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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

I would first like to welcome Mr. Dalton back to the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the best committee on Parliament Hill, and to welcome a newcomer, Mr. Brad Vis. I am delighted to have you here. This is a great committee, as you'll see.

Welcome to the 33rd 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 now like to welcome the witnesses who are appearing in the first hour of the meeting and who form the first panel. First, we have with us the Impératif français organization, which is represented by its President, Jean-Paul Perreault, its Treasurer, Édith Gendron, and its Administrative and Development Officer, Fêmi Abigail Houinsou. We also have with us Jean-François Parent, from

the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Canada, the RDÉE, who is participating in the meeting virtually.

Witnesses will have five minutes for their opening statements. Although the members are now used to it, I warn everyone that I am very strict about speaking time because that lets everyone ask more questions.

We will begin with Impératif français.

Mr. Perreault, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault (President, Impératif français): Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we are definitely pleased to accept your invitation.

I believe that, in some respects, cultural diversity is now on the defensive all around the world. The concept of nations is increasingly being undermined, and national and international languages are necessarily being shoved aside by the Americanization and anglicization of cultural preferences. We are now involved in a debate that vastly transcends the debates over Quebec, French Canada and Canada as a whole.

Today, we have chosen a more comprehensive approach than a mere study of Bill C-13. This bill cannot address every aspect of the current inferiorization and trivialization of French, French-language culture, French Canadian identity and Quebec identity. It will take much more than Bill C-13 to respond to that, and we will have to reconsider our approach and vision in order to do so.

First, I intend to raise a number of points for consideration. We have to understand that, when we discuss the French language, we need to look beyond partisan politics.

Members of Parliament should not limit themselves to the vision of their political parties, imagining that it's the one they should promote. I think we need to look beyond partisanship and try to understand the situation so that every party can develop its own approach to the problem. Consequently, our comments today will reflect that non-partisan stance.

There is little or no recognition of cultural and linguistic asymmetry in Canada. The federal government, in its own way, imposes its vision of bilingualism and multiculturalism on Quebec, while Quebec strives to protect and promote its identity, culture and language within its borders in order to make French the only official and common language in Quebec.

In addition, the symmetrical vision of the status of English and French results in inequality. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging that status. However, when we realize that French, an official language, is a minority language and, what's more, that it is declining and regressing, we need to abandon the symmetrical approach as it applies, not to the equality of status of the languages, but also to the resources that are made available to Quebec and the francophonie outside Quebec.

Furthermore, federal resources are inadequate. If French regresses as it is doing, that is obviously due in large part to the federal vision. Funding for the creation, production and dissemination of a strong culture that can promote and spread the French language must absolutely be increased, and by a large margin.

These thoughts transcend partisan politics. That's true. You need only consider the way English-language post-secondary educational institutions in Quebec are overfunded relative to the historical weight of the minority population, and even the English-mother-tongue population, which represents 7.6% of Quebec's total population, all of which results in an underfunding of French-language institutions. What I'm talking about here are reputation and prestige. As I just said, this results in the underfunding of French-language university institutions since 30% of available funding is invested in English-language post-secondary institutions.

How is it that everyone across Canada, including in French Canada and Quebec, acknowledges that French is declining?

• (1110)

I'm not asking you to answer that question, but how do you explain why the organizations that work to promote and advance the majority official language in Canada...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perreault.

You will be able to comment further during the rounds of questions.

We will now hear from Jean-François Parent, the manager of research and policy analysis at the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, the RDÉE

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Jean-François Parent (Manager, Research and Policy Analysis, Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité (RDÉE) Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, distinguished guests, witnesses and members of the audience, good morning.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss Bill C-13 with you today.

With more than 430,000 francophone businesses in the country, representing approximately 19.5% of national GDP and generating more than \$130 billion of economic impact, the Canadian economic francophonie wants and absolutely has to be involved in efforts to restore the economy and to modernize legislation promoting the full development of official language communities across the country.

Expectations are running high in the francophone in Acadian minority communities. In a survey conducted by the TACT organization together with the LégerOpinion online focus group, 77% of respondents said they wanted the government to do more for the economic development of francophone minority communities across the country. Francophones have great expectations of our elected representatives.

Now that the restrictions and repercussions of the pandemic are gradually easing across Canada years after the fact and the economic recovery is under way, and since we are now facing unprecedented labour challenges, our organization, the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Canada, or simply RDÉE Canada, wishes to demonstrate its keen interest in Bill C-13 and its importance for the full development of francophone communities across the country.

The Canadian government officially introduced the bill on March 1 last. The bill's main purpose is to amend the Official Languages Act and other related acts, and more particularly to introduce legislation on the use of French in federally regulated private businesses. The act would grant new rights for employees and consumers in regions with a strong francophone presence and would recognize the right to work in French and to receive communications and services in French from federally regulated businesses.

The question we ask at RDÉE Canada is this: why weren't these provisions included in the legislation many years ago? After all, the new act would apply, in particular, to banks, interprovincial and international rail and road transportation businesses, air and marine transport businesses, as well as telephone and cable companies. Those businesses are important players in our national economy and affect millions of Canadians every year. According to the latest data from the 2021 census, the vast majority of those businesses regularly deal with some of the 2.7 million francophones living in minority communities.

In the past year, we have witnessed numerous debates in the press and in our communities on the importance of this new bill. This legislation is of paramount importance to us at RDÉE Canada because it's a bill that can potentially be used to leverage the francophone factor in developing businesses on Canadian soil. Historically, the language issue has often been overshadowed by business decisions. We would like to suggest another approach, one in which French has substantively equal status with English across the country.

A passage from an article published in *L'actualité* on June 9 of this year reads as follows: "The Parliamentary Budget Officer stated in a recent report that, under Bill C-13, businesses would incur one-time costs of \$240 million to hire bilingual supervisors."

That article discusses costs. However, in our view, its logic seems somewhat faulty. We should view those costs instead as an investment, a major investment in the capacity of businesses to adequately meet the needs of employees, the labour force and official language minority communities, something, moreover, that too many private businesses currently cannot do.

We need to build a solid foundation that future generations can rely on to provide support and prosperity for official language communities across the country.

• (1115)

Otherwise, if we fail to give proper consideration to the language factor, as well as the economic and social factors in the equation, we run the risk of perpetuating the decline of the French fact in Canada.

The Chair: Mr. Parent, would you please conclude in less than 30 seconds?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: I'll be brief.

In closing, I will say that we don't want to see the French fact "folklorized" in the medium term. On the contrary, we want to see it become a powerful driver of economic and community development in this country.

That was the whole purpose of the national summit that we held on September 28 and 29 of this year.

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

We will now go to the first round of questions. The allotted time will be six minutes. As I said, I am strict about time so that everyone has the time they need to ask their questions.

I now give the floor to the first vice-chair of this committee.

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

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

Thanks to the witnesses for taking part in this exercise. As I very often say, you help us to be better.

My first question is for the Impératif français organization.

Mr. Perreault, in your opening statement, you discussed the overfunding of English language education in Quebec, which you pegged at 30%.

Please tell me where that money comes from.

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: It comes from both private and public funding. However, we're talking about 30%. That's a documented figure.

The English-mother-tongue population of Quebec represents 7.6% of the total population.

Allow me to finish. You will understand as we do...

Mr. Joël Godin: Please note that I only have six minutes and therefore have to maintain a quick pace. I also have questions for the other witness.

Here's my question. You said that the 30% overfunding came from private and public funding. When you say public funding, are you referring to the federal government or the provincial government? As we all know, education is a provincial jurisdiction.

Is the 30% overfunding that comes from public funding attributable in large part to the federal government or the provincial government?

• (1120)

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: It doesn't matter, since the total is 30% for a mother-tongue population. I don't mean "historical" here. When the Constitution was adopted, it was for the historical minority at the time. Nothing that's been added for the English-mother-tongue population is part of that same vision and, in our view, it should all be allocated to the French-language education system. Thirty per cent is a lot.

If the government, in its programs...

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Perreault, I have to interrupt you. Thank you for that information. However it's not clear to me. I may have to do some checking with the Quebec government on the subject.

Perhaps some adjustments have to be made on the federal side, but the federal government doesn't have to bear the blame for the entire 30%...

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin. I'll stop the clock.

I've been told we have technical difficulties with the interpretation, but I'm not sure.

You have used two minutes and five seconds, Mr. Godin.

We will now return to questions.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My next question is for the representative of the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Canada.

I understand the whole process. You told us that things were poorly done in the past. As you know, we can't change the past, but we can change the future.

Mr. Parent, what you think are the three priorities that should be established in Bill C-13?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: That's a very good question.

First, to answer the questions regarding the labour force, there should be separate measures for francophone immigration to minority communities. That opinion is also shared by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA. That would be a comprehensive response to the francophone labour force issues in official language minority communities.

Second, you should ensure that federally regulated businesses allow full representation, complete fairness, for francophone minority consumers and employees.

Third, you should define more precisely what an official language minority in a minority community officially represents. It's quite vague in legislative terms, and we'd like it to be clearer, particularly in order to promote the research that's being conducted on minority businesses. A more precise definition would help in making progress on various aspects, including all the work that Statistics Canada is doing on the subject.

Mr. Joël Godin: Under Bill C-13, a business in Regina, an airport, would have to comply with bilingualism requirements. As you know, that business is facing a labour shortage and access to francophones is a problem. The airport has to provide bilingual service, of equal quality in both languages, but still can't recruit the required personnel after taking the necessary steps and calling for applications. No one answers the call for personnel to go and work in French in Regina. Those people don't have that skill.

What does that airport do?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: For example, couldn't second-language learning programs be established for the people who already work there and might benefit from them?

Many options are available to businesses seeking fair representation in both official languages in their operations. If that balance can't be struck by drawing on the available labour pool, it's also possible to develop those skills within the business by establishing second-language learning programs. A single solution isn't always available; many solutions can be added to the equation.

Mr. Joël Godin: You mentioned francophone immigration. It seems to me the government doesn't treat anglophones and francophones equitably. Processing times are practically three times longer for francophones.

What would be your priority, first, for meeting your members' economic development needs and, second, for protecting the French language?

• (1125)

The Chair: You have less than 20 seconds left.

Mr. Jean-François Parent: I would create a special pathway for francophone immigration to minority communities and economic immigrants, those who have the skills sought after in the labour market across the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parent.

Mr. Drouin will ask the next questions.

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 the witnesses for being with us, both in person and virtually.

My first question is for the representatives of *Impératif français*.

Good afternoon, Mr. Perreault. I want to inform the members of the committee that Mr. Perreault was my teacher more than 15 years ago...

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: He wasn't a great student.

Some hon. members: Oh oh!

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Perreault taught me statistics, and I can assure the members of the committee that, even at the *Cité collégiale*, Mr. Perreault was strict about French in our classrooms. He required everyone to speak French. I want to thank him for giving me the chance...

Mr. Joël Godin: You're thanking him for having the good fortune to be your teacher. Is that it?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Exactly.

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: You can see the result. My apologies.

Some hon. members: Oh oh!

Mr. Francis Drouin: Now let's get down to business.

You said that Bill C-13 is a tool but that it isn't the tool that will defend the francophonie. I think the same is true of Bill 96 in the National Assembly. They're important tools, but a set of tools has to be used. I increasingly realize that speaking French is a choice, but that's even truer outside Canada, where we are present, but not in the majority there either. We have the good fortune to speak French with certain members of the committee and with other parliamentarians outside the country, but we realize that's nevertheless a choice that we make.

Since I know you're involved in the defence of the French language, Mr. Perreault, my question will concern young people, who spend far more time on their telephones and in the virtual world, where there are no geographical barriers. How do you think we can ensure that French content is available in a sea of anglophone content?

I'm not pointing my finger at anglophones; I'm merely observing that the digital world is a largely anglophone world. Even in scientific research, we realize that, relatively speaking, French is virtually nonexistent. That's an issue we can discuss both in Quebec and internationally.

What do you think we should do, and could Bill C-13 help us do it?

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: The reason we're here is precisely to invent, think about and reflect on programs or ways to redevelop structures so that French doesn't solely occupy a defensive position. I think the Canadian francophonie and Quebec deserve much more than that. What we need to establish is a position that enables the French language and everything related to it, such as culture and communications, to expand and advance.

You mentioned that French content has a weak presence on social media and that there's an overconsumption of English content. Since we aren't limiting ourselves to Bill C-13 today, we could look into other issues and consider what steps the federal government can take to increase the presence of French on social media. We can put that question to the municipalities as well, and to the Quebec government and the anglophone governments of the anglophone provinces. Why not? What can they do to increase the presence of French on the Internet?

It seems to me there must be ways. We can do great things, not solely in English. If society wants, it will develop ways, such as presence programs in universities, CEGEPs and high schools. We can consider programs for funding virtual and electronic creation on social media and the Internet. Once the problem has been observed, it must not be used to further inferiorize or trivialize French, but rather to consider what we can do from now on.

That's our mandate, and very much yours as well. You've just identified a serious problem, Mr. Drouin. It's true that young people consume too much social media in English.

• (1130)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

I'll ask Mr. Parent the same question. I'm familiar with the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, or RDÉE Canada, and the Société Économique de l'Ontario, the SEO.

Bill C-13 includes provisions on immigration. Are you satisfied with that, or are you aware of any improvement or change that could be made to the bill on the subject?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: I think every bill can be improved, regardless of its form.

We think that, in its present form, Bill C-13 should be amended to provide for a separate path for francophone economic immigration to official language minority communities. That opinion is shared not only by SEC and RDÉE Canada, but also by other organizations of the Canadian francophonie, including the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA.

This subject is partly addressed in the text of the bill, but it should be clarified to state exactly what such a path would be.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parent and Mr. Drouin.

The next question will be asked by Mario Beaulieu, the second vice-chair of this committee.

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

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

Thanks to the witnesses as well.

I want to go back to what Mr. Godin said earlier. Between 2000 and 2017, the federal government paid more than 35% of funding allocated to anglophone universities. For 2017, that figure rose to 38.4%, which represented \$363 million, quite a significant sum.

I realize you didn't finish your presentation, Mr. Perreault. Do you have any other important points to raise?

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: The situation at the airports was raised earlier.

What is Canada's international image?

It's actually the image of an anglophone country. Let's admit it. Just try to find French in Canadian embassies and consulates. You may find some, but not very much. The image of Canada as a francophone country doesn't exist.

Here's a visually strong example. Consider the impact on immigration. If Canada's embassies and consulates around the world project the image of an anglophone country on their home web pages, I don't think that will encourage a lot of francophone immigration. The image that immigrants have before coming here is that of an anglophone country.

Here's a personal example, Mr. Beaulieu.

Coming back from the south, where I had spent my winter vacation, I arrived at Ottawa airport, in the nation's capital, like any immigrant, refugee or tourist from abroad. The signs on all the welcome booths read, "English agents — Agents anglais", but those on two other booths read, "Bilingual agents — Agents bilingues".

It didn't take long for me to understand that there are two languages in Canada: French and bilingual. It's not surprising that 90% of English Canadians are unilingual or that, given the vision that French is bilingual, the language is eroding in Quebec.

That suits the "anglosphere" because, by anglicizing citizens, it can fill its universities, CEGEPs, radio stations, media and whatever you want to name.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm going to continue in the same vein.

You talk about bilingualism. Ultimately, the Canadian model is institutional bilingualism. That's what the Official Languages Act imposes on Quebec, whereas, under its own model, French is the common language across Quebec.

If all federal government intervention is always designed to increase services in English in order to ensure bilingualism, how does that guarantee the future of French?

• (1135)

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: In Canada and North America, this equality of status is good for French. However, when all programs are put on the same footing, the minority official language will always be at a great disadvantage. Equality on the ground is measured by the availability of resources for creation, production and dissemination. When the federal government decides to give grants to Quebec...

Remember, French is the minority language. French is the one that's declining in Canada; it's the one that's being shoved aside. It's the one that's being systematically erased. That's the right word: it's being quietly erased. It's being erased here in Hull on the NCC signs that the City of Gatineau is required to post in English and French. French has been erased in Quebec in order to be consistent with this vision of bilingualism. We had removed English, of course, but French is being erased in Quebec.

The federal government has taken incredibly violent action through the National Capital Commission, which we are supposed to call the "Commission de la capitale fédérale"! For a Quebecker, the national capital is Quebec City. Ottawa is the capital of the Canadian federation. I think the word "national" is inappropriate in that title.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I agree with you.

According to many researchers, including Charles Castonguay and Quebec's French language minister, at least 90% of language transfer payments should be earmarked for French-language programs in order to secure the future of French and maintain the demographic weight of francophones.

However, the federal government uses the first official language spoken to determine what services to offer in English. In Quebec, that includes 33% of immigrants. We want to get 90% of those transfers, but the federal government is anglicizing that 33% of Quebec's population. In other words, it's working hard to put French in a minority position in Quebec.

Do you agree with that?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

That's an excellent question, but we'll have to come back to it later.

A pleasant breeze has blown in from Manitoba. Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thanks as well to the witnesses today.

My question is for Mr. Perreault and Mr. Parent.

We've analyzed the numbers from the Department of Immigration, relying on the data on permanent residents admitted in 2019. The main 10 source countries of immigration provide 61% of the immigrants who arrive in Canada. English is the official language, or one of the official languages, in 6 of those 10 countries. French is an official language in none of those countries. Some 45% of newcomers come from these six countries. Add to that a minor consular presence in francophone Africa, for example, and we're beginning to see the picture that explains why the federal government's policy is failing.

Mr. Perreault and Mr. Parent, what do these numbers say about the efforts the federal government has made to attract francophones to Canada?

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: Mr. Parent, do you want to answer that question first?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: Yes, I can answer it briefly.

Ms. Ashton, you've raised a very good point about our consular presence in countries of interest to the Canadian francophonie. Unfortunately, Canada's presence in Africa isn't proportionate to the country's interest in the Canadian francophonie.

Furthermore, certain initiatives directed by Global Affairs Canada, through its Trade Commissioner Service, for example, are minor and do little to offset the pool of francophones that should normally arrive in Canada but doesn't.

A few days ago, I took part in a Global Affairs Canada consultation, in which it was noted that the average cost associated with francophone programming in our embassies and consulates was only \$2,000 per embassy, which is really very little. The whole issue

here is the unfair situation of French and the fact that it isn't represented internationally. That has to be rebalanced.

• (1140)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Perreault, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: I believe that Quebec claims exclusive jurisdiction over immigration. This is the territorial approach, of which I am very much in favour because no self-respecting nation can allow another to tell it what it wants. The concept of nationhood is important.

Immigration is a major factor in the situation and future of a nation. In my view, the entire immigration sector should be Quebec's responsibility. As regards what Canada would do about francophone minorities outside Quebec, I hope that English Canada will open the door to even more francophone immigration based on an equal partnership.

It's not surprising that we take in so many anglophone immigrants since the Canadian government continues to enter into international agreements. If Canada were French, do you think it would forge more international ties with the francophonie as a whole? Of course it would. However, Canada defines itself as English as it presents itself to the world. What French there is is only a facade.

Immigrants want to come to a country where the level of comfort is quite high. It must be understood that it's anglophones who are integrating, which undermines French Canada and Quebec. In fact, 50% of allophone immigrants who opt to use a language other than their own choose English when they immigrate to Quebec. That's not good. We need 90% of immigrants to opt for French.

You mentioned regression. Immigration and education are central issues. Theoretically, education isn't a federal government jurisdiction. In that instance as well...

Ms. Niki Ashton: I apologize for interrupting, but you're coming to my next question, which concerns education.

My question is for Mr. Parent.

Mr. Perreault, thank you for the points you've raised.

Mr. Parent, the RDÉE, the FCFA and the ACUFC recently published a report on labour needs in the francophone and Acadian communities.

The highlights that you forwarded to us reflect what the committee has heard. There is a labour shortage in many sectors that threatens the vitality of francophone communities.

Do we have enough personnel to teach French to rights holders and those who want to learn it?

Is there any international demand for potential francophone teachers who want to come to Canada and work in our school systems?

The Chair: Mr. Parent, please answer the question in less than 30 seconds.

Mr. Jean-François Parent: The immediate answer is no. There isn't enough personnel to meet the demand. The report also indicates that this is a general finding. All regions of Canada have labour shortages in the nine sectors, including education, on which we relied to conduct the study.

However, there is strong international demand, which also raises the question of credential recognition, which unfortunately still requires a lot of work. A great deal of work needs to be done to align immigrants' separate path to integration with our labour needs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parent.

You'll be able to expand further on your idea later on.

This completes the first round of questions.

To begin the second round of questions, I give the floor to our newcomer, Mr. Vis.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): I'm very pleased to be here today. As I previously said, the northern Fraser River in British Columbia is well represented today.

At the start of the meeting, someone told me that the French word "vis" means "screw". However, my family comes from the Netherlands, where it actually means "fish". So think of me as a fish rather than a "screw".

Mr. Perreault, I listened to you talking passionately about protecting French. I'd like to tell you a little about my personal situation.

I have a six-year-old son who wants to learn French. He entered a lottery and won a place at a francophone school in the British Columbia education system. When he started the school this year, not a single teacher could speak French. Many parents in British Columbia would like their children to be taught in Canada's second official language, but we're unable to grant that constitutional right to my son and thousands of other children in the province who have neither the luck nor the opportunity to speak both official languages.

How can we change this situation?

Is this a federal transfer payments issue? Should the government establish incentives to attract more teachers and to address the labour shortage problem?

• (1145)

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: At the rate Canada assimilates francophones in its anglophone provinces, it isn't surprising there's a shortage of French teachers. Unfortunately, there are also a lot of francophones in Quebec, although relatively fewer than elsewhere, whose main language has become English as a result of circumstances. Our mother tongue is being lost over time. We're experiencing the phenomena of assimilation that are occurring outside Quebec.

Now you want to take action on this. Good. Bravo! The woman who spoke earlier discussed immigration. If the British Columbia government wants francophone teachers and can't find any within its borders, it should recruit internationally. That would meet the

objective of Mr. Parent, who wants an increase in francophone immigration. The money's there, and we're able to recruit them. Surely there are people in countries like Gabon, Morocco, Switzerland, Belgium and France who would be happy to teach French around the world under some arrangement. When I say "around the world", I of course include British Columbia, Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you very much.

Mr. Parent, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: Absolutely.

There is growing interest in francophone minority education programs. Programs, such as immersion, that are mainly in French have been monitored for many years. That attests to an interest in understanding the Canadian situation and living in both official languages and also represents more opportunities and possibilities in the job market after the fact for students who learn French.

In the logic of economic nation-building, we have to be able to stimulate that interest in teaching French because that can then create professional development opportunities for those who benefit from it. This is an investment that Canadians want. Greater investment in immigration, particularly for teaching in minority communities, would add value for the government.

Mr. Brad Vis: Earlier you discussed the situation of federal airports and other federal institutions. In British Columbia, I recently tried to speak French with someone at the airport and at Service Canada, for example, and it's virtually impossible to obtain services in both official languages there.

How could we improve the level of French of workers in federal institutions?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis. That's an excellent question.

We will now give the floor to Arielle Kayabaga for five minutes.

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

I would first like to thank our guests for taking the time to come and speak with us.

Mr. Parent, Bill C-13 would require the Department of Immigration to establish an integrated policy on francophone immigration with indicators, markers and targets.

What impact do you think that will have on the demographic weight of the francophone population, the vitality of French and our country as a whole?

• (1150)

Mr. Jean-François Parent: If we had a specific framework for measuring francophone immigration to Canada, it would help agencies and institutions that work in the sector more accurately measure changes in francophone immigration to Canada. That would help us conduct more thorough follow-up on the subject.

I recently had a chance to speak with some researchers, including Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault, who cooperated in the study that the Commissioner of Official Languages conducted on the 4.4% immigration target in the minority communities. That kind of data would help develop predictive models and provide better follow-up to IRCC. While some data were available in 2003, 2008, 2019 and 2021, there are nevertheless discrepancies that must be corrected regarding access to immigration data and, more specifically, for official language minority communities.

I would be good to have an accountability framework, specific objectives and better metrics to assist in conducting more regular and constant follow-up, ideally from year to year, and in determining the extent to which immigration thresholds can be reestablished for minority communities. The ideal would be to have a restorative target in the next few years.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you for your answer.

Your organization's also seeking a separate francophone immigration program, which would not be mixed, as a solution to recruiting a qualified francophone workforce.

Could you tell us more about how that could be done? How do you view this?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: Actually, this should be compared with the research project that Ms. Ashton previously noted on the specific labour needs of official language minority communities. Those needs overlap in some communities, and there are several thousands of unfilled jobs in various communities.

This kind of program would, first, help promote economic integration and directly meet existing needs on the ground. It wouldn't be easy to do because it would require a study to determine the needs that should be segmented by community and by municipality. However, it would have a direct impact on the labour force.

As a result, this kind of program could be custom-built to meet needs and, more particularly, to respond to the issues encountered across the country.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Do you agree that we can use many methods to come up with an approach to increasing francophone immigration outside Quebec. This is a good approach that would help reinforce minority communities so they can acquire that labour force. It would also help achieve this harmony in the francophonie across Canada.

Mr. Jean-François Parent: Exactly. It would result in a targeted approach that would directly meet the communities' needs and would be defined by and for the communities themselves. You have to visualize this whole "by" and "for" approach as part of the equation in order to establish a separate program that meets the requirements on the ground and also responds to the evolving representation of francophone communities in Canada.

We know from the latest statistics that French is declining proportionately in the communities. However, if we look at the absolute numbers, we see that the number of francophones is slightly increasing. So we should understand these facts and consider how this kind of program could meet the specific needs, for example, of far northern Ontario or western Canada. The needs of those regions differ from those of Acadie and southern Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kayabaga.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Mr. Perreault, going back to a question I asked you earlier, based on the first official language spoken criterion, the federal government wants to ensure that 33% of immigrants to Quebec have access to English-language services everywhere.

Isn't that tantamount to an effort to put Quebec francophones in the minority?

• (1155)

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: There's a clash of visions here. The problem won't be solved until the federal government adopts a territorial approach to Quebec and stops applying to Quebec what it provides for francophones outside Quebec. Between the two of us, this is a symmetrical approach, but we know very well that the situation isn't symmetrical. Quebec is in a unique situation in Canada and North America.

If there's any genuine concern in Canada to see Quebec and, consequently, the North American francophonie develop, the federal government will have to abandon this approach whereby it does to Quebec what it's doing to Canada outside Quebec. No, it can't work. Fifty per cent of students at McGill University are non-anglophone. That represents the whole recruitment pool for the French language, and the federal government gives millions of dollars to organizations in Quebec to promote the advancement and spread of English. They need students in their CEGEPs and universities. Where will they find them? They guarantee themselves an additional clientele through francophone bilingualization and anglicization programs.

Between the two of us, this is a trick, a politician's manipulation to maintain this imbalance. It's a tough thing to say, but let's admit it: this vision is what's weakening the francophonie and the French language in Quebec. When the federal government gives money to organizations that promote English in Quebec, what do you think they're doing? They'd need it in Canada outside Quebec...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perreault...

Mr. Jean-Paul Perreault: Take that money and send it to the organizations that promote French outside Quebec.

I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I cheated and I'm not proud of it.

Some voices: Oh oh!

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

Mr. Parent, we know your organization helped immigrants before they arrived. You noted the service that you offered before the government decided, pursuant to a call for bids in 2019, not to retain your services. You also noted that you worked in francophone Africa, where the government systematically denied immigration applications.

Based on your experience, would you please tell us more about the efforts the government is making in Africa to attract francophones who would like to come and settle in Canada?

What should the government do to stop impeding those efforts?

Mr. Jean-François Parent: The answer to your second question is simple: expand pre-departure services and, in particular, include the economic aspect in the equation. If we want a more significant presence in francophone Africa and to attract more international francophones to Canada, we must reinforce pre-departure programs, in which the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, or RDÉE Canada, had been involved for a number of years before I joined the organization. That service was unfortunately taken away from us despite its tangible results on the ground. We hope it will be reinstated.

Since economic immigration plays an increasingly dominant role in our society, we need specific authorities and programs to meet the needs on the ground. With its 12 provincial and territorial agencies representing each of the minority communities, RDÉE Canada lends itself perfectly to this kind of initiative. Consequently, when the action plan for official languages is next renewed, or when the obligations associated with Bill C-13 are reorganized, we would like to be able to play a greater international role in promoting francophone minority communities and increasing their appeal.

• (1200)

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'd like to thank you and to tell you we were shocked to hear that your service was cut cut.

I'd also like to note that the labour shortage issue also affects people outside Quebec and that action must be taken.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Before suspending, I would like to thank our guests for their impassioned comments on the subject of Bill C-13. It was very interesting.

If you were unable to share any information for lack of time, please feel free to send it in writing to our clerk. She will then forward to all the members of the committee.

Thank you very much for being here.

We will now suspend.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: We will now resume.

The second panel of witnesses includes Alain Laberge, Executive Director of the Franco-Manitoban School Division, and Antoine Désilets, Executive Director of the Société Santé en français, both of whom we welcome by videoconference.

The witnesses will have five minutes each for their presentations, after which we will proceed to the period of questions. Since I am very strict about time, you have a maximum of five minutes.

I now give the floor to Alain Laberge.

Mr. Alain Laberge (Executive Director, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

As the chair mentioned, my name is Alain Laberge, executive director of the Franco-Manitoban School Division, a school division representing nearly 6,000 students and located in the territories of treaties 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 and the lands of the birthplace of Louis Riel and the Red River Métis.

I would like to begin by thanking the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages for allowing me to appear this morning. Modernizing the Official Languages Act is no mean feat, but it was necessary after all those years. I also appreciate being able to present our school division's views on the proposed amendments.

Before commenting on the various specific specific amendments proposed in Bill C-13, I would like to share a few thoughts inspired by a reading of this document.

As we all know, education is a provincial jurisdiction, but let's stop for a brief moment to consider the reasons why we neither can nor must dissociate the bill from what we call the education world and, more specifically, minority community education.

Having been thoroughly involved in the field for more than 30 years, at times swimming against the current, I think it's important, even essential, to note that minority community education entails far more than the mere acquisition of knowledge. It's more a concept or a universe anchored deep within us and includes: the language, with its beautiful accents that come from many places; inclusion, which is who we are and how we come together; culture, which enables us to express ourselves creatively; identity-building, which constructs what we are; and many other things such as health, immigration, youth and the economy.

In fact, minority community education is our inheritance from the past and our wealth for the future, because are we not learners from the cradle to the grave?

It would be easy to discuss health, education and the economy under the individual umbrellas of their respective departments, but why not use Bill C-13 to connect those various sectors so that our minority communities can develop more fully?

We welcome the wording that would replace the tenth paragraph of the preamble to the act, and more particularly the following two statements concerning what the federal government recognizes:

AND WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of providing opportunities for everyone in Canada to learn a second official language

AND WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of supporting sectors that are essential to enhancing the vitality of English and French linguistic minority communities

As you can see, we refuse to view "education" as one single thing.

For this recommendation to be implemented, it will be important to ensure that major and continuing investments are made and that francization programs can be offered in both urban and rural areas.

Now allow me to present the major themes of our discussions of the latest amendments to the Official Languages Act. Note that I will emphasize certain changes but will also underscore other parts of the act that are decisive for the survival of our francophone schools.

We consider it necessary to emphasize the importance of the amendments proposed to the seventh and eighth paragraphs of the preamble to the act. After providing that the the Government of Canada is committed to "enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development," the new version adds the following:

taking into account their uniqueness, diversity and historical and cultural contributions to Canadian society...

This addition truly builds a bridge between our two solitudes, but also, I should say, a bridge among our various solitudes because let us not forget that the Canada of today and tomorrow must take into consideration our new compatriots and the fact that we will be blending our histories with those they will have brought with them in their suitcases.

We also consider it necessary to underscore the importance of the elements of the tenth paragraph of the preamble and of the amendments proposed thereto, particularly the following:

AND WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of providing opportunities for everyone in Canada to learn a second official language...

AND WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of supporting sectors that are essential to enhancing the vitality of...French linguistic minority communities...

...the Constitution of Canada provides every person with the right to use English or French in the debates of the Houses of the Legislature of Quebec and those of the Legislature of Manitoba...

I want to draw your attention to the inclusion of "those of the Legislature of Manitoba" because it was not a foregone conclusion.

I also welcome the new wording making clear that the purpose of the Official Languages Act is to

(b) support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities in order to protect them;

(b.1) advance the equality of status and use of the English and French languages within Canadian society, taking into account that French is in a minority situation in Canada and North America...

The addition made to clarify that French is in a minority situation is crucial to an understanding of the everyday struggle in which the various minority school boards are engaged. Make no mistake: the vitality of our educational communities hangs by a thread and is

supported by hundreds, indeed thousands, of educators and parents across the country. These people, like the Gaul Village, have chosen to live in French, knowing full well that nothing will come to them easily. Consider the allegory of the tiny flower that, despite desert conditions, flourishes and resists the winds and squalls.

We consider it necessary to emphasize the importance of the elements set forth under the heading, "Définitions et interprétation", including the addition of three provisions on the interpretation of language rights.

We feel we have a duty to remember that thousands of francophones across the country have attended anglophone schools against their will and passed on their language in secret, concealing their books to avoid the ire of the majority. We have a duty to remember the rights holders who, despite their goodwill, lost the privilege of educating their children in French. In this regard, the three provisions concerning language rights, even unamended, must be interpreted as correcting the errors of the past. Can we stop these all too often political power struggles and let parents make the best choice when the time comes to take back their language and culture?

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Laberge. You'll be able to discuss that at greater length in response to the questions put to you.

Now it's the turn of Antoine Désilets, from the Société Santé en français, to make his presentation.

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

Mr. Antoine Désilets (Executive Director, Société Santé en français): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the members of the committee. It is a genuine pleasure to be here today.

First, I would like to acknowledge that the land on which the Société Santé en français sits is part of the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Before proposing two amendments to Bill C-13 regarding the health of the francophone and Acadian minority communities, I would first like to provide you with some figures on access to health services in French in Canada. These figures date back to 2020 and come from a survey that the Léger organization conducted for Health Canada. They reveal how official language communities perceive access to health services in French.

The first finding is that access to health services in French still faces challenges. One-third of survey respondents reported that they had received health services entirely in French, another third that they had received partial access, and the remaining third that they had received no services in French.

The second finding was that progress had been made in providing access to services but that there had also been some backsliding. Some 19% of survey respondents said they had seen improvements in the previous 10 years, while 42% had seen no improvement, and 16% reported that the quality of access had declined. The remaining 23% had no opinion on the matter.

Lastly, the survey reveals that the main barriers to access to health services in French stem from a lack of human resources, fear of long waiting times in hospitals, a lack of information available in French and concerns about receiving poor-quality services.

The Chair: Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Désilets, but I'm being told to ask you to speak more slowly for the interpreters.

Mr. Antoine Désilets: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll try to speak more slowly. I don't often make presentations to committees.

Allow me to say a few words about the Société Santé en français.

We are a national organization supported by Health Canada. We celebrated our 20th anniversary this year. We are a network of networks, essentially as a result of the administration of health services. Since we need to have bases in all provinces and territories, we support 16 independent French-language health organizations across Canada. Those 16 members are directly connected to their health systems and to a group of essential partners: governments, health institutions, health professionals, training institutions and the communities themselves. Our job is to make known the needs of francophones and the contributions that these health partners can make. We support the development of capacity to serve francophones in order to transform programs and public health policies in a sustainable manner.

As you will have understood, we receive funding from the federal government for the purpose of offering our support. We cannot intervene directly in the delivery of services. Consequently, we engage in support work to foster systems and capacity development, but it's a David and Goliath struggle.

The federal and provincial governments spent a total of \$300 billion on health in 2021. Keep that figure in mind. However, federal government support for the official language communities amounts to \$40 million a year. That money is earmarked for 13 separate English and French health systems for professional training and capacity development. Essentially, one penny for every \$100 spent in Canada every year is allocated to official language communities. We really are a tiny canoe competing with big ocean liners.

All of which brings me to two recommendations respecting Bill C-13.

I want to start by noting that we have been a member of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada since December 2021 and that we support all the proposals that the FCFA has made regarding, for example, management of this issue by a central agency. However, the two proposals I am presenting today are more specifically related to health.

Our first recommendation is that authority to subject the federal government's spending power to official-language-related conditions in sectors essential to the vitality of the official language minority communities named in part VII be reaffirmed in the act.

What kinds of conditions are we talking about? I am suggesting two. First, they may be conditions respecting the collection of data on the health status of official language minority communities. We still don't have a clear picture of the health status of French-speaking official language minority communities relative to the majority

population. The data are collected by system or by institution and are not standardized nationally. However, it seems essential that we have a clear idea of the situation in order to provide official languages support programs. A second type of condition would be that the delivery of services in both official languages be reflected in the government's priorities as set forth in its bilateral agreements for both mental health and long-term care.

Our second recommendation is that it be clearly stated in the act that health is divided into two parts: health services and public health. Allow me to explain the distinction. By health services, I mean the public system, health professionals, hospitals and everything falling under provincial jurisdiction. By public health, I mean the health status of populations, healthy habits, prevention, vaccination and health promotion. This is a field in which the federal government makes a direct contribution because it is a shared responsibility.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Désilets. You will be able to discuss this at greater length as questions are put to you.

We will begin the first round of questions.

I give the floor to the first vice-chair of our committee, Joël Godin, for six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for taking part in this exercise today. As I told the previous panel, you are helping us to be better.

My question is for both organizations.

In your opening statements, you gave us an overview of the situation, and we all feel the same: an enormous amount of work must be done to improve the situation of the French language, one of the two official languages in Canada. Now, how can we do that?

We are here today to improve Bill C-13, the purpose of which is to modernize the Official Languages Act. My question will be very specific. How can we establish tools, statutory provisions, that would enable action to be taken in the provinces and territories? How can we improve the bill by considering language clauses, for example? What do you think would be the best amendment to make language clauses effective?

I'll ask Mr. Laberge to answer first, and then it will be Mr. Désilets' turn.

Mr. Alain Laberge: Thank you very much for that very relevant question, Mr. Godin.

At the Franco-Manitoban School Division, we believe that the federal government can play a leading role in establishing the foundation of bilingualism.

I cheated a little: I listened to the first panel of witnesses earlier.

We think the essential tools would be designed to give newcomers access to francization courses in both rural and urban areas. These people have to be supported. We often take in people from Africa, Europe and Asia—

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me, Mr. Laberge. I'm going to stop you right away.

My question is very specific: what do you think would be the best language clauses that we could include in Bill C-13 to achieve a specific result?

• (1220)

Mr. Alain Laberge: As we said, one of the language clauses should be designed to foster a progression toward the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society. Until we have achieved that equality, the sole purpose of the schools will be to teach a language that will never be used in society, and we will turn regions outside Quebec into places where students learn an obsolete French language that will serve absolutely no purpose.

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

What do you think, Mr. Désilets?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: This bill mentions respect for provincial jurisdictions under the Constitution of Canada. We could also add recognition of the right to subject the federal government's spending power to conditions.

In my presentation, I mentioned two specific factors, including the collection of compelling data. Every year, the government transfers \$45 billion to the provinces. That amount will probably increase over the next few years. I think we have a right to ask the federal government for something in return, such as data specifically concerning the use of official languages in health services and the service levels offered by the programs. That would help establish a complete picture of the situation. If federal health transfers exacerbate unfair situations between francophones and members of the majority population, I think we're failing to meet the act's objective.

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

I'm going to test an amendment respecting language clauses that I've considered and intend to move.

You have to understand that there are areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction and areas of federal jurisdiction. I believe that Mr. Désilets deals with that situation every day.

Let's say we introduced an amendment to Bill C-13 respecting language clauses in which we stated that bilateral agreements would be reached between the federal government and the provinces and territories regarding every infrastructure investment but that additional funding would be allocated to provinces and territories wishing to introduce specific measures for minorities. Would that be realistic and effective?

I'll let you answer, Mr. Laberge.

Mr. Alain Laberge: You're absolutely right. I love that proposal.

There would nevertheless have to be transparency when money was transferred to the provinces. As you noted, there are two systems. Education is an area of provincial jurisdiction. We'd like to know whether that money would be paid directly to us so we could move matters forward in such a way that they aren't blocked by the province. For example, we could build new schools, offer more transportation and hire more teachers in rural areas. We could have the same thing.

Mr. Joël Godin: You're right. I think that there's an obligation of result and that it should be indicated in the language clause.

Mr. Désilets, I'd like to hear you comment on my language clauses proposal.

Mr. Antoine Désilets: You mentioned the idea of allocating funding to provinces and territories prepared to take specific action. I think that would be a good amendment. However, it can't be denied that the federal government also has to play a leadership role. Not all Canadian provinces will get involved in official language issues. It will have to keep putting very clear expectations and objectives on the table and support the francophone community organizations on the ground that are offering tools and are keen.

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

I would've liked to ask you more questions, but the chair is signalling to me.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, if you have any more amendment ideas or wording to suggest to reinforce the bill and language clauses but don't have the time to tell us about them during the meeting, I would like you to send them to us in writing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I now give the floor to Patricia Lattanzio for six minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for taking the time to join us today to help us study Bill C-13.

My first question is for Mr. Laberge.

I'm very pleased that you're with us today and that the school sector is represented. I was a commissioner on the largest anglophone school board in Quebec. So I'm very pleased to have you with us because you may be able to give us some ideas about how to preserve the schools. We're talking about a provincial jurisdiction here, but, as you said in your speech, we're talking about communities, not schools. It's a question of inclusion, culture and, actually, identity.

I'd like to go a little further with a view to helping you. Apart from increasing the number of French teachers in our schools, are there any other measures or other investments that could enhance the presence and maintenance of French in Manitoba.

• (1225)

Mr. Alain Laberge: I remember you, Ms. Lattanzio. I was executive director of the Sorel-Tracy school board in another life, and I remember you very clearly.

How would it be possible to go further? You mentioned the teachers, and that's one of the aspects. However, when we talk about minority education, we often seem to forget that the enormous costs are necessary simply to have a school in our community, whether those costs are for books, software or transportation. When students travel 75 to 90 minutes by bus morning and evening, they really have to be devoted to the cause of education in French.

Since we have few schools, a virtually inadequate number of schools, we need more real estate to welcome our students. We also have to give parents a chance to choose their children's schools. Many parents in Flin Flon and Thompson are rights holders who, however, have lost their rights. We must ensure that section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is considered in its entirety.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: As you know, we've just received the results of the 2021 census. It's a new census outlining the data that were collected more specifically on rights holders. Could you tell us more about the statistical results based on the data that was collected?

Mr. Alain Laberge: Actually, the first statistics revealed didn't include that. The statistics including what we call rights holders are supposed to be released in November. The census was expanded to allow families to report that they have two mother tongues, which is fantastic. However, I haven't received those figures yet.

From the last data we received in August and September, we can see that the number of students wishing to enrol in French-language instruction programs rose substantially. That was noted by Mr. Parent, who was on the first witness panel. The problem is that, here in Manitoba, even if you want to enrol in an immersion program—I know I'm talking to the competition here, but I'll be brave—no school outside Winnipeg offers one. So we're depriving ourselves of part of the population, which will never be able to speak French because we don't even give them the opportunity to attend those schools.

The new census and the proposed amendments to section 23 of the Charter will help us expand that pool. It must be understood that we still have to fight with the departments to substantiate our needs. Anglophones in Transcona need only tell me that the population has grown and they want a new school, and it will be accepted. If I say that the francophone population of Trendsona has grown, I'll be asked how many more families that represents. However, I don't have the data I need to put up a fight before the department. So those figures will be essential.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: My next question is for Mr. Désilets.

Earlier you talked about a survey that had been conducted on health. How many people were surveyed in order to generate that data? When was the survey conducted? Was it before, during or after the pandemic?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: Thank you for that question.

As regards methodology, I don't have the number of respondents with me. The survey was conducted by the Léger firm, which is well known in the field.

The study was released in early 2020, and the data was gathered before the pandemic. We have no clear idea of the impact of the pandemic. However, the Société Santé en français estimates that the impact of the pandemic, which affected the general population, was even greater in the minority official language communities as a result of the challenges associated with access to health services.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Do you think that all communications should be conducted in both official languages, whether or not they're urgent?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: I think that's essential.

In an emergency, if society shirks its responsibilities and abandons its official language objectives, it sends out the message that French is a secondary language. I don't think that's a good message to send.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I would now like to go back to the proposals you made.

You drew a distinction between public health and health services.

How does that work for the two types of services?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: I'll be pleased to tell you a little about that.

• (1230)

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

Mr. Antoine Désilets: Virtually 75% of funding and support, that is to say most of it, currently concerns service development at the federal level.

As I said in my presentation, we influence the situation somewhat indirectly. Our work is to equip the provinces to do this work.

Currently, in public health, there's a...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Désilets.

We'll be able to come back to that later.

I now give the floor to the second vice-chair of the committee.

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

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

My question concerns the schools.

I read that approximately 50% of the children of francophone parents don't have access to a French school.

Do you think that percentage reflects the actual situation?

If so, would that situation be attributable to the fact that francophones are scattered across an enormous territory?

Mr. Alain Laberge: That's an excellent point.

I worked in British Columbia for 15 years. Quebeckers congregated in Maillardville.

At one point, the number of newcomers speaking English exploded, along with house prices, and francophones then found themselves scattered everywhere. That's why we need more schools.

In addition, newcomers often face financial challenges and all wind up in the same area, which increases the number of students in our already full schools. We also send them the wrong message by saying that, even though Canada is a bilingual country, they will never work in French in Manitoba. To ensure their survival, these people enrol their children in English-language schools. I speak very good French, and my daughter went to the French school and is already bilingual.

However, you have to take all these factors into consideration.

Mr. Beaulieu, you're right in saying that nearly 50%, perhaps even more, of the children of francophone parents currently don't attend French-language schools.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: According to Bill C-13 and the white paper, we're trying to increase the funding granted to immersion schools. However, there's no talk of increasing funding for schools managed by francophones and intended for francophones.

Many stakeholders have told me that immersion schools guarantee a minimum level of French-language learning but that, in many instances, they promote the assimilation of young francophones.

Don't you think we should also increase the funding granted to schools managed by francophones and intended for francophones?

Mr. Alain Laberge: I completely agree with you.

I think we also have to change the culture. If you have immersion schools, but there's absolutely no francophone life outside school, that kills the language.

For example, children may attend immersion school and want to learn French, but if everything they do, such as playing soccer or swimming with their friends who speak English, or going to mass, takes place in English, it's a complete waste of time.

The fact that immersion schools receive more money is one thing. However, schools absolutely have to operate in an environment where the structure also enables students to live in French.

As was noted earlier, part of French-language school budgets should be used to promote new immigration, in particular. We would also like to recruit people from Africa and have them come here, but we can't offer them work or anything else. It's like a wagon with a broken wheel.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Most of the funding goes to immersion schools.

Would it be a good thing for immersion schools to be managed by francophones?

Mr. Alain Laberge: That's a very political question, Mr. Beaulieu.

I'm an administrator. If you tell me that, tomorrow morning, the Franco-Manitoban School Division will manage the real property of the immersion schools, I'll do it because it will be my duty. Would we go about it differently? Yes, of course. Would we have trouble finding teachers? Yes, we'd be facing the same challenge.

Canada claims to be a bilingual country, but it needs to walk the walk. French-language services must be made universally accessible. It's impossible to be served in French at Saint Boniface Hospital. Where's the logic in that?

Why would children and newcomers want to learn this language if nothing then attaches them to it?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In Quebec, the Act respecting health services and social services guarantees service in English for English-speaking persons, not just for anglophones.

Many hospitals have been designated to provide those services under article 29.1 of the Charter of the French language. This means that they operate in English and hire anglophone personnel.

The plans respecting access to those services aren't subject to a clause specifying "where numbers warrant". Services are simply provided on demand.

Shouldn't that be introduced outside Quebec for francophones? In any event, I think the situation should be rectified accordingly.

Perhaps this is a bigger concern for the representative of Société Santé en français.

• (1235)

Mr. Antoine Désilets: The issue of designations is critical, and it's essential that we know the population pools.

That takes me back to the compelling data issue. As is the case in education, there's no clear information on the services that francophones use or on the service points where they go. We don't know if they have any different health needs. So everything depends on access to good data, and we don't have that on the ground right now.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Given that observation, should Bill C-13 be reinforced in order to reverse the trend toward assimilation of francophones outside Quebec?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: It's important to seize the opportunity. The objectives in Bill C-13 must be clarified and the right measures put in place.

I obviously agree that the bill has to be reinforced in order to guarantee its impact. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that language isn't a barrier for francophones in the health field. We want all Canadians to be well served across the country.

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

I think my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We will complete this first round of questions with Ms. Ashton, who is from Manitoba.

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

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

Thank you very much to our witnesses for being here today.

Today's meeting is special for me, because we have a representative of the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, the DSFM, here with us today. The committee is well aware of the challenges I encountered when I tried to enrol my children in the francophone day care centre in Thompson, and we know that these challenges are related to the worker shortage in early childhood education across Canada.

The committee also knows how pleased I am that the DSFM accepted my children, who are beginning kindergarten this year. If you can hear them in the background, it's because schools are closed today. It's a professional development day for the teachers. I must say that things have been going well for my children and that we've been speaking French to one another, even though the school is closed today.

I'd like to thank Mr. Laberge and Mr. Désilets for their testimony and for the clear message they have been sending out on what we can do at this historic moment to improve the bill and stop the decline in French across Canada, including Manitoba communities.

Mr. Laberge, the committee previously heard from Mr. Jean-François Parent, of the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, which published a report last month about the shortage of francophone workers in many different fields, including education.

We also heard from Mr. Roger Lepage, who told us that the situation was more or less the same in Saskatchewan.

To what extent do you think the report's conclusions are applicable to Manitoba?

Mr. Alain Laberge: That's really a very good question.

You're talking about Thompson, Manitoba, a city in the northern part of the province that has a small francophone community. The community wants to grow. But for a community to grow and prosper in French, access to services is essential, and francophone members of the community need to work twice as hard to get them. It's therefore important to encourage potential newcomers to come and work here to repopulate and remain in the community. There is no point in bringing in new teachers to work at the La Voie du Nord day care centre if they're going to move to Winnipeg two years later.

In order to provide a basic level of services, a system needs to be introduced and investment is required. If there's only one francophone day care centre in a city like Thompson, and it happens to be 10 or 15 kilometres away from where you live, then it's easier to send your children to the anglophone day care centre just around the corner.

It's impossible to fight against a system like that. If families are to be helped, then equitable services have to be available in all the provinces.

Ms. Niki Ashton: That's it exactly. We are well aware of that reality.

I'd also like to ask you what you think, given your experience not only with the DSFM, but also in British Columbia, about the following issue.

We acknowledge that there is a worker shortage. We've tried to support day care services by recruiting people from abroad. We encountered many different obstacles as a result of the federal government's lack of priorities on the recruitment of education and early childhood professionals, including internationally.

Do you think the federal government should use this act to do a lot more to attract francophone educators from abroad, including those who work in early childhood education.

Mr. Alain Laberge: At the federal level, education is the poor relation, because it's a provincial jurisdiction. I believe the federal government understands the importance of funding. It also understands the role Canada can play in retaining foreign workers. But first, you have to go and get them. You have to attract them and then make them want to live here.

There are gaps in education, just as there are in other fields. Is this because it's not considered a saving, or rather an investment?

I think we have to look at things the other way around, and view education as the lifeblood of francophone communities outside Quebec. In fact, it's true for Quebec as well.

• (1240)

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

Mr. Désilets, according to the employability report prepared by the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, there is also a shortage of qualified workers in health care services.

What more can the government do to ensure the continuance of francophone health care services, and what would be the repercussions if the francophone immigration policy were to fail?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: I'm not a specialist in immigration policy. However, with respect to the availability of labour, there's a shortage in health care everywhere in Canada. It affects francophones even more. By that I mean that there are no francophone health care professionals in Canada who are unable to provide services in English as well, at least outside of Quebec.

These are people who are really bilingual, because that's the reality of the workplace. It means that they can work equally well in anglophone, francophone and bilingual settings. This exacerbates the shortage.

Francophone immigration is certainly one solution to the immigration-related problems. Credential recognition is another extremely important factor. There are major challenges in integrating workers from abroad. One example is the language tests prior to the skills upgrading tests. People arrive here thinking they will be working in French, but are told they have to learn English before their capacities can be recognized. I think some changes could be made in this area.

Then, of course, it's important not to forget training. There are structural circumstances that impede the training process. One example of this involves nurse training in Canada. At the moment, several provinces administer an American test that puts francophones at a significant disadvantage. Before this new test was introduced, the success rate for francophones was 93%. After the introduction of the new test, it dropped to 35% in the first year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Désilets.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

We are now going to the second round of questions.

Returning to join us today is someone who missed the Standing Committee on Official Languages so much that he begged us to invite him again.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): You've answered my prayers after months of entreaties.

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I am pleased to be back with the committee again.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here today.

I'm a member from British Columbia, as is my colleague Mr. Vis. It's difficult for me not to emphasize the importance of French in our history in the west. The problem doesn't arise only in Quebec and New Brunswick, but also in the west.

On the other side of the Fraser River, the first capital was Fort Langley, where there were many *coureurs de bois*. It's part of who we are historically. We don't want to see the use of French decline in our province or in the West. It's very important to preserve it, and I thank you for your efforts to do just that.

French used to be spoken in the countryside, in churches and in the rural communities where there were many farmers. Today, life is much more urban. It's really a struggle to preserve the use of French.

Mr. Laberge, you represent the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine. You're aware of the huge importance of French in education, training and schools. Several aspects in these areas need to be improved.

Can you explain to us how the property disposal process works? Can you give us concrete examples?

What happens with surplus buildings?

Can you tell us about what works and what doesn't?

Mr. Alain Laberge: Thank you for the question.

I used to be a school principal in Chilliwack, Mr. Dalton. So I'm very familiar with the Fraser Valley.

You mentioned the situation in the countryside, and it's important to talk about that.

When a building is declared vacant or available, it should be offered first to francophones and indigenous people. However, the process is much more complex than might appear.

We went to Manitoba in search of land and buildings, but in vain. Property developers had often already purchased the buildings without anyone checking to see whether the indigenous or francophone communities had been consulted. We might not have acquired them in any event, but we are missing out on opportunities to acquire new buildings.

● (1245)

Mr. Marc Dalton: That might in fact have helped to keep some French-language community centres or education centres going.

What percentage of federal funds earmarked for francophones in Manitoba actually get to them?

Mr. Alain Laberge: That's a good question.

We don't have access to all the data. Some of the money goes to administering the Bureau de l'éducation française, the BEF, which is part of the department of education. It handles French-language education and immersion.

One-fifth of our total budget, about \$24 million or \$25 million per year, comes from the federal government. The problem is finding out what the total amount is. How much money was allocated to immersion programs? How much money did the BEF receive? How much money did my organization receive? It's always rather difficult to get answers to these questions, because the process itself is complicated.

I'm not saying we can't get them, but we can't spend all day filling out Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act forms.

Mr. Marc Dalton: That's also the case in British Columbia. We don't know exactly where the money earmarked for program improvements goes.

How could we do a better job of welcoming newcomers into francophone minority communities?

The Chair: There are 10 seconds left.

Mr. Alain Laberge: We need to welcome newcomers properly and recognize their credentials. This process should continue for four or five years, long enough for families to settle in properly. People who come from another province are asked if they have a licence...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Laberge. You'll be able to provide further details later.

It's over now to Mr. Iacono for five minutes.

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

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

Mr. Désilets, What would you like to see happen?

What is it absolutely essential to include in Bill C-13?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: We believe that language clauses are essential. It's often hard to see where the money is going. Language clauses are needed if we want details about the outcomes. I mentioned two important areas earlier.

Having a central agency do the administration strikes us as essential. For example, there is a health program administered by a department other than Canadian Heritage, but most of the action plan and measures taken in the field are administered by Canadian Heritage. That leads to a misalignment in terms of indicators and outcomes. A central agency would be able to keep track of everything.

As I mentioned earlier, the act should speak out clearly on public health. That would give us the means to do something. The federal government finances an official languages program in the field of public health, but not for early childhood. There are no official languages programs for mental health care or care for seniors. Public health is a direct responsibility of the federal government.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

For francophone and Acadian minority communities, what are the main challenges in relation to Bill C-13?

Is that more or less covered by what you just said?

Do you have any other comments for us?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: It's a complex question because health is largely a provincial jurisdiction. Each health system in Canada has its own structure and its own challenges.

In order to take action, you have to know what is needed. So in fact, my answer does resemble my answer to the previous question.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Okay.

In your opening address, you spoke about the need to collect missing data. Could you give us advice on this? What kinds of data need to be collected? For what purposes and contexts should they be collected?

• (1250)

Mr. Antoine Désilets: I'll be very brief. Two types of data should be collected.

Firstly, there should be data about systems capacity, to determine which service centres and which professionals are capable of providing service in French. The purpose is to develop signage and to make sure that such services are accessible.

Second, there should be data on official language minority community health needs. We know that there are certain specific needs owing to their minority status.

Effective solutions have been adopted in certain locations. For example, Prince Edward Island collects data on the language vari-

able, such as what language people speak, which enables them to indicate on the health card which language people prefer to use for receiving medical services.

With data like that, Canada would have an overview of needs. There are all kinds of other ways of obtaining information about health system capacity.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Who should be handling this task?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: Collecting data on community needs is already part of the work we are doing directly with the provinces and territories. We have to prepare them and coach them. Of course, adding funding conditions and other revealing data, which could be collected on behalf of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, would provide an accurate overview of the situation and ensure that the programs instituted by the federal government actually meet the needs on the ground.

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

Mr. Laberge, you mentioned the need for funding to increase the number of francophone teachers. Should this be provided for in Bill C-13? How could we facilitate this funding?

Mr. Alain Laberge: It's a complex question, because part of the answer has to do with immigration.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's why I'm asking it.

What we really want to know is which way to turn. Of course we don't want to encroach into other areas, because several provinces would tell us that we are overstepping our areas of jurisdiction.

Mr. Alain Laberge: Bill C-13 could be a bridge. This question is related to immigration, on the one hand, and the capacity to welcome new students to universities on the other. Each province has a college that approves whether or not teachers can teach. We end up with lots of people from other countries whose credentials are not recognized.

We know, for example, that British Columbia has two superb universities, but that it's French-language offerings are minimal. In the west, with the exception of Campus Saint-Jean and the Université de Saint-Boniface, there are few programs in French. So where do we turn to find people? We look for them in Ottawa or Moncton. But when I go looking for people in Moncton, the president of Université de Moncton complains to me that I'm stealing her people. When they come here, some don't want to return to Moncton while others do.

There should therefore be a link between immigration and education.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I like the expression "trait d'union" that you used in French to mean a bridge or a link. I'm going to use it myself more often.

Do you have any comments to add Mr. Désilets?

Mr. Antoine Désilets: It's important to recall the power structure in health services. As I mentioned, for each \$100 spent in Canada, one cent goes to official language minority communities. We should be proud of the advances we have made in health, but I think we still need support to reduce inequities.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: In that case, I'd like to thank the participants.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd like to have the extra 30 seconds.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: You see, I'm being generous to you today Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

In connection with schools, I spoke yesterday with Mr. Lepage from Saskatchewan. He monitored the pattern for African immigrants and told me about his observations. After a year of attending a francophone school, and realizing that they could receive hardly any services in French and that Canada wasn't really a bilingual country outside of Quebec, they changed their minds and decided to attend an English school. The assimilation rate for francophone immigrants, and even Quebecers, who move elsewhere, is as high as the overall assimilation rate for francophones.

Do you think a provision in Bill C-13 could help to change this trend?

Mr. Alain Laberge: In passing, I know Mr. Lepage well. In examining Bill C-13 and the current situation, it's also important to look at the hosting structure. As I've already mentioned, three or four months after they arrive in Canada, some immigrants stop receiving services. At the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, we have what we call cultural agents who go and meet immigrants during the evening to speak with them, to explain how education works in Canada and to tell them that their children will inevitably learn English. The intent is to forge ties within what we refer to as the school community.

It takes money, of course, but also the federal government's resolve, to ensure that services are available in both languages everywhere.

• (1255)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a question for Mr. Désilets about health.

In 2019, I complained to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages about the Crisis Services Canada platform, funded by Health Canada, which offered a text messaging support service only in English. It was described on its website. I spoke directly to Health Canada people about it when they came here to testify, and eventually, the situation was resolved.

Do you feel that situations like this occur often within the federal government or in health services in general?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds to answer the question.

Mr. Antoine Désilets: I believe that the public service has very good intentions. However, there are often programs translated from English which are not entirely suited to the realities of official language minority communities. One such example was the launch of the Wellness Together Canada site, early on in the pandemic. The situation has now been dealt with, but we need to remain vigilant.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Désilets.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

To conclude, Ms. Ashton, from Manitoba, now has the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

I'd like to ask a question that I put to the previous group of witnesses.

According to data on permanent residents admitted in 2019, 45% of newcomers came from six countries whose official language is English. Even though 29 countries have French as an official language, none of these was on the list of the 10 countries from which the most immigrants come to Canada. Our consular presence is also very limited in francophone Africa.

In light of these data, what could the federal government do to help meet your workforce requirements and provide the essential services that francophone communities deserve?

Please go first, Mr. Laberge. After that, I'd like to hear what Mr. Désilets has to say.

Mr. Alain Laberge: Consular services are essential. If they barely exist in certain countries, then people won't go there and consular services won't be able to do the legwork that gets people to Canada.

It's important to understand that uprooting an entire family from places like Congo or Rwanda represents an enormous change for them. It requires monitoring and mentoring. Consular services have to have a strong presence, but more support is needed for a much longer period of time.

Mr. Antoine Désilets: I think that what's needed is more personnel, particularly in health. At the same time, it's important to make sure that the integration process is a good one and that their credentials are recognized. There's no point in bringing an enormous number of people here if their abilities and skills are not given recognition so that they can contribute. It's obvious that credential recognition is essential. Not only that, but it's important to ensure that the francophone settings are genuinely francophone in every facet of life.

Each year, 98% of Canadians make use of at least one health service. In other words, everyone uses health services. If this essential facet of life is not available everywhere in French, then the message being sent is that health is secondary if you happen to be francophone.

Francophone immigration is needed, in addition to strong environments and an effective integration process to ensure that Canada's labour objectives are met.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'll quickly ask my final question.

Other witnesses we have heard, like the FCFA and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, have spoken at length about the importance of including language clauses in the bill. These clauses would ensure that federal-provincial agreements would prioritize investment in services for francophones and francophone communities.

Do you think that in your respective fields, it's essential to include language clauses in this bill? We could begin by—

The Chair: That's an excellent question, Ms. Ashton, but your speaking time is up.

Mr. Laberge and Mr. Désilets, if you feel you've run out of time to expand your ideas, or wish to put forward some advice, don't hesitate to send additional information in writing to our clerk. She will then send the information to all members of the committee.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your testimony. Because of your experience, it was a pleasure to hear your suggestions with respect to Bill C-13. It will definitely help the committee prepare a better report.

However, there appears to have been some talk about our meeting next Tuesday being spent on committee business. I believe that the list of witnesses is in the binder. We can discuss it.

Is everyone in agreement?

Some hon. members: Yes.

● (1300)

The Chair: I am therefore confirming that the second hour of our meeting, to be held next Tuesday, will be spent on committee business.

The meeting is adjourned.

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