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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1630)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 90 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 29, 2024, the committee is meeting to resume its study on language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions.

Since all the witnesses are appearing in person, I will skip the usual instructions for individuals using Zoom.

I'd like to welcome our wonderful witnesses.

We have Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters, vice-president of the business enablement branch and chief financial officer at the Canada School of Public Service.

We also have Ms. Jennifer Carr, president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada.

I believe it's your first time appearing before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Welcome to the best committee in town.

As you probably know, since you've undoubtedly appeared before other committees, you will each have five minutes for your opening remarks. This will be followed by a question and answer period.

I'll be quite strict on time, because I want everyone to get at least two turns for questions. Therefore, I'll ask you to respect the five-minute maximum. If you take less time, that's fine too.

We'll start with you, Ms. Bullion-Winters. You have five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters (Vice-President, Business Enablement Branch and Chief Financial Officer, Canada School of Public Service): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, and good afternoon.

I'm honoured to be speaking to you today on behalf of the Canada School of Public Service from Ottawa, the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinabe people.

[*Translation*]

Our mandate is to provide common, standardized curricula and training to support federal public servants with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to fulfill their responsibilities in serving Canadians.

[*English*]

The school provides online self-paced and instructor-led courses, learning events and numerous other learning products. The school has over 350 course offerings and over 500 additional learning tools, including videos, job aids and articles, on its learning platform and website. So far this year, over 290,000 public servants have participated in courses at the school.

[*Translation*]

As you can see, the school has many areas of learning. However, today, I will be speaking to you about areas pertaining to official languages.

The school was established in 2004 when the legislative provisions of part IV of the Public Service Modernization Act came into force. The school was created as an amalgamation of three organizations, namely, the Canadian Centre for Management Development, Training and Development Canada and Language Training Canada.

Prior to 2004, Language Training Canada was responsible for providing language training to departments.

Beginning in 2006, a series of government decisions stipulated that the school would no longer provide language training for acquisition of a second language and transferred the responsibility to departments.

In simpler terms, the school is no longer offering courses to learn a second language. Instead, it now offers learning products to help maintain the language skills already possessed.

• (1635)

[*English*]

The school offers access to 15 online second-language training tools and job aids, in English and in French, to help public servants maintain language skills and to support their preparation for their second-language evaluation tests. These tools include self-directed evaluation, simulations, and interactive tools designed to improve oral and written comprehension, pronunciation, grammar, written expression and fluency in their second official language. The school also offers two courses on the Official Languages Act and hosts various learning events to raise awareness about linguistic diversity and to promote an inclusive environment in the public sector.

[*Translation*]

This year, two events on official languages were already held. These events were attended by over 3,500 public servants.

The school's learning products and courses are offered in both official languages and are compliant with the Official Languages Act.

I thank the committee for having me here today and for their interest in the work of the Canada School of Public Service.

I'm happy to answer any questions that committee members may have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bullion-Winters. That was just three minutes and 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Carr, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Carr (President, The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Jennifer Carr, and I am the proud president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada.

Our union believes in a country where people can successfully pursue their career and obtain the services they need in both official languages. That is our belief for our organization and for Canada's public service.

It's not only a fundamental right set out in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It's also an important Canadian value.

[*English*]

That's why we stand behind the protection of both official languages and the protection of the many indigenous languages spoken across our country. Protecting one's language and preserving one's culture go hand in hand.

The institute believes the federal government must set the example for all other employers and be held to the highest standard, but our employer is failing to uphold bilingualism in our public service. Our members have raised concerns about inadequate investments in language training. They have told us there's a lack of a coordinated language strategy, and it's hurting their career development opportunities. They've spoken about their frustrations when tools they must use for everyday activities aren't available in both official lan-

guages. With remote work and cross-country virtual teams, this is more important than ever.

We're also concerned about how the use of private contractors is making things even worse. Contracting out is being done outside of the normal rules the government has set for itself, ignoring the language and diversity requirements that our government says are its priorities. This means that on top of runaway costs and the damaging loss of institutional knowledge, contracting out is hurting the government's ability to offer quality services in both official languages.

I was also concerned to hear the language commissioner's testimony about the lack of a centralized approach. Decentralized systems, where individual managers carry out too much of the load, lead to an uneven response to common problems. As the commissioner recommended, a central body at Treasury Board, with responsibilities for implementing and governance, could help.

We also urge the committee to consider how the government can support diversity within the public service. People from indigenous communities, who may not know both official languages, can bring valuable knowledge of indigenous languages and cultures, enrich our government and help us deliver better services to their communities.

A thoughtful implementation of Bill C-13 presents a unique opportunity for the Canadian government to promote and protect bilingualism and linguistic diversity. To achieve this, we have three recommendations for this committee.

First, the government must engage in continuous dialogue with its stakeholders. This means establishing ongoing discussions with unions like mine, employee groups and linguistic minority communities. It is critical to ensure that the processes and policies implemented are practical and fair and consider the diverse needs of our members.

Second, the government must provide comprehensive, accessible and flexible language training opportunities for all employees. This must be backed with adequate investments and proper resourcing. It is crucial that these training programs accommodate various learning styles and different schedules and ensure equitable access for all.

Third, the government must establish mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process. This must include seeking regular feedback from employees and their representatives to identify challenges and areas for improvement. The government should commit to clear implementation goals and a timeline that it must report on regularly so that adjustments can be made if and when necessary.

Treasury Board is in a unique position to show leadership and establish a coordinated language strategy, one backed by properly funded language training.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

We hope that the committee, in preparing its final report, will take our members' concerns and recommendations into consideration.

Our goal is to ensure that the results of your work will benefit all employees and support the development of a public service that truly reflects Canada's linguistic diversity.

Thank you.

I'd be pleased to answer questions from committee members.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Carr.

[*Translation*]

We'll now start with the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes to question the witnesses.

Mr. Godin, Conservative Party member and first vice-chair of this committee, will start.

You may go ahead, Mr. Godin, for six minutes.

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

I thank our wonderful witnesses for coming.

I'd like to clarify something right off the bat. Do the Canada School of Public Service and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada work together or at the same location?

My question is for both witnesses.

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Normally, we don't work together. I work mainly with Treasury Board.

However, I think that we have similar mandates or concerns: the public service needs to be able to respond to requests in both official languages.

Mr. Joël Godin: Ms. Bullion-Winters, would you like to add anything?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: Some members of the institute work at the school, such as information technology professionals, so we do work together to some extent.

Mr. Joël Godin: If I understand correctly, your clients are in the public service, and Ms. Carr's clients are in the public service. Is that correct?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: That's correct.

Mr. Joël Godin: Don't you think it would be useful to join forces so that there's only one language institution for public servants?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: With regard to working together, the structure that exists right now is that the unions speak directly to Treas-

ury Board when it comes to Treasury Board policies. The Canada School of Public Service is one of those clients and is not responsible for the policies and processes. It is there to implement, so from that level, I need to talk to Treasury Board about those policies and make sure they're implemented in a fair and transparent way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: My next question is quite simple, Ms. Carr. What's your role at the institute?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: I'm the president.

Mr. Joël Godin: Are you bilingual?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Yes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay. It's just a question.

Ms. Carr, you made three recommendations. If I remember them correctly, the first was to engage in continuous dialogue with the unions. Does that mean that there's no dialogue right now?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: There's a dialogue, but it's not constructive. It's not a dialogue where our concerns are taken into consideration and where we work together. We're simply being given information. Sometimes, we're listened to, sometimes not.

We really need to have more fluid conversations and the opportunity to develop better policies for our employees and the public service.

● (1645)

Mr. Joël Godin: Ms. Carr, as you know, when our committee studied Bill C-13, which included amendments to the Official Languages Act, we moved an amendment to make Treasury Board fully responsible for applying the act to all affected organizations, rather than dividing those responsibilities.

You just told us about a fruitless dialogue. I understand that this is the result of the old bill, now law, which divided powers. Once again, it falls between the cracks.

Is this something you've observed? Are you happy with the situation?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: It's a preoccupation of mine.

I've come to many committees where I've talked about the decentralization of services, and we did hear from the Canada School of Public Service about decentralization and leaving those responsibilities for the department. That has created an inequity within the department such that things have fallen through the cracks.

It depends on where you work. If you work for a small agency or department that can put resources towards something, you get them, but other agencies or departments may not put the emphasis necessary to achieve what is asked for under Bill C-13.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: I now have a quick question for both of you: Do you provide language training to senior officials?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: We offer training to maintain language skills. The school offers its services to public service employees only. Any employee may take courses at the school.

Mr. Joël Godin: So senior officials can receive training from you.

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: Yes, senior officials can also take our courses.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do they take only take courses from you, or can they also take them outside the public service?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: When it comes to senior officials, second language acquisition is a responsibility that lies with their own department.

Mr. Joël Godin: I see.

Mr. Chair, before we go any further, I would ask that you stop the clock, as I have motions to move.

You know that April 1st is not only April Fools' Day. Unfortunately, a new carbon tax will be imposed on that day.

I believe you received notices of motions in a timely fashion and in accordance with the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, which allows us to move them here this afternoon.

I think it's important to represent all groups in Canada with concerns about the French language and a sense of belonging to the francophone community. So, I'm going to propose motions that concern official language minority communities, Acadians in New Brunswick, Acadians in Nova Scotia, Acadians in Prince Edward Island, Acadians in Newfoundland and Labrador, Franco-Ontarians—

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin.

First, I'd like to inform you that I stopped the clock and you had one minute left.

I'd then like to point out that you should present one motion at a time.

Mr. Joël Godin: I haven't moved any motion yet. I'm still speaking to the motion.

The Chair: So this is your introduction.

Mr. Joël Godin: Exactly.

What I was going to say is that we're going to cover all the official language minority communities in Canada. In my list, I had gotten to Franco-Ontarians. We're also going to represent Franco-Albertans and Fransaskois.

It's important to be concerned about these people, who will be affected by a 23% increase in the carbon tax as of April 1st.

I'd like to begin by proposing my first motion, for which I filed notice on Friday, March 15. It reads as follows:

Whereas, according to Statistics Canada data, official language minority communities are predominantly located in rural and remote areas;

Whereas the carbon tax has a greater impact on Canada's rural and remote communities;

Whereas a 23% increase in the carbon tax is scheduled for April 1, 2024;

Whereas 70% of Canadians oppose this increase;

Whereas seven provincial Premiers have also opposed this increase;

Be it resolved that the Committee calls on the government to immediately reverse its decision to increase the carbon tax on April 1st.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I read each of your eight motions carefully, and, for obvious reasons, I declare them out of order.

We can start with the first, if you don't mind. Pursuant to Standing Order 108, I'm of the opinion that these matters exceed our committee's mandate.

• (1650)

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, Mr. Chair, I think this is where we can defend the interests of official language minority communities.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I understand your thinking, but I declare the motion out of order. We must follow procedure.

Mr. Joël Godin: In that case, Mr. Chair, I appeal your ruling.

The Chair: That is precisely what I was going to ask you.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's what you were expecting, isn't it? I didn't think I would have to go down this road, but I appeal your ruling, because, in my opinion, it's important to defend official language minority communities—

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Joël Godin: Let me finish, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, Mr. Godin. The motion is out of order. You were going to speak to me about the motion—

Mr. Joël Godin: Then I appeal your ruling.

I was going to present arguments to persuade you to change your ruling.

The Chair: No. My ruling is obvious. As vice-chair of the committee, I thought you knew that—

Mr. Joël Godin: When it comes to being obvious, Mr. Chair, it's obvious that—

The Chair: I was going to say that as vice-chair of this committee, you know as well as I do what Rule 108 stipulates and the scope of this committee's role.

Since you are appealing the chair's ruling, we will happily follow procedure and vote on it.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4.)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I will try again by moving a second motion. I appeal to my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for their understanding and open minds.

Here is the second motion:

Whereas, according to Statistics Canada data, Acadians in Newfoundland and Labrador are predominantly located in rural areas;

Whereas the carbon tax has a greater impact on rural and remote communities;

Whereas a 23% increase in the carbon tax is scheduled for April 1, 2024;

Whereas 70% of Canadians oppose this increase;

Whereas the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador opposes this increase;

Be it resolved that the Committee calls on the government to immediately reverse its decision to increase the carbon tax on April 1.

The Chair: For the same reasons, Mr. Godin, this motion is out of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: For the same reasons, Mr. Chair, I'm appealing your ruling.

The Chair: That's the beauty of democracy.

We'll proceed to the vote.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4.)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I will try my luck by moving another motion, to see if there's any flexibility. It's important to—

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

Mr. Marc Serré: We have two witnesses here whom the Commissioner recommended we invite as part of an important study, but, once again, the Conservatives are delaying deliberations by talking about things that have nothing to do with the committee.

The Chair: I understand, Mr. Serré, and I know it may be upsetting for the witnesses who have come here, but this is all in keeping with the Standing Orders.

Furthermore, Mr. Godin moved his notices of motion within the prescribed deadlines. So, if he's moving the motions, we have to follow the established process.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

● (1655)

Mr. Joël Godin: I'll be quick, out of respect for the witnesses.

Here is my next motion:

Whereas, according to Statistics Canada data, Acadians in New Brunswick are predominantly located in rural areas;

Whereas the carbon tax has a greater impact on rural and remote communities;

Whereas a 23% increase in the carbon tax is scheduled for April 1, 2024;

Whereas 70% of Canadians oppose this increase;

Whereas the Premier of New Brunswick opposes this increase;

Be it resolved that the committee calls on the government to immediately reverse its decision to increase the carbon tax on April 1.

The Chair: Since this motion has exactly the same content as the first two, except for the people involved, it is out of order, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I challenge your decision, because New Brunswickers have the right to have some room to breathe.

The Chair: I'd like to clarify that your motion is about New Brunswick Acadians, not all New Brunswickers.

Mr. Joël Godin: We are indeed talking about the Acadians of New Brunswick.

The Chair: Very well then, that is it.

Mr. Joël Godin: However, all New Brunswickers have the right to relief.

The Chair: All right.

We will now hold the vote.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'm going to try my luck one last time. I have other motions to move, but I understand that my colleague is a little impatient and I respect his intention to move the matter forward.

I move the following motion:

Whereas, according to Statistics Canada data, Fransaskois are predominantly located in rural areas;

Whereas the carbon tax has a greater impact on rural and remote communities;

Whereas a 23% increase in the carbon tax is scheduled for April 1, 2024;

Whereas 70% of Canadians oppose this increase;

Whereas the Premier of Saskatchewan opposes this increase;

Be it resolved that the committee calls on the government to immediately reverse its decision to increase the carbon tax on April 1.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

The people targeted in this motion are different, but the content is the same as in previous motions. For the same reasons, this motion is out of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: Of course, Mr. Chair, I challenge your decision.

The Chair: We will now hold the vote.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I still had other motions to propose, notably for the Acadians of Prince Edward Island, for the Franco-Albertans and for the Franco-Ontarians. However, since I know the outcome in advance, I will spare the committee this procedure and allow it to continue its study with the witnesses who are here today.

The Chair: Perfect, Mr. Godin.

I'll take the liberty of making a comment. One of your motions talked about rural Canadians. The other motions talked about francophone groups outside Quebec also living in rural areas. So a single motion would have sufficed, since the first one encompassed each of the other motions. The result would have been the same, that said.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have one minute of your time left, no more.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, Mr. Chair. Time is a very scarce commodity.

As I understand it, Ms. Carr, despite the passage of Bill C-13, the model is not currently effective. Apart from the Official Languages Act, which doesn't solve the problem, what should we, as legislators, be doing to improve things? Is there anything else we can do? Do you have any suggestions? Are there any regulations to put in place, decisions to make, or new bills to propose to ensure that the model is effective and that Canadians have access to services and can be served in both official languages? That is the goal, after all.

• (1700)

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: It's very clear that we have to go back to a centralized system to ensure the policy on language, as well as training, comes to fruition. We cannot have silos. We cannot have inequity happening among the departments—whether or not they have money to spend on training for certain employees versus others.

I think it's very clearly about centralization.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Carr.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Carr and Ms. Bullion-Winters.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

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

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses who are before us today.

Ms. Carr, I think I've already had a chance to meet you before you became president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. You were then the person responsible for the National Capital Region, as I recall. It's been a long time since I've seen you. Welcome to the committee.

In principle, we're doing this study because the Commissioner of Official Languages has asked us to assess the effects of the adoption of Bill C-13, particularly on senior public servants.

My first question is for Ms. Bullion-Winters.

You said that the Canada School of Public Service provides training for senior public servants to maintain their language skills and level in line with the requirements of their position within the public service. Is that right?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: Yes, that's right.

Since a decision to that effect was made in 2006, the Canada School of Public Service no longer has a mandate to offer language training for second-language acquisition. Instead, it offers learning products to maintain language levels already acquired and to help public servants prepare for the language assessments conducted by the Public Service Commission of Canada.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Basically, senior public servants must pass a test to determine whether they meet employment conditions.

Ms. Carr, you mentioned the decentralization of language training within the various departments.

Ms. Bullion-Winters, if a prime candidate applying for a position of high responsibility does not have the language skills to access that position, it is now the department's responsibility to ensure that this person is able to meet the language requirements of the position.

Prior to 2006, such candidates were instead sent to the Canada School of Public Service. Currently, does the department have the option of sending someone to the Canada School of Public Service and paying for their training, or have you not offered this service at all since 2006?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: No, we no longer offer these services at all.

Mr. Francis Drouin: People therefore must go to an educational institution, whether it's a college, university or other school, to learn a second language, to prepare for a job.

Ms. Carr, I know you don't necessarily represent senior executives. However, I know several of your members who live in my region, and language training is still important to them, since some of them will certainly want to move into an executive position one day.

You talked about general training within the public service and said there was not enough language training. Is there no training that your members can access right now?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: They can't access language training unless it's approved by the department. As a public servant, if I want to improve my language skills but I'm not in a bilingual position, I have to fight for the few resources that exist.

If possible, I do want to address the last question.

When the government decentralized and took the responsibility for language training away from the Canada School of Public Service, it created a whole area of contracted-out services. We spend a lot of money on services to receive language training, but we don't have control over the quality of that training. We don't have any metrics on that training and whether people are getting the language they need through that training.

We've lost all capacity to do matrices on efficiency and have lost the ability to know how the training is happening.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: So you would favour a model where the Canada School of Public Service would once again have this responsibility within the government.

Also, you mentioned Treasury Board, which now has, in principle, responsibility for implementing the policy, but is not necessarily responsible for day-to-day training. How do you see the role given to Treasury Board by Bill C-13?

We are talking about senior executives, but training is also relevant for people who might move into these positions later.

So, how do you see the new legislative provisions that have come into force and the role granted to Treasury Board in this new legislative framework?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Sometimes I feel like a broken record because policies don't mean that departments will comply. If there is no way for them to have mechanisms to ensure a department complies, the policy isn't worth what it's written on. They need to have centralized control. They need to have matrices that make the departments responsible for meeting targets and then need levers to hold them accountable.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I know departments are a bit more scared of Treasury Board than they are of, for instance, Canadian Heritage, where they encourage people to speak the other official language.

Thanks for your recommendations. They're sincerely appreciated. I'm speaking in English in the spirit of both official languages.

[Translation]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I now yield the floor for six minutes to Mr. Beaulieu, member of the Bloc Québécois and second vice-chair of this committee.

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

I'd like to thank our guests here.

You talked about when the Canada School of Public Service stopped being responsible for language training. It reminds me a little of the Translation Bureau: services were decentralized, contracts were given out and quality declined. Now it's the same thing with language training: we're seeing more and more complaints and things are not working well.

Doesn't this reveal a lack of political will? Have there been any discussions about returning to a centralized system?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: In my opinion, if we're serious about official languages, we should centralize responsibility at Treasury Board. However, there is also a lack of resources. Budgets are insufficient. We can already see that departments have less money, and the first expenses they're going to cut are those related to training and travel.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Ms. Carr. By the way, you speak excellent French.

The situation is a little discouraging. On the one hand, the government talks about strengthening the French language, introduces bills and has good intentions. In reality, however, it's still too expensive to translate documents into French and to provide effective French training. I think we really need to take action. We'll see what kind of report the committee produces, but I think we're going to have to shake the tree a bit.

Yvon Barrière, from the Public Service Alliance of Canada, actually said the same thing, that we need to stop outsourcing language training.

Also, as part of the study of Bill C-13, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada published a brief that made some pretty hard-hitting observations. For example, you were concerned that the federal government was failing to foster respect for language rights by not adequately funding resources.

Do you get the impression that there's a will to improve things since the adoption of Bill C-13, or that nothing is happening?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: In my opinion, the situation isn't worse, but it hasn't improved either. We don't see things changing quickly. The act was intended to accelerate the achievement of objectives with regard to both official languages, but I don't see it working so far.

• (1710)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you for your observation.

In your brief, you also said that there was an inequality in the designation of language requirements for positions, and you talked about professional problems. I'm not sure I understand your sentence. I may have misinterpreted it.

What should be done about designating language requirements? We've seen a lot of problems in this regard. Sometimes, some positions don't even require bilingualism. So what should be done about it? My question can be for both witnesses.

As we can see, we accept people who don't speak French in bilingual positions, with the promise that French training will be taken. Sometimes the training doesn't produce very good results; sometimes it produces fairly good results, but, if the person doesn't practise speaking French, they revert to English.

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: I'm going to answer in English just so it's clear.

When we changed the Public Service Employment Act and we made language a requirement, we did ourselves a disservice, which means that we didn't allow people the opportunity to get the training they needed to become bilingual.

One thing that I like to point out is that the position is bilingual, not the person. We have a lot of bilingual people who sit in unilingual positions. I think that is not a good way to know who can perform in what official language.

It's very clear to me that people who serve the public need to be able to speak in both official languages. It's not nice to have; it's a requirement.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In another meeting we had, a measure was discussed that should be advocated. When a bilingual position is to be filled, either training should be given to the successful candidate before they are given the job, or the person should be required to already have some knowledge of French. Clearly, some people find it very difficult to learn a new language. In other cases, people don't even have access to resources.

Would you agree with such a measure?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: That's how it used to be. You used to be able to hire somebody in a bilingual non-imperative role, which meant that it would give them time, a year or two years, to obtain their language certification. With the change of the act and making it mandatory, you had to have the certification on the day you were appointed. When I said that it's a disservice, it's because we're not offering the ability to have the language training so you can meet those requirements.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Carr.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have less than five seconds left.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In that case, I thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

For this first round of questions, Ms. Ashton of the NDP will be the last, but not least, to speak.

Just before, Ms. Ashton, could you say a few words so we can test the sound?

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Hello. I hope you can hear me well and that the sound is good.

The Chair: I'm told everything is good on the interpretation side.

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

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

Thank you very much to the witnesses.

Ms. Carr, you mentioned the devastating impact the outsourcing of government services has had on bilingualism, but also on public services in general.

Can you talk to us about that? Can you also give us some recommendations on that?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Again, we're talking about the pitfalls of contracting out. We have less accountability and transparency. We have higher costs. When it comes to things like language training, we also don't have the matrices. It's about a check box or performance.

I can give you a personal example. I know of people who are set to take the generalized training—two hours, two times a week—and are never advancing. If it was in the public service, we could identify things like language barriers or disabilities.

A contractor is taking the money and running. They don't care whether you succeed. They don't have the values of the public service and the public good in mind when they come to the table. There's a lot of money being spent on contracting out, when we could hire internal people to do that training and have the matrix and quality we need to obtain a viable bilingual federal public service.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Ms. Niki Ashton: The Public Service Alliance of Canada, as part of its negotiations with Treasury Board, is asking for a review of the bilingual bonus directive. In particular, it is asking for an increase in the bonus from \$800 to \$3,000.

In your opinion, do we need to increase the bilingual bonus? If so, why?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: We need to revise the bilingual bonus. In this assessment, we also need to ask whether the public servants in question are providing a service to the public. There are many public servants who are bilingual, but who occupy a unilingual position, not a bilingual one, and who therefore do not receive the bilingual bonus.

Every time we ask that the policy be revised, Treasury Board tells us they want to abolish the bonus instead. So they don't want to talk about increasing the bonus; they want to take it away and reinvest the money elsewhere. In our opinion, we need both: an increase in the bonus and more investment.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton: I would like to refer to one of the points you talked about: the importance of respecting and recognizing indigenous languages known by members of the public service. Many of your members work in first nations and Inuit communities—in indigenous communities across the country. You've spoken about how important it is to not just protect but also recognize that skill set.

Do you have a recommendation to our committee on the recognition of indigenous languages known by public servants? How important is it to see increased recognition from the federal government?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: I think it's fundamental to make sure there's inclusion in the federal public service.

I'll go back to reconciliation. If you have members of a community who can speak the language, it goes a long way to say that we value and want to provide services in those languages.

When somebody comes with a native language but may not have both official languages, you need to give them the opportunity to learn. There shouldn't be a barrier to their moving up in the federal public service just because they don't have those two languages. They have two languages, just not the ones that are recognized as the official languages.

[Translation]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

I'd like to quickly ask Ms. Bullion-Winters if she has anything to add about one or more of the questions I asked.

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: No, thank you.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right.

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

The Chair: You have just over a minute left.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right, thank you.

In that case, I'll get back to you, Ms. Carr.

Could you elaborate on the priorities or recommendations you submitted to the committee? What are the important things to keep in mind for the recommendations we will be making to the government as part of this study?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: I gave three recommendations. They're all critical, but, again, it's crucial that we have training programs that accommodate various learning styles, different schedules and equitable access. That shouldn't depend on whether my department has funds; it should depend on the priority of the government.

I will share a story with you. I am person who has no diversity issues, and when I self-identified as needing accommodations for language training, I was passed over time and time again because I couldn't fit the prescribed two hours a week. I think we need to look at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Carr.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

As we won't have time for the full second round of questions, I'm going to shorten the speaking times. That's because we have two small budgets to pass before 6:30 p.m., which is when the meeting is scheduled to end. So I'm going to allocate two minutes to the Liberal and Conservative members. That's very short. After that, the Bloc Québécois and NDP members will have the floor for one minute.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for two minutes, and that's firm.

● (1720)

[English]

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): About 290,000 people have taken courses this year alone. What is the average number of people who take the courses in a year and what is the motivation? Is it really for advancement?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: This year we've had more than 41,000 registrations for the 15 courses that pertain to official languages. I feel that's encouraging, and it shows that public servants are interested in maintaining their second official language and in the learning products we offer.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I had heard 290,000, and I was kind of blown away by the number.

The Chair: It's since the beginning.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Oh, it's since the beginning, okay.

Do you have teachers, or is everything online and the people get directed by questionnaires and that sort of thing? Do you have instructors working with people?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: I'll just clarify that the 290,000 public servants were the total for all of our courses. We offer 350 courses across five business lines, of which 15 courses are specific to official languages. It's 290,000 public servants for 350 courses, and 49,000 for the 15 official language courses.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you. Time is so short here.

What about your senior staffers? My understanding is that quite often they could get up to a year off with pay for intensive French learning. Do you run that also, or how is that run?

The Chair: You have less than 15 seconds.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Actually, Monsieur Gagné, read your question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Are there any guidelines for contracts awarded to third parties that provide language training? If so, do they have to be—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux. I made it clear that the speaking time was firm at two minutes, because we're short on time. I know it's because motions have been moved, but that's the name of the game.

We'll go now to the Liberal Party.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor for a firm two minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Carr, you spoke earlier about your three recommendations. They more or less concern employees who are already part of the public service and who are entering bilingual or senior positions.

I'd like to look at the issue of recruitment. I often hear so-called bilingual institutions say that they are unable to recruit bilingual people because there aren't any who are qualified. So they only hire anglophones.

What recommendations do you have for us on that? Have you heard of tools that could facilitate the recruitment of francophones across the country?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: If you don't have any qualified bilingual candidates, I think you should offer training to the ones you have, the ones who have competence. I'll turn to Michael Ferguson as a good example of somebody who was offered training, succeeded and now can work in both official languages.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Ms. Bullion-Winters, you mentioned that the training the school offered for second-language learning was abolished in 2006. This is another example of the budget cuts made by the Harper government.

Do you hold activities as part of the International Day of La Francophonie or other events where employees have the opportunity to speak French?

Ms. Wendy Bullion-Winters: Yes, we encourage learning events, including the International Day of La Francophonie.

[*English*]

We offer many different types of events.

[*Translation*]

For example, this year, we held two events on official languages. As I said, 3,500 public servants attended.

Mr. Marc Serré: My time is almost up.

Thank you for your work. We'll be looking at your recommendations shortly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for a firm minute.

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

In his report, the Commissioner of Official Languages states that linguistic duality and cultural diversity shouldn't be pitted against each other, nor should linguistic duality and the issue of indigenous languages.

For example, you said that if a person spoke a first nations language and English, French wouldn't be required. Is there a way not to weaken French?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: That doesn't mean that we should forget about providing training. I think the government must provide training in the missing language. That way, the person can improve and can provide services in three languages, rather than just two.

• (1725)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Are guidelines given when contracts are awarded to third parties?

The Chair: That's an excellent question, Mr. Beaulieu, but you've exceeded the one minute allotted to you.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for one minute.

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

Ms. Carr, I have one last question for you.

[*English*]

We talked about outsourcing of language learning services. I'm wondering about the impact of broader outsourcing within the federal public service and the impact it has on bilingualism within the public service overall. Could you speak to that and what we as a committee should be taking forward given this reality?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: There are two ways to look at that. Contracting out means that those positions don't have to meet the language requirements. That work is done by a contractor who doesn't know both official languages, so we need to make sure that what the government says are its priorities are still met, even when we're contracting. Maybe we can make those part of the contracts such that if there's a bilingual position, we need to have them.

From the perspective of contracting out the language services, I think we get less accountability and transparency. We don't have standards, and we need to make sure that when we offer language training, everybody has equitable access to that training.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Carr.

I see we're at time—

Ms. Jennifer Carr: I'll answer the questions afterwards too.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Yes, I know, but before you leave, I would like to thank you for all your comments, Ms. Bullion-Winters and Ms. Carr.

As chair, I know that I compress everything, and looking at the clock right now, I see we have four minutes to deal with other things. If there's any other information you think we should be aware of, please provide it in writing to the clerk.

[*Translation*]

Some members of the committee started to ask certain questions, but time ran out. We all know how speaking time works. Like me, everyone has a cellphone with a clock on it. So, if you didn't have enough time to answer certain questions, you can send the clerk any additional and relevant information in writing that could help the committee in its work. The clerk will then forward that information to all members of the committee, and we'll look at it when we write our report.

With that, thank you very much.

Before we adjourn, folks, we have two budgets to approve for committee studies. You received a copy of it earlier through the clerk.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the budget for the study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions in the amount of \$16,900?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I have a question for the clerk.

Are these costs comparable to those for the other studies? Are you using the same costs based on past experience?

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Audrée Dallaire): I looked at everyone's list of witnesses and where they live. Several are in western or eastern Canada. That's the main reason why the amount is higher for this study. That's what I based my budget on.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm a true Conservative, Madam Clerk.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This budget was based on the assumption that they were going to be here in person. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If they participate by Zoom, it will cost less.

The Chair: You can err on the side of the budget and then say you didn't use it all, rather than err on the side of omission, because once the budget is passed, you can't ask for any more funds.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You'll look very frugal.

The Chair: That's right.

So does the committee adopt this budget proposal?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Wait a minute, there's something else before we wrap up.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the budget for the study on language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions, in the amount of \$5,250?

Mr. Joël Godin: In that case, it's the study with—

The Chair: Yes, that's the current study.

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to ask the same question, Mr. Chair. Is this budget based on other experiences?

The Chair: This study costs less because the witnesses, like the federal departments from which they come, are overwhelmingly located in the Ottawa region. That explains the difference in costs between the two studies.

Mr. Joël Godin: Public servants don't get paid when they come here, do they? There's no accommodation to pay for.

The Chair: I don't know. That's something else.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt this budget?

(Motion agreed to)

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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