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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 113 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few instructions to prevent audio and feedback incidents. I would ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table.

I would like to remind participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will do our best to manage the speaking order and to see the raised hands on the screen. There are many people attending today's meeting via video conference.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on April 29, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of the minority-language education continuum.

Today we have the good fortune of welcoming extraordinary people. They are the ones who will break the ice on this ambitious study that we are undertaking.

First I would like to welcome two representatives from the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario: Mr. Labelle, president, and Ms. Girard, executive director. They are both joining us by video conference.

I would also like to welcome two representatives from the Commission nationale des parents francophones, Ms. Anderson and Mr. Racine, who are participating in the meeting in person.

Each of your organizations has five minutes for your opening remarks. I want to be clear that I will have to interrupt you if your speaking time is up, otherwise the clerk and the analyst will scold me. I would ask you to be concise and respect the time given to you for opening remarks. In any event, you will have the opportunity to finish your remarks during the period for questions and comments that follows. You have attended committee meetings before so you know how this works.

We will begin with the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario. Ms. Girard or Mr. Labelle, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Denis Labelle (President, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario): Good morning.

I thank the committee for inviting the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario, or ACEPO.

ACEPO represents the four French-language public school boards of Ontario and the Jules-Léger Centre Consortium. Together, they manage 153 schools for a total of more than 35,000 students. Among the four school systems in Ontario, the school boards that we represent obtained the best educational outcomes. The goal of our schools is to build a pluralistic francophone culture that, in addition to celebrating the diversity of origins and experiences, creates a sense of belonging. However, to achieve their ambitions, our schools need adequate resources.

As a reminder, judges unanimously ruled that students whose access to French-language education is guaranteed under article 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms have the right to institutions equivalent to those of the majority, but often that is far from the case. Under that principle, francophones have the right to a school of comparable quality to that of the anglophone schools in a given attendance boundary. The chronic underfunding of francophone school boards is limiting access to an education in French for children who have such rights and francophone newcomers, and is an obstacle to the development and consolidation of existing educational services.

There are many challenges. Language minority schools are dealing with demographic pressures, geographic constraints and limited resources. They have to reconcile the reality of a dominant anglophone environment with the mission to preserve and promote French. This double mandate cannot be met without adequate financial support.

That is why the Official Languages in Education Program plays a key role. Through that program, the provinces and territories receive funding that allows them to support key initiatives.

In the context where the majority of French-language school boards are underfunded because of provincial per-student funding formulas, for many school boards and schools, federal funding is a lifeline that allows them to offer enriching services and programs that guarantee that students will not only learn French, but will flourish in a fully francophone environment.

However, this support needs to go beyond simply maintaining the status quo. It is imperative to commit to strengthening and improving this funding in order to guarantee that each child in a minority community has access to a higher quality education, without compromise. What is more, the funding must take into account not only the rapid growth of the French-language system, but also the higher inflationary costs that are putting extra pressure on the resources that are available.

It is essential for the federal government to enforce the provinces' obligation to implement an authentic process with the French-language school boards so that the funding is used to meet the real needs of the school boards. The right to managed French-language school boards exists from one end of the country to the other.

Another crucial aspect is the funding to address the shortage of teaching staff. That funding needs to be significantly increased and be much less dependant on the centralized control of the provinces in order to provide the school boards the flexibility they need to attract qualified teachers and keep them in the community. It is about the survival of French-language education in Canada. I would even go so far as to say that in the longer term, it is about the survival of the francophonie in our beautiful country.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the fundamental importance of adequate federal funding to ensure a full continuum of services. Our elementary schools rely on early childhood services that are funded and structured to meet the needs of francophones, while the survival of our secondary schools depends on access to quality post-secondary francophone institutions that are nearby. All of these components are indispensable to the vitality and survival of the Canadian francophonie. Without financial support from the federal government, our efforts for ensuring an education in French from early childhood to adulthood would be seriously compromised, which would threaten not only the quality of teaching, but also the future of francophone culture and identity.

We still have a long way to go, but preserving and encouraging the French language is everyone's business.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Labelle.

Now we will hear from the Commission nationale des parents francophones.

Mr. Racine or Ms. Anderson, you have five minutes.

Ms. Gillian Anderson (President, Commission nationale des parents francophones): Thank you.

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

My name is Gillian Anderson and I am a proud francophone parent from the St. Albert region in Alberta. I am also president of the Commission nationale des parents francophones, or CNPF.

Thank you for inviting CNPF to speak to the study on the minority-language education continuum.

Although CNPF works with all parents on the education continuum, it has done a lot of work on early childhood education over the past few decades. We are here today to talk to you on behalf of the parents of 141,000 children aged 0 to 4 who, according to the recent census, have the right to education in French in a minority setting under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The serious shortage of child care spaces in French and the long waiting lists force parents to make choices that have serious consequences: They either register their child for English child care, or they keep their child at home. That agonizing decision is made at the most critical time in their child's development. It is during early childhood that language and a sense of identity develops.

Many parents tell us that their children speak only English after attending an anglophone child care facility even if both parents are francophones, as is often the case. Many parents choose to register their children at an anglophone school to ensure their scholastic success, out of fear that they will not be able to adapt to a francophone school. Imagine how the parents feel: They feel like they failed to pass down French to their children.

In all, 141,635 children have the right to education in French in a minority setting, but less than 20% of parents manage to place their children in francophone child care. In other words, 80% of parents, which represents thousands of parents, have no other option than to place their children in anglophone child care.

Why this lack of early childhood services in French? Essentially, the biggest part of the problem is the agreements concluded with the provinces and territories under the national child care program. These agreements include language clauses, but the provincial and territorial action plans are vague and include very little access to child care in French. For example, there are situations like the one in Alberta, where only 19 of the 1,500 new child care spaces have been allocated to the francophone community.

Early childhood is the gateway to education in French for the entire continuum of education. The fact is that the lack of child care services contributes directly to the assimilation of our francophones. It is crucial to act quickly to expand access to early childhood services in the minority language in Canada and to ensure their quality to promote a positive impact on the language and social development of children.

We also think it is essential for the francophone child care services in minority communities to benefit from much more stable, long-term funding to ensure their sustainability and growth.

Lastly, I would like to take a bit of time to say a few words about the rest of the continuum of education.

We would like to support all the stakeholders who come here to tell you how much the continuum in French is underfunded in Canada.

What is more, we strongly believe it is essential to offer more support to the parents in the entire continuum of education. In our communities, two out of three francophone children come from exogamous families, and parents have intense debates on whether or not to continue educating their children in French. These parents need a lot more support. To that end, more substantial funding needs to be given under the Official Languages in Education Program in Alberta.

We also need to support the parents when it comes time to choose a French-language post-secondary institution. Parents are sorely lacking information to properly support their young people at this important stage of the continuum.

The lack of early childhood services in French and the lack of support for parents is a barrier to exercising the constitutional right to education in a French minority community. As such, this constitutes a threat to the future vitality of francophone minority communities. Action is urgently needed.

Thank you very much for your attention.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Anderson.

Perhaps I should have made it clear that Ms. Anderson is the president of the Commission nationale des parents francophones, while Mr. Racine is the executive director.

Denis Labelle is the president of the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario, while Ms. Girard is the executive director.

For anyone not yet familiar with the committee, I should point out that, in the first round of questions, each political party will have six minutes to ask questions and listen to the answers.

Ms. Gladu can start.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome all the witnesses here today.

My first question is for Mr. Labelle.

You spoke about the need to uphold the rights accorded to francophones under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You also talked about the teacher shortage. Can the federal government take any other steps to improve the situation for francophone post-secondary institutions?

Mr. Denis Labelle: If funding were available, we would like to narrow the gap in terms of capital investments. Some areas lack schools. This is especially true in northern Ontario, where I live. That's the first step.

We also need adequate funding to bring in teachers. We're currently struggling to cope with a shortage. We lose 1,000 teachers a year, but only 500 students graduate from our universities with teaching degrees. In Ontario, three institutions provide a French-language teaching program: Laurentian University in Sudbury, the University of Ottawa and the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto. Only 500 students a year graduate with a teaching degree. This means that we're short 500 teachers every year.

Of course, any surpluses would help us narrow the gap in the number of French-language schools in Ontario.

Ms. Girard can chime in if she wishes to do so.

Ms. Isabelle Girard (Executive Director, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario): Yes, thank you.

I think that you clearly established ACEPO's two main priorities.

I also believe that funding is vital to address the teacher shortage. One of our challenges is the lack of spots in universities. With the exception of the Université de l'Ontario français, funding isn't guaranteed for French-language spots in bilingual universities. This means, for example, that the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University can decide how to allocate their funding. They receive funding, but spots aren't guaranteed for French-language students. A portion of the funding given to faculties of education must be allocated specifically to French-language education students. This money must stay in French-language training.

There should also be funding for teacher training for small cohorts. As Mr. Labelle said, few graduates go on to become secondary school teachers. These training courses aren't provided because the cohorts are so small. There are creative ways to get around this issue, but they require funding and support from our governments.

• (1120)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: In my constituency, the situation is similar. We have five or six schools for 8,000 francophones or francophiles. There are many applications, but not enough available spots.

My second question is for Ms. Anderson.

Based on your experience, what steps would you suggest that the government take?

Ms. Gillian Anderson: In terms of early childhood, it really comes down to improving provincial and territorial agreements to ensure that they include language clauses for our francophones. It currently depends on the party in power and this changes every four years or so. We need stronger agreements that specifically focus on francophones.

Mr. Racine may want to comment.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine (Executive Director, Commission nationale des parents francophones): The early childhood sector currently lacks structural funding. For the past two years, the early childhood sector in minority communities hasn't received any funding. Day care centres are run without any form of government support. Opportunities with British Columbia have recently opened up. Aside from that, we have absolutely no financial support.

A program has just been announced. We hope to receive funding. However, in March it will have been two years since any funding was allocated to the early childhood sector in francophone minority communities.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: As you said, only 20% of rights holders manage to access these services.

You also said that the provincial agreements were weak. Could you elaborate?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds to do so.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes. The agreements include language clauses. However, the issue lies with the provincial action plans. When we want to know how these clauses apply, we take a look at the action plans. We find that they don't contain anything in this area. Only Manitoba has announced a small amount of funding. In all other cases, the action plans don't contain anything specifically for francophones in minority communities. We know this because we studied them. I challenge you to find anything of this nature. The funding is piecemeal. We don't know what will happen. That's our reality.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

I didn't want to interrupt Ms. Gladu earlier for this, but I would like to make a comment, Mr. Racine. You talked about the upcoming funding. However, you didn't specify whether it would come from the province or the federal government. You know your files well. We assume that it will come from the province.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: No. It will come from the federal government.

The Chair: It would be good idea to specify this next time, so that we know exactly what you're referring to. We don't have as much expertise as you do.

Speaking of expertise, the next questions will be asked by an expert in the field.

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

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleagues for being here today.

I have so many questions that I don't know where to start. My team told me not to provide too much background information. However, I want to make one point before I ask my questions.

Bill C-13 supported the recognition of early childhood and post-secondary education in the minority language. This is a first in Canadian history. There had never been any references to it before. When this issue was raised, the governments said that section 23 of the charter didn't include early childhood and post-secondary education at all. For the first time in Canadian history, we can find these references. I think that the bill refers to post-secondary education four times. Early childhood education comes up in part 1 of the bill. It's in proposed subsections 41(3), 41(6) and 93.1(1.2) of the Official Languages Act, which talk about indicators and measures.

For the first time, you have power in your tool box. That's remarkable. It's all down to your hard work.

In reality, the approach in Canada for the past 50 years was a recipe for failure. It was impossible to succeed. However, we didn't talk about it because we lacked the power. Today, we have that power and we must talk about it. The current and future governments must give you substantial support.

That said, I'll now ask some quick questions.

My first question is quite specific. Does the addition of day care spots for \$10 help parents of francophone children in minority communities in Canada?

• (1125)

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: This amount certainly helps them. However, there are still major barriers. For example, it's hard to access day care spots. Let me give you an example. In British Columbia, to access \$10 day care spots, 70% of the spots must be filled. The day cares are often small. If you have three educators and lose one, you fall below the 70% mark and you're no longer eligible for \$10 day care spots.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I want to make sure that I understand. The \$10 day care spots help the people who are already in the system if they meet the criteria.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes. Exactly.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The Senate proposed an amendment to Bill C-35 to strengthen the wording. The House then considered and passed this amendment. This is all down to your hard work. You did your job even though you didn't have any power. You now have that power. Please continue your work, because we need you.

Now that we have stronger wording for francophone day care centres, I assume that this helps you. Can you explain how?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: This will certainly help us. Bill C-35 ensures long-term funding for minority communities. That's a plus. Of course, this legislation must now be put into practice and the funding must follow suit. That's our hope.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Good.

The first step was to ensure recognition.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The second step is funding.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It should be coming soon, if the next government continues to fulfill the commitments.

You also referred to the official languages in education program, or OLEP. You have never received any money through this program. Is that right?

Ms. Gillian Anderson: It depends on the province.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Could you please elaborate?

Ms. Gillian Anderson: In British Columbia, parents receive funding through the OLEP. They receive funding to manage their parent program. In Alberta, parents have never received any funding. The same federal program is used differently in each province.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Are other provinces in the same situation?

The OLEP focuses solely on the education of young people aged 5 to 18. Is that right?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes. Sometimes, funding is available for the early childhood sector. Sometimes, funding is also available to support parents. It varies a great deal and it strongly depends on the provincial governments.

As my colleague was saying, in British Columbia, funding is provided for day care and to support parents. In Alberta, the amount is zero across the board. In some other provinces, the amount is also zero.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Is this set out in the OLEP, or does the province simply choose to provide funding to these organizations?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: The province determines where the funding goes. Communities are often consulted, but parents and the early childhood sector are very often not consulted.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You have all the answers. Thank you. It's really important to explain the situation quickly.

Are you saying that the money should go directly into the OLEP? The province would then have a much greater responsibility to distribute the funds appropriately, compared to when the money doesn't go into the OLEP. Should it be added?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: It depends on the clauses and action plans. Even though the funding is included in the OLEP, there's no guarantee that it will be allocated directly to specific sectors. The provinces and territories have discretionary power. If they decide to allocate more funding to high schools, for example, the money will go to that sector and not to the early childhood sector.

We never have a clear idea of where the funding will go. It must be allocated piecemeal, province by province, territory by territory. This complicates matters.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

I want to thank the committee for embarking on this study today, because it's extremely important. I hope that we can make findings for each province and territory and that this will help us move this issue forward.

This topic is incredibly important. We're delighted that you could be here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson. For once, you stuck to your allotted time. It's all in good fun.

I'll now give the floor for six minutes to the committee's second vice-chair, Mr. Beaulieu, from the Bloc Québécois.

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

I want to thank our guests for joining us.

My question is for just about everyone.

We've heard a great deal about how Statistics Canada estimated the number of rights holders outside Quebec for the first time. What percentage of rights holders can access French-language schools run by and for francophones?

• (1130)

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: It varies a great deal. My colleagues at the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario probably have data on this topic. I know that the figure can be as high as 70%, but it can sometimes fall below 50%, as is the case in Alberta.

For the early childhood sector, the proportion seems to fall below 20%, according to current data. We hope to have more recent data soon. This means that 80% of parents have no other option than to enrol their child in an anglophone day care centre. As we explained earlier, we receive many reports about cases where children attend anglophone day cares and end up speaking to their parents in English only, even though both parents are francophone. It doesn't take long. All it takes is two or three years in an anglophone day care and it's a lost cause.

Ms. Gillian Anderson: I want to add something. Parents and people in general always take the easy road or the road with the fewest obstacles. It's challenging enough to find a spot in a day care centre, regardless of whether it's English or French. Parents must work even harder to find a francophone day care centre. If we ask them to take an extra step to find a day care centre in their first language, things get challenging and we lose them right away.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In Ontario, what percentage of rights holders can access schools run by and for francophones?

Ms. Isabelle Girard: I can answer your question.

In Ontario, there are 268,250 rights holders and 158,000 day care spots. The math is easy. As of today, we're short about 110,000 spots.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's about 60%.

Ms. Isabelle Girard: Exactly.

Mr. Denis Labelle: Mr. Beaulieu, I would like to add something. I have a doctorate in health administration and a knowledge of all the communities. I sincerely believe that day care plays a key role in the survival of the French-speaking community. It's where we identify the rights holders and how we keep them in our public system. When day care centres are attached to our elementary schools, we don't lose the rights holders. This is the key to our success. It helps us address the issue of the shortage of French-speaking young people and rights holders.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We heard that 20% of rights holders could access the day care centres run by and for francophones. Is the same thing true in Ontario?

Ms. Isabelle Girard: I could find that information. Since day care falls outside our jurisdiction, I don't have that information. However, my colleagues may have the answer.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Unfortunately, I don't know the percentage for Ontario specifically. The percentage I do have is for Canada as a whole.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Overall, it's 20%.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes. Exactly.

The fact remains that we have much less capacity to meet demand. Let me give you an example. The Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario, or AFESEO, currently oversees about 25 day care centres in different parts of Ontario. The occupancy rate for the available spots in these centres is around 55%. In other words, despite having the necessary licences, these centres can't provide 45% of the available spots. This is partly because of the labour shortage. Many of these centres are also located in remote areas, which makes it challenging to maximize the ratios.

We're talking about an occupancy rate of around 55%. However, I don't have the data to show what percentage of rights holders manage to access these services. If we ever get the future funding, we can obtain all the data needed to really understand the situation. However, I can tell you that the figure for the whole country is less than 20%.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The percentage is as low as 20%. However, as you said earlier, no funding is provided by the provincial governments. How can you explain this?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: There are small exceptions here and there. I spoke about British Columbia. We received some good news on that front recently. However, to some extent, francophones and anglophones receive funding in the same way. Parents have access to \$10 day care, but the difference comes down to this. If a parent wants to enrol their child in a specific anglophone day care, but no spots are available, that parent will turn to another anglophone day care. We don't have that luxury. If a francophone day care centre doesn't have space, the parents must enrol their child in an anglophone day care. We need to build our structure.

I referred to AFESEO, which oversees 25 day care centres. These centres are run by parent committees. Only four of these 25 day cares are financially viable. In all the other cases, the parents ended up saying that they couldn't handle it any more and asking others to take over and run the centres. The reality is that these day cares are located in remote areas, are struggling to maintain ratios and aren't financially viable. We're losing money. However, since four of these centres are viable, we're counting on them to help the others. That said, not a penny comes from the government. Everything comes from the operations. That's how we get the job done.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It's unbelievable.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Therein lies the problem. With the exception of British Columbia now, none of the provinces recognize the need for what we call shared resource management to ensure greater effectiveness. That's the key to success.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Julian, welcome to the committee. You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): I'm happy to be here, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

You spoke about the importance of French-language services. We know perfectly well that the lack of French-language services in education, day cares, public schools and universities plays a major role in assimilation. That's exactly why francophone parents have fought so hard for years to secure spots in these systems. Your comments on this topic are important.

I'll turn to you, Mr. Racine and Ms. Anderson, to talk about day cares. Do you know how many bilingual or francophone day cares are located outside Quebec?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: There are around 750 day care facilities. However, the number varies considerably. Some day cares close and others open. I would say that the number is between 700 and 750. As I said, we're hoping to receive funding that will help us obtain more tangible data. In any case, the number of day care centres is currently around 700 or 750.

Mr. Peter Julian: We're talking about day care centres outside Quebec. Is that right?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes, outside Quebec. We depend heavily on strictly French-speaking day care centres.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Julian. I would like to make a brief comment. It won't be included in your speaking time.

Mr. Racine, you said that your organization is waiting for funding. We're not as familiar with the file as you are. Can you elaborate on this?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes. We're waiting for funding from Employment and Social Development Canada. A call for proposals is under way. We're talking about \$47.7 million in funding here. This was announced in the March 2023 action plan. Since then, we've been waiting. Next March, two years will have passed.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Good question, Mr. Chair.

Roughly speaking, we're talking about 750 day care centres. Can we find out how much money the federal government is paying to support this system?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Funding comes from the federal government and goes to the provinces. Right now, it's mostly for \$10-a-day day care. Sometimes, subsidies are available, but other times, the process is more challenging. Ontario is a good example, because all the funding goes through the municipalities. You know how many municipalities there can be in Ontario. We need to approach each municipality and ask them how many spots are allocated to francophones and how many francophone parents can benefit from a subsidized day care spot at \$10 a day for their child.

Moreover, the governments often think that, because a spot has been found in an anglophone day care for a francophone family, the job is done. Some tell us that, once a child has been placed in a day care, the issue is resolved. They don't make any distinction between the two languages. They don't even see the importance of placing a francophone child in a francophone day care rather than in an anglophone centre.

We prefer unilingual French-speaking day care centres. Placing francophone children in anglophone day cares leads to assimilation rather than the preservation of the French language.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I would now like to ask Mr. Labelle and Ms. Girard a question.

You said that there were about 260,000 francophone rights holders, but only 150,000 spaces in francophone schools. Is this gap between needs and available spaces due to a lack of staff or a lack of funding?

• (1140)

Ms. Isabelle Girard: I think it's both.

When you listen to what our early childhood colleagues are saying and you also take into account what we're experiencing on our side, it quickly becomes obvious that the common factor is the shortage of French-language staff. Unfortunately, until that problem is addressed, we will not be able to take advantage of the many other opportunities that could be available to us.

The good news is that many of the solutions can apply to educators as well as teachers, not to mention mental health workers, for example. Indeed, the shortage is affecting many other sectors. We have to solve this problem and devote significant resources to it, because it has an impact on all the other great measures we can implement, particularly through the OLEP.

As far as funding is concerned, the issue for French-language public school boards is the number of schools. We know that in many regions of our province, people don't have access to a French-language public school. So parents often have no other option than to put their child in an immersion school. It's always the reasonable parent's test: faced with the choice of sending their child to a nearby school in the neighbourhood, even though it's an English school or an immersion school, or registering them in a French-language school that requires a one-hour or one-and-a-half-hour bus ride, the reasonable parent sometimes has to choose the first option, unfortunately.

Those are the big challenges we're still facing. That is why we are fighting every day for these key elements.

In my opinion, it is imperative to focus on finding solutions, both for educators and teachers. The good news is that the federal government also has a big role to play, of course, because the solutions lie in large part in immigration, recognizing foreign credentials and welcoming newcomers.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Girard.

Thank you very much, Mr. Julian.

I now give the floor for five minutes to Mr. Godin, who is also the committee's first vice-chair.

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

I'd like to thank the representatives of the Commission nationale des parents francophones for being with us in person. I would also like to thank the representatives of the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario for making themselves available to take part in the meeting by video conference.

I have three comments I'd like to make.

First, when I arrived at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I realized that the problem was not a lack of clients, but a lack of will on the part of the authorities to provide services to these clients. I used to work in the private sector. There is enormous potential for a solid client base, but we are not going to go after it, we are not going to encourage growth, we are not going to do anything. That's my first comment.

Second, I find it odd that the future of French in Canada depends on the stubbornness of parents. This is odd. We are making our French language vulnerable. If parents have a tendency to choose the closest school, our language will simply be abandoned, and that worries me a lot.

Third, I would like to come back to what my colleague Mr. Samson said. Earlier, he talked about Bill C-35, to which the Senate proposed an amendment. I would like to remind him that you are the architects who allowed us, the Conservative Party of Canada, to table amendments to ensure that elements of the Official Languages Act would be included in Bill C-35. I myself went to the committee responsible for studying Bill C-35 to propose these amendments. Hey presto, the amendments were made.

Now, I would like your help. I can see that the provinces are not necessarily allies. You mentioned British Columbia and Manitoba, who are aware of the issue. That said, can you tell us what needs to be done so that the federal government can impose measures while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdictions? Help us to help you. We are on the same wavelength and we have the same objective.

I'd like to hear from Mr. Racine and Ms. Anderson first.

Ms. Gillian Anderson: I'll start, and then I'll ask Mr. Racine to add his comments.

There should be clauses that can apply in each of the territories and provinces. It's that simple. Then there should be someone at the bargaining table to ensure that the clauses are respected in all territories and provinces.

• (1145)

Mr. Joël Godin: So it's down a lack of will.

Ms. Gillian Anderson: Absolutely.

Mr. Joël Godin: Perhaps it's out of ignorance, by which I mean that the provinces and territories aren't aware of the consequences. I won't make any accusations. Whatever the case may be, there is a lack of will.

What you're telling me is that this should be included in very specific clauses in federal-provincial agreements.

Ms. Gillian Anderson: Absolutely.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Racine, any additional comments?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: I would add that we have to ask the provinces to be clearer in the action plan they present as per the terms of the agreement. Things need to be really clear.

In addition, the federal government must make the provinces understand that we have different ways of doing things because we are a minority.

I'll give you an example. In Prince Edward Island, in Charlottetown alone, 150 children are on the waiting list for a French-language child care service. One way to improve the situation would be to set up francophone home child care services. However, the government says it can't grant us that funding because anglophones haven't asked for it. If anglophones haven't asked for it, they're not going to give it to us. However, that's what we need. If anglophones don't get a space for their child in a certain child care centre, they can always have access to another. That is not the case for us francophones. We can't do that. So there are 150 children on the waiting list, and there are no home child care services because the government refuses to fund a home child care association.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Labelle or Ms. Girard, do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Denis Labelle: I would just like to confirm that we need very specific clauses. Without that, we lose the battle from the outset.

I can say that in Ontario, the government does consult. When the government receives funding, sometimes it will invite us to discuss it. However, we never see an action plan come out of consultations. We always have to do a follow-up. Of course, there has to be political pressure. We are not the masters in our own house, even today, despite all the strikes we have conducted in Ontario over the past 50 years in order to have our French schools.

I'm jumping from one topic to another, but I'd like to come back to the challenge presented by the labour shortage, which was mentioned earlier. French immersion schools and the funding granted to them are managed by anglophones. Where do you think they are getting teachers from? They come and get them from us. This is a factor that contributes to the shortage of teachers in the francophone system, both on the public and Catholic sides.

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

I will now turn to the representatives of the Commission nationale des parents francophones. I have a very quick question.

What are the repercussions on funding when rights holders are enumerated rather than estimated?

The Chair: That's an excellent question, but you'll have to come back to it a little later, if you have the chance.

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

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. They've already given us a number of recommendations.

As Mr. Samson mentioned, what we're doing is truly historic. This is the first time that all the elements of the education continuum—early childhood and primary, secondary and postsecondary education—are grouped together in a single study.

My comments will be brief, because I really want to let the witnesses continue to foster the discussion.

My first question is for Mr. Labelle and Ms. Girard.

I was appointed a school trustee in Ontario in 2000, shortly after the creation of the individual francophone school boards in 1999. We're talking about per-student funding, which you find hugely flawed. Could you give us some recommendations in that regard?

You talked about geography, limited resources and distances. Have you made any specific recommendations to the province to change the core funding formula for francophone minority communities, which is based on the number of students?

Mr. Denis Labelle: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

In Ontario, there are two systems: Catholic schools and public schools. We all have to work together if we want to survive.

Right now, we are working together on transportation consortia. It didn't make sense to have four buses on the same street, two separate buses for English and French Catholic schools and two separate buses for English and French public schools. So we worked together and we managed to save a lot of money, which we then redistributed to the schools.

I don't know if Ms. Girard could add to that.

Ms. Isabelle Girard: I'm sorry, Mr. Serré, can you repeat your question?

Mr. Marc Serré: I was saying that the provincial funding formula is based on the number of students, which penalizes francophone school boards.

• (1150)

Ms. Isabelle Girard: Yes, absolutely. It's something we discuss with our provincial government on a regular basis. Unfortunately, we don't necessarily have the department's ear.

It is true that funds are given to francophone school boards to help them address certain specific challenges faced by francophones.

The fact remains that the average size of our school boards is 55,000 square kilometres, while that of the anglophone school boards is 5,000 square kilometres. I talk about this all the time. Imagine 200,000 students in a very small geographic area and compare that to 2,000 students spread out over a very large territory which is twice the size of Belgium and has 200 municipalities. That's the reality of one of our four school boards.

Even though our per-student funding is a little higher, it's impossible for us to meet our needs. This funding model for our students is completely inequitable. Despite that, we still manage to achieve the best educational outcomes. Nevertheless, major concerns remain about our ability to maintain services in this context.

Mr. Marc Serré: You talked about the shortage of teachers and the number of spaces. What recommendations would you make to the federal government so that it can solve this problem with the provinces?

Mr. Denis Labelle: Ms. Girard is on the provincial committee, so it would be much easier for her to give you that information.

Ms. Isabelle Girard: There's a lot of work being done with our provincial government. This work is largely funded by the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Minority-Language Education and Second Official Language Instruction. What we would like to see is more control over funding and how it can be used.

A few years ago, we did a major study on the labour shortage in Ontario, and we made 37 recommendations. A strategy along with an implementation committee was established to respond to those recommendations. Since then, there have been a few gains. I can't say there haven't been any, but they are very limited.

If we had more control over how the funds were used and if there were more accountability, I think that money would allow us to go much further.

Mr. Marc Serré: That's perfect.

Time is running out. I have 30 seconds left.

I am very much involved with the Consortium Centre Jules-Léger. Thank you for your role in managing the institution. Deaf people who use Quebec sign language are in a double minority situation. Could you submit a report or recommendations to the committee specifically on Quebec sign language? I am very interested.

Mr. Racine and Ms. Anderson, can you provide a table that would describe funding models in all the provinces? You talked about the gaps in British Columbia and the 70% test. It would be good to have a table that shows shortcomings at the provincial level before starting to paint a national picture. Could you please submit that to the committee?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

Witnesses will be reminded at the end of the meeting of the additional documents you ask them to send.

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

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

The Commission nationale des parents francophones did a study entitled "Où sont passés les milliards \$?" several years ago. In that study, we found that a very significant portion of the funding for minority language education went to Quebec anglophones. I think it was 47.7%. Only about 29% went to francophones outside Quebec. We also noted that at the time, there were more francophones outside Quebec than anglophones in Quebec. Not only did anglophones start out with a school system that was already completely set up, but this school system was also overfunded compared to the francophone system. We were surprised at how the funding was distributed. It was also found that in terms of education in their mother tongue, francophones had to be satisfied with the immersion or core French programs offered to the anglophone majority, where they were quickly assimilated. That's how things were at the time.

Is there a more recent study on the same issue? Do you think things are very different now? I think the funding is more proportionate now in the case of anglophones in Quebec, who don't have the same needs at all, in my opinion. What has changed for francophones outside Quebec since then?

• (1155)

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Unfortunately, we don't have data and we haven't updated that study. We focused on certain sectors, especially early childhood. However, like our partners, we still feel that we need more funding.

What's unfortunate, however, and it's important to mention, is that there are additional costs associated with teaching French in a minority context, but that's not recognized, because everything is mixed up. Earlier, Mr. Godin asked us what the federal government should do. In my opinion, if there is one thing we must insist on, it is the issue of transparency. We need to be able to know exactly where the money is going, because it's difficult to know right now.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Basically, when—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Two and a half minutes go quickly.

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

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

When the NDP pushed hard for a bill on the child care system, Niki Ashton and Leah Gazan really ensured that there would be provisions to support minority language child care, especially French-language child care. However, one of the problems is the shortage of French-speaking educators in the child care system.

Is the federal government doing anything to address this labour shortage? I'm not just talking about day care centres, but also about teachers in the network of French-language public schools in Ontario, for example. Is there a way for the federal government to ensure that enough people work in these networks? I understand the funding issue very well, but the labour shortage issue is also worrisome. Do you think the federal government has a role to play?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: In early childhood, the solution is international recruitment, and we're good at that. For example, in the Yukon, 80% of the workforce was recruited directly from abroad. In Prince Edward Island, it's the same thing. Among the Canadian provinces and territories, those are the two places where there are the fewest sustainability problems at the moment.

Mr. Peter Julian: Can I ask where that labour is coming from?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: It comes from Belgium, France and certain African countries, such as Morocco. So our child care services are multicultural.

I understand very well that we want to try to limit immigration. However, we just learned this week that no exceptions will be made for child care. In other words, we are subject to immigration restrictions. That means that we will no longer be able to recruit internationally, or that we will be able to do so to a lesser extent. I told you earlier that child care spaces in Ontario were sitting at a 55% occupancy rate. As Ms. Girard mentioned, it's because of a staffing shortage. The only solution is to recruit internationally.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

I know it's stressful to see the chair making gestures, but there will be two short rounds of two minutes each.

Mr. Dalton, you have two minutes.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Labelle, you talked about demographic pressures on francophone schools.

Has the number of students decreased over the past 10 years, or has it remained stable? Tell us a bit about the role of immigration in all of this.

Mr. Denis Labelle: Thank you for your question.

For the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario, the number of students has doubled over the past 20 years. We now have 35,000 students in our schools. At one time, it was 12,000 to 15,000. So it is a success story. We promote our schools and young people register.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you.

You also talked about the shortage of teachers. Normally, universities offer programs based on enrolment. Do a significant number of students finish high school and enrol in a university program in French to become teachers? Is that number going down or is it going up?

• (1200)

The Chair: Please limit your answer to 30 seconds.

Mr. Denis Labelle: The department has increased enrolment for students wishing to become teachers. However, I'd like to point out that becoming a teacher is not financially attractive to students. That's one of the big problems.

The second issue is that the government recently mandated grade 9 and 10 students to take a skilled trades course. So we have to go and find specialists and teachers who can teach welding, plumbing and so on. We don't have any.

We also don't have the necessary locations. The major English-language school boards have all the locations they need to offer workshops, but for us francophones, it's an ongoing battle and a heavy burden.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Labelle.

Ms. Koutrakis, you have two minutes.

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

We don't have a lot of time. So what do you think is the most important recommendation, the one we absolutely must include in our report?

Mr. Denis Labelle: We need a clear action plan with specific points on funding, and we need to consult the associations, at the very least.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: What do you think, Ms. Anderson?

Ms. Gillian Anderson: We have to make sure that specific points are included in the action plans to ensure that francophones have ongoing and stable funding.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Have the various levels of government consulted you about the action plan for official languages?

Ms. Gillian Anderson: Are you talking about the provincial government?

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Yes, but I also want to know if the federal government consults you.

Ms. Gillian Anderson: For the federal government, the answer is yes, but for the provinces and territories, it depends.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Are you consulted, Mr. Labelle?

Mr. Denis Labelle: We have a good relationship with the minister, but there could be more consultation—

The Chair: Which minister are you referring to, Mr. Labelle? The question was about federal and provincial.

Mr. Denis Labelle: I'm talking about the provincial government. In the last three months, we've had three different education ministers. So it's difficult to establish a foundation. However, an action plan with very clear terms and conditions that would be approved by both parties, federal and provincial, would definitely make our lives easier.

The Chair: That completes our first round of questions.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for taking part in this exercise. It's extremely valuable to us. This has helped us get off to a good start on the ambitious study we want to do. We could talk about it for hours, but we never have enough time.

If you think of any additional information that it would be important for us to receive, send it to our clerk, who can forward it to all committee members.

Are you clear on the information that Mr. Serré asked you to provide to the committee?

People seem to have understood correctly, so I won't go back over that.

We will now take a break so the witnesses can leave the room, and then we will move on to committee business in public.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1214)

The Chair: We're back.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for 30 seconds.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd like to move a motion about the Governor General of Canada.

Since you have the wording, I won't reread the motion in its entirety. In summary, on September 25, the media reminded us that the Governor General of Canada, Mary Simon, was still unable to converse in French during her visit to a community organization in Lévis. She had to cancel some of her activities while she was in Quebec City.

We certainly strongly question Justin Trudeau's decision to appoint Ms. Simon to the position of Governor General. I believe it was a voluntary decision. I don't think the federal government rushes things through when it appoints governors general without first considering its options. In my opinion, it deliberately appointed someone who did not speak French. It shows a willingness to challenge bilingualism in Canada's central agencies at the federal level.

I would also like to draw your attention to an article by Patrick Moreau published in *Le Devoir* on October 4 that was really quite interesting. It's entitled "What Mary Simon's bilingualism tells us". We see it as exploitation of indigenous peoples to weaken the conditions for French-language services. Normally, the Governor General must know both official languages.

In a sense, this situation is a way of trivializing French, of seeing it as just one more language among others. This is somewhat the result of Canadian multiculturalism, according to which Quebecers or Acadians are not necessarily peoples or nations, but one of many other cultural communities. That's the impact of this appointment by Mr. Trudeau. I think it's important that we say we disagree and ask that the committee report on it.

I yield the floor to Mr. Godin. I believe he has some amendments.

• (1215)

The Chair: To put us in context, this is a notice of motion that was duly sent to us. It's on time, so admissibility is not at issue. Are there any questions on the motion? Has everyone seen it?

Mr. Beaulieu, did we receive it last week?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It was sent two weeks ago.

The Chair: So it was September 26. You can look at your P9 email account for that. The notice is completely in order.

Do you want to speak to this motion, Mr. Godin?

The floor is yours.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, the spirit of my colleague's motion is legitimate, in my opinion. However, I think he's on the wrong track. I think he's aiming at the wrong target. In my opinion, the person who holds the position of Governor General should not be targeted by this question and this blunder by the current government.

I think we need to look at the appointment process. My colleague talks about intention, will, and I agree with him on that. A lot of people were ready to take on this position. However, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of the person who was appointed.

If you are appointed Governor General of Canada, you will certainly be grateful and commit to learning Canada's second official language, in this case French, to hold this position of representation. The Governor General, who holds the highest office in Canada, obviously has an obligation to speak both of Canada's official languages. It was entirely legitimate for her to react by saying that she was going to learn French. I would have done exactly the same thing.

The Chair: She said she'd learn it.

Mr. Joël Godin: The problem is not the individual, but rather the process and the missteps the government has made since it came to power. I have here a list of missteps that demonstrate the government's incompetence when it comes to protecting French, which is one of the two official languages.

First, the Centre d'expertise en immigration francophone was established in Dieppe, New Brunswick a few years ago, but we still have no information on its expenditures and what it's done so far.

Second, I could talk about the hit CBC podcast that was translated into French in Paris.

Third, certain bilingual positions are held by unilingual anglophones in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Fourth, I could talk about the ArriveCAN app, which does not respect both official languages.

Fifth, there is the issue of unilingual English labelling during the pandemic.

Sixth, there are the appointments of the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province in Canada. She speaks only English and she has not committed to learning French, which is unacceptable.

Seventh, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the comments of our colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who made vulgar remarks about the witnesses.

Eighth, I could talk about Ms. Gainey. When she entered the House of Commons, the Prime Minister introduced her in English only.

As I said earlier, Bill C-35 makes no mention of official languages in the day care process. It was the Conservative Party of Canada that tabled amendments.

Ninth, I could talk about the commissions of inquiry chaired by Justice Rouleau and Justice Hogue. The Commissioner of Official Languages confirmed that it was unacceptable that the documents were not translated.

Tenth, the government order and regulations for modernizing the Official Languages Act, Bill C-13. Nine orders remain. Royal assent was received in June 2023. This shows that the government has neither the will nor the intent.

Eleventh, no one is accountable for the Action Plan for Official Languages.

This list is not exhaustive, but I wanted to show that the government made a mistake when it appointed the Governor General.

Mr. Chair, I don't know if I can do it now, but I'd like to move an amendment.

• (1220)

The Chair: I thought you were going to say that you wanted to move your motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm going to draw on my motion.

The Chair: Yes, I understand.

Procedurally speaking, you may move your amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move an amendment to my colleague's motion. According to my proposed amendment, the text would begin with “Given that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has failed to appoint a bilingual Governor General and that the latter is still unable to speak French after 3 years in the position”.

Then we would go back to the next two paragraphs of Mr. Beaulieu's motion, the one that begins with “the media reported” and the one that begins with “the Governor General said she was ‘deeply committed’”.

We would strike out the rest of his motion and replace it with, “Be it resolved—

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin. I just want to clarify that all members received this on their P9 account.

Mr. Joël Godin: I will resume, Mr. Chair.

The rest of the text would read as follows:

therefore, be it resolved that:

- a) The committee report to the House the Prime Minister of Canada's failure to respect Canada's official languages by appointing a Governor General that cannot speak French, and has not demonstrated any improvements over the past 3 years;
 - b) Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the committee undertake a study of the reasons which led the Prime Minister to appoint the Governor General unable to express herself in one of Canada's two official languages and that, as part of this study, the committee invite to appear:
 - The Honourable Jean-Yves Ducloux, Quebec Lieutenant;
 - The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, former Quebec Lieutenant;
- Advisory Panel on the Selection of the Next Governor General:
- The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Co-Chair;
 - Janice Charette, Co-Chair;
- Privy Council Office:
- Donnalyn McClymony, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet (Senior Personnel and Public Service Renewal)—

Mr. Marc Serré: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, the motion that Mr. Godin is reading is the same as the one he already submitted in his notice of motion. I just want to make sure it's in order. It's an amendment, but he is proposing his entire motion as an amendment to Mr. Beaulieu's motion. I want to make sure that's allowed.

The Chair: Mr. Godin gave notice of his motion, but he told us earlier that he was going to draw inspiration from his motion to amend Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

If I understand correctly, he will not be introducing this text twice.

Is that correct, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Joël Godin: Absolutely, Mr. Chair. There's nothing better than being on site to get a solid grasp of the situation.

May I continue, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: That was—

Mr. Joël Godin: It was a cheap shot.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay. I'll continue with the list of people the committee should invite:

- Donald Booth, Canadian Secretary to the King;

Office of the Secretary to the Governor General:

Ken MacKillop, Secretary to the Governor General;

that the committee allocate a minimum of 5 meetings to this study; and, that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

That's my motion, Mr. Chair.

I think we have to be concerned about this appointment made a few years ago. In addition, we have to be consistent. However, I believe that the Prime Minister and his government representatives need to come and explain themselves so that we can understand how the appointment process for the person currently occupying the position of Governor General was conducted.

The Chair: One moment, please.

I've been conferring with our clerk.

Mr. Godin, I have to rule on the following question.

I get the impression—and I'm even convinced—that Mr. Beaulieu's motion has been completely transformed, because Mr. Beaulieu's motion intended to express the committee's disappointment with the appointment of the Governor General, without doing any additional work or studies, without summoning anyone.

I am using the words of Mr. Beaulieu's motion, in point a), that the committee “express its profound disappointment”, and so on, for the same reasons that appear previously, in the section that says “Given that”. Your amendment proposes to remove the core intent or objective of Mr. Beaulieu's motion; in addition, it would require a study, and to summon witnesses to reach conclusions and report them to the House of Commons.

It seems I have to decide. I must tell you that your motion is still up in the air, we can agree on that, but that the amendment you are proposing it is out of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

• (1225)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, given the respect I have for the committee and for your role, I will accept your interpretation. I don't agree with that interpretation, but I accept it.

You will understand that I intend to move my motion and that I will seek the floor to move my motion at the appropriate time.

The Chair: Absolutely.

I want to come back to Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

I know you have your hand up, Mr. Beaulieu, but Mr. Dalton had his up before you. I'm sorry, did you have a point of order?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd like to know if I can withdraw my motion and then move an amendment to Mr. Godin's motion.

The Chair: No, you can't withdraw your motion without unanimous consent first.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Is there unanimous consent?

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to.... Actually, it will amount to the same thing.

Mr. Godin has already moved his motion within the prescribed time. You can ask for unanimous consent. It's up to you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Otherwise, we'll continue the discussion on this, and if my motion is defeated, Mr. Godin can move his. Ultimately, I can move a new amendment to his motion, if necessary.

The Chair: Actually, if Mr. Godin decides to move his motion, for which he gave notice in due course, one motion will follow yours, if yours isn't adopted. We don't know what will happen to your motion. You just moved it. You can't withdraw it yourself, but perhaps you can ask for the unanimous consent of the committee to amend your own motion based on Mr. Godin's motion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I therefore ask for unanimous consent.

The Chair: Your intention is not to withdraw it, but rather to amend it. Is that correct?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like to withdraw it and then amend Mr. Godin's motion, which I think is more likely to be adopted.

The Chair: Okay. In that case, it requires the unanimous consent of the committee.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, I have a question.

The Chair: I'm surrounded by chairs here. There's one to my left and one to my right.

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: If Mr. Beaulieu obtains unanimous consent to withdraw his motion, can the same motion be moved again later? Should we just vote on this?

The Chair: The answer is yes, he will be able to, because we won't have dealt with his motion. It will be as if we hadn't heard it.

So, Mr. Beaulieu, you raised a point of order and I answered you. Now the ball is in your court.

• (1230)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm seeking unanimous consent to withdraw my motion. The reason I want to withdraw it is that I don't intend to move it again.

The Chair: We will suspend the meeting so that everyone can think about it on their own.

• (1230)

(Pause)

• (1233)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Beaulieu had the floor—

Mr. Marc Dalton: No, I had the floor 10 minutes ago.

The Chair: I know, but your comment was in response to Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order.

Mr. Dalton had the floor, and then you gave the floor to Mr. Beaulieu on a point of order.

The Chair: Okay, but who is supposed to have the floor on this point of order now?

Mr. Joël Godin: It's up to you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: That was a comment on the original motion. So there are several speakers who have gone before me.

We understand the importance of Canada appointing an indigenous Governor General, but as a Métis person, my concern, like many others, is that a person was appointed who doesn't speak French, when many qualified indigenous candidates can speak French. Appointing one of those people would have respected the bilingual nature of our country.

What the Prime Minister has done is insulting. None of this is directed at the Governor General herself, who is highly respected—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt you, Mr. Dalton.

I'm going to give you the floor again, don't worry, but when we suspended the meeting, the question was whether there was unanimous consent to withdraw Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, but those are comments I wanted to make before that.

• (1235)

The Chair: I know, but since Mr. Godin's amendment was ruled out of order, we were going back to Mr. Beaulieu's motion. I understand what you're saying, but I want you to understand what I'm doing.

Here's what happened, in chronological order: Mr. Beaulieu moved a motion, and then Mr. Godin moved to amend it. Then that amendment was ruled out of order, so we were back to square one with Mr. Beaulieu, who asked for the committee's unanimous consent to withdraw his motion.

Is that correct, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We can also vote on the motion. It's one or the other.

The Chair: The ball is in your court.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Let's vote on it, then.

The Chair: Let's vote on what?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Let's vote on my motion. You've ruled it out of order. Now you're giving me a choice—

The Chair: Before we suspended, you asked if the committee would agree to your withdrawing your motion. Is that still what you want?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes, if there's unanimous consent.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there unanimous consent for Mr. Beaulieu to withdraw his motion?

(Motion withdrawn)

The Chair: It's done.

Mr. Dalton, your comment can no longer apply to Mr. Beaulieu's motion. That's what I wanted to tell you.

Now I have to give the floor to Mr. Godin, who had raised his hand to talk about another motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I would like to move the following motion that was moved on October 2:

Given that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has failed to appoint a bilingual Governor General and that the latter is still unable to speak French after 3 years in the position,

therefore, be it resolved that:

- a) The committee report to the House the Prime Minister of Canada's failure to respect Canada's official languages by appointing a Governor General that cannot speak French, and has not demonstrated any improvements over the past 3 years;
- b) Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the committee undertake a study of the reasons which led the Prime Minister to appoint the Governor General

unable to express herself in one of Canada's two official languages and that, as part of this study, the committee invite to appear:

- The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Quebec Lieutenant;

- The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, former Quebec Lieutenant;

Advisory Panel on the Selection of the Next Governor General:

- The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Co-Chair;

- Janice Charette, Co-Chair;

Privy Council Office:

- Donnalyn McClymony, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet (Senior Personnel and Public Service Renewal);

- Donald Booth, Canadian Secretary to the King;

Office of the Secretary to the Governor General:

- Ken MacKillop, Secretary to the Governor General;

that the committee allocate a minimum of 5 meetings to this study; and, that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Mr. Chair, you'll understand that I won't repeat the list of actions taken by this government over the past nine years that demonstrate its unwillingness to protect the French language in Canada.

Now, I want to address a very important point. My motion in no way attacks the person who currently holds the title of Governor General. As far as I know, there was another person in the appointment process. There seems to be a sensitivity towards indigenous people, and I'm as sensitive to this issue as people who are questioning it. However, in the appointment process, there was a woman who was subsequently appointed to the Senate, probably as compensation. She is indigenous, she speaks French, and she speaks English. Why wasn't she appointed? Why was someone who speaks only one of the two official languages—English—chosen over her?

That's where I'll end my presentation of the motion I'm proposing. I hope that everyone around the table listened carefully to my comment about the sensitivity of the Conservative Party of Canada to indigenous people.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Are there any questions or comments about Mr. Godin's motion?

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like to move an amendment.

In the preamble, after "Given that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has failed to appoint a bilingual Governor General and that the latter is still unable to speak French after 3 years in the position," I would add this is despite the Official Languages Act, whose purpose is to ensure respect for both official languages, including French, and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions and advance the existence of a majority-French society in a Quebec where the future of French is assured.

• (1240)

The Chair: Please email the text of your amendment to the clerk so we can take time to process it.

I would just point out to the committee that the Governor General is bilingual.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, but she doesn't speak both official languages.

The Chair: I was just mentioning that in passing. I didn't move the motion. Maybe the wording could be adjusted.

Mr. Beaulieu, would you please reread your amendment slowly?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This is in point a) of my motion, if the clerk wants it. I based my amendment to Mr. Godin's motion on this:

despite the Official Languages Act (OLA), whose purpose is to "ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions," according to section 2(a) of the OLA, and to "advance the existence of a majority-French society in a Quebec where the future of French is assured," according to section 2(b.2) of the OLA;

The Chair: After "3 years in the position" and the comma after that, you would add what you just read. Is that right?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

The Chair: After the part about the OLA, it would read, "Therefore, be it resolved that:"

I'll read the preamble to the motion with Mr. Beaulieu's amendment:

Given that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has failed to appoint a bilingual Governor General and that the latter is still unable to speak French after 3 years in the position, despite the Official Languages Act (OLA), whose purpose is to "ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions," according to section 2(a) of the OLA, and to "advance the existence of a majority-French society in a Quebec where the future of French is assured," according to section 2(b.2) of the OLA,

Therefore, be it resolved that:

Is that right, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

The Chair: After "Therefore, be it resolved that", points a) and b) of Mr. Beaulieu's motion would appear as read to the end.

Are there any questions or comments about Mr. Beaulieu's proposed amendment?

Mr. Dalton, go ahead.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I don't have a question or comment.

The Chair: If there are no questions or comments, we'll go ahead and vote.

Mr. Samson, go ahead.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Are we voting on the amendment?

The Chair: Yes, we're voting on Mr. Beaulieu's amendment.

Ms. Koutrakis, go ahead.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Can we pause until we get a copy of Mr. Beaulieu's amendment, please?

The Chair: Yes.

We just got the text. We'll insert the amendment and then send it to committee members.

We will pause.

• (1245)

(Pause)

• (1245)

The Chair: And we're back. Everyone has Mr. Beaulieu's proposed amendment.

Ms. Koutrakis, you asked for some time.

This is a long motion. Are there any questions or comments? If not, I'm going to ask that we vote on Mr. Beaulieu's amendment.

Mr. Samson, go ahead.

• (1250)

Mr. Darrell Samson: We've all consented to add the amendment to Mr. Godin's motion. We have no problem with the amendment.

The Chair: First we need to determine whether the amendment is an integral part of Mr. Godin's motion or not.

[English]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay.

[Translation]

The Chair: An amendment has been moved, so we have to follow procedure.

I'll go around the table. Is everyone in favour of Mr. Beaulieu's proposed amendment? Raise your hand, please.

On the monitor, I see that Mr. Boulerice is in favour.

Ms. Lucie Lecomte (Committee Researcher): We have two NDP members.

The Chair: Oh, I didn't see him.

Ms. Lucie Lecomte: I didn't see Mr. Julian.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Boulerice. At the moment, Mr. Julian represents the NDP.

Mr. Peter Julian: No, I'll yield to Mr. Boulerice, Mr. Chair.

That was nice. Thank you. We'll see each other in the House in a bit.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, you have the hot potato.

I'm sorry, Mr. Boulerice. You're in favour of Mr. Beaulieu's amendment, and so is everyone else around the table.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Let's move on to the motion as amended. Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Samson, go ahead.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I've expressed my opinion about this in the media. I believe the Governor General should be able to speak both of the country's official languages. That has always been, is and always will be my opinion. In addition, I've stated publicly, and I stand by this, that I was disappointed that the Governor General, who, as the motion points out, made it clear she would make every possible effort to learn French, did not achieve the level of proficiency she hoped to achieve. She herself has recognized this. I'm just echoing what she said. I'm sure you can understand my position.

That said, I will vote against the motion because it's just a political tactic designed to waste the committee's precious time. We all know this Parliament will end by October 20, 2025, at the latest. We have an extremely important study to do between now and then. It's historic. As I clearly explained this morning—or at least it was clear in my head—as proud as I am of section 23 of the Charter, I have to recognize that it was a major achievement for the government of the day, the government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. I also want to recognize the incredible work done by the minister responsible for this file, Jean Chrétien, who was the key player in the section 23 negotiations on education. He did an amazing job of negotiating to convince the provinces and territories to agree to it. That was huge.

I can hear some of my colleagues saying I'm obstructing the process, but that's not true at all. I'm just explaining why I'm going to vote against the motion. As soon as I'm done, we can vote. I know my Liberal colleague would like to talk about it, but I'm fine with it.

I just want to explain and recognize that section 23 and now Bill C-13 are amazing tools to make positive change for Canada's francophonie. However, I don't want to waste one second of the essential work we need to do here and in the House, and this motion is a tactic to get in the way of that work.

For those two reasons, I will be voting against the motion put forward by my colleague, of whom I'm very fond.

• (1255)

The Chair: Mr. Lightbound, go ahead.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll start by saying that I'm glad to be participating in this committee for the first time, but Mr. Samson is a tough act to follow. He set the bar high. I'll echo what he said.

First of all, it's inconceivable to me that the Governor General still doesn't speak French after three years. I definitely think the appointment was regrettable. A Governor General must speak both official languages at the very least. I don't know if I've said that publicly before, but there you have it. I truly believe that.

Now, as to the function of the Governor General, I may not be quite as attached to that as my Conservative colleagues, who would undoubtedly rename this committee the “Royal Committee on Official Languages” if they could. I myself no longer subscribe to Mr. Beaulieu's school of thought. In fact, I voted with the Bloc Québécois—as did you, Mr. Chair—to cut ties with the monarchy

so we no longer have to swear an oath to the king. I don't see the Governor General as having a very important role, but I do understand the symbolic importance. In essence, that's why I share Mr. Samson's sentiments about the fact that the Governor General doesn't speak French, as expressed in the motion before us.

Nevertheless, I will vote against the motion because we just heard from witnesses who told us that only 20% of rights holders in Canada have access to early learning services in French. They also told us that, when francophones don't have access to early learning services and child care in French, that alters their entire linguistic trajectory for the rest of their lives. The stats are clear. We're talking thousands of children across Canada. The committee can bring this situation to the fore and make recommendations to the government. Instead of focusing on that, some people want to dedicate no fewer than five meetings to talking about the Governor General's French.

I think the fact that the francophone population is losing thousands of Canadian children a year because they don't have access to early learning services in French is far more important than Mary Simon's language.

That's why I'll be voting against the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

I see you, Mr. Boulerice, but I'll go to Mr. Beaulieu first.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think those are just excuses. Everyone says they're against the appointment. If people are against the appointment, I think they need to walk the talk.

I think this study would give us a chance to examine the mechanisms that led to this situation. This is a symptom of a bigger problem. That's what Mr. Godin said earlier, and there are all kinds of examples. Even the Supreme Court refuses to translate many of its rulings into French.

There's no date specified in this motion. You can't say it'll delay the study on the French education continuum. That will depend on when we decide to do it.

I see no reason not to support this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: Folks on the other side of the room suspect we're trying to waste time.

Mr. Chair, it's important to understand that our purpose as parliamentarians is to do our job. As politicians, we're always going to be doing politics.

That said, no matter what we do from this point on, the Liberal government will always accuse us of trying to waste time and playing politics. All the members over there, or at least most of them, have said they weren't in favour of the Governor General that their Prime Minister, their government, appointed. I think it's important for us to study that appointment so we can understand what happened and fix the process for future appointments. We need to have a vision.

As my colleague, Mr. Beaulieu, said, we won't be taking this time away from the study on the education continuum, which just started today, because there's no date in the motion. We have to approach this with the right intention.

I like the folks over there well enough outside of our parliamentary debates, but, unfortunately, I find this attitude on the part of the government and its representatives unacceptable. They agree with the motion, but they won't support it. That's not logical.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Boulerice, go ahead.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I found the Bloc and Conservative members' position really appalling. They're doggedly pursuing this and wasting the committee's time. I don't agree with Mr. Godin. The Conservatives are wasting the House of Commons' time in general. Parliament is at a standstill right now, but they want a debate about one single person, one individual.

I agree that Canada's Governors General should speak both official languages, which means they should speak French. I don't agree with having Governors General at all, because I'm not in favour of the monarchy, but that's another debate.

Allocating five of the Standing Committee on Official Languages' meetings to talking about one person is nonsensical. Witnesses just told us that they need more early learning and child care in French, that they need more funding for community groups and more resources for the francophonie across the country, but the Conservatives are using the committee's time to talk about one person, one individual.

I personally refuse to be part of this farce, because it's sad. I'll let the Bloc and the Conservative Party play their little political games. Obviously, I'll vote against the motion.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I would ask for a vote.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I can't stay. My schedule is packed, and I have to go to the Confederation Building at 1 p.m.

The Chair: I'm going to use the same technique I used last winter. I'm going to adjourn the meeting instead of suspending it.

Everyone, please note that Mr. Samson asked for a vote. On Thursday morning, I'm going to pick up where we left off even though the meeting was adjourned. Otherwise, it's too complicated.

I'm therefore adjourning the meeting, but, on Thursday morning, we're going to resume debate as though the meeting had been suspended.

Meeting adjourned.

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