currency of the federal government. However, these cuts certainly diminish the quality of translation. We see that every day here.

● (1135)

Mr. Donald Barabé: Absolutely, and that makes the role of the Translation Bureau very difficult. Take interpretation, for example the bureau no longer provides interpretation for conferences given by departments, but now devotes all its resources to Parliament Hill.

I want to clarify something. I don't represent the Translation Bureau, even though I was the vice president and spent my entire career there. I retired in 2012.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have one question left.

Translators in Quebec have launched legal proceedings. They say that the new model of proposing similarities between texts in order to translate them complicates matters. A lot of translators have told me that their working conditions have deteriorated considerably. Some can't even do it.

Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Mr. Donald Barabé: I can't tell you more because the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec will be called to appear in this matter. So I would prefer not to comment on it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Does Bill C-13 contain provisions that could address this issue?

Mr. Donald Barabé: As I said earlier, it would be a good idea to enshrine translation and its importance to the application of the Official Languages Act. Respect for the fundamental constitutional right not to speak the other official language and to obtain quality services and documentation in the official language of one's choice must be enshrined in the act. Whether in the preamble or in the body of the text, it would be important to recognize the importance of translation and, at the same time, the importance of the institution that has the role of enforcing these provisions.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Before 1995, translation was done by the Translation Bureau, wasn't it?

Mr. Donald Barabé: Since the creation of the Bureau in 1934, and until 1995, it was mandatory to go through the Translation Bureau. Departments did not have to pay for these services because parliamentary appropriations were allocated to the bureau.

The user-pay concept has been in place for 27 years now, and this has led to major shifts.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It's a shame because—

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

The next questions will be from Ms. Ashton, from Manitoba. She has six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank our witnesses today.

Mr. Barabé, my questions are for you. First, I'd like to thank you for your testimony. You've given us a number of disturbing insights into the state of translation in Canada and the devastating impact of the privatization these services.

In the last five years, the Translation Bureau has reduced its services to federal departments to meet the needs of Parliament.

Since the Translation Bureau no longer provides these services outside Parliament, do you know if any agency is responsible for ensuring that the government actually meets its obligation to ensure the equality of official languages in the machinery of government?

Mr. Donald Barabé: That is the Translation Bureau's exclusive mandate. That's why I wanted to quote subsection 4(1) of the Translation Bureau Act. However, that mandate was taken away as a result of the 1995 decision. Basically, it's now up to agencies like Treasury Board to make things right.

Ms. Niki Ashton: My next question is about translation, a topic that concerns us as parliamentarians right now.

The House of Commons is reportedly currently considering the possibility of using interpreters not accredited by the Translation Bureau to meet its interpretation needs. What do you think of this proposal?

Mr. Donald Barabé: As president of the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec, I have personally written to the Speaker of the House of Commons to express our concerns about the use of interpreters who have not been accredited beforehand.

I am about to write to him again to tell him that the ordre and other organizations working in translation and interpretation will be proposing concrete measures in the short and medium term to address this problem, including measures that should resolve it once and for all. I can give you a taste of that, if you like.

• (1140)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Donald Barabé: For example, a new scholarship program could be created for interpretation students. That has solved all the shortages for years, so it would be a huge help. That's one of the solutions.

Ms. Niki Ashton: We share your concerns about this.

My next question on Bill C-13 concerns the fact that it does not propose any amendments to emphasize the importance of translation, as you said, and does not ensure that the needs of the Translation Bureau are met to ensure the equality of the two official languages are addressed. Instead, the government seems to suggest that administrative changes will suffice.

Do you think it would be appropriate to include additional provisions in the bill to ensure that the Translation Bureau will serve the government as a whole and help ensure the equality of French and English?

Mr. Donald Barabé: I think this is the best way to guarantee that and to ensure that there will be no administrative changes that could be harmful, as has been the case since 1995. We must not forget that the Official Languages Act has a special status: it is a quasi-constitutional act. So that would be very important.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Furthermore, do you think that the Translation Bureau is proactive enough in encouraging potential interpreters to become accredited in order to offer their services across the government?

Mr. Donald Barabé: I think the Translation Bureau's hands and feet are tied in many areas, including interpretation, because its budgets haven't changed since 1995. It doesn't really help things at all.

However, I can assure you that the private sector and all the associations, including the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec, are working closely with the bureau to help it address the issues.

Ms. Niki Ashton: You've already given an example, but what more could the government do to encourage the next generation of interpreters and translators?

Mr. Donald Barabé: There are two things.

First, the university translation programs need to be built up. There are only two, or actually one and a half. These should be reinforced and at least a third added.

Next, a scholarship program should be created. Personally, I joined the Translation Bureau through a scholarship program, so I know how amazing that is. Scholarships in interpretation are needed this time.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I was going to add, not to assume your age, that the costs of education for young university students are much higher now. The financial crisis is pretty serious.

Thank you very much for your suggestions and for emphasizing the importance of supporting the translation system in our country.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

I'll now give the floor to Richard Lehoux for five minutes.

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

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

My first question is for Mr. Barabé.

Do you support an amendment that would make the Treasury Board the central agency responsible for all aspects of the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Donald Barabé: I'm not opposed to that.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Would you support an amendment like that?

Mr. Donald Barabé: It depends on the mandate entrusted to it by giving it that responsibility.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Perfect. Thank you.

In your brief, you say that many departments use unqualified resources. Can you give some concrete examples?

• (1145)

Mr. Donald Barabé: I'll give you an example. In late August, the Université de Montréal received a request for interns from 13 federal departments and agencies, which I will not name. According to a Treasury Board directive adopted in 1995, departments are not allowed to hire translators; only the Translation Bureau can do so, yet all departments now employ translators. That is one of the major shifts I mentioned earlier. So there is a need, because we have returned to the exact same situation that existed before the bureau was created in 1934.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: What you just said refers to the passage in your brief where you mention the existence of a second translation bureau created by the departments, right?

Mr. Donald Barabé: That's right.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: But we can't know which departments these are.

Mr. Donald Barabé: I'd prefer not to name them, but I can if necessary.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: If it's necessary, we can find out.

I have another question along the same lines. You also say in your brief that many departments have stopped having some of their documents translated. Is that the case? How do you explain that situation?

Mr. Donald Barabé: To explain it, I have to tell you what happened in 1995. In 1994, the Translation Bureau had an appropriated budget. In 1995, when it was decided to charge for the bureau's services, the parliamentary appropriations that were allocated to the bureau were distributed among all the departments according to their previous use, minus a commission retained by the Treasury Board. This has never changed since 1995, while demand has more than tripled. Since departments don't know where to find the money, they save as much as they can. One way to save money is to stop having documents translated or to have them translated on request.

I'll give you an example. My daughter applied for a bilingual position in the public service. She had to request a translation of the job posting and the job description because they hadn't been translated. Incidentally, this happened in the Translation Bureau's home department.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: That's interesting. Thank you.

Mr. Donald Barabé: I've just given you a hint.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Noted. Thank you.

You just mentioned the shortage of interpreters. What do you suggest for the short term? Can an amendment be made to the bill on that?

I find your idea of increasing university capacity and creating a third opportunity interesting, but how can that be done quickly and in the short term? We are in a unique situation.

Mr. Donald Barabé: Help should be given to the Translation Bureau in the way of funding so that it can set up a computer system that would include a schedule that would allow interpreters in Canada to view and register for work opportunities. The bureau does not have the financial means to create such a system.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: At the outset, you talked about amendments. We've been discussing them for a while now. Can you confirm that you'll be able to send us those proposed amendments in writing?

Mr. Donald Barabé: Yes, of course.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Lehoux.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you very much.

You might still get questions about what the department names are. I, myself, would like to know which departments we are talking about. Internally, we share our observations, but I'd like details on the various departments.

Mr. Donald Barabé: Very well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lehoux.

Mr. Iacono, we now go to you for five minutes.

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

My questions are for Mr. Barabé.

In your brief, you say that the federal government is a hub where francophones and anglophones come together to serve Canadians, and that the implementation of the government's language of work obligations still has gaps.

Besides giving the translation bureau back its exclusive mandate and making its services free of charge throughout the federal government, what can we do to strengthen the role of translation workers? Can you give us some concrete examples?

• (1150)

Mr. Donald Barabé: The best example I can give is using the federal government's translation buying power. Proportionally speaking, the federal government is by far the largest purchaser of translation services in Canada. That purchasing power could be used to strengthen the private translation sector.

Right now, Canada is the biggest supplier of translation services in the world. Canada's translation firms should be buying foreign companies, but the opposite is happening. Foreign firms are the ones buying up Canadian firms. The reason for that is the decision that was made in 1995 to take the federal government's buying power and divvy it up among the departments, which, in turn, divvied it up internally.

Consequently, a director of a unit can tender a small translation contract. What happens is that large translation firms can't compete. What we've ended up with is a majority of freelancers, when we used to have translation companies with the ability to buy foreign firms and do business in foreign markets.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thanks for explaining that.

What are the main things you think absolutely need to be in Bill C-13, as opposed to being implemented through an administrative change?

Mr. Donald Barabé: It is essential that the bill recognize the importance of the role of translation and the translation bureau. Since you asked, I will prepare some provisions that could be included in the bill, for the committee's consideration. You can count on me.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you very much, Mr. Barabé.

We want to promote high-quality translation in both languages. Against the backdrop of rapid and constant technological change and its impact on the translation sector, what can we do to ensure high-quality translation?

Mr. Donald Barabé: The elephant in the room is machine translation. It's an extremely valuable tool for those who know how to use it. Machine translation is done by a computer, and what computers do is calculate. They don't think, and they don't understand. A machine translation tool is a calculator of probabilities. For example, it determines that there is a high probability that a certain word means X or Y. It's an extremely useful tool, but it needs to be used with great care. Above all, it should be used by professionals and should not be used to translate Government of Canada documents for the public.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: What would you say are the most important elements of Bill C-13 for Quebec? Can you name two?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds to answer.

Mr. Donald Barabé: It's important to recognize the vital role that translation plays in the constitutional rights of Canadians who do not speak the other official language.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

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

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

I'm going to start with Ms. Herrick.

In 2019, your organization parted ways with the Quebec Community Groups Network, or QCGN, saying that its hard line did not appeal to younger generations. You also said that its position was abrasive and divisive.

Can you explain that?

[*English*]

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: I'll say this in English just to make sure I'm clear.

I wasn't in my role at the time, but I was working with another organization representing English-speaking seniors, so I am aware of what happened. I think the leadership at ELAN at the time was looking—

• (1155)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Anik Cindy from Geloso sent me a text message—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Just a moment, please.

Mr. Iacono, could you please mute your mike?

You may carry on.

[*English*]

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: One of the main goals of our organization is to build bridges and connect with the French community. We work with the Quebec government. We work with francophones in Quebec. We value the contributions they make to Canada, and we appreciate those who value the contributions we make. The QCGN had a much harder line in working with the Quebec government that we just felt wasn't conducive to building partnerships. I think things have changed in their organization and things have changed in ours, but some of those challenges still exist.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're saying that the Quebec government is passing anti-English legislation? You think making French the common language and ensuring that certain services are available in the common language of Quebec is anti-English? Do they have to be in opposition?

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: No.

[English]

I will say that I understand that the official language of Quebec is French, and it should be that. We support that. We live there within the French community because that's what we want. But I don't think it should be only French. We have a multilingual province with people who have been there.... The English-speaking community has been there a long time, as have many other communities.

Again, as I said, I believe these should be efforts in building bridges, working together and finding common points instead of looking for divisive points. Can it be done only in French? I think the majority of services should be, but certainly, when you have a predominantly English-speaking community and you're talking about things like health care, that's non-negotiable, absolutely.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Ms. Vanessa Herrick: I'm out of time.

The Chair: I know it's quick.

Madame Ashton, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

My questions are for Mr. Barabé.

In your brief, you point out that many departments do not respect the Official Languages Act and that some documents are no longer translated. We think that's unacceptable. We've actually heard that from public servants, both in the committee and in the media.

What should the government do to better support the translation bureau so that it can serve the entire federal administration?

Mr. Donald Barabé: The best thing would be to enforce the Translation Bureau Act effectively. In other words, give the bureau back its mandatory role and make it free for departments to use the bureau's services again. As I said in my opening remarks, that approach would cost the government a lot less. It costs departments between 18% and 735% more to purchase translation services than what it would cost them to use the translation bureau.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Paying 735% more is outrageous. I assume cost savings is the reason that was originally given, back in 1995. As we all know, privatization ends up costing everyone more.

That calls to mind what the Public Service Alliance of Canada said about language training increasingly being contracted out, instead of being provided by the public service.

We know that the government is in desperate need of translation, so why do you think the government is making such poor use of taxpayer money and not using its own translation bureau translators?

Mr. Donald Barabé: When the Official Languages Act was introduced in 1969, public servants were told that they would have two bureaus serving them: the language bureau, which helped to deliver language training, and the translation bureau, which provided translation services. The language bureau isn't around anymore,

and it's clear now that the translation bureau is really struggling to fulfill its mandate. When I left the bureau, it had 2,100 employees. That workforce now stands at about 1,300.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Barabé and Ms. Herrick, thank you for your remarks. They will really help the committee in its efforts to move this bill forward.

● (1200)

[English]

If you have any further information that you would like to provide us in writing, please provide the information to our clerk here.

[Translation]

She will forward that information to all the members of the committee, so feel free to share with the committee in writing any information you deem appropriate.

We will now suspend momentarily to bring in our next witnesses.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Chair: The meeting is resuming.

I'd like to say a few words for the benefit of the witnesses joining us for the second hour. Two of them are participating by video conference.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

For interpretation services, those participating via Zoom have the choice, at the bottom of their screen, of either Floor, English or French. Members participating in person can use the earpiece and select the appropriate channel.

Lastly, a reminder that all member and witness comments should be addressed through the chair.

I want to let our witnesses know that they will have five minutes each for their opening remarks, after which, we will proceed to questions.

I would like to welcome the witnesses. From Acfas, formerly known as the Association francophone pour le savoir, we have the executive director, Sophie Montreuil. This is her very first appearance before the best committee on the Hill. We also have two representatives from the Société de la francophonie manitobaine: Daniel Boucher, executive director, and Jean-Michel Beaudry, assistant director general.

Ms. Montreuil will start us off with her five-minute presentation.

Over to you.

• (1210)

Ms. Sophie Montreuil (Executive Director, Association francophone pour le savoir): Mr. Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, good afternoon.

[English]

I am really honoured to be with you today.

[Translation]

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss a very important issue: the vitality of French-language research in Canada.

My name is Sophie Montreuil, and I am the executive director of Acfas, an association that has been working in the sciences for nearly a century. We will be celebrating our 100th birthday in June, in fact.

Our association brings together French-speaking researchers across Canada, as well as research users. On average, we have 4,500 members annually and more than 25,000 supporters.

We have a very large network, with a regional presence spanning almost the entire country. Our six branches are located in Acadia, Toronto, Sudbury, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Those branches are overseen by volunteer committees made up of French-speaking students and teachers, and they organize French-language science activities in minority communities.

As a general rule, research contributes to the development of societies, states and their citizens. In a bilingual country like ours, research conducted in French opens the door to many more possibilities.

First, it helps build a French lexicon that can be used to disseminate knowledge throughout francophone minority communities, in the media and among government workers.

Research conducted in French produces data on issues and realities that affect francophone minority communities, and that data supports the development of public policies and services tailored to those communities.

Research conducted in French also helps to strengthen the ties between universities and the communities they belong to.

In addition, research conducted in French makes scientific life possible in French, fostering a sense of linguistic security among French-speaking youth and the French-speaking science community.

Lastly, research conducted in French provides an inclusive space for researchers of all backgrounds and origins, brought together by the desire to study and work in French.

Acfas carried out a significant study between 2019 and 2021. The report provides an overview of French-language research in minority communities across Canada and addresses the challenges. Basically, the study reveals a decline in research conducted in French in Canada and a significant lack of support for researchers working in French. Unfortunately, those are the clear and simple report findings, and they are corroborated by other studies.

That is why it is so important that the modernized Official Languages Act clearly mention support for the development and dissemination of knowledge in French in Canada.

We are delighted that Bill C-13 includes a commitment to replace sections 41 and 42 of the Official Languages Act, so that positive measures can be taken to “support the creation and dissemination of information in French that contributes to the advancement of scientific knowledge in any discipline”. We certainly welcome that provision, but some minor changes are needed in order for us to be completely satisfied.

As the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne also noted, the provision is too broad and will have a limited impact. All it will do is support the flow of information, something that is already provided for in other parts of the act.

We would like to propose three amendments.

First, we recommend going back to the language in the official languages reform document. Specifically, we propose adding the term “research” and rewording the reference to positive measures in new subsection 41(6) proposed in the bill. Accordingly, the language that currently reads “may include measures, among others, to” would instead read “include measures, among others, to”.

Lastly, we also recommend that the positive measure I referred to a moment ago be reworked. In other words, the measure to “support the creation and dissemination of information in French” should be amended in two ways: the term “scientific” should be added before the word “information”; and it should be clearly laid out that, to achieve the measure, the government must “support scientific research and life in French, among other things”.

I will leave it there.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Montreuil.

You took 4 minutes and 59 seconds.

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: That's great.

Mr. Joël Godin: It's exemplary.

The Chair: We will continue with Daniel Boucher, from the Société de la francophonie manitobaine.

Mr. Daniel Boucher (Executive Director, Société de la francophonie manitobaine): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings from the beautiful province of Manitoba and the centre of Canada. I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting us to appear today. My name is Daniel Boucher, and I am the executive director of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, or SFM. I am joining you today from Treaty No. 1 territory, and the lands I am standing on are part of the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples and the homeland of the Métis nation. On this eve of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, I want to acknowledge that the French language was unfortunately used as an instrument of colonization in the history of the indigenous peoples.

Today SFM expresses its wish that the indigenous peoples and communities in Canada may flourish, and we demand complete respect for their voices, particularly in their efforts to preserve and restore indigenous languages. As the representative organization of the francophone community of Manitoba, and with the help of its network of collaborators and partners, SFM strives for the advancement of all the community's areas of activity.

I would like to address two major themes today: the urgent need to modernize the Official Languages Act and the importance of language clauses respecting third parties. First, I would like to state that SFM fully supports the demands of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, respecting the modernization of the Official Languages Act. I would also like to refer to the brief that the FCFA submitted in May entitled, *Proposed amendments to Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.*

You have that brief to hand, and it is divided into six themes: clarifying the Treasury Board's role; addressing the issue of language clauses with third parties, including the other orders of government; ensuring the effectiveness of the francophone immigration policy; strengthening part VII, particularly with respect to consultations; including part VII in the order-making powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages; and clarifying the definition of "francophone minorities".

The work leading up to Bill C-13, currently under consideration, was not done in haste and began more than five years ago. The bill itself is the result of many studies and consultations conducted, in particular, by this committee, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, the Department of Canadian Heritage, the FCFA, and many others.

As our president, Angela Cassie, told the committee on February 14 last, before Bill C-13 was introduced, "Any more delays would only further weaken the position of French in our communities. Parliament should therefore begin its work immediately."

However, I agree, as do all francophone communities, that Bill C-13 still contains deficiencies that must be corrected. I refer you once again to the FCFA's recommendations. This bill is an important step toward ensuring the survival of the official language minority communities. Do not let this legislative work be in vain. The Official Languages Act must be renewed soon, failing which prejudices will worsen.

Moving on to the importance of language clauses, allow me first to clarify the reason why the issue of these clauses with third parties, including the other orders of government, should be addressed more expressly in Bill C-13. In Manitoba, under certain agreements between the province and the federal government, support is provided for the development of the official language minority communities.

• (1220)

The Chair: Mr. Boucher, can you summarize your conclusion in 15 seconds?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: All right.

In some instances, these clauses concern early childhood. To sum up, we have language clauses that enable us to develop as a community. We're essentially trying to ensure that this is included in Bill C-13.

I'm now ready to answer your questions. With me today is Jean-Michel Beaudry, who can respond as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boucher.

I realize five minutes isn't much time, but you'll have an opportunity to continue your presentation during the period of questions.

We will begin the first six-minute round of questions with the first vice-chair of this committee, Joël Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses, Ms. Montreuil and Mr. Boucher.

I'm going to let you continue your presentation, Mr. Boucher. At the end of your statement, you discussed language clauses and the need for them to be explicit.

Could you be "more explicit" in your definition of "language clauses"? It must be understood that a language clause is a provision respecting languages. However, we're studying Bill C-13, which concerns the modernization of the two official languages, English and French.

Wouldn't it be better to state more clearly that the purpose of those clauses is to maintain both official languages?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: In our case, we're essentially talking about the French language in communities where we aren't in the majority. The principle that's important to follow with regard to language clauses is that, when you acquire a benefit at the federal level, a program, for example, or a benefit negotiated or transferred to the provinces, it's important not to lose that connection after the benefit is transferred or negotiated. It's hard to put a lost asset back on the table, whether it's a service or a language obligation.

Language clauses are important for us because we have an important federal partner and provincial partners that guarantee services and administer agreements. In those circumstances, it's important to maintain and even improve language clauses when transfers are made and agreements reached.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have another question concerning language clauses.

Since the federal government works with the provinces and territories, it has to consider the jurisdictional issue. It's always a delicate matter to impose something on the provinces. We of the Conservative Party respect the areas of jurisdiction of the provinces and territories.

How could we come up with a model under which we could achieve the objective while respecting the areas of jurisdiction of the provinces and territories?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I think you've raised a very good point.

This important issue should be put on the table and be part of the discussion. Some things are very simple and others more complex. Generally speaking, however, if it's impossible to have language clauses, there's a problem.

I mentioned early childhood, for example. It's essential for us to have language clauses that guarantee French-language services.

Mr. Joël Godin: Let's consider the child care program agreement, for example. How can we compel Manitoba to establish infrastructure to serve Manitoba's francophone minority without encroaching on the province's jurisdictions?

It's a very delicate matter, and one that we respect. I'd just like to find a solution so we can both respect federal, provincial and territorial agreements and achieve the objective involved in modernizing the Official Languages Act, which is to give the minority language communities access to French-language services.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: That's a very good question, but, once again, we're asking that the door at least be open and that it be possible to reach that kind of agreement with the provinces and territories.

I know there are various areas of jurisdiction and that these kinds of agreements have to be negotiated. I believe Mr. Beaudry might have something to add.

• (1225)

Mr. Jean-Michel Beaudry (Assistant Director General, Société de la francophonie manitobaine): We are the proof that this approach can work because we have an agreement under which the provincial government is required to consult the community before making any decision so that the needs expressed by the minority are taken into consideration.

The Manitoba example shows that this can work. The success of this approach doesn't depend on predetermined relationships, but rather on the fact that there's an agreement. If the federal government has an obligation to negotiate with the provinces, it will be able to do so.

Mr. Joël Godin: Based on what you're telling me, since the community is being consulted, you can believe that language clauses will be protected in future and that Manitoba's francophone minorities will be well served. Wouldn't you like the bill to have more teeth? Are you satisfied with that?

Mr. Jean-Michel Beaudry: The provincial government [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mr. Joël Godin: We can't hear you, Mr. Beaudry.

The Chair: Mr. Beaudry, can you hear us?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: It's working.

The Chair: Since you're with us, Mr. Boucher, can you continue?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Yes.

Regarding potential negotiations with the provinces and territories, it's really important to continue this discussion on the specific issue of consultations.

Obviously, the more rights we secure, the better it will be. Once again, however, it's important to include in the bill an obligation to

consult, which could lead to language clauses that are more robust and better suited to the needs of the provinces.

Although we clearly understand the sharing of jurisdictions and the differences between those jurisdictions and the fact that we respect them, certain official language obligations take precedence over those considerations. We should always bear them in mind, put them on the table and consider what we can do together to achieve a good result.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boucher.

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

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

I want to thank my colleagues here present, both in person and virtually.

My first question is for Ms. Montreuil.

You raised a very important point. It's true that research conducted in French is on the decline in Canada and around the world and isn't proportionally representative of the global francophone population. The vice-chair and I are also discussing that issue.

We're trying to determine how to stimulate scientific research and establish incentives so that it's published more extensively around the world. I know there are excellent researchers in Canada. The aim of these discussions is also to give them access to French-language infrastructure and vehicles and francophone universities, or at the very least enable them to dialogue in French.

How can that aspect be linked to Bill C-13?

Then I'll discuss positive measures with you.

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: It's closely linked to Bill C-13; that's clear. I won't comment on the French-language research situation around the world. I'll be focusing on Canada because the data we have concerns this country. It comes from the study we conducted together with some leading researchers.

Here are a few figures. In 2020, there were 63,455 francophone researchers in Canada, 30,070 of whom worked in francophone minority communities. Broadly speaking, that number was almost evenly divided between Quebec and the other provinces.

Researchers who conduct research in French in Quebec don't experience the issues that the other 30,000 researchers in the other provinces encounter. These are two worlds, two completely different universes.

You mentioned dissemination. I'll begin by discussing the support provided for research production.

Researchers need research funding. There are three granting councils. First, at the federal level, there's the Canadian Foundation for Innovation. However, according to the figures in the report we published, the percentages of funding granted to francophone researchers are less than those of funding granted to anglophone researchers. You could say that's not unusual if it represented a proportional distribution among anglophone and francophone researchers, but that's not the case. Consider this example. Only 5% to 12% of funding applications submitted to the granting councils are prepared in French, whereas francophone researchers represent 21% of the research community.

Here's the reason for that discrepancy. In many cases, researchers conducting research in French at a bilingual or English-language university can't submit their funding applications in French because authorities at their institutions are unable to assess their French submissions. Bear in mind that applications may be several tens of pages long. Consequently, researchers either don't submit them or they prepare them in English, which isn't their first language. We can assume that the quality of those applications isn't as high as if they had been prepared in the researchers' native language. So there's a problem at the outset.

There's no substantive equality with researchers who conduct research in English, even though francophone researchers are absolutely entitled to it. I'm not taking a confrontational stance here; I just want to promote substantive equality. In Canada, we're entitled to want to study in French, to conduct research in French and to teach in French. We simply should have the same conditions as researchers and students who choose to do so in English enjoy. All the figures show that this is unfortunately not the case.

Would you like to react, or would you prefer that I continue?

• (1230)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Continue quickly, and I'll react quickly afterwards.

The Chair: You have two minutes left, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's why I said "quickly".

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: I'll be brief.

My organization's position on the bill and the consultations conducted this past summer on the Action Plan for Official Languages has nothing to do with any defence of the budgets allocated to research. The granting councils have their research budgets.

I'm trying to facilitate the conditions of access to funding applications, and that access is made possible by support for the vitality of the francophone minority communities, which are home to francophone researchers, who are moreover well established in their communities. I'm currently unable to obtain funding—we'll discuss money at some point—from the Department of Canadian Heritage to support those efforts. I'm not talking about securing funding to support research because it's the funding councils that do that. If knowledge in French were more expressly addressed in the act, the Department of Canadian Heritage could create and welcome projects that support francophone scientific vitality in all provinces and cities that are home to francophone communities.

Mr. Francis Drouin: You mentioned the provision on positive measures, and you propose an amendment under which the words

"*notamment comprendre*" would be replaced by "*comprennent*", making the sentence more declarative.

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: I propose that the words "*peuvent notamment comprendre*" be replaced by "*comprennent*". The sentence would then be more declarative.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I see.

Then you would add the word "*recherche*" to subparagraph 41(6)(iv). Is that correct?

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: Yes. It would read as follows: "*...d'information scientifique...notamment en soutenant la recherche et la vie scientifique*".

Mr. Francis Drouin: The research chairs, who grant funding, would be required to verify whether they meet their official language obligations. Is that correct?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I would point out that sticking to the six-minute time guideline allows us to have five full minutes during the second round. That's why I strictly enforce it.

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

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

Thanks to the witnesses for their presentations.

I'll go to Ms. Montreuil first.

You say that French-language research is on the decline in Canada. We agree on that. Do you think that decline is linked to university funding?

For example, outside Quebec, there's the Université de l'Ontario français, which is new. Generally speaking, there are very few francophone universities relative to the demographic weight of francophones. Do you think that's linked to the decline of French-language research in Canada?

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: My colleague and closest ally, Lynn Brouillette, who is the president and chief executive officer of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, is the best person to tell you about universities and their funding. Ms. Brouillette and her organization are trying to improve the funding and recognition of educational institutions, whereas I work at the individual level. So we work together. Consequently, I can't openly comment on that.

Funding the universities is no easy task. However, there has to be more support so the programs... Sometimes programs are even cut.

You should definitely take a careful look at francophone and bilingual post-secondary educational institutions, but also at anglophone universities because research is also conducted in French there.

• (1235)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Federal funding for universities in Quebec comes from sources such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Foundation for Innovation and so on. A researcher named Frédéric Lacroix, who has studied this closely, has observed that federal funding for English-language universities in Quebec constantly rose from 34.5% to 38.4% from 2000 to 2017, whereas mother tongue anglophones constitute approximately 8% of Quebec's population. That also has a definite impact on research conducted in French in Quebec and Canada. I think Quebec should support research virtually everywhere.

Do you think criteria should include language clauses to make funding fairer?

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: I'm going to stay within the limits of what we're proposing.

You mentioned the granting councils. We propose to work together with them to ensure they afford the best possible conditions for researchers wishing to submit their applications in French. That's a recommendation that we made in our June 2021 report. Reviewers must be completely bilingual so that English and French files are handled equally and fairly. These are the aspects that must be focused on first. These are competitions of excellence. It's ultimately the best applicants who are selected.

The granting councils have a role to play in this process. Francophone researchers must be able to state in their applications that they live in a minority community. That might result in a different take on the project they submit.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Historically, the entire French-language post-secondary education system was seriously underfinanced and probably prohibited in several provinces some years ago. Didn't these past injustices give preferential treatment on those who benefited? Ought there not to be some form of remedy?

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: Today, there is a continuum of French-language education from early childhood to university. While it can't undo what's happened in the past, it is a step forward, which may at least lay some positive and equitable new foundations for francophones and anglophones.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My next question is for Mr. Boucher or Mr. Beaudry from the Société de la francophonie manitobaine.

According to recent data from Statistics Canada, the decline of French in Manitoba has continued. That's what is shown by nearly all the indicators, including first official language spoken. Those who speak mainly French at home account for 1.1% of Manitoba's population.

Do you believe that the Manitoba government, and to a certain extent the federal government, allowed measures prohibiting French in Manitoba from being implemented? Should there be some form of restitution? Do you think there is a desire to rectify past injustices?

The Chair: That's an excellent question, Mr. Beaulieu, but your six minutes are up.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: They can answer in connection with another question.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Ashton, you have six minutes.

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

I'd also like to welcome our witnesses. I am of course very pleased to see people from the Société de la francophonie manitobaine here today.

I'd like to begin on somewhat of a personal note. I have already spoken about this in committee.

I'm a francophile from Manitoba, and everyone of my generation had access to an education in French. For me, it was in immersion. We owe a great deal to the hard work and efforts of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine. The battle continues, and it's thanks to you.

I would also like to emphasize the importance of the Franco-Manitoban School Division, which has made it possible for us to send our children to the division's schools so that they can learn French.

On September 7, I had the great privilege of being able to send my twins—you saw one of them earlier—to the La Voie du Nord community school here in Thompson, a community that has no francophone heritage, but where quite a few francophones live. The school is a response to the clear desire of Manitobans of my generation to give their children the opportunity to speak French. It's not something that can be taken for granted. It's been possible because of your work.

The struggle has to continue, and in order to do so, several measures need to be introduced, including the modernization of the Official Languages Act. The existing shortcomings you discussed earlier today need to be addressed.

Once again, I'd like to give you my heartfelt thanks.

I would now like to ask you a few questions.

Mr. Boucher, we have frequently spoken with you and others from the Société de la francophonie manitobaine about the importance of francophone immigration in countering the demographic decline in minority language communities. We have been hoping to have some targets embedded in the act to make up for lost ground, but Bill C-13 does not get contain any.

How important is catch-up demographic growth for a francophone community like Manitoba's?

• (1240)

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Thank you very much, Ms. Ashton.

We are delighted to have a French school in Thompson and to know that your children can go there.

As for the importance of correcting the numbers and setting demographic targets to close the gap in Manitoba, there were worrisome trends in the last census, but on the other hand, the work that we've been doing on francophone immigration for several years now makes us optimistic for the future. That's a partial answer to Mr. Beaulieu's question.

However, it's essential for the Canadian government and the provincial government to work together to reach these targets, because we're not going to get there otherwise. It's absolutely essential to introduce all the programs and services needed to so.

Manitoba has received considerable support in this area. For several years, the federal government has been investing in francophone immigration. But there's still something missing. We're not meeting the francophone immigration targets, which means that Bill C-13 has to set very concrete targets, because that's one way of making up the demographic shortfall. Unless there are much more robust measures in Bill C-13, even though I believe we have made quite a lot of headway, we won't move forward. We believe that we would be missing an opportunity if we were to fail to be as explicit as possible in Bill C-13.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for your answer.

I would now like to move on to language provisions, a subject that you've already raised. It's one of the priorities of the FCFA, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne. We support this measure and believe, as many people have mentioned, that it would give the Official Languages Act more teeth.

Education is a key issue for francophone minority communities in places like Manitoba. The tools adopted by the various government departments are inadequate to fund the educational mission of teaching institutions. From preschool to post-secondary, the federal government has not been the reliable partner it ought to be.

For example, over the past few years, the francophone day care centre of the DSFM, the Franco-Manitoban School Division, has experienced serious labour shortages. We are well aware of it, because we have supported its efforts to remedy the situation. We are also aware of several other problems, including immigration. There is a lack of funding to encourage people to come and work here and teach our children. The government is only funding ad hoc projects, and educational institutions are having to raise half of their funding elsewhere.

Do you think that language provisions will perform an important role in dealing with this crisis?

• (1245)

The Chair: That's a very good question, Ms. Ashton. Unfortunately, we are short of time. There might be an opportunity to come back to it.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

Good afternoon, Ms. Montreuil. My first question is for you.

What's a positive measure, in your opinion? Such measures are discussed at length in Bill C-13 and we've talked about them with several witnesses who told us that they're important. But what are they, concretely? People appear to be saying that they could be applied through regulations developed afterwards, or at least formulated. What does it mean for you?

That's a good question, isn't it?

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: Yes, it's an excellent question and I'll answer it from memory because I don't have my computer in front of me to check the exact wording of Bill C-13.

I previously mentioned the changes we were proposing for those aspects of the bill pertaining to positive measures.

Positive measures can represent leverage to encourage the entire machinery of government to comply with and espouse the principles of the act. We are proposing changes in wording because the very words used in those passages about positive measures all provide leverage on behalf of organizations like mine, and can remind certain authorities, organizations, departments and other bodies of their obligations under the act.

For example, in the paragraph that begins with "to support the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French," we propose adding, "namely by supporting scientific research and science in French".

Concretely, this proposed addition would give us some leverage to tell the Department of Canadian Heritage that, to the best of our ability given our limited funds, we support all of our researchers, students, experienced professors, and volunteers across Canada. They do remarkable work to ensure that the French language and French-language activities exist within their institutions and communities, and our view is that it's up to the country to support the vitality of these communities.

One such positive measure would give us added leverage to do things like insist that the Department of Canadian Heritage fulfill its obligations.

You may perhaps think that the research granting councils are taking care of everything and that it's a done deal, but that's not the case. It's all linked together, because in order to support research, one must also support science and the communities, as well as student development, if we want them to be able to continue their research in French and remain in their communities rather than have to move to another province.

An organization like the Department of Canadian Heritage could have much more responsibility in this area

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you.

My next question is for you, Mr. Boucher. You appear to be satisfied with the consultations provided in the act, but should it not contain more outcome-oriented obligations?

Should it not contain extremely clear requirements? Instead of providing only for consultations, which is perfectly legitimate, should the act not include outcome requirements?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I believe that consultation is clearly a starting point. Indeed, Bill C-13 should be more explicit about very concrete results in various areas, including immigration.

Generally speaking, I believe that the exercise is useful, but that holding consultations is only the beginning. Consultations must be conducted seriously to really obtain an accurate picture of the community's opinion.

• (1250)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Boucher, but I want to point out that we only review this act about every 40 years. We are currently conducting this consultation, whose purpose is to fine-tune the act that will stand as the official languages framework for the next 40 years. Shouldn't results requirements be incorporated into the act?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Ms. Kayabaga, it's over to you now for five minutes.

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

I'd like to begin by thanking our guests today for having taken the time to attend this meeting.

I'll begin with a question for Ms. Montreuil.

Ms. Montreuil, I'd like to begin by allowing you to finish answering my colleague's question about the measures in Bill C-13 designed to support research in French.

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: What we're asking for in terms of amendments to the Official Languages Act is relatively simple. The amendments consist of changing one word for another and adding a phrase somewhere else. However modest that may be, it would have a major impact on an organization like ours. It would be the first time that there is a mention of francophone knowledge and research in French. It would be a plus for us.

We are asking that a little more be done to ensure that researchers outside Quebec, particularly in francophone minority communities, acquire better conditions as the years go by, in order to slow down or even stop the decline in French-language research in Canada. No one would benefit from the disappearance of research on local francophone, anglophone or other language groups. Different points of view, multilingualism and multiculturalism in Canada are important. We need to make sure that there are studies done on those areas.

In our case, what we are defending is research in French. It's important for the studies and data to have an impact on the public policies that serve the population, the institutions and the organizations. The changes we are proposing go some way towards ensuring a better grasp of things so that all sectors targeted by positive measures are affected by our additional phrase concerning knowledge and the importance of producing and disseminating knowledge.

Have I answered your question?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Yes, thank you very much.

Mr. Boucher, you mentioned earlier that there were still shortcomings in francophone minority communities. Can you mention a few and explain how Bill C-13 addresses them?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I'll ask Mr. Beaudry to answer that question.

Mr. Jean-Michel Beaudry: Of course.

To return to the matter of the consultations and the regulations that stemmed from them, I'd like to point out that Manitoba was closely involved in legal action concerning the federal government and part VII of the Official Languages Act. The official languages regulations that resulted from consultations did not go far enough in addressing the needs of minority language communities. Something more than straightforward consultation is therefore required. The interests raised in the consultations must be taken into consideration by the government from now on. Consideration must also be given to the fact that needs vary from one region to another. This consultation phase is therefore very important if we are to have programs and services that directly meet the local needs of minority language communities.

So I don't believe a straightforward consultation is adequate.

• (1255)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: All right.

Mr. Boucher, you mentioned earlier that it was essential to have a strong francophone immigration policy. Why is it so important to communities like yours for this policy to accurately target minority francophone communities?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I'll be very brief.

It's critical for our communities. We have been working on this issue since 2003 and have made considerable progress. We're very proud of this, but we need to keep at it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boucher.

I'd like to point out that for the next two rounds of two and a half minute questions, that I need the unanimous consent of the committee to go beyond the allotted time by a few minutes. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes, but no more than that.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Boucher, I asked you a question which you didn't have enough time to answer.

Basically, I was wondering whether, since the passage of the Official Languages Act, Franco-Manitobans had obtained a right to a remedy. Do you feel that this ought still to be applicable?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: It depends on what is meant by “remedy”. I think that we managed to succeed largely thanks to the support programs we receive. We still have an enormous amount of work to do, and effecting a remedy or making up for lost ground truly remains a major challenge. However, I believe that if we were to introduce measures and programs, in consultation with the communities, and speak to one another to agree on what steps to follow, we could make enormous progress.

To answer your question, I think that we are slowly catching up, and making progress fairly quickly.

Mr. Jean-Michel Beaudry: I'd also like to comment on Ms. Ashton's proposals.

One factor wasn't mentioned, and that's that the number of enrolments in immersion and French-language programs has been rising steadily over the past 10 years. It's true that we still have to make up for lost ground, and we hope that a modernized bill will lend us even more support.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Excellent.

I have a question for the Acfas representative.

Does Acfas also have a mandate to defend research in French in Quebec, and if so, what is it doing? Should Bill C-13 have provisions to cover that?

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: I think I have only a few seconds left.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: Okay, Mr. Chair.

Acfas has indeed been promoting research in French in Quebec and Canada, and even internationally. The mission hasn't changed in 100 years. We are well served by the Quebec government in terms of funding. I'm pleased to be able to say so.

I'll take the liberty of adding something important. The Quebec government recently awarded us funding on two occasions with a view to establishing a service to provide research assistance in French. It's something completely new that our organization will be creating over the next few months, and which is not in any way for researchers from Quebec, but solely for francophone researchers in minority communities.

We are not currently receiving anything from the federal government for this service. Our funding comes strictly from the private sector and the Quebec government.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Montreuil.

I am now giving the floor to Ms. Ashton for two and half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

I want to give Mr. Boucher or Ms. Beaudry the opportunity to add a comment on the matter of language provisions. I'd like to know what they involve for Manitoba's francophone communities in terms of the services to which francophones are entitled.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Mr. Beaudry can tell us more about the most recent early childhood language provision.

Mr. Jean-Michel Beaudry: I believe its impact was truly important. In 2020, under the federal-provincial agreement, half of the 600 spaces available in child care centres were awarded to francophone children.

Beyond consultation, I think that governments must take action. They acknowledge that the impact on minority language communities of not having access to day care services in the language of their choice was asymmetrical.

From one standpoint, the impact has been immediate. The idea is to continue efforts to improve the situation. The adoption of the revised bill will be very important. Someone mentioned that the Official Languages Act was only revised every 40 years. I hope that we won't have to wait another 50 years before the next major revision and that we will be able to improve the bill more quickly.

● (1300)

Ms. Niki Ashton: It's encouraging and it's clear. Thank you very much for the tireless work that you and the community have been doing on behalf of us all.

I'd also like to ask Ms. Montreuil about the same subject.

In your brief, you are in favour of supporting the continua for French-language education in Canada from early childhood through post-secondary studies. Do you think that the government should negotiate language provisions to protect services in French in the agreements it signs with the provinces, such as the agreements on day care centres?

Ms. Sophie Montreuil: I must admit that I'm unable to comment on the issue of language provisions. As for education, I know that it's very difficult for the federal government to interfere in provincial powers. That's how the system is designed. It has to be respected and other ways of working together have to be found.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Montreuil.

I would like to thank our witnesses today. For those attending for the first time, I would remind them that the speaking time allocated to each question was determined ahead of time by mutual agreement. So if I appeared to be someone with an iron fist in a velvet glove, I would remind you that I did no more than apply the established rules.

Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony. If you believe you have additional information that you did not have time to submit to us because of the short amount of time allowed for questions and answers, you can send them it writing to our clerk, who will forward it to us.

Before adjourning the meeting, I would like to remind members that there won't be a meeting on Thursday, and that next Tuesday, the last half-hour will be spent on committee work to establish a list of witnesses based on political party representation and to vote on a motion concerning the information that was requested from us.

The meeting is adjourned.

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