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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Monday, May 6, 2024

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 98 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 20, 2023, the committee is resuming its study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

Given the recommended changes to how we handle earpieces, among other things, I'm going to take a few minutes to go over the instructions so that we can avoid audio feedback incidents. Before we begin, I would like to remind all members and other in-person participants of the important preventative measures indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29.

The following measures have been taken to prevent disruptive—and potentially harmful—audio feedback incidents that could cause injuries.

We remind all in-person participants to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times. All earpieces have been replaced by a model which greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black in colour, whereas the former earpieces were grey. Please use only a black approved earpiece. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of a meeting. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down, on the middle of the round sticker that you see in front of you on the table, where indicated. Please consult the card on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. The layout in the room has been adapted to keep the microphones further apart and reduce the risk of audio feedback.

These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. I'm taking the time to mention this because we recently learned that the audio feedback problems causing injuries to interpreters were around long before the pandemic and are not necessarily caused by the Zoom or Teams platforms. The injuries were being caused by the equipment in committee meeting rooms.

When and only when I give you the floor, the microphone will light up so that you can speak. This will keep several people from talking at the same time.

I'm being told that there is an interpretation problem. We will therefore briefly suspend the meeting.

• (1530)

(Pause)

• (1535)

**The Chair:** We will now resume the meeting, as it seems that the problem has been resolved.

Mr. Carrie, welcome to the committee.

Pursuant to our routine motion, I wish to inform the committee that all witnesses participating in the meeting by video conference completed the required sound tests in advance of the meeting.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour of our study. We have Professor Stéphanie Chouinard from the Royal Military College, Queen's University, as well as Mr. Zundel, president and chief executive officer, Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, who is joining us by video conference. Since they are committee regulars, they know how things work.

Madam and Sir, you have a maximum of five minutes each for your opening remarks. Then we will go to questions from members. I remind you that I'm very strict about speaking time because if we stick to it we will be able to complete two rounds of questions. I would ask you to respect the time given to you.

Professor Chouinard, you have the floor for five minutes.

• (1540)

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard (Professor, Royal Military College, Queen's University, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee, thank you for having me here today to discuss funding for minority French-language post-secondary institutions.

I'd like to draw your attention to the federal government's new obligations under Part VII of the Official Languages Act and, above all, to how they will be implemented. I will focus my remarks on three factors: sharing jurisdiction, making funding sustainable and strengthening our institutions.

First, although post-secondary education is now explicitly named in the act as a crucial driver of vitality in our communities, first and foremost it remains a provincial jurisdiction. So I believe it's essential for the federal government to come to an agreement with the provinces to ensure that federal funding remains supplementary funding and that it does not result in proportionate divestment from minority institutions by the provinces, which would take us back to square one. Funding must also be provided at the agreed-upon time, so that institutions can properly manage their resources. Finally, the funding granted must adequately address the needs of the institutions that serve our communities, which means they must participate in federal-provincial negotiations.

As we've known for a long time, the official languages in education program is a frankly imperfect funding distribution tool that allows abuses by some provinces, which reallocate funds for core funding or fail to take community priorities into account in the way they spend the funds. Let's try to learn from our mistakes and make sure that the public funds spent on post-secondary education will be put to good use.

Second, to make a difference, this funding will need to be sustainable. A solid foundation in post-secondary education can't be built on a project-by-project basis. We can't set up laboratories or programs that will have a real impact if we're not sure we'll have the funding to keep them going for more than four or five years.

It would also be hard to talk about funding without mentioning the issue of international students. With all due respect to Minister Miller, the Canadian francophone's institutions are not largely responsible for the abuses of the system we're witnessing. They're not the bad actors, and yet they're punished just as severely as other institutions. Worse still, the minister's decision not to make these institutions exempt from permit caps goes against his department's priorities based on the francophone immigration policy.

Let's also assume that if we gave francophone institutions the means to be as competitive in the post-secondary education market as the majority institutions, they would need less supplementary funding from the federal government. I commend the members of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne for the complaint they filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages on this matter. I don't want to put myself in Commissioner Théberge's shoes, but I sincerely hope that he will find the complaint to be founded.

Finally, the new version of Part VII of the Official Languages Act and the action plan for official languages 2023-2028 both mention the need to protect and promote the community's strong institutions. I invite you to start thinking about the indicators that will determine what exactly constitutes a strong post-secondary institution. This terminology raises concerns for some of our existing institutions, which could hardly be described as strong since they are weakened by a chronic lack of funding, among other things. However, these institutions are necessary because they are often the only ones in their community to offer training in French.

How will the new version of the act take into account their reality on the ground, including their multiple governance arrangements, among other things, since some of our institutions are not homogenous francophone or fully independent institutions? Take,

for example, the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs affiliated with Simon Fraser University or Glendon College, which is affiliated with York University.

In short, I feel we need to think about how we will determine who deserves funding and for what reasons in order to truly support the development of francophone minority communities.

Thank you. I look forward to discussing these issues with you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Chouinard. You gave your speech in four minutes, which is perfect.

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

**Mr. Pierre Zundel (President and Chief Executive Officer, Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Members of Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, or CCNB, regarding federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

The CCNB has more than 90 programs of study and has admitted 2,324 students this year. By cultivating an inclusive and diverse environment, the CCNB makes a significant contribution to the demographic, economic, social and cultural development of the province of New Brunswick.

You are no doubt already aware that due to a delay, we haven't yet concluded our new funding agreement and are waiting for the details on funding from the official languages in education program. Our core funding agreement ended in March 2023, and since then we've been twice informed that the agreement has been extended. As a result, we have no information on how much funding will be granted to us under the agreement—which was to be renewed in 2023—and on the distribution of the funds set out in the action plan for official languages for post-secondary institutions.

This federal funding is crucial for our institution. In particular, it will enable us to carry out a major exercise to modernize our internal systems, and another to transform our programs of study and the services we offer to support the recruitment and retention of our student population. We've used federal funding to start making significant changes to our curriculum, with a focus on skills development. In addition to enhancing our graduates' competency profile, this approach makes our program delivery more flexible. For example, we can offer combined micro-certifications that result in full certification in a single discipline, and we can serve multiple cohorts in the same program at the same time.

Ultimately, this helps us to better meet employers' needs by enabling our students to keep their jobs at the same company throughout their studies, and to provide a larger number of graduates per year who are ready to enter the labour market immediately. Students also benefit because it's a great advantage for them to be able to better align their training with their ability to work.

Our college provides training on five campuses in the francophone regions of New Brunswick. The delivery of college programs in rural areas poses particular challenges. Economies of scale are much easier to achieve in urban areas than our rural areas. Our fixed costs remain high, while our revenue depends on how many students we can admit to our programs.

As a result, the current funding formula and delayed confirmation are preventing us from fully moving forward with our modernization initiative and hindering our ability to develop and implement our efficiency practices. They are also jeopardizing the student experience at the CCNB. That's why we would like to see special projects funding integrated into institutions' core funding to avoid this kind of problem in the future.

Finally, since your study is also about how influential welcoming international students can be, I'd like to tell you about a new reality at our institution. Historically, college students from New Brunswick have had a strong tendency not to travel more than 80 kilometres from their home to enrol in our programs. They often prefer to change programs rather than move to another region, either for financial reasons or due to complications in their lives, or because they have children at home. A major challenge for us regarding international students is that they need housing, whereas our Canadian students do not. So that would require a significant investment in residences.

• (1545)

With that, I will conclude my presentation. I'll be pleased to answer your questions.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Zundel.

We will now begin the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes.

I now give the floor to the first vice-chair of this committee, Mr. Godin, of the Conservative Party of Canada.

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

I'd like you to stop the clock, because I'll take this opportunity to table a motion. I believe you received it on Friday afternoon. Our witnesses are probably familiar with this type of procedure in the House of Commons.

I'm tabling this motion because of the news last week and the observation made about the Minister of Official Languages. Unfortunately, he and his firm are receiving money in connection with lobbying activities. I think the Minister of Official Languages is both judge and jury.

The motion reads as follows:

That, given the recent allegations that Minister Randy Boissonnault tried to hide that he was getting payments from his lobbying firm while it was lobbying his own government, and he is currently the Minister responsible for Official Languages, who reports to this committee, the committee invites the Minister to appear for no less than two hours.

We could have invited the Minister of Canadian Heritage, but she doesn't accept our invitations. She claims that the minister—

**The Chair:** Stick to your motion, please, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** The notice of motion has been moved, Mr. Chair, and I'm defending the importance of the motion.

We know that Edmonton International Airport received more than \$100 million as a result of lobbying activities by the firm that is partly owned by the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages. I think it would be appropriate to hear from the minister here at the Standing Committee—

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** —on Official Languages, and that we be able to ask him questions. I think it would be relevant—

**The Chair:** One moment, please, Mr. Godin.

Something's ringing in our earpieces. I'm going to ask people to turn off their telephones, because it's really a problem. The interpreters' hearing injuries are happening in committee meeting rooms, and nowhere else. We have to be careful.

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

**Mr. Joël Godin:** May I finish before I give the floor to someone else?

**The Chair:** We have to stop talking at the same time and respect what is being said.

Mr. Godin, we have a point of order. We'll hear that point of order and then I'll come back to you.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to make sure that Mr. Godin realizes that we have witnesses—

**The Chair:** Mr. Serré, just a moment, please.

I would ask everyone not to speak until I give them the floor.

Mr. Godin, turn off your mike, please. You aren't the problem, but be careful: A microphone that's on can create something called Larsen effect.

Mr. Serré, I'm sorry, but what you just said is not a point of order.

Mr. Godin, please continue.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I believe the Standing Committee on Official Languages is the place to debate the issue I've raised. That's why I'm introducing this motion, which proposes that we invite the minister so we can ask him questions.

He is both judge and jury, because he's part of a government that allocates funding. It's a bit like Minister Duclos, whose job is protected at Laval University while he gives money to the university as Minister of Public Services and Procurement. I feel the people have a right to know these things.

So I'd like to move this motion and see if my colleagues want to know the truth about this situation.

**The Chair:** Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** I always respect my colleagues' motions.

However, I know that the Minister of Official Languages was not behind the transaction, because he's an honourable man. As every honest person knows, MPs, ministers and lobbyists are not allowed to use allocated funds. It's totally illegal. My colleague, Mr. Boissonnault, is certainly very aware of the rules, because the law changed in 2006, when Mr. Harper was in power. I'm sure he checked. There are rules that I, as a parliamentary secretary, have to follow every year, rules governing who I do business with, my assets and my debts. I report everything to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

I don't see how this issue has anything to do with the Standing Committee on Official Languages. If this is an ethical issue, then I don't think it's up to the Standing Committee on Official Languages to debate it, unless the transaction took place in the context of a contract whose funds are administered or granted by the official languages department. I know that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics may deal with it.

I just want to say that the needs in minority language communities are great. I respect Mr. Boissonnault, but the situation he's talking about at the moment is not one of those needs. The ethics committee will have to make up its mind about that. If there's a problem, maybe we should let the Ethics Commissioner deal with it, but it's not up to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I respect Mr. Godin. We're on the same page when it comes to advocating for the francophonie internationally, a subject on which we always agree. We can sometimes dig in our heels here at the Official Languages Committee, though.

On that note, could we set Mr. Boissonnault's situation aside and debate it at another time, when we don't have any witnesses with us?

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I took a good look at the motion when we received it. I did my homework, as you might expect. I'm ready to rule on the motion, but I'm open to hearing from other people who would like to speak to it.

Mr. Godin, do you wish to respond?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I want to point out two things.

First, Mr. Drouin mentioned that this is an Ethics Committee matter, but that doesn't mean we can't address it here. It's true that the Ethics Committee has to look at the situation, but I believe the Standing Committee on Official Languages can do so as well, be-

cause, according to Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Official Languages is the minister responsible for enforcing the Official Languages Act.

There may be a conflict of interest, as the Global News article suggested, because the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner condemned the actions of Xenex Venture Catalysts. Another Alberta company, Navis Group, whose legal company number I will spare you, pays the minister money. That raises some questions, and I think Canadians need to know what's being done with their money. I think it's important for official language communities to know that.

Are ministers losing or gaining money? I couldn't say, because I don't have the information to answer that question. However, I think it would be appropriate for the ministers to appear before us and explain.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with everything Mr. Drouin said, so I won't waste any more time debating this motion, and I think we should vote on it.

**The Chair:** I'll be deciding that, Ms. Koutrakis. We're going to finish hearing from people who had their hands up. Then I'll decide, and we'll see if there has to be a vote or not.

Mrs. Kusie, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I understand Mr. Drouin's comments, but the fact remains that Mr. Boissonnault is still the Minister of Official Languages. He must therefore fulfill his responsibilities in that capacity. The situation will have an impact on another committee that will have to examine it, but the minister must nevertheless take responsibility and appear before us to explain what this is all about. It's just as much his committee as it is ours.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The comments all have to do with ethical allegations, but it's not up to us to decide whether they are admissible or not.

I'll refer to our committee's mandate, which is very short. I'll read it word for word. The mandate of the Standing Committee on Official Languages "shall include, among other matters, the review of and report on official languages policies and programs, including Reports of the Commissioner of Official Languages, which shall be deemed permanently referred to the Committee immediately after they are laid upon the Table."

It would be quite a stretch to include in the mandate behaviours that may or may not give rise to ethical accusations, especially since we have a parliamentary committee that deals with ethics. I've heard everyone's comments. I understand the issue, but it doesn't in any way, shape, or form fall within the mandate of this committee.

I have therefore determined that this motion is out of order. If the situation is to be studied, it must be done elsewhere. That's my ruling.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I'm just going to say I disagree with your position.

**The Chair:** Before you said that, I was about to say that there's a procedure for appealing a committee chair's ruling. As you know, if my ruling is overturned, the matter will be referred to the House of Commons.

I'll give you the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I would like you to start that procedure. I respect the chair, but I disagree with your ruling. I am therefore appealing the chair's ruling.

**The Chair:** That's fine. Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will have a recorded vote on the following question: Shall the decision of the Chair be sustained?

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

**The Chair:** Let's proceed.

Mr. Godin, you spoke for seven seconds, if memory serves. Actually, you spoke for 8.38 seconds. You have the floor.

• (1605)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, thank you for respecting House of Commons procedure.

Ms. Chouinard and Mr. Zundel, please excuse us for going through this procedure. This is a tool we have, and it's our duty as parliamentarians to use all the tools at our disposal.

Ms. Chouinard, you talked about indicators in your presentation. Can you define them? What impact does it have on the subsequent evaluation?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** Thank you for the question.

That's actually an issue I hope parliamentarians will address. Part VII of the new Official Languages Act states that the government will protect and promote the presence of strong community institutions. As part of the regulatory process that has just begun, selecting the criteria for determining whether an institution is strong or not is essential. However, that wording can be confusing because lots of the institutions that our communities depend on for local access, as Mr. Zundel explained, are the only ones in their province that offer post-secondary education in French and are not necessarily strong institutions.

Objectively, how do we determine the characteristics of a strong institution? Then, how do we determine, according to the act, who deserves federal funding? These are some very important issues that need to be addressed.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, I'm going to interrupt you and stop the clock.

I just want to let committee members know that there's going to be a vote in the House in 28 minutes. Is there unanimous consent to continue the meeting until one minute before the vote, because we can all vote electronically?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Let's stop five minutes before the vote, Mr. Chair. People who want to vote in person must be given that privilege.

**The Chair:** Are there people who want to vote in person in the House and go back and forth?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Ms. Koutrakis, to your right, wanted to vote in the House.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I'll let you know five minutes before the vote, and we'll suspend for the vote.

Mr. Godin, let's resume. You've used up one minute and 58.19 seconds of your time.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Chouinard, do you have definitions for the indicators? You've identified the problem. Can you suggest pathways that would allow us, as legislators, to define indicators for effectiveness and performance?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** One of the first things I would recommend is to find out what local communities think.

For example, what are the needs on the ground? How are the existing institutions meeting the needs? What do they need in order to meet the needs on the ground? What institutions would these communities like to have nearby?

We also have to figure out just how strong the institutions are. Look at the University of Sudbury, which is struggling to establish itself, as you know. How do they get stronger? To figure that out, we need to look at the communities that are served by those institutions.

In terms of indicators, those are all things I would look at.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You also said in your opening remarks that we have to make sure the provinces and territories invest in these institutions and target their funding more effectively. That was my understanding of what you said. As you know, provincial, territorial and federal jurisdictions are all involved.

I know you're here today as an individual. Your wealth of experience is valuable to us, and that's why I'm asking you this question. How can the federal government urge the provinces and territories to be realistic, serious and rigorous about their investments and to provide funding on an ongoing basis?

We agree with you, but what can we, as legislators, do to get to the effective agreements we need to achieve that?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** I know I'm not the first person to ask this question about funding, obviously. Negotiations that result in agreements with clearly established priorities are crucial. The parties must agree on accountability, funding amounts and how the funds will be used. Also, the provinces shouldn't decide what the community's priorities should be. Communities themselves must be consulted, and the money must be allocated where it's needed.

• (1610)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** We did a study on Bill C-13, which is toothless, if you ask me. Do you think the new Official Languages Act contains the necessary tools to improve post-secondary education in Canada for official language minority communities?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** I think it's a good start. Having said that, I also think that what comes next, that is, how the act is implemented and what comes out of that process, is critical. Again, it's about the part VII regulations, so many aspects of which have yet to be clearly expressed so that federal, provincial and territorial officials know what to expect, particularly in terms of accountability.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You said it's a good start. That worries me, because we need to act fast to curb the decline of French. We're going to be stuck with this act for the next 10 years. Aren't you concerned?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** We can have the best legislation in the world, but there will be no progress at all if lawmakers like you aren't prepared to implement it as it was intended.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin and Ms. Chouinard.

Next we have Ms. Koutrakis, from the Liberal Party of Canada, for six minutes.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

Professor Chouinard, you've written many scholarly articles in both official languages. When someone wants to write an article, they have to choose the subject and find a journal to publish it. In your opinion, are there more English scholarly journals than French ones? If so, does that mean there's a greater incentive to publish more research in English? Feel free to tell us how this affects your peers as well.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** Thank you for the question.

My job as a professor involves three main things. First, I teach. People know that because their kids go to university. Professors spend about 40% of their time teaching. Second, I do research. That's another 40% of my job. Third, I provide services to the community, which can be interpreted broadly.

The research part often goes unnoticed, but it's crucial to how universities operate. Support for francophone post-secondary institutions must take that aspect of university work into account. I mean not just research, but research in French, and not just research in French about francophone communities, but research in every other field, such as biology or psychology.

Continuing to conduct research in French is a political choice. That's true in Canada, and it's true in francophone institutions around the world. More and more science is being done in English, and it's been that way for 50 years now. If I'm not mistaken, the

Commissioner of Official Languages made that observation in 1973. It is now 2024, and nothing has changed. It certainly continues to be a challenge.

Canada has a French-speaking research ecosystem, especially in the social sciences. I'm kind of lucky that way, compared to my colleagues in the pure sciences. When you work in anglophone or bilingual institutions, as I do, it's very hard to justify publishing in French if you want to rise in the university ranks. The audience is smaller, francophone journals are less prestigious, and the good old impact factor is lower, yet people keep choosing to publish in French. We can be strategic and choose to publish some things in French and others in English, depending on the audience we want to convey our messages to. However, the fact remains that this has consequences for our personal and professional future.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Zundel, when we talk about official languages, we often talk about the federal government and its role in this area, as we're seeing with this particular study. However, the federal government is not the only player. The provinces actually play the most important role in post-secondary education.

Can you tell us about the provincial funding your institution receives?

• (1615)

**Mr. Pierre Zundel:** Certainly.

We receive core funding from the province to provide our essential services, as well as project funding that allows us to invest in educational or technological innovations. We also receive capital funding. The Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick is unusual in Canada in that it's a Crown corporation, which means that the physical infrastructure belongs to the province, not the college. The college also has to follow different rules than institutions in other provinces for things like collective bargaining and salary increases.

Having worked in other provinces, I know that the way New Brunswick does things is a little better for the college than the way other provinces do things. For example, unlike in New Brunswick, colleges in other provinces may not be required to increase base salaries in accordance with collective agreements.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Do you think what you've received so far is enough? If not, how could the federal or provincial governments do better?



**Mr. Pierre Zundel:** Tuition fees have increased significantly with the arrival of more international students, so the core funding we get from the province is enough to cover our essential services. However, as my colleague Ms. Chouinard and I indicated, we really have to move away from an ad hoc funding model to a long-term funding model.

Under the circumstances, it's no secret that it's harder to find staff to deliver programs and take on projects. It's even harder when the projects last only a year or two. If we were guaranteed long-term funding, we could plan better, and it would be easier to recruit the staff needed to implement the programs.

One of the problems we had—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Zundel. That's all the time we have, because I have to move on to the next member. I hear the bells ringing, and I want to make sure that everyone gets a chance to ask questions at least once.

Mr. Beaulieu from the Bloc Québécois and the second vice-chair of this committee, you have the floor.

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

Thank you to our witnesses.

Ms. Chouinard, when you appeared before the committee in 2021, you stated that post-secondary education in Canadian francophone communities was in crisis. Do you think the situation has improved or deteriorated since then?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** I think the situation has deteriorated.

In 2021, Laurentian University was going through a crisis and the Ford government had decided not to fund the Université de l'Ontario français. The second matter was finally settled. However, now we have the issue of international students that Mr. Zundel raised. This is a challenge that is widely discussed behind the scenes and has worsened the erosion of programs that we were already seeing at the time.

When we look at the background of these students, who fall off the institution's radar after their admission, we see that the vast majority of them were not enrolled in francophone institutions, and even fewer of them in francophone minority institutions. That's a fact.

Université de Moncton and Université Sainte-Anne, two institutions I am personally more familiar with, cherish their relationship with international students. They want to keep track of them and guide them toward success. They don't see them as people who are invited to come to Canada only to lose track of them. The decision by the Minister of Immigration not to make exceptions for such institutions, which already have a much harder time recruiting students than anglophone majority institutions, is fundamentally undermining their success.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** It seems to me that it would have been entirely possible and desirable to put in place measures to increase the number of international students at francophone universities, especially outside Quebec.

• (1620)

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** Yes, absolutely. Under part VII of the new Official Languages Act, the minister had every power to create such an exception. This would take into account the fact that a francophone minority institution—even before the minister's decision to cap the number of visas for international students—needed twice as many applicants as an anglophone institution in order to end up with the same number of actual students in its classrooms.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** When we look closely, we see that, at the same time, there is a decline in French in Canada, especially outside Quebec.

There is a kind of sloppiness and indifference on the government's part. Sometimes it has good intentions, but it does not do enough to counter that decline. Shouldn't its rhetoric be more critical of what is happening?

At the same time, the concept of providing a service when the number of people warrants it somewhat forces francophone Acadian communities to inflate their numbers in order to get more services. However, if those figures are inflated, it sends the message that everything is fine and that, at the end of the day, we don't really need to reverse the trend.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** I have two points on that. The application where numbers warrant comes from section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which deals with primary and secondary education. It has no impact on post-secondary education, first of all. If you look at—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I was talking about the conclusion.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** Okay.

When you consider the number of rights holders in each province, you realize that minority institutions actually have access to a much larger pool than they currently capture. The numbers already warrant it, so that's not where the challenge lies.

The current challenge for our institutions is to be able to compete with majority institutions, particularly in situations where, as is the case in Ontario, tuition fees have been reduced and frozen since 2019. As a result, some institutions are being choked.

To stay afloat, majority institutions turned to international students. However, the competition is unfair, especially since the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is overwhelmingly rejecting francophone students from Africa. This is not the first time you've heard this. I'm repeating what you already know. As a result, francophone minority institutions do not currently have access to the same lifeline as majority institutions.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** You talked about the Laurentian University debacle, which revealed the weakness of bilingual institutions and the fact that the government is not really acting in the interest of minority language communities.

You also mentioned Sudbury, but in terms of universities “by and for” francophones outside Quebec, things don't seem to be heading in the right direction either. With respect to the University of Ottawa, we hear that an agreement has been reached. What are your thoughts?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** If we want to talk about “by and for”, Laurentian University does not meet that definition since it was a bilingual institution.

When it decided to reduce its number of programs because of a real financial problem, it did not try to maintain a balance by saving francophone programs. These programs had fewer staff and students, since it is a minority language community, but they were fundamental to the survival of the community.

Laurentian University decided to eliminate programs indiscriminately, with the result that a hundred francophone professors were laid off and some 30 francophone programs were eliminated—two thirds of the university's programs, if I'm not mistaken.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chouinard.

Ms. Ashton from the NDP, you have the floor for six minutes, which should take us to about five minutes before the vote is held in the House of Commons.

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

Welcome to our witnesses.

Mr. Zundel, I would like to begin by saying that you are the only representative of a college to appear as part of our study on post-secondary funding. Therefore, your perspective is very important.

In previous committee meetings, representatives of academic institutions have emphasized the fact that stable and sufficient funding is essential to their work. What are the implications for francophone colleges of not having access to stable funding?

• (1625)

**Mr. Pierre Zundel:** Stable funding is obviously important for any post-secondary institution. Every one of these institutions undertakes long-term activities that require investments in highly specialized personnel, and expensive and complicated infrastructure. Having secure and adequate core funding is therefore essential. That is clear to everyone.

Universities, which have a greater number of permanent employees, rely more on secure core funding, but the fact remains that this funding is important for everyone.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Okay, thank you.

I want to come back to the importance of welcoming international students and the role of the federal government. Given that 28% of your college's students are from overseas, what impact will the new IRCC rules on international students have on your college and the communities in your region?

**Mr. Pierre Zundel:** It's important to understand that, because of our demographics, 40% of New Brunswick's job vacancies in the next 10 years will have to be filled by immigrants. The foreign student program is the best way to attract those immigrants. Any change to limit the number of international students will have a di-

rect impact on our communities. Those are the graduates who will one day be working in our emergency rooms and on our construction sites. They are vital, so it's hard to imagine how we're going to meet the new immigration targets and our labour market needs without the ability to increase the number of foreign students we bring in.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** The committee talks a lot about the education labour shortage, including in early childhood education. Francophone and bilingual communities here in western Canada are very familiar with that reality. We know that one of the programs your college offers is early childhood education, and that's very important.

Can you talk a bit about how important the program is? Also, given the labour shortage, how important is it for the federal government to support early childhood education programs and education training overall?

**Mr. Pierre Zundel:** First of all, early childhood is the stage of life when language skills develop most. In the education cycle, the earlier the child starts, the greater their ability to learn French.

Second of all, federal funding has supported the programs we offer in two ways. On one hand, we received direct support for early childhood education programs, and on the other, we received investments that helped us move towards skills training, as I said earlier. Thanks to those types of programs, we're able to build the skills of early childhood educators more quickly.

Without that federal support, it would have been a struggle to develop our new programming and offer so many programs.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** With your early childhood and other training programs being so important, I imagine it reinforces the need for stable, long-term funding.

**Mr. Pierre Zundel:** Absolutely, and the funding needs to be predictable as well. To hire the people to teach those programs, we have to be able to convince them to come and work for us, and that means assuring them that they will have a job for years to come. That is the way to hire the people we need and keep them.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Great.

Is my time up, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds left.

• (1630)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** In that case, I'll ask Ms. Chouinard if she has anything to add.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** I can quickly finish answering Mr. Beaulieu's question about Laurentian University and the idea of “by and for” francophones.

The university doesn't necessarily meet the definition of "by and for" francophones, but that's the kind of question that will have to be considered when establishing the indicators to measure whether an institution is a strong performer or not.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You'll have to forgive us, Mr. Zundel and Ms. Chouinard, but life on Parliament Hill means that voting takes precedence over everything else, even committee meetings. Motions can be put forward in accordance with the rules, as is the case today.

I believe you are the last witnesses we've invited to appear for the purposes of this study, apart from the government officials. Since we didn't have time for a second round, I encourage you to contact the clerk in writing with any additional information you'd like to share. Drawing on your input will be an integral part of drafting our report.

Thank you very much, and again, my apologies for the inconvenience.

We'll suspend so that members can go and vote. When we get back, we will be meeting with our panel for the second hour.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1630) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1650)

**The Chair:** We will now resume the meeting.

This portion of the meeting has been cut short because of voting in the House. I'd like to welcome the witnesses and apologize for the delay. That is life on Parliament Hill. Joining us now are Frédéric Lacroix, independent researcher, and Nicolas Bourdon, representative of the Regroupement pour le cégep français.

I'll start with a few rules. I will ask all participants, whether you are in the room or on the video conference, not to turn on your microphone until I have recognized you by name. Doing so will create feedback, which could cause injury to the interpreters. I am therefore asking each and every one of you to wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Bourdon, you will each have up to five minutes for your opening remarks. Every political party will then have an opportunity to ask you questions. Please note that I will be very strict on speaking time—not to be mean, mind you. I just want to make sure that everyone has ample opportunity to ask questions.

We'll start with you, Mr. Lacroix. You have a maximum of five minutes.

• (1655)

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix (Independent Researcher, As an Individual):** Good afternoon.

I sent you my PowerPoint presentation, but I was told that I couldn't share it with you, unfortunately. I hope you'll still be able to follow along.

My name is Frédéric Lacroix, and I wrote a book about the failure of Bill 101. It's called *Pourquoi la loi 101 est un échec*. One of

the things I examine in the book is the federal government's overfunding of English-language universities in Quebec, which I believe is a direct cause of the decline of French in Quebec.

As I see it, the decline of French in Quebec is now indisputable. Statistics Canada figures show that the population of people who speak predominantly French at home has declined by 3.9% since 1991, whereas we've seen the opposite trend for English. After being in decline for decades, English is on the rise in Quebec, with the number of people who speak predominantly English at home increasing by 0.5% since 2001. The same trend applies to the use of English in the workplace. In Quebec, English is on the rise and French is on the decline, and that is true for all the language indicators.

A number of factors are contributing to the decline of French. In my view, the overfunding of Quebec's English-language university system is one of them, and it's driving francophones and allophones to pursue their studies in English. As a result of pursuing their post-secondary education in English, these individuals are becoming anglicized, which is deeply impacting their language of work and cultural sphere, and causing French to decline. This is one, but not the only, cause of the decline of French.

In my book, I examine the concept of institutional completeness, developed by sociologist Raymond Breton in 1964. He posits that having institutions such as universities is a factor that contributes to the development of a minority community. Francophones are a minority in Canada, including in Quebec. As a concept, institutional completeness has stood up in Canadian courts, and Ms. Chouinard probably talked about that.

Statistics Canada has shown that, when English is the language of instruction at universities in Quebec, it has a very clear impact on the prevalence of English as the language of work. Accordingly, an allophone is 6.6 times more likely to work in English. In 2023, the Office québécois de la langue française conducted research proving that doing university studies in English significantly increases the use of English as the language of work.

Using data compiled by Statistics Canada, I studied the funding of universities in Quebec. The agency collects data on the revenues and expenses of every university in Canada, broken down by province and source. With that information, it's possible to calculate the share of federal funding each university gets. I focused on the data for 2000, 2010, 2014 and 2017, and found that the proportion of federal funding received by Quebec's English universities—so McGill, Concordia and Bishop's—varied between 34.6% and 38.4% over that 17-year period.

Federal funding accounted for approximately 65% of French universities' funding but dropped to 61.6% in 2017. Keep in mind that francophones make up roughly 80% of Quebec's population and thus receive significantly less in federal funding than their demographic weight, whereas anglophones receive about four times their demographic weight.

When we consider this through the lens of institutional completeness, we see that anglophones benefit from institutional overfunding. In other words, the proportion that goes to English institutions significantly outweighs the size of the English-speaking community. As a result, the anglophone system is able to create spots for students and enjoys more prestige, which drives enrolment. In 2019, Quebec's English universities accounted for 25.9% of university enrolment, three times the demographic weight of the anglophone community. More than one in four university students in Quebec is enrolled in an English-language program, despite the fact that the anglophone community basically amounts to just 10% of the population. The federal government's overfunding of English-language institutions is a factor that directly contributes to anglicization and the decline of French in Quebec.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lacroix. You're at four minutes and 40 seconds, right within your time.

We will now hear from Mr. Bourdon for five minutes.

**Mr. Nicolas Bourdon (Cegep professor, Regroupement pour le cégep français):** Good afternoon.

My name is Nicolas Bourdon, and I teach CEGEP students at Collège de Bois-de-Boulogne. I hope I do as good a job of sticking to my allotted time as Mr. Lacroix did.

As Mr. Lacroix and others have pointed out, French is fragile, not just in the rest of Canada, but also in Quebec. We are seeing that in CEGEPs as well. As CEGEP teachers, we found the situation very worrisome and joined forces. We came up with five devastating findings, prompting us to push for Bill 101 to be enforced in CEGEPs. The five findings appear in my PowerPoint presentation, which the clerk should have shared with you.

The first finding is that the amount of funding received by the English CEGEP system is not proportional to the anglophone community's demographic weight. English speakers make up about 8% of Quebec's population, but English CEGEPs account for 17.5% of CEGEP enrolment, just over double the size of the English population. This, too, is an example of institutional overfunding, but at the college level.

The second finding is that English CEGEPs are now attended primarily by non-English-speaking students, in other words, francophones and allophones. Those institutions were established mainly for the English-speaking community, which is entirely appropriate and fine by me. However, francophones and allophones now make up two thirds of enrolment at English CEGEPs.

The third finding is that unhealthy competition exists between English and French CEGEPs. English CEGEPs have the advantage, and as a result of this competition, we as teachers are seeing francophone CEGEPs become anglicized. In order to compete with En-

glish CEGEPs, French CEGEPs have had to develop English-language programming and bilingual college diplomas. Our group wanted to send the message that it was time to put a stop to that, because French CEGEPs, themselves, were becoming anglicized.

The fourth finding is that English CEGEPs have become colleges for the elite, chosen by students with the highest R scores. The R score is used to rank a student's academic performance in relation to their overall average. English CEGEPs attract the top students. Here is a glaring example. Montreal's Dawson College accepts only 30% of its science program applicants and can therefore pick the cream of the crop.

The fifth finding, but not the least, is that the English CEGEP system contributes significantly to the anglicization of Quebec's population overall, especially those on the island of Montreal. As Mr. Lacroix mentioned, when someone attends an English-language university, they take up their career in English. That's also true of English CEGEPs. Research on the subject reveals that students who attend English CEGEPs go on to do their university studies in English and pursue careers in English. That means there is a strong correlation between attending an English-language CEGEP and living your life in English. The reverse is also true: Attending a French-language CEGEP puts you on a much more francophone track. Students who attend French CEGEPs tend to choose French universities and enter the workforce in French.

I hope I didn't go over my time.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** No, your speech was shorter than Mr. Lacroix's: It lasted four minutes and twelve seconds. That's a good sign. We'll be able to conduct a full round of questions.

I know Mr. Lacroix has appeared before our committee before, but I believe this is the first time for you, Mr. Bourdon. So I'll give you a brief explanation. The first rounds of questions and answers last six minutes for each of the four political parties. Today, we'll start with the Conservatives.

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

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

Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Bourdon, thank you for being here today.

It's almost an existential question you're raising today. I've been married for 35 years to an English-speaking woman from Montreal. I exported her from Montreal and imported her to the Lower St. Lawrence, so my children are bilingual, as are my grandchildren, who are less than 10 years old. I'm extremely proud of that. My parents and seven brothers and sisters are all bilingual. We travel all over the world, and our French roots have never been compromised by the fact that we speak English. I want to make sure I convey that clearly.

My assistant, who is here behind me, speaks four languages: French, English, Spanish and Arabic. Today's young people are very open-minded and inclined to learn other languages. Even if French is a very important language in the world, particularly in Africa and Europe, today's technologies encourage young people to have a certain level of general knowledge. They are greatly influenced by social networks, which go beyond the borders of Quebec and Canada.

I say all this because Mr. Lacroix said that francophones are a minority in Quebec.

Did I understand you correctly, Mr. Lacroix?

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** Francophones are a minority in Canada. I refute the framework of the Official Languages Act, which postulates that anglophones are a minority. In my opinion, anglophones are not a minority anywhere in Canada. That's what I said. Francophones are a minority everywhere in Canada.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** According to the rather large figures you gave us, French is declining in Quebec. Can we say that this decline is also attributable to the massive influx of immigrants in recent years, particularly in the Montreal region?

I'm from La Pocatière, in the Bas-Saint-Laurent region, where we'd love to see our population grow, not decline as is currently the case. In fact, we're losing ridings, which my colleague Mr. Beaulieu is delighted about. We'll be adding a new riding north of Montreal and removing one in Bas-Saint-Laurent, to correct inequalities in representation.

Inevitably, the fact that immigrants aren't coming to our regions has consequences. We'd probably have an easier time francizing them in our regional CEGEPs, which I know well, because they're not very anglicized, unlike Montreal's CEGEPs, which Mr. Bourdon talked a lot about. Sherbrooke's may be a little anglicized, but the ones in the Lower St. Lawrence and northern Quebec aren't.

I've raised several points, so I'll let you respond.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** I didn't hear a specific question, but what I'm saying is that the English-language institutional set-up in Quebec is leading to a decline in French. For supporters of bilingualism, I'd point out that it leads to a decline in bilingualism, because people end up not speaking French and passing on English as their mother tongue to their children.

It's not a dynamic of openness to the world where you want to speak all sorts of languages and collect them. It's more a dynamic of subtractive bilingualism. The language being subtracted in Montreal is French. The number of indicators pointing in this direction is very large. It's not just happening on the island of Montreal, but throughout the Montreal region.

I believe that the federal government's overfunding of McGill, Concordia and Bishop's universities is contributing to the decline of French in Quebec and the advance of English. That's my argument.

• (1710)

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Bourdon, what do you think?

**Mr. Nicolas Bourdon:** I would tend to agree with Mr. Lacroix, but I would like to make a clarification on CEGEPs, since you made a comment on the situation.

There's a danger for a language like French when another language, in this case English, is deemed superior and more attractive. This phenomenon is reflected in the behaviour of our CEGEP students, who see English as the language that must be mastered, which poses a problem. Our group went to several CEGEPs and we succeeded, at a union meeting, in getting 41 CEGEPs to vote in favour of applying Bill 101 to CEGEPs, to reverse this problematic phenomenon where English becomes the more attractive language.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** All right.

Quebec has recently made changes with regard to higher education, which amount to a defunding of certain English-language universities. Have these changes reassured you in any way?

**The Chair:** That's an excellent question, Mr. Généreux, but your time is up. You'll have a chance to come back to it.

Mr. Drouin, from the Liberal Party of Canada, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Bourdon, you've done studies on the effects of English or other languages on international communities, for example in France and Belgium, more specifically in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. You make some pretty extremist points, if I may say so.

For my part, I come from a French-speaking community in Ontario. Have you done any studies on the phenomena observed in other francophone communities in Africa or Europe to back up what you're saying? You can simply answer with yes or no.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** Is the word "extremist" part of parliamentary language? Is it acceptable to—

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Mr. Lacroix, if you want to fool around, I have no patience for that.

Have you done any studies on the influence of the francophonie internationally, yes or no?

**The Chair:** Wait a moment, Mr. Drouin.

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

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Raising your voice and shouting at a witness is unacceptable. He called him an extremist.

Mr. Drouin, you could be called an extremist. That's not language that contributes to a logical, rational discussion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, thank you for your intervention.

Mr. Drouin, let's calm things down a bit. When you said "extremist", I understood that you were talking about the position and not the person, but you could rephrase those words. I stopped the clock at one minute thirteen seconds, because there was a point of order. I'll let you continue.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not accusing anyone of having such a position, I'm simply trying to understand reality. I'm president of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie and I have discussions with my colleagues in Africa and France. The problem of anglicization is real in France, even though it's a free and independent country. France faces the same problems as we do. I'm just trying to have an intelligent conversation about protecting the French language.

Do my colleagues really think that the problem of anglicization in Quebec is mainly attributable to McGill University and Dawson College? That's what I'm trying to tackle. Are we going to stick with this notion or tackle the real problem?

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** Let me return to the realm of rationality to answer this question.

I took an interest in the Quebec situation. Statistics Canada, probably an extremist organization in your eyes, has proven that bilingual institutions have a very strong impact on the anglicization of francophones and allophones in Quebec. The Office québécois de la langue française has also conducted studies that corroborate this fact. So, all the data converge towards this conclusion.

I'm not aware of any state or province in the world that is in Quebec's situation. You should know that in Flanders, for example, French-language universities were closed in the 1960s, and Flemish universities in Wallonia. In Switzerland, we see the same situation: territorial bilingualism is applied.

So I think Quebec is in an abnormal situation compared to other states on the planet. If you call this position extremist, in fact, you're calling Belgium and Flanders extremist states.

• (1715)

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** No. In principle, Mr. Lacroix, I'm telling you that if you think McGill University or Dawson College in Montreal are anglicizing the whole of Quebec because they teach in English, you're completely mistaken, and by a long shot.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** In that case, Statistics Canada is completely mistaken.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I'm Franco-Ontarian even though there are plenty of English-language universities in Ontario. I find these comments insulting and they show an intellectual lack of respect for what's really going on internationally. We are 321 million French speakers.

When you say that English-speaking universities are anglicizing Montreal, a speech I've been hearing for 40 years, excuse me, but I think you're full of hogwash. I take back what I said, but you're out in left field. You have to be respectful of the facts.

Mr. Chair, are you going to cut me off?

**The Chair:** I'm not cutting you off. I was going to tell you that wasn't parliamentary language, but you pulled yourself together before I could say it.

You may continue. You still have 20—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** I'll stop the clock. Following up on the last instructions we received, I'd also like to remind everyone that only one microphone should be switched on at a time. It's not often that things get this hot at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

You have the floor, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** This is witness intimidation and I find it totally unacceptable.

It's as if, according to Mr. Drouin, it's okay for French-language universities outside Quebec to be underfunded and English-language universities in Quebec to be overfunded. Yet Mr. Lacroix had to qualify things earlier by saying that this was only one of the factors—

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, can you get to your point of order?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I raised a point of order, because I feel that by raising his voice and calling guests "full of hogwash", Mr. Drouin is really Quebec bashing. This is exactly what we often see from Liberals, who say we're aggressive or extremist as soon as we want fair funding.

We're not asking to take away funding from English-language universities, but to be fair in funding English-language and French-language universities.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, I accept your point of order.

Just before I rule, Mr. Godin, did you want to intervene on this point, specifically?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Absolutely, Mr. Chair.

I think that the Standing Committee on Official Languages cannot accept this kind of rhetoric towards witnesses. Witnesses must be respected. If we don't share their opinion, we have the right to do so, since we don't all share the same opinion here.

We sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages and two witnesses have come here to appear before us. I think Mr. Drouin should withdraw his words and apologize.

**The Chair:** It's already been done, but I totally support these two interventions.

Mr. Beaulieu, you're absolutely right to have raised this point of order.

Mr. Drouin, you withdrew your words. I'm not used to hearing you speak in that tone, but I'll let you continue. You have one minute 15 seconds of speaking time left.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** May I remind you that I was the ardent Ontario defender of the Charter of the French Language in Quebec.

Mr. Beaulieu, I welcome your comments. I'm very respectful of Quebec, I have family there. I respect the French fact. I also respect the fact that we live in a French-speaking minority throughout Canada and North America. On the other hand, I'm not prepared to listen to rhetoric that doesn't lead anywhere. That's my problem. The fact that we have English-speaking universities in Montreal and that, because we have English-speaking universities, we say that all anglicization comes from a university, that's a false debate.

We have to look at the reality of things, we have to have a debate that is true, and the real debate is that our young people are now using virtual platforms, to which neither Quebec's Bill 96 nor Canada's Bill C-13 apply.

Mr. Lacroix, as an academic, and Mr. Bourdon, as a representative of a post-secondary institution, what are you doing to promote French learning on these virtual platforms? That's my question.

• (1720)

**The Chair:** That's an excellent question, Mr. Drouin, but your time is up.

We'll move on to the third speaker, the second vice-chair of the committee, from the Bloc Québécois.

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

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

What we heard from Mr. Drouin, we normally hear from Mr. Rodriguez or other Liberal members. When we ask for equitable funding or recognition that francophones are a minority everywhere in Canada, including Quebec, we're told we're attacking anglophones. But we're not attacking anglophones. As Mr. Lacroix said from the outset —

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I would simply like to point out to the Standing Committee on Official Languages that the Bloc Québécois has never defended minority francophones. I know this isn't really a point of order, but...

**The Chair:** This is indeed not a point of order, Mr. Drouin.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That's just utterly wrong—

**The Chair:** Just a minute, gentlemen. I've been on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for eight or nine years and I've never seen a situation like this. Let's adopt a slightly more civilized approach. After all, we're representatives of our ridings, of our part of the country, and also of the country.

Mr. Beaulieu, I've stopped the clock.

Mr. Drouin's point of order is not a point of order.

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

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I'm intervening because one of the witnesses had pressed the "Raise hand" button. Does he have the right to speak or not? If yes, give him the floor. If not, ask him to deactivate the "Raise hand" function.

**The Chair:** All right.

Mr. Bourdon, could you please deactivate the "Raise hand" function? When questions are addressed to either of you, you may or may not answer them, unless otherwise indicated.

Mr. Beaulieu, I'll start the clock again. Only 24 seconds of your speaking time has elapsed and you have the floor again.

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

Mr. Bourdon, I'll give you the opportunity to finish your comment.

**Mr. Nicolas Bourdon:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. I would like to clarify a few points in response to Mr. Drouin's comments.

In 2022, Statistics Canada conducted a study on Quebec. The results are quite clear. Attending an anglophone institution increases the likelihood of a graduate working in English by a factor of 12. The correlation is quite strong.

I would also like to respond to Mr. Drouin's statement that we're taking an extremist position. Unfortunately, I was rather taken aback by this statement.

I want to remind you of some basic facts. In Quebec, English is taught as a second language in all francophone institutions from the first year of primary school until the end of CEGEP. This means that thousands of hours of English as a second language classes are already being taught in francophone schools. It isn't true that we're taking an extremist position.

I also want to remind the committee of some historical arguments concerning the supporters of Bill 101. When the debate that led to the adoption of the Charter of the French Language took place in 1976, supporters of this legislation were called extremists, even fascists. After the bill came into force, people realized that allophones and francophones had to attend primary and secondary school in French. People said that Quebecers would no longer be bilingual and that there would be a dramatic decline in bilingualism, which would be terrible. Yet, in spite of everything, bilingualism has grown in Quebec.

Calling people who wanted to strengthen francophone institutions in Quebec through Bill 101 extremists was wrong. It amounted to overblown rhetoric.

• (1725)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Mr. Lacroix, I gather that the only studies available on the funding of francophone universities compared to anglophone universities outside Quebec show that francophone universities are generally underfunded in relation to their demographic weight.

If wanting equitable funding for francophone institutions is described as extremism, English Canada would see it as quite extremist. Do you have any comments on this?

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** I conducted this study a long time ago. The figures aren't up to date, unfortunately.

We can see that francophone post-secondary institutions are significantly underfunded across Canada. Outside Quebec, the situation is particularly critical. In Ontario, the figures are fractions, small percentages. Funding is well below the demographic weight of francophones in Ontario, whose assimilation rate is now over 45%.

The correlation between the underfunding of educational institutions and the assimilation rate is obvious. This holds true everywhere in Canada, including Quebec. In Quebec, francophones are being assimilated. On the island of Montreal, 4.6% of francophones have switched from French as their mother tongue to English as the language most often spoken at home.

The same process is under way in francophone communities across Canada. It's simply further along in Ontario than in Quebec. A major part of this process is the underfunding of francophone educational institutions.

Ottawa isn't solely responsible for this underfunding. A number of factors are at play. Ottawa is a factor given the federal government's major investment in research in Quebec. The figure amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars a year. This impact is significant.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Okay.

I don't know whether you're familiar with a study carried out a few years ago by Patrick Sabourin from the Institut de recherche sur le français en Amérique. The study was quite comprehensive. It showed the impact of allophones, but also francophones, attending English CEGEPs in Montreal.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** This study was later corroborated by the Office québécois de la langue française. The study showed that the theory that people attended anglophone CEGEPs and universities to learn English was completely false. These people attended anglophone CEGEPs and universities to integrate into the anglophone world, thereby opting for a way out of the francophone world. It wasn't about immersing themselves in a language that they hadn't mastered.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Beaulieu.

We'll finish with the NDP member's six-minute round of questions.

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

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

I would like to welcome the witnesses.

I also want to share my concerns about how my colleague, Mr. Drouin, asked—

**The Chair:** Hold on a second, Ms. Ashton. I'll stop the timer, because there's a point of order.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Sorry to interrupt, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Chair, I'm looking at the clock and it's 5:28 p.m. We would need the committee's unanimous consent to extend the meeting past 5:30 p.m.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin. I hadn't noticed the time. The committee should indeed end the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Is there unanimous consent to extend the meeting by no more than four or five minutes? The room is still available.

**Voices:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Good.

Ms. Ashton, I'll start the timer again. Only 18 seconds went by. The floor is yours.

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

As I said, I also want to share my concerns about how my colleague, Mr. Drouin, asked his questions. I think that we all have the right to ask questions, given the topic of this study and the views shared by the Quebec officials regarding francophone post-secondary institutions in Quebec. These views must be heard, even if we disagree.

Mr. Bourdon, as you know, we've been working hard for quite some time on modernizing the Official Languages Act. How will this modernization help francophone communities set up francophone schools?

• (1730)

**Mr. Nicolas Bourdon:** When it comes to Quebec, I think that Mr. Lacroix and I want to convey the same message. We're saying that, by funding anglophone universities and CEGEPs in Quebec, the federal government is unfortunately working against the French language. Mario Beaulieu's study, for example, shows that 95% of the federal money spent in Quebec to protect official languages in minority communities supports projects run by anglophone institutions. We can see that this money is once again strengthening these institutions. Unfortunately, these institutions play a harmful role with regard to French in Quebec. Mr. Lacroix and I wanted to show this.

In terms of the federal legislation, there really should be an asymmetrical vision. English doesn't need help, French does, both in and outside Quebec. I think that you want to move in this direction. You have this principle, but how do you apply this asymmetry? That's the issue.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Okay.

I'm from western Canada. I represent a constituency here in Manitoba that covers two-thirds of the province.

As you know, we have a vibrant francophone community in Manitoba. However, regardless, the French language is still declining. How can we ensure that francophone universities outside Quebec work more closely with Quebec's post-secondary institutions?

**Mr. Nicolas Bourdon:** I don't know whether Mr. Lacroix wants to answer this question, because my main concern is CEGEPs.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** You can both answer the question from the perspective of CEGEPs and universities.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** I'm not sure whether I can answer this question.



In my opinion, for francophones outside Quebec, institutions must provide full programs “by and for” francophones. I think that this concept is key. Institutions shouldn't simply provide one-year programs, but full engineering, medical or law programs, for example. Francophone institutions must have strong faculties that lead to well-paying jobs. Other things are needed too.

This may not answer your question. However, I think that this approach is the right one.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** That's a helpful answer. Other witnesses also spoke about the need to provide university programs of this nature, for example.

Mr. Bourdon, do you have anything to say about CEGEPs?

**Mr. Nicolas Bourdon:** I would say more or less the same thing as Mr. Lacroix. In Canada outside Quebec, universities and colleges provide only certain programs in French. These institutions are sometimes fragile and have unfortunately been weakened, particularly in Ontario by the Ford government's budget cuts. Outside Quebec, more investment is definitely needed. Universities and colleges must have the funding needed to provide a full range of programs, including the most coveted programs, such as medicine, engineering and law. That's what I would look for, obviously.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

In this study, we've talked a great deal about the significant role played by international students in our francophone institutions. In your opinion, how can institutions such as CEGEPs and universities establish themselves as international leaders in francophone education?

**The Chair:** Ms. Ashton, I'm sorry, but you have gone way over your time. I didn't want to interrupt you. I let you finish your question.

Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Bourdon, you may not be used to this. You may have appeared before, Mr. Lacroix, but you haven't, Mr. Bourdon. The meeting was cut short as a result of the vote. We started again late, and then there were objections, as we heard and as you saw. I ask that you let us know in writing what else you would have wanted to say. We value both your written and oral testimony. Please send the information to the clerk, who will pass it on to everyone.

I would like to briefly take advantage of my privilege as chair to ask you a question about statistics, for the committee's benefit. The

question is for Mr. Lacroix, but perhaps Mr. Bourdon can answer it as well.

You said earlier that 35% of federal funding goes to anglophone post-secondary institutions, compared to 65%, down to 61%, for francophone institutions. I rounded off the figures. How can the numbers be broken down to determine what portion of this funding is tied to official languages? I'm not asking you to do doctoral research. However, if you have the figures, how much of that money is tied to official languages?

Other parts of this funding focus on science and technology. If you have these figures, it would be good to know how federal funding for francophone and anglophone post-secondary institutions is divided between science and technology programs and official languages programs. Do you understand my question?

• (1735)

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** Yes. I understand it.

I don't think that Statistics Canada makes this distinction in its figures. The funding comes from the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the three federal grant funds, in particular in the social sciences and humanities and in science and engineering. However, I don't think that the amounts earmarked for official languages are listed as such. That said, it must be small amounts compared to the funding from other organizations.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Beaulieu, did you want to comment on this?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** The amounts referred to by the witnesses aren't the same as the amounts from the official languages or official languages education programs. These are additional amounts.

**The Chair:** Okay. This would have to come from the witnesses, because you aren't a witness, Mr. Beaulieu.

Witnesses, if you have any additional information to share with us in writing, again, please don't hesitate to do so. The committee will greatly appreciate it.

Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.





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