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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 154**

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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley





# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, November 21, 2024

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone. Welcome.

I call this meeting to order. It's meeting number 154 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, I'll get to you in two seconds, Mr. Brock.

Very quickly, I have a gentle reminder to please keep your earpieces away from your microphones at all times so we can protect the hearing of our very valued interpreters. Also, do not touch your microphone at all.

Mr. Brock, go ahead, quickly.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to remind all colleagues that during the last appearance of Tom Clark at this committee, he indicated that he'd be willing to be put under oath to reiterate his talking points.

With that being said, I'm seeking unanimous consent from committee members that Mr. Clark, prior to his opening statement, be given the opportunity to either swear to tell the truth or affirm to tell the truth, Mr. Chair.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We're fine with that.

Mr. Clark, I understand you have the text.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard):** Hello, Mr. Clark.

Would you like to perform an oath or solemn affirmation, sir?

**Mr. Thomas Clark (Consul General of Canada in New York, United States, Consulate General of Canada in New York):** I will do the affirmation, please.

**The Clerk:** Please repeat after me.

I, Tom Clark, do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is according to my religious belief unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I, Tom Clark, do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is according to my religious belief unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Clark. Welcome back.

We'll start with a five-minute statement from you. Go ahead, please, sir.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, members of the committee.

I'm pleased to be here in support of the committee's important work to ensure the full accountability and transparency of government operations, including those of Global Affairs Canada.

Today, I will speak to my role as consul general to New York and clarify any remaining questions you may have.

As consul general, I am mandated to advocate for Canada's interests in the five-state territory of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Connecticut. This region has a combined GDP of more than \$6 trillion, and it has two-way trade with Canada of more than \$200 billion a year. The consulate is one of Canada's most important missions in the United States and in Canada's global network abroad.

[Translation]

An official residence is one component of the diplomatic tool kit used by countries around the world. For the New York consulate, events hosted at the official residence foster partnerships between American business and political leadership and Canadian federal, provincial and business leaders. With the world focused on the changing administration in the United States, these relationships—and the economic opportunities they generate—are more important than ever.

Upon my arrival at the consulate in February 2023, I began hosting events in the official residence to build these networks and create opportunities to advance the political and economic interests of Canadians.

As we've learned, Canada's official residence in New York was purchased in 1961 and last renovated in 1982, more than forty years ago. While hosting events at the official residence to advance Canada's interests, I observed that the property could not appropriately accommodate guests with mobility issues and posed challenges between the family and representational space. I was informed that these concerns were in line with deficiencies reported to Global Affairs Canada headquarters since 2014.

• (1110)

[English]

As I indicated in my previous testimony, I did not provide input to the headquarters-led multi-year process to address the deficiencies of the official residence. With respect to previous questions from the committee regarding a report prepared by the department's property bureau in April 2023, I want to be clear that I was unaware that any mention of my observations had been included as part of the mission's input to the property team.

Any mention from the mission referencing my views on the state of the official residence was the result of an indirect, third-hand report of a remark made to a colleague. This in no way constituted an effort to influence a complex departmental process initiated in 2014—that is, eight years prior to my arrival.

As all officials who have come before this committee have stated, the property project for the official residence was led by Global Affairs Canada headquarters. The decision to relocate the residence was taken in Ottawa, based on a detailed financial analysis and needs assessment overseen by a governance structure designed to prevent against any undue influence. As with all departmental property decisions, this process followed a strict set of guidelines and requirements designed to ensure that decisions are based on value for money and long-term benefits for Canadians. As we have heard, Canada's new official residence is smaller, cheaper and accessible.

In closing, I did not seek or have the opportunity to exert influence or direct the department's ongoing consideration of the residence, nor did I exert any influence or direction on the purchase of the new residence.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

We will start with Mr. Barrett.

I'll just remind everyone, because we have a short time with Mr. Clark today, to please watch the clock, so that we do not go over time.

Mr. Barrett, the floor is yours for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** On November 5, news broke about your involvement in the purchase of the \$9-million condo on Billionaires' Row. Then, having been found out, you sent a letter. The letter said, "I was not aware until media reports this week that this comment made in passing to a colleague had been reported by the Consulate General to the Global Affairs Canada property team."

Let me give you an example of a comment made in passing, Mr. Clark. "Hey, that meeting didn't go so well."

Now let me give you an example of someone who holds the most senior position at an organization telling their team that the facilities for them to live in and for them to work in were insufficient.

That's what you did, sir. Isn't that right?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Mr. Chair, as previous testimony has shown, the concerns about the official residence—let's call it the old official residence—had been around since 2014. I was warned that—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Let me stop you there, Mr. Clark. The difference, sir, is that you got the job and then the condo got bought. That's the difference. This isn't about what happened eight years ago.

What we need to know, sir, is why you didn't tell the truth—why you lied to committee the last time you were here. Why did you do that?

• (1115)

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Mr. Chair, the evidence I have given this committee has been consistent with the evidence every other witness has given to this committee. It is straightforward, and it is simple. There was a process—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** That's not true. Let me display for you some of the evidence that comes from your own department.

First of all, there's the ATIP that was the subject of the November 5 story that was published, in which you are the current CNGNY HOM, as follows:

The current CNGNY HOM expressed concerns regarding the completion of the...kitchen and refurbishment project and indicated the unit was not suitable to be the [consul general's] accommodations and it does not have an ideal floorplan for [consul general] representational activities.

That's not what you said when you were here last time. You were asked pointedly. One of the Liberal members helpfully asked, "Did you at any time talk to anyone regarding a desire for relocation?" You replied, "Never."

We know now that's not true. We know, in fact, that you did make the comments. You just didn't know that it was captured in official briefing notes. You knew that you had made the comments. You just didn't know that you got caught. Isn't that right?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Mr. Chair, as every other witness has testified, and as I have testified, this process has been going on for a long time. As I testified to this committee, I did not ask for, or request, a change of residence. I will restate that now. However, this has been a process that has been led by Global Affairs headquarters property division in Ottawa—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Sir, let me tell you this. You described the importance of the mission, which you're the head of. You described how important it is. In order for you to get things done, I don't imagine you need to directly instruct individual members of your team to do them. You need to identify that there's a problem, and then the team engages to solve it. That's how it works. This isn't some comment made in passing.

Again, you talk about the evidence. Let's talk about the June 17 email from Emily Nicholson. Ms. Nicholson says that the “[head of mission] and staff have been instrumental throughout this process, with the [head of mission]”, which is you, “providing the greenlight for the selection of the new residence.”

We know, once this scandal ended up in front of a parliamentary committee, that damage control was engaged, and Ms. Nicholson swallowed herself whole, saying that you had nothing to do with it. Well, I imagine, when she was trying to save her job, that's exactly what she would say.

However, there are now multiple data points that didn't come from admissions by you or your staff; they came from access to information demands and from document production orders from this committee, which revealed that you were involved, that your champagne tastes weren't being met, either with the recently modified shared representational space at the mission or with the multi-million dollar condo on Billionaires' Row.

With my last 30 seconds, sir, we know that you're not going to resign for having bought a \$9-million condo on Billionaires' Row and for having personally initiated that process. Will you resign for lying to a parliamentary committee?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Mr. Chair, the evidence I have given to this committee consistently has been the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** It's too bad that the facts don't back that up.

**The Chair:** Thank you, gentlemen.

We'll now go to Mr. Jowhari for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome back, Mr. Tom Clark, and thank you for making yourself available.

I am the member of Parliament our colleague MP Barrett was quoting, and I'm going to go back to the same line of questioning that I had very shortly. I want to pivot to something a lot more important.

Given the fact that you now agree to be under oath, I'm going to pose to you the same question that I posed last time you were here, but I'm going to probably edit it a bit. Mr. Clark, did you at any time exert influence in the purchase of the new building and in the divestment of the old building?

• (1120)

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** No, I did not.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Did you at any time show a desire to move from the old building into the new building for a personal reason?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** No, I did not.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I'm not sure how else to ask this question. Did you, at any time, have a conversation with the Prime Minister to say that it was time for you to move?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I never had a conversation with the Prime Minister about the old residence or the new residence at any time.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the fact that this process has been going on for a long time, although [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] are there, and our analysts [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] put it in the report that we are hoping to publish very soon.

I want to go back to another line of questioning. About two weeks ago, there was an election in the U.S., and as you clearly indicated in your opening remarks, there is \$6 trillion in trade, which is twice the GDP of Canada, and \$200 billion in trade coming from just your office. That's almost 50% of our government budget. If you want to put it into perspective for Canadians, twice the GDP of Canada and 50% of the government's budget are things that you're managing. Can you tell me what you've been doing for the past two weeks, as a result of this change, to get ready?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** My team and I have been extremely busy, as you can imagine. This week alone, I was on a two-and-a-half-day outreach trip in Pennsylvania, which took me to Erie and Pittsburgh. I had multiple meetings in both places. Right after this testimony, I'm off to Philadelphia for more meetings, and I'm giving a speech there tonight.

Our objective right now is to talk to as many people as we possibly can in the United States, fulfilling our mandate here of promoting and protecting Canadian interests in the United States. To give everybody an idea of the five states I'm responsible for, in four of those states, which are four of the biggest states, Canada is the number one customer. It's far above and beyond any other customer around the world. That is the level of importance Canada has in this region, and that is what we continue to promote and protect.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

How closely are you working with the committee of cabinet ministers that the Prime Minister has put together? How closely are you working with it vis-à-vis your jurisdiction?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** What I do is feed information, analysis and intelligence through a system, so I don't deal directly with the committee, but I deal with our ambassador in Washington. I deal with Global Affairs in Ottawa in what we call the NGM.

It is my job to provide advice to the government, but through the structures that are in place, so I don't talk directly to the cabinet committee, nor have I talked to it. I don't talk to cabinet, but I feed information.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I'm sure our G7 partners are also preparing for this transition within two months. I'm sure there are a lot of conversations going on among consuls general.

Can you shed some light on the dynamic and the level of engagement Canada has as a key player within the G7?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Yes. We have probably one of the most dynamic missions in New York. This is the only area I can really talk about, because it's the one I know.

We're the largest here in New York because of the size of our relationship with the United States. I think, as I stated previously, we have many friends around the world in many different organizations, but here in New York, although they may be friends, they're also competitors, so there is a friendly competition, if you want.

Obviously, a place like New York is where Canadian companies would find investment money and the ability to grow and create more jobs. We see it as our job—at the federal level and the provincial level, and even at the municipal level—to help Canadians at whatever level they're trying to engage New York.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you, gentlemen.

We'll go to Mrs. Vignola now, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clark, thank you for joining us once again. I have a few quick questions to ask you.

I reread the transcript of your previous appearance before this committee. At that time, you repeatedly said that you were not involved in the decision-making process.

Are you making a distinction between being involved in a decision-making process and expressing an opinion?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** French is a beautiful language and I love it; however I'll speak in my mother tongue so as to be more precise.

[*English*]

I don't make the distinction on an operational basis. In other words, the decisions that are made by divisions in Global Affairs Canada, I have nothing to do with when it comes to the property.

In terms of casual comments that are made, whether they be about the office or the residence, I don't see a connection between those two. Certainly, they were never, ever intended to try to sway anything.

Madame, I just want to repeat very quickly that at no time did I ask that we change residences. That's an important point.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** We also learned, in the last few meetings, that you visited the residence located at 111 West 57th Street.

Did you visit it before or after Global Affairs Canada signed the offer to buy it?

[*English*]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I made that visit after we made the offer to buy.

I'm sorry that I don't have the exact date with me. I know the official signature to buy the property was made in June. I had one visit to the property after we made the offer to buy. Between those two points is when I first saw the residence.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** In short, even if you'd said, during your visit, that the residence wasn't right for you, that would have changed absolutely nothing since the offer to buy had already been made and signed.

[*English*]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** The offer had been made. That is correct. The signature to finalize the purchase came later.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** The fact remains that, at the time of your visit after the offer to buy was signed, even if you'd said it wasn't right for you, the process wouldn't have changed at all. Is that correct?

[*English*]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** That is correct. It wouldn't have changed a thing.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Furthermore, we learned that the average sale price for a residence in New York was \$1.6 million. When I ask what you could get for that, I was told a studio apartment.

In speaking with people, I thought that a consul general could live in a studio, since he doesn't have young children going to school, for example, or use the offices on Lexington Avenue for receptions.

Would that be feasible? Would that be suitable over the long term, over a 60-year period? You wouldn't be consul for 60 years. Usually appointments last four or five years. So, do you think, over the next 60 years, a studio would have been a suitable place to do business in New York?

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** No, I don't, and let me explain why.

Once again, as I said, we're in a competitive environment here. The residence for the consul general is a working residence. It's part of what we do in terms of whether we have dinners, meetings, seminars, receptions and all sorts of things. Take a look at where our competitors are. I think the United Kingdom spent \$26 million on its residence, and the Italians spent \$35 million on theirs. I'm talking about American dollars. In American dollars, we spent \$6.5 million. You can see, already, that we are much smaller and more compact, and maybe more efficient than our competitors.

However, a small, personal apartment—

• (1130)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you, Mr. Clark. I apologize for interrupting you, however, I'd like to ask you one last question.

You freely and naively shared an opinion with an employee. It was based on one experience.

What challenges does the residence at 550 Park Avenue pose in terms of family and representational space?

[English]

**The Chair:** I'll ask for a brief answer, please.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** The family space is very small. The official space is very big.

That's as briefly as I can put it.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Mr. Boulerice, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Clark, thank you for joining us again today.

In response to repeated questions from the committee, you've been very clear. You were asked whether, at any time, you talked to anyone about a desire to be relocated, and you gave an unequivocal one-word answer: never.

You can understand then why our committee is somewhat troubled and concerned by the fact that you seem to have misled us. Indeed, we later saw reports indicating that, on several occasions, you had expressed concerns that the old official residence was unsuitable. You expressed those comments to consulate employees. You said you made those comments casually, in passing. What concerns me, however, is that you were so categorical in stating that you'd never expressed any concerns to anyone about the old official residence. However, it turns out that's not true.

Even if you had made the occasional comment and you didn't expect them to be interpreted by employees as direction, why were you so categorical in your answers to the committee, when you said you'd never talked to anyone about the possibility of relocating?

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I did not talk to anybody about relocating. My comments, casual as they may have been, were directed towards what I had to work with at 550 Park Avenue, in unit 12E.

I noted that there were problems with the furniture, for example, that made it very difficult for people with mobility or accessibility issues to use.

Regarding the family space—and this goes a bit further to explaining what I meant by that—there is in that apartment no designated family space other than the bedrooms. Everything else is representational.

I brought this up to say, as we have heard in previous testimony from officials of Global Affairs, that this is not an uncommon comment for incoming heads of missions. It is a problem with many of official residences.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** I understand your point of view.

That said, you just indicated in a previous response that you never asked to move or be relocated. However, when you repeatedly tell your staff that the official residence is inadequate, that the space and furniture aren't suitable, that it's not designed for a family and that accessibility is an issue, don't you think that could easily be interpreted as a desire to relocate?

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I want to repeat that the process for relocating an official residence is not in the hands of the local head of mission or the staff of the mission in New York. It is entirely in the hands of the property division in Ottawa.

• (1135)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Understood, however, when you responded to the question from my colleague Mr. Jowhari, you said that you never talked about it to anyone at any time. Surely you can understand that, as parliamentarians and as a committee, we feel we've been misled by your testimony.

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I can assure the member that everything that I have said and am saying now is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The decision to buy and sell the residences was taken by Ottawa. I had no role in that. I did not exert any influence, nor did I have the ability to exert any influence.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** In that case, Mr. Clark, would you say that the newly acquired residence has everything you asked for?

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Global Affairs Canada informs me that the new residence meets all the criteria that it has.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** In other words, you're happier with the new residence than you were with the old one.

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Mr. Chair, you will understand that it's not a question of my happiness. It wasn't a question of my unhappiness or my happiness. I go where I am told to go. Global Affairs decided to put a process in place, and it wanted to move the residence. That's where I'm going.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** How much time do I have left?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** To what extent does the official residence function as an essential or fundamental tool of the trade for a consul in New York?

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** That's a good question.

I find it very helpful for the type of work that I do. Very often, we convene, for example, dinners on particular subjects. We have access to some of the top brains in the United States, and we put them together with Canadians, with Quebeckers and with people from other provinces. It is a way for us to find a way in this very noisy environment in New York to be relevant to the conversation in North America, so it's a very important tool for me.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, gentlemen.

Next, we have Mr. Brock, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Tom Clark, at your last appearance, you were emphatic when you stated that you had nothing to do with the decision to sell the old official residence, you had nothing to do with the decision to buy the new official residence and you had nothing to do with deciding on its amenities or its location, so let's cut to the chase.

Since 2014, plans to repair the old, luxurious official residence on Park Ave were ongoing and repairs had commenced. No other prior head of mission had demanded an immediate replacement. On February 23, 2023, your buddy Justin Trudeau appointed you head of mission in New York City.

On April 27 of the same year, just a few months later, you hosted a reception for your buddy. You posted a video to social media of the two of you in a limousine.

Around the same time, you and your office informed GAC officials, according to an ATIP request, that “the property is not suitable for representational activities...it is not suitable as a residence, and”—and I'm going to highlight this—“requires immediate replacement”. I have it right here in the ATIP request, in black and white, Tom Clark. No other head of mission to New York City had issued that directive before, other than you, Tom Clark.

We also have the infamous email dated June 17, 2024, from Emily Nicholson, which states, “Both CNGNY HOM”—that's you, Tom Clark—“and staff have been instrumental throughout this process, with the HOM”—you, Tom Clark—“providing the greenlight for the selection of the new residence.”

After your lies were exposed, you wrote to this committee and you tried to explain that your comments to officials were made in passing. Tom Clark, that's another lie. Comments made in passing might include, “How's the weather?”, “How was your weekend?” or “I guess my appearance at committee is not going very well today.” Those are passing comments.

You issued a mandated direction to your staff that was communicated to GAC officials, that the official residence on Park Avenue needed an immediate replacement. Isn't that correct?

• (1140)

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I feel I have to correct the record here.

Let me start by saying there was never a directive or a mandate from me to my staff whatsoever, by any—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Let's talk about who in your office you spoke with. I'm also looking at an article from the National Post, in which you indicated, “I also observed the issues between the family and representational spaces. I shared these views with the Consulate General administration”.

Who in administration did you communicate with? Give me names, please, and positions.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** When I first saw the residence, I—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** I want names, please—names.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** When I first saw the residence, I was in the company of the MCO—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Mr. Clark, it's a direct question. Who are the officials in your office you spoke with and raised these concerns? Give me names, please.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I'm trying to tell you that. I am trying to say that when I arrived in New York and I saw the residence for the first time, I was—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Don't give me the history, Mr. Clark. Just give me the names of the officials in your office you spoke with. It is not a difficult question.

For the third time, give me names.



**Mr. Thomas Clark:** For the third time, I will say that when I made those comments, I was in the residence; I was not in the office. The people in the residence were the ones greeting me at the time. One was our MCO, who was Mario Bot. Quite frankly, I can't remember who else was there. I think there were about three or four other people, mainly from the property section of New York.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Table all the names of the individuals you spoke with where you highlighted deficiencies in the official residence, whether in the residence itself, the staff, or your staff at your office in Manhattan. Will you table those names and those positions, including their email addresses, to this committee, yes or no?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I will do my very best to try to remember who was in that meeting—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** You also indicated that the comment you made about immediate replacement was made in passing to a colleague and reported by the Consulate General to Global Affairs. Who was that colleague?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I never made that comment.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** You're quoted in the National Post, so you can take that up with the National Post.

It's very clear that GAC officials earlier this week confirmed how important your mission is. You, as head of mission, are the most important official in that residence, and what you say carries great weight, so, Tom, you influenced your staff, because you indicated to your staff that your champagne tastes were not suitable anymore for Park Avenue, and you needed that wonderful Central Park view on Billionaires' Row. Isn't that correct?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Mr. Chair, everything that was said is inaccurate.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's our time.

We'll go to Mr. Bains now, please.

**Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Consul General Clark for once again joining our committee to clarify and answer these questions.

Mr. Clark, my hometown is Richmond, British Columbia, and the cornerstone of this city is the fishing industry in Steveston. We have the largest commercial fishing harbour in Canada, and it offloads approximately 100 million pounds of seafood and fish annually. The harbour recently established another new business offloading another four million pounds of crab, Dungeness crab, and a new processing plant has been set up there.

I'm curious about our seafood and fish trade on the eastern seaboard there. Maybe you can talk a bit about that industry, that sector, and the impacts that it may have on trade with the States that you recognized earlier today and that amounted to \$325 billion.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Agriculture and aquaculture are big industries and are being recognized as such in the investment community here in the United States and, frankly, also in the restaurant industry here in New York. There are thousands of restaurants here.

We have hosted, for example, Prince Edward Island. The Premier of Prince Edward Island came down with a delegation, and we

helped them make contact with both food distributors and restaurants here in New York. It was a very successful trade mission.

We've also done the same, for example—and this is a little outside of the fishery industry—with hosting Ontario wines, Quebec wines and Nova Scotia wines here in New York, as a way of connecting them to the larger ecosystem both financially and in terms of the hospitality industry in New York.

I would simply agree with you, sir, that this is a very big and important business for Canada down here.

● (1145)

**Mr. Parm Bains:** It amounts to about \$200 million of economic impact just in our region here in the Lower Mainland in British Columbia. I was just curious to see how much of an impact that may have on those eastern states.

You talked a bit about competitiveness. Maybe you can talk to us about the official residence in New York. We know now that we have a new administration coming in. Many of the allied nations, the G7 nations, will need to establish new relationships as we see members of the new administration being appointed, many of whom may not have pre-established relationships with some of these nations. We need to find our way and make sure we remain competitive and are at the forefront of some of these discussions.

Will there be more activity, all of a sudden, at this residence? Take your time. Go ahead and explain, please.

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I think that all of our diplomatic tools are now going to be used more than they've ever been used before.

We're engaging with the new administration. We're engaging with, as I said at the beginning, as many Americans, both inside and outside the political process, as we possibly can.

We are at a point when defending, protecting and promoting Canada's interests in the United States means all hands on deck. We have a story to tell. We have interests to protect. We want to promote Canadian business, as you were just talking about with the Lower Mainland and the fishing industry that exists there.

As with any new administration coming in, there are new players; there are new ideas, and there are new thoughts. We want to intersect with all of those and, in the process of doing that, tell Canada's story.

To go directly to the question you're asking about the use of the official residence, this is really Canada's house in New York. This is where people come from all walks of life in New York, and they walk into Canada's house. It is there that we exchange ideas, tell our story and promote ourselves as true allies, friends and partners in North America, promoting the North American vision of what we are and who we want to be collectively.

I envisage that the new residence—

**The Chair:** I'm afraid we're well past our time, Mr. Clark.

Thanks very much, Mr. Bains and Mr. Clark.

We'll go to Mrs. Vignola. However, before we start, there's a fair amount of noise in the room. Can everyone keep it down, please?

Mrs. Vignola, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much, Chair.

If I understand correctly, Mr. Clark, you made what you thought was a casual comment. You never thought that it would get back to Global Affairs Canada. Have I understood correctly?

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** That is correct.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I have a question for you, then. I don't have much time, maybe two minutes.

How can we prevent a misunderstanding from happening in the future like the one that led to this study and everything that we're going through now?

Could some guidelines be given to consuls, consular staff and Global Affairs Canada employees to ensure there is a very clear distinction between an unofficial opinion, which is not intended whatsoever to influence a process, and the process itself? Would there any such recommendations to be made?

• (1150)

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** That's a very good question. I will answer it this way, briefly.

The process needs to remain the process. I think anybody coming into a new residence.... You can't prevent somebody from saying, "Wow, this is nice," or, "Wow, this is bad." However, I think there has to be an understanding on the part of everybody—as there is now, and as there was here in New York—that the process is entirely in the hands of Ottawa. I don't think it would befit any head of mission to walk in and ask for a new residence. I can't imagine anybody doing that. I certainly didn't do that.

I think that, to your point, madam, perhaps HOMs should be told the obvious, which is, "Don't interfere with the decisions that are properly being made elsewhere."

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That's our time.

Mr. Boulerice, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clark, I'm going to take advantage of your presence here today to ask you a question about a matter of great concern to Quebecers and Canadians. I'm referring to the upcoming installation of the new Trump administration. Trump announced his intentions regarding, among other things, economic protectionism. The imposition of customs tariffs and a potential renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement could threaten jobs in Quebec and Canada.

What strategy and what game plan are you putting in place in New York to protect jobs in Quebec and Canada?

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** What we are doing is talking to as many people as we possibly can. This is a wonderful occasion for education. What I find so often, quite frankly, when I'm dealing with issues here in the United States, is that we're pushing against an open door. There's no real resistance to dealing with Canada. It is a matter of educating people about who we are and what we bring to the table. I work closely, for example, with the Délégation générale du Québec à New York. We work collaboratively to advance both Canadian and Québécois interests here in New York.

On all of the above questions you asked, the answer is that we need engagement; we need to talk, and we need to tell the Canadian story.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** In closing, I would remind everyone that the United States has a federal government too. It wields tremendous power in some respects.

I'd like your opinion on the role the individual states play in our economic relationships with our American partners.

[English]

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** That's a great question.

This is extremely important. As I said earlier, in four of my five states, we are the number one customer by a wide margin. When you take a look at the central issue of energy, for example, Hydro-Québec is building a line into New York City that, within a year and a half, will provide 20% of the electricity needs of New York City. That's enormous, and that's coming from Quebec. That is a real—excuse the expression—connector between the two places.

When you deal with this at the state and county level, you're dealing with very important, on-the-ground decisions that really mean something to people. That is very satisfying for me.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, gentlemen.

We'll go to Mrs. Block, and then we'll finish with Mr. Sousa.

Mrs. Block, go ahead, please.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr. Clark, for joining us today.

It would appear that your testimony today is consistent with that which you gave at your first appearance here at committee, in which you continued to deny having any involvement in the purchase process for the new official residence and you made no direct complaints about the state of the current residence.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I made no direct complaint to the process. That is correct.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** That's "to the process". I'll note that.

To be clear, in response to my colleague's questions, you testified that upon your arrival to the most important mission that Canada has, the first comments you made to those welcoming you were to express concerns about the residence you were in fact going to be living in.

I'll refer back to the ATIP. I won't quote it, because my colleague already did that. The first comments you made to those welcoming you were to express concerns regarding the completion of the renovation and the refurbishment project. You indicated it was "not suitable" to be the consul general's accommodations and that it did not have a floor plan that was ideal for representational activities.

You went on to say—and you've testified to it again today—that somehow there is absolutely no connection between making these comments, which were made to those greeting you, and the actions that took place and the decisions that were made following that. While you refuse to see the connection, I think your staff certainly understood the mission. They understood what they were hearing, and they absolutely understood that you were not happy with the accommodations. You were making those observations right from the get-go, and they needed to do something about that.

You've also stated time and time again that you did not ever talk to anyone about this, yet in your own letter.... You refused to admit that these comments were made to a colleague, and you said that you didn't say that, but it's in your letter.

Did you write the letter that was sent to this committee?

• (1155)

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I did.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** In this letter, you said, "I was not aware until media reports this week that this comment made in passing to a colleague had been reported by the Consulate General".

My colleague asked who that colleague was, and you said that you didn't make these comments to a colleague. Which is it?

Did you speak to a colleague or did you not?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I did, but, perhaps just for precision, could you tell me what comments you're referring to?

If the comments you're referring to are me saying that we need a new residence, that simply is not true. Perhaps—

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** I'm going to interrupt you there, Mr. Clark, because this letter you sent was all about the issue of the kind of influence you may have exerted over the purchase of this condominium. If you want to try to distract and confuse, I'm just going to use the time I have to keep us on task here.

We have received emails and official documents that indicated that you were instrumental in getting the ball rolling on the purchase of the new residence. That's why you hurriedly wrote this letter. It was to say the comments that were made were only made in passing. I think we've already debunked the theory that you were

only making comments in passing, especially since they were comments made upon your arrival. We also have the official report from Global Affairs Canada.

Mr. Clark, the issue we are facing here is that you have obviously and shamelessly lied to this committee on multiple occasions.

My question for you right now is, why don't you just come clean with this committee and Canadians, admit you've lied, follow in Randy Boissonnault's footsteps and resign?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Once again, under oath, I can tell you that everything I have said is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** I cede the remaining seconds I have to my colleague.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you.

Given this testimony, I'm looking for unanimous consent to call Mr. Mario Bot, Mr. Christopher Veenstra, and the author of the international platform report, Ms. Kristy Fleet.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sousa.

**Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clark, thank you for being here.

I want to verify a couple of things. I'm going to reset my time, so that I can monitor this.

A lot of allegations are being made against you. A lot of people are trying to accuse you of lying, and a lot of others are trying to misinform on the issue.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Point of order, Chair.

There is no interpretation.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm going to stop the clock. We have an interpretation issue. Hold on, Mr. Sousa.

Go ahead, Charles.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Mr. Clark, do you have anything to gain by the purchase and sale of this property?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** This property was not bought for me. It was bought for Canada. It will be the residence of consuls general for many decades to come.

It was not bought for me. What else can I say?

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Mr. Clark, regarding the consuls general before you, have they not related and conveyed the status of the former residence to other officials, its state of affairs?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Yes, going back to at least 2014.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I have had the opportunity to use that residence on many occasions in the past, with Conservative-appointed consuls general who complained about the status of that residence to accommodate receptions and do the official functions. As well, they recognized that there was a need for improvement.

Did you feel that when you first moved in?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** What I felt when I moved in was, number one, I didn't accept this commission on behalf of Canada because of the accommodation. I went where I was told to go. I made casual comments about the usefulness of it. I never said that we should sell it, that we should move on, that we should do anything. It was just a normal, casual observation when you walk into a new place and you see what it is, especially after you've used it a couple of times.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Mr. Clark, my point is that, as the tenant of the residence, it's appropriate to discuss the status of the property in order to accommodate the use of that property for yourself and your staff.

I think members in the opposition do that all the time with their offices and their residences and their appropriations of the allocation of those resources.

At the same time, Mr. Clark, when you have those discussions, is it appropriate as the tenant to share them?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Absolutely. I don't know what would be wrong with that. Again, it's outside of a process. It has nothing to do with the process of looking at buying or selling residences. It's simply where you end up and what you see.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Mr. Clark, I'm going to ask these questions again: Did you have influence in making the decision to sell or buy?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** No.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Did you actually approve any decisions to sell or buy?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** No.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Did you have discussions with elected officials or the senior management of the process to determine the sale or the purchase?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** No.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Are you aware that a number of properties were reviewed in order to make that decision?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Yes.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Did you visit all the locations that were being assessed?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** No.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** In regard to the residence that is there now, is it now up for sale?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** It is.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Do you know what approximate value would be netted by the taxpayer?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Again, I'm not part of that process. My understanding is that it's about \$13 million, but I think previous testimony has covered that.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** It certainly has.

The property that you're now being forced to move into... Frankly, is it less expensive than the one you were in previously?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** It is my understanding that this will save millions of dollars.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** It's approximately \$7 million in the net sale and purchase and something like \$115,000 a year in savings. That's what we're told, Mr. Clark.

That's a substantive improvement and benefit to Canadians and taxpayers. Would you agree?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** I would think that's a good thing, yes.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Are you able to continue your role in the new residence? It's a prominent position, and it's certainly required by other provinces, premiers and members of governments throughout Canada. Is it a more accessible location and a more effective use of government space?

**Mr. Thomas Clark:** Yes. Canada is open for business on West 57th Street.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I am being told I have to wrap up.

Mr. Clark, thank you for your service and your time. I appreciate you for doing the work you're doing.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Mr. Sousa, thank you very much.

Mr. Clark, thank you for being with us again.

Colleagues, we're going to suspend for a few minutes to excuse Mr. Clark and set up for our next panel. Thank you very much.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Good afternoon. We are back in session.

I'd like to welcome our guests for this part. I understand that there will be opening statements from Heritage Canada.

Please go ahead. You have five minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Sarah Boily (Director General, Official Languages, Department of Canadian Heritage):** Mr. Chair, members of the committee, good morning.

I'd like to start by acknowledging that we are gathered here on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

I am here in response to the invitation you extended to the deputy minister of Canadian Heritage, whom I am replacing here. I am accompanied by Carsten Quell, executive director, and Annie Proulx, director of regulations and policies. They both work at the official languages centre of excellence, within the office of the chief human resources officer, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

I'm speaking to you today in my capacity as director general, official languages, Department of Canadian Heritage.

As you know, Canadian Heritage has various official language responsibilities. As director general, I offer my best advice and input to the assistant deputy minister for official languages, heritage and regions, as well as to the deputy minister of Canadian Heritage within the framework of her mandate as the general administrator of the department. It is our duty, among others, to ensure that Canadian Heritage provides a workplace conducive to the use of both official languages.

The deputy minister also has the mandate to support ministers whose portfolio falls under Canadian Heritage's responsibility. To that end, she supports the Minister of Official Languages by providing her with professional non-partisan advice for the purposes of developing and implementing policies, such as the development of a government-wide official languages strategy commonly called the official languages action plan.

That said, I must point out that changing the linguistic status of 24 additional post offices in the greater Montreal area is beyond the scope of those responsibilities. I therefore defer to my colleagues at Treasury Board Secretariat who are responsible for this file.

I would be pleased to answer any questions which falls under the responsibility of Heritage Canada.

Thank you.

• (1215)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Quell, go ahead with your opening statement, please.

**Mr. Carsten Quell (Executive Director, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee.

[Translation]

Today, in my brief remarks, I would like to provide some key information on the issue of the linguistic designation of post offices in Quebec.

Our two official languages are at the heart of the Canadian identity. Bilingualism and the protection of French throughout the country are a priority for the Government of Canada.

If I may, I would like to provide a little historical context.

In 2016, the Government of Canada committed to ensuring that more people who speak the minority official language—French-speaking people outside Quebec and English-speaking people in Quebec—could obtain federal services in their language anywhere

in the country. This decision led to the launch of the revision of the official languages (communications with and services to the public) regulations.

[English]

The regulations establish the circumstances under which federal offices, including a post office, are required to offer their services in English, French or both official languages by determining whether or not there is significant demand in the minority official language. I should add here that the right to receive these services is protected under section 20 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is the charter that establishes the concept of “significant demand”.

As part of this revision of the regulations, the Treasury Board Secretariat conducted extensive consultations across the country, including with official language minority communities and with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. These consultations inspired the regulatory amendments that were tabled in both Houses of Parliament in October 2018 and published in the Canada Gazette, part I, shortly thereafter to give the public and all stakeholders the chance to review and comment.

[Translation]

The amended regulations were adopted on June 25, 2019 and include several amendments in response to stakeholder requests.

For example, it uses a more inclusive calculation method to estimate significant demand in the minority official language that considers all those who use the minority official language at home.

The amended regulations also recognize that the existence of an official language minority school is a stable indicator of community vitality and significant demand for minority language services in the region where the school is located.

[English]

Federal offices will always offer service in the majority language of the province or territory in which they are located, and they will always offer service in the majority language first. In Quebec, service in federal offices will therefore always be offered first in French.

Let me now take you to today. Most of the amendments to the regulations are in the process of being implemented as part of the official languages regulations reapplication exercise. We call it the OLRRE. The OLRRE is an exercise coordinated by TBS whereby some 180 federal institutions reapply the regulations to update the linguistic designation of some 10,000 federal offices located in Quebec and across Canada.

This reapplication of the regulations is based on data from the 2021 census.

[Translation]

Thanks to the amended regulations, more Canadians will be able to obtain federal services in French across the country.

In accordance with Treasury Board policies, in a bilingual Quebec office such as a post office, staff must greet and communicate with customers in French first.

I will stop here. My colleague and I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.

• (1220)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Quell.

Mr. Godin, welcome back to OGGO. The floor is yours for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

I thank the witnesses for joining us and taking part in this exercise.

The situation in Quebec is unique, since it's the only province where French is the first language and the common language.

Unexpectedly, following the 2021 census, Canada Post undertook consultations. I remember the 2021 census included an enumeration. Unfortunately, we'll never have that opportunity again because the government did not want to include a similar provision in the Official Languages Act. That situation led Canada Post to decide to poll its customers.

I'd like to know what takes priority, but I don't know to whom I should put my question. Should I ask the Heritage Canada representative, even though she said in her opening remarks that it's not part of her mandate? Should I ask, instead, the people from the Treasury Board Secretariat, or the people responsible for procurement? I'd like someone to enlighten me.

Once again, unfortunately the new Official Languages Act does not clearly define who is responsible for its application. We, on this side, asked that Treasury Board be the one to oversee the application of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Quell, we met during our study on modernizing the Official Languages Act, so I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Canada Post follows the process set out in the regulations. In other words, based on new demographic data in the 2021 census, we determined the number of individuals likely to want service in a minority official language. I'm choosing my words carefully, it's a new method of calculating. This new calculation method—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You're referring to the 2016 regulations, correct?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** From 2019.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Yes. Indeed, work started in 2016 and the regulations were passed in 2019.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** That's correct.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** In that case, you're referring to the old regulations. The new regulations will be implemented in 2026.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** There are a number of regulations. We're talking here about regulations under part IV of the Official Languages Act, on communications with the public and the provision of services.

The regulations currently being drafted fall under part VII, on the vitality of minority-language communities, administrative monetary penalties that can be imposed by the commissioner and the use of French in—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Quell, I'm going to stop you right there. Don't talk about monetary penalties because the government hasn't even introduced its order yet. Don't tell me about something that is hypothetical. Who knows when it's coming.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** That wasn't what I was trying to do. I just meant that a number of regulations are in the process of being developed. Here, we are talking about regulations passed in 2019 that won't be amended or reviewed until 2029.

Canada Post takes the census data and looks at its network of post offices in Montreal. Under the regulations, the number of offices the Crown corporation has must be equal to the proportion of census respondents likely to want—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm going to stop you there, because I have a question about that.

You must have realized that, in Quebec, specifically in the Montreal area, the number of anglophones has increased since the last census. The data from the 2021 census show that French is in decline.

Can you determine that, since there are more anglophones in Montreal, there must be fewer francophones?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I'm going to try to clarify the purpose of this calculation method.

People in mainly francophone minority communities came forward because they wanted to make sure—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Yes, but let's stay focused on Quebec.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** What is different now is that, under the calculation method, anyone who, according to the census, regularly speaks a minority official language at home should be considered to want access to services in that minority language.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Quell, sorry for interrupting, but I have a limited amount of time.

Does the new calculation method promote French in Quebec?

• (1225)

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** The new calculation method brings—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Given your experience, is the answer yes or no?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I can't comment on what does or does not promote French. It's a very broad issue.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You understand the situation that's been observed in Quebec. A census was taken in 2011 and then in 2021. If the Canada Post Corporation did its homework, it would have noticed the decline in French in Quebec between the 2011 and 2021 censuses.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** What Canada Post is doing is applying the regulations in consultation—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You're talking about regulations that now set out a new calculation method.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Exactly.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I will ask the question again, then. Does the calculation method promote French in Quebec?

We are talking about Canada Post, but the issue is deeper than that. It is important to recognize that French is declining across Canada, including in the only province where the common language is French.

Has the government taken the necessary steps to protect the two official languages? This is not about pitting English and French against each other, but it's important to understand that French is the vulnerable language in Quebec. Are the measures in place—is what Canada Post is doing—helping to protect French in Quebec?

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid there's no time for a response, but perhaps you can respond in the next round or the next intervention.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to Mr. Quell for his testimony here today.

I want to ask you if you'd be able to explain for us the main reasons behind Canada Post's decision to convert 24 post offices from unilingual to bilingual services. How does this align with the modernized Official Languages Act?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Mr. Chair, the alignment with the Official Languages Act can be explained quite simply. The regulations were made in 2019, and that was before the new Official Languages Act was adopted in 2023.

What Canada Post is doing, like any other federal institution subject to the regulation, is applying the regulations. The objective of the regulations, when they were adopted, was to increase the offer of service in both official languages across the country. We estimate that currently we will move from 34% bilingual offices across the country to about 40% with the application of the regulations.

The desire was specifically strong among francophone minority communities who wished to see that, for example, in the area around a Service Canada centre, when there was a school in that area, the school would be considered a factor in the vitality of the community. This would then trigger the Service Canada office, for example, to have to offer services in both official languages.

As I said in my opening remarks, any federal office will always offer its services first in the language of the majority of the province or territory. The action on the part of the government seeks to increase and enhance the offer of services and allow more Canadians to use services either in English or in French. The fact is that a bilingual office is not an office that is less English or less French because of its bilingual designation.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you for that.

You mentioned moving from 34% to 40% in terms of the percentage of bilingual federal points of service. My understanding is that this will result in the creation of about 700 new bilingual offices across Canada and that it's going to actually provide bilingual services for 145,000 more Canadians—again, just from Service Canada offices—so that, again, Canadians can access services in their official language of choice.

Do those numbers jive with what you know?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Yes. The numbers that were mentioned are based on simulations that the Treasury Board Secretariat undertook before the regulations were adopted. We will have to wait to see what the final numbers are, but the number of 700 is correct, and the number of 154,000 more Canadians who will be able to access the services of Service Canada after the regulations are fully implemented.... Those numbers are correct.

• (1230)

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I'm wondering if you might be able to also provide us examples of other federal institutions but looking more at English-speaking provinces that have converted to being bilingual and some of the impacts that has had. Can you maybe provide us with examples from other areas?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Certainly, the impact is one that will be felt across the country. More French-speaking Canadians in the minority situation will be able to have postal services in the minority language, but this will also apply to other institutions, like Service Canada and the RCMP. Maybe I'll invite my colleague Annie, who is responsible for the implementation of the regulations, to give some examples.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Annie Proulx (Director, Regulations and Policy, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Thank you.

[English]

Those 700 offices will be spread across the country. In terms of specific examples, we can think of the key services. Business development agencies are also to be added to the list of examples provided by Mr. Quell.

Thank you.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** If you could, please provide that in correspondence—just examples for the committee, concrete examples where we can see those bilingual services supporting and providing services to francophone communities across Canada. Just some illustrative examples would be fantastic, if that's possible.

I wanted to ask you about the consultation process, but I think we're going to be short on time here. Can you talk a bit about the consultation process that took place before these changes were introduced?

**Mrs. Annie Proulx:** When an institution such as Canada Post has several offices offering the same type of service in one particular region, as a general rule the regulations stipulate that it must offer bilingual services in a number of offices equal to or greater than the percentage of the minority population region. Canada Post proceeded with this survey to establish where those offices would be designated bilingual.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

We'll go to Mrs. Vignola for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I'm going to start with Ms. Boily, from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

I checked your website. As far as the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act goes, the Department of Canadian Heritage is a kind of legislator, if I can put it that way. In other words, the department develops the law and applies it elsewhere. That's another one of the department's roles.

Under the act, consumers have the right to communicate in French with federally regulated private businesses that carry on business in Quebec or a region with a strong francophone presence. Furthermore, employees of federally regulated private businesses who work in Quebec or a region with a strong francophone presence have the right to work in French. The act also stipulates that existing, potential and former employees and unions have the right to receive communications and documents from federally regulated private businesses in French.

Quebec is formally recognized as a francophone jurisdiction. At best, the French-speaking community in North America has eight million people. That's out of a total population of 340 million. I would call that a minority. In Canada, Quebec accounts for roughly eight million francophones. Let's say it's about 7.8 million people, if we take into account francophones in Louisiana and the Atlantic provinces. In Canada, then, we are talking about some 7.8 million francophones out of a total of 40 million people. Nevertheless, the government keeps saying that the minority language in Quebec is English. I have trouble finding a French radio station when I'm driving, and sometimes, I even have trouble getting service in French in Montreal. The first language people address me in is English.

Francophones in the Toronto area account for 1.9% of the population, and I see that 1.9% of all offices there are designated bilingual. In Toronto, then, the number of offices is at least equal to the proportion of the minority population, in accordance with the regulations.

In comparison, when I look at the Montreal area, I see that the 24 additional offices brings the proportion of bilingual offices in the area to 31%, meaning that they are for anglophones. I'm sorry

to put it that way. Actually, no, I'm not sorry, since anglophones account for just 27% of the population there.

That means the number of offices serving anglophones is greater than the proportion of the area's anglophone population, but no way would the number of offices serving francophones ever exceed the proportion of the francophone population.

Do you see a problem with that? Do you see it as an injustice, a disparity in how the regulations are applied? At the end of the day, the law grants fewer rights to francophones in Quebec and outside Quebec than to anglophones in Quebec.

• (1235)

**Ms. Sarah Boily:** Perhaps I'll start by repeating that anything having to do with the design or implementation of the principles underlying the services to the public regulations really falls under the responsibility of our colleagues here, Carsten Quell and Annie Proulx.

Nevertheless, I can certainly comment on the measures the Department of Canadian Heritage has taken to further promote and protect French in Canada and in Quebec.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you, but my question was really about the disparity in the services provided to francophones and anglophones.

I'll keep going then.

Let's turn to the Minister of Canadian Heritage's mandate letter, which dates back to 2021. To my knowledge, the ministerial mandate letter has not changed since 2021. It says, "We must continue to address the profound systemic inequities and disparities". To do that, the minister is expected to "include and collaborate with various communities" and to "seek out and incorporate in [her] work, the diverse views of Canadians." The letter goes on to list those communities, "women, Indigenous Peoples, Black and racialized Canadians, newcomers, faith-based communities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ2 Canadians".

Who's missing from that list?

**Ms. Sarah Boily:** The listed groups cover the vulnerable groups included in the federal government's equity measures.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Okay.

I would say that the outright refusal to consider francophones a minority community in Canada is, in my humble opinion, a blatant display of inequality and disparity and even of systemic exclusion and disrepute. It's clear to me. You can't even say that francophones are a minority in Canada and that they should also be included on the list in the Minister of Canadian Heritage's mandate letter.

The mandate letter doesn't even protect people who constitute one of the country's minorities and founding peoples alongside the first nations. For the record, the first nations arrived here long before us francophones. However, we arrived 150 years before the anglophones.

The mandate letter doesn't even mention the protection of Canada's francophone minority group. How can we expect Canadian Heritage to truly protect francophones through the Official Languages Act if it doesn't even mention them?



**Ms. Sarah Boily:** Here—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid we're out of time for a response, unless you can offer a quick one. Otherwise, we'll get back to the next round.

[Translation]

**Ms. Sarah Boily:** I simply wanted to say that the mandate letter just quoted dates back to 2021. The modernized version of the Official Languages Act, which recognizes the special status of the French language in Canada, including Quebec, was adopted in June 2023. This can give us hope for the future as far as recognition is concerned.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next, we have Mr. Boulerice, please, for six minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For 13 years, I've been the member of Parliament for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, a constituency in the heart of Montreal. There are challenges for the French language. However, I can say that we have a variety of French-language radio stations in Montreal. Moreover, people are served in French every day in restaurants or other places. Certain issues can sometimes arise, but it's extremely rare.

That said, the overall situation of French in Montreal, Quebec and across Canada remains fragile and sometimes under threat. The House of Commons has recognized this. We must remain constantly vigilant and make every effort to advocate for the preservation and development of the French fact. We agree on this.

That's why the August 19 article in the Journal de Québec, which reported that Canada Post changed the status of 24 Montreal-area post offices from unilingual French to bilingual, caused quite a stir. This shows, for example, a potential decline of French and a bilingualization of the Montreal area.

According to the explanation given, the decision seems to have been made based on data from the 2021 census. According to the census, 71.3% of people in the Montreal area speak French, 20.4% speak English and 6.7% speak both languages, meaning that they're bilingual. I already have my doubts about this figure. However, I'll check with Statistics Canada, since it isn't your department's responsibility. The 6.7% figure for bilingual people in the Montreal area seems low to me, given what we're seeing on the ground.

However, the change in status of these Canada Post offices has increased the percentage of bilingual offices from 21% to 31%. The key issue here is that unilingual anglophones amount to 20.4% of the Montreal population. In light of this, the 31% figure for bilingual offices seems enormous. I understand that, if we add the 6.7% of people who identify as bilingual, the figure rises to 28% of the Montreal population who identify as either anglophone or bilingual. This would justify the 31% figure. However, the 6.7% of people

who are bilingual don't need bilingual post offices, since they can speak and understand French.

Why the discrepancy between the 20.4% figure for anglophones and the 31% figure for bilingual offices?

• (1240)

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** First, the Government of Canada's policy is to offer Canadians services in the official language of their choice, regardless of their language skills. A bilingual person shouldn't be treated any differently from a unilingual person. Everyone who visits a federal office has the right to choose the official language in which they wish to receive service, according to their needs.

We wondered what led to this increase in the number of people who may want to receive service in the minority language. This is the impact of this new calculation method. The goal is to count all the people across Canada who use a minority official language at home. We then consider that all these people, such as francophones outside Quebec, might want to receive service in French.

The fact that the post office now provides services in both official languages doesn't make it any less anglophone or francophone. This certainly wasn't the intention of the Governor in Council upon establishing these regulations.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Quell, I gather that this calculation method provides more benefits or protection for francophone minority communities outside Quebec. The situation isn't the same at all in Montreal. I find that applying the same formula everywhere adversely affects the protection of French in Montreal. This is especially true given that the new Official Languages Act recognizes the imbalance between the status of French and English across Canada.

Why not take into account this imbalance recognized by the legislation and do things differently in Quebec?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I can only say that, before the adoption of these regulations, extensive consultations were held on their possible impact. The regulations were introduced in Parliament. We're now implementing the regulations.

• (1245)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

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

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** I'll give them to you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mrs. Kusie for five minutes.

We'll do five minutes for Mr. Jowhari. Instead of two-and-a-half-minute rounds, we'll finish up with five minutes for the Bloc and the NDP.

Mrs. Kusie, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions tie in with the questions asked by the Liberal and Conservative members.

I remember a Liberal member asking why you decided to give these 24 post offices a bilingual status rather than a unilingual French status. I think that you briefly answered the question.

The decision was made on August 19 of this year. However, the survey of the anglophone minority population ran until August 16. How could you review the results and make a decision in three days?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Federal institutions are free to decide how they conduct their consultations. I can't comment on the decisions made by Canada Post regarding the consultation process.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay.

Even though you said that Canada Post made the decision, I'll ask another question on the same topic. Could you please send the results of this survey to the committee?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Again, this is a matter for the federal institution. Federal institutions must implement the regulations.

To find out about the methods used to conduct the surveys and the results of these surveys, you need to ask the institution in question.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Was this decision made before August 19, and was this survey sent out to provide further justification for the new bilingual status of these offices?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Could you repeat the question?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Was this decision made before August 19, and was this survey sent out to provide further justification for the new bilingual status of these offices?

**Mrs. Annie Proulx:** Canada Post's survey sought to consult the official language minority community in order to inform its choice regarding the bilingual offices in the greater Montreal area.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I'll change the subject and continue along the same lines as my colleague.

Canada Post advertised jobs that didn't require knowledge of French, even though the positions were posted in Quebec.

In your opinion, is it appropriate for Quebec francophones not to have access to postal services in the language of their choice?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** If I understand correctly, the question is about Canada Post employees. Again, that's a question for Canada Post.

What I can offer as a general explanation is that a bilingual federal office does not require all staff in that office to be bilingual. However, all services must be offered to the public in both official languages. An institution can organize its operations in various

ways, including through recruitment and language training, to ensure that office staff have sufficient bilingual capacity to meet its obligations to serve the public in both languages.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** All right.

I have another question, which may be more relevant.

Initially, it was declared that these job offers complied with the requirements of the Official Languages Act, but shortly thereafter, the requirement for Quebec letter carriers be able to speak French was reinstated.

Who oversees the application of the Official Languages Act at Canada Post? I think you said it was Treasury Board. It's clear to me that this is a matter for Treasury Board.

Is Treasury Board involved in the process to ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act?

• (1250)

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Treasury Board requires federal institutions to report to it on a biannual basis. We monitor, but institutions are free to manage their bilingual capacity. That means—unfortunately—that I can't answer the question about letter carriers.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Mr. Jowhari, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the officials from both departments.

I want to take a bit of a step back.

Did Canada Post take this initiative on their own, or were they mandated by regulations to do that?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Canada Post was mandated to undertake the consultations in order to determine which location would best suit the community in terms of the additional offer of bilingual services.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

Where is that mandate coming from?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** That's part of the official languages regulations.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay.

Is TBS driving that?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** The institutions must apply the regulations.

The Treasury Board Secretariat assists the institutions in applying the regulations. We communicate with the institutions in order to publish the list of 10,000 federal offices, once the linguistic designation is complete.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** When you say “institutions”, is it more than Canada Post?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** It's all of them. It's departments, agencies, Crown corporations and privatized entities such as Air Canada, for example. They all fall under the regulations.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Great.

As a result of those regulations, there is a consultation process. One of the elements of that process is census data, the way I understand it.

Aside from census data, can you tell me what other data elements go into this consultation process, and can you give me the key steps in that process?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Certainly the census data are the key demographic data that are used, but for certain services—and I'll pass it on to my colleague—the institution has to conduct special service because of the demographic data. For example, when you're serving the travelling public, looking at the composition of the area around an airport or a train station doesn't really help you. You need to do a survey of the people who are travelling and going through the airport to determine whether they need services in one or both languages. I'll ask Annie to complement that.

**Mrs. Annie Proulx:** In the case of this survey, Canada Post established a number of post offices in a designated geographic region. Based on that number, following the regulations, now they have to consult the linguistic minority community to establish the percentage relevant to the percentage of that minority community and identify  $x$  number of offices that will be designated bilingual. That survey was to help. According to the regulations, that's part of one of the steps that they need to complete this study.

It's the same thing for all institutions under that.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I understand the process now. We understand the mandate; we understand the input, and we also understand the augmented activities to consult locally. Now, as a result of that, there's a list of post offices—and I know there are other institutions, but we're talking about post offices—across Canada where they identified that they need to be able to offer bilingual services. Am I right to understand that?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** As part of the exercise, it depends on the location. Let's take the example of the national capital region. All post offices are automatically bilingual, so nothing needs to be applied in terms of the regulations.

In other areas, they will need to take into account how many offices there are in a given service area and the percentage of the minority population. Then they move to saying that a percentage of those post offices, equal to or greater, has to be designated bilingual, but, before we as the institution go ahead and designate a particular office, we want to make sure that, for example, for francophones in a minority context, we consult them and find out which offices it makes the most sense to make bilingual, so that they can—

• (1255)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I have only about 15 seconds, and I just want to ask, aside from these 24 offices in the greater Montreal area, are there regions or cities across Canada that are now going to offer bilingual services, specifically French, as a result of this?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Absolutely, yes. Canada Post has a network of about 6,000 offices, and it applies across the country.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay, thank you, sir.

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

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Quell, you said earlier that the presence of anglophone schools demonstrated a stable anglophone presence in Quebec. What level of schools were you referring to?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** These are schools that teach in the minority language.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** That's not what I want to know. Are we talking about primary schools, secondary schools, colleges or universities, or any and all educational institutions?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** We're talking about primary and secondary schools.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** All right.

Are you aware that not all students' first language is necessarily English at those schools? They may be francophones whose parents or grandparents attended an English-language school, in accordance with Bill 101, or they could be allophones.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I'm familiar with the makeup of anglophone minority schools in Quebec in general, but I can't comment on the percentages of anglophones, allophones or francophones.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** About 3% of Quebec City's population is anglophone, and yet there is a brand-new anglophone school in Quebec City and another in Lévis. Two schools for such a percentage of the population is a much higher representation, not to mention the fact that those schools are generously funded. That gives you an idea of the disparities that can occur from the outset.

We're always talking about a united Canada from coast to coast and programs that apply from coast to coast. However, when it comes to official languages, particularly French, suddenly it doesn't apply from coast to coast, and there is a difference depending on the province. Yet, it has been said and you said earlier that French is a minority language in North America. This is a debate that we also held in the context of the new Official Languages Act and regulations.

I'd also like to go back to what you said about the regulations, because I'd like to remind you of our position. You said it was debated by parliamentarians, and that's true. We agreed to the regulations because they protected francophones outside Quebec. However, our position never changed as to the fact that it could be harmful to Quebec's francophones, since it favours a linguistic group that is a minority in Quebec, but a majority in Canada and North America.

Do you recall the many comments by my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île on this subject?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I had the privilege of attending meetings spent on the study of Bill C-13, and I generally recall the remarks made by the colleague Mrs. Vignola just mentioned.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Earlier, you said that not all employees of a bilingual post office were required to be bilingual. However, I would like to draw your attention to a reality within Quebec. Quebecers have the highest rate of bilingualism in Canada, at about 44%. I am among that number, along with my husband and our four children. In fact, we're even working on becoming multilingual.

Often, when bilingual francophones only hear English spoken in a workplace, they will automatically assume that the workplace is anglophone and, out of politeness and respect, they will request services in English. Others will demand services in French. That stems from a kind of fatigue—let's put it that way, to use parliamentary language—from constantly having to fight for one's own language.

When you're in an officially bilingual environment in Quebec and there is just one unilingual anglophone, what language do you think the other workers will speak?

• (1300)

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I don't want to comment on a hypothetical scenario, but I can certainly say that the Government of Canada makes intense efforts to ensure that services are offered in the official language of the client's choice. That is known as active offer. We want to make sure that all clients feel comfortable using the official language of their choice, regardless of the language used by the service providers.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** What about employees, though? Shouldn't they also feel comfortable speaking French? I could give you a lengthy list of examples. People really like to talk to me about it.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I can certainly talk about the language of work situation in the public service. In some regions of the country, employees have the choice of using the official language of their choice. We make efforts to ensure that any employee in that situation has the freedom to speak in either official language.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Very well, I'll give you some concrete examples.

First, I'll tell you about a bilingual francophone who has the misfortune of speaking English with an accent. When a bilingual anglophone has an accent in French, not much is made of it, but francophones who speak English with an accent aren't so lucky. This person has tried several times to access positions at higher levels, but their applications were always unsuccessful, despite their skills and experience. However, a unilingual anglophone was accepted into such a position, on the condition that they promise to learn French within three years, which has still not happened.

Then, I can tell you about a person who was the only francophone in a group of anglophones to take part in a working session. She was bilingual, but there were technical terms for which she requested translation. The anglophones suggested that she leave the room and be briefed by them later, because it would be faster to hold the meeting without her than to try to translate everything.

That's also the reality for public servants. When a community is considered bilingual and there is a unilingual anglophone, francophones speak English with that person. Employees also lose the power to really choose their language in the workplace. Ultimately, clients who hear them speak English will also use that language. This is a reality that we have to recognize. When there is only one anglophone, francophones will speak English, but the reverse is not true. These are not scenarios or exceptions. That's important to understand. However, when people talk about it, they're cut down to size. This is true for employees as well as for members.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

Ms. Blaney, welcome back. The floor is yours for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always good to be back in OGGO.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

My question is around the preamble of the Official Languages Act. It says that the government:

recognizes the importance of remedying the decline in the demographic weight of French linguistic minority communities, including by restoring and increasing their demographic weight

Considering that preamble, can you offer reflections on the fact that the act and its regulations treat French and English equally insofar as they concern the language designated at federal offices?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I will try to attempt a response here. Part of the question deals with the re-establishment of the demographic weight of francophone minority communities, where the government has committed to re-establishing the proportions that existed, I believe, in 1971.

The principal lever to achieve this, given that the demographic growth of Canada depends on immigration, is through the francophone immigration policy. That is the objective of the government, to ensure that francophone minority communities see the arrival of sufficient numbers of immigrants who will integrate into their community, so that over time the proportion of that community grows.

Now, when it comes to federal offices, of course, the offer of services to francophones in the minority context, including immigrants in the minority context, is a key aspect of ensuring that international immigrants will want to settle in Canada and will want to use the services that the federal government offers them in both official languages and, in particular, in French in the minority context.

• (1305)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that.

I'm really curious about how the consultations with minority language populations help federal institutions to fulfill their Official Language Act obligations to those communities.

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** Maybe I'll take a moment to talk about a project we're currently involved in, which is developing regulations on part VII of the Official Languages Act. This part of the Official Languages Act was substantially modified. There is a commitment both to ensuring that minority communities are supported and protecting and promoting the French language.

As part of this work, the government and our team are reaching out to minority communities. We are developing regulatory options, and we want to make sure the options we're developing are sensitive to the needs of minority communities across the country.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

Those are all the questions I have, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mrs. Vignola, you indicated that you wanted a few more minutes. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** May I? Maybe two....

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Ms. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Mr. Quell, in offices with a francophone status, is it forbidden to respond in English to anglophone users?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** The linguistic status of the offices is determined according to the goal of serving the public in one language, the other language or both languages. In an office that provides service in only one language, clients cannot expect to be served in the other language. I can't comment on specific hypothetical cases where another language may be used.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Is it legally prohibited to respond in English to anglophones in an office with a francophone status?

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I'm not aware of such a provision, so I would have to check.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Ms. Boily, are you aware of that?

**Ms. Sarah Boily:** I'm not aware of it either, but I don't believe that's the case.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Montreal has official francophone status. In fact, it is the only officially francophone metropolis in America, not only in North America, but in America as a whole. That's extraordinarily unique. It's exceptional. And yet people can work there and be served in both French and English. That's clear. In Canada Post's

francophone offices, it is also quite likely that people can be served in both French and English, because that's the way we are. It's simple. Quebecers are like that by nature.

I understand all the regulations. However, I just want us to perform the intellectual exercise of understanding that, in Quebec, even if the status is francophone—and it's very important that it be so—services in English will be available for those who request them, because we have that respect.

So why change the linguistic status of these offices without taking into account Quebec's official status and the difference in the approach to official languages in Quebec?

• (1310)

**Mr. Carsten Quell:** I think that, in Canada, we are lucky to have services to the public that are provided politely and with a care for clients. That said, a person who requires service at a post office should be assured that they can be served there in the language or languages corresponding to that office's linguistic status.

If I wanted to use English at a post office, I could go to an office that is designated as French, but I couldn't be assured that I would be served there in English. However, if I went to an office with bilingual status, I would have the right, as a client, to be served there in English. It's that clarity that the linguistic designation is trying to provide.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you for demonstrating that Quebec's uniqueness and its cultural differences are not understood in Canada. I'm so sorry, but that's my understanding.

Thank you and have a good day.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mrs. Vignola.

Witnesses, thank you for being with us today. You are dismissed.

Colleagues, quickly, on Tuesday 26, we're going to be hearing from the Office of Supplier Integrity and Compliance. In the second hour, we're going to finish off, hopefully, the Canada Post study, which is rather timely. On Thursday, we'll have Liberal, Bloc and NDP witnesses for indigenous procurement. On December 3—thank you, Mr. Jowhari—we have the Treasury Board minister with us, and then we're working on PSPC. There's also timing regarding the estimates. We're trying to wrap those in. Once we hear back, we will advise everyone.

Thank you, everyone, for your patience and flexibility in allowing a bit of extra time for others, and for accommodating them. It is appreciated.

If you have anything, quickly—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** On the ministers, there are a couple of ministers we asked for in relation to indigenous procurement. Are they blowing us off so far?

**The Chair:** We have not heard back further from them, but I will follow up and advise at the next meeting. We had Minister Hajdu.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Minister Duclos was on it, but he'll be here for the estimates. I'll be blunt. I doubt we'll have him separately, but we will follow up and let you know at the next meeting.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** We'd also be open to having him do two hours on the same day, with one on each topic.

**The Chair:** We will make that information available to him. We will do our best.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Minister Anandasangaree is still....

**The Chair:** We'll update you at our next meeting.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

We are adjourned.

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