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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Yvan Baker





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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** This meeting is called to order.

Welcome to meeting number 17 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted on October 23, 2025, we are meeting today to complete our study on the use of French in government communications and federal institutions.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, we have Raymond Th  berge, Commissioner of Official Languages; Patrick Wolfe, assistant commissioner, compliance and enforcement; Pierre Leduc, assistant commissioner, strategic orientation and external relations branch; and Mathew Croitoru, senior counsel.

The Commissioner will have five minutes for his opening remarks. We will then proceed to a question and answer period with committee members.

Mr. Th  berge, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Raymond Th  berge (Commissioner of Official Languages, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hello, honourable committee members.

I wish to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people, an indigenous people from the Ottawa valley.

Your study on the use of French in government communications and federal institutions is very important and I want to thank you for it. During my mandate, you have often heard me say that bilingualism is an essential skill for all leaders, whether in politics, in the federal public service or even in the private sector.

I know that the Official Languages Act imposes requirements on federal institutions, but not on individuals. It is those institutions that are responsible for ensuring that their official communications, including speeches by the Prime Minister, are available in both official languages. While the act does not impose any personal requirement on the Prime Minister, it is nonetheless desirable for him to embody that symbol of Canadian identity and linguistic equality in his daily work.

[*English*]

When it comes to federal institutions, the promotion of both official languages starts at the top. In other words, senior managers

must lead by example through their actions. When they actively use both official languages, they encourage others to follow suit and contribute to the creation of an organizational culture that values French as much as English.

It's clear that much work remains to be done to create a truly bilingual public service. During the last fiscal year, 255 admissible complaints related to the language of work were filed with my office, and I believe this is just the tip of the iceberg. Many public servants are still reluctant to file a complaint when their language rights are infringed upon for fear of damaging their work relationships.

Of course, I was pleased to see the amendments to the act that came into force on June 20, which confirmed the right of federal public servants to work in the official language of their choice in regions designated as bilingual for language of work purposes, regardless of the linguistic identification of their position.

[*Translation*]

The Treasury Board Secretariat has also enhanced the linguistic requirements of bilingual supervisory positions in regions designated bilingual for language of work. I am nonetheless concerned about what could happen to individuals supervised by incumbents in unilingual positions or by those who do not meet the linguistic requirements at the CBC level. Federal institutions will have to ensure that measures are taken and maintained to protect the linguistic rights of the employees in question.

Too often, I also notice that French is neglected in government communications and that federal institutions relegate French to a translated language instead of striving for real equality of the official languages. The 766 eligible complaints filed with the Office of the Commissioner in 2024–2025 pertained to shortcomings in communications with the public, and the delivery of services reflects that. The new act is nonetheless very clear: given the precarious position of the French language in Canada, more must be done to protect it. I therefore expect, even at a time of budget cuts, that the leaders and senior officials of institutions send a clear message that French and English both play an important and equal role in the federal public service.

[English]

In closing, I'd like to briefly discuss the proposed administrative monetary penalties regulations that were recently tabled in Parliament. My team and I have conducted an in-depth analysis in order to fully understand the potential impact of the regulations on Canadians, members of the official-language minority communities and my office's operations.

As you may have read in our position paper, which was sent to you last week, I am pleased to see that many of the elements we recommended have been included in the proposed regulations. However, I'm concerned about some of the elements that have been put forward. For example, before being able to impose an administrative monetary penalty, my office will have to follow what seems to be a very time-consuming process, particularly because of the addition of several criteria to be considered and the obligation to justify the reasoning and methodology for each criterion.

Expectations are high for the modernized federal language policy and it's essential that the government make every effort to meet them. I therefore invite the government to take into account the considerations I've outlined in my document so that the regulations have the potential to fully meet the objectives of the modernized act.

• (1110)

I hope that my successor will have the opportunity to discuss this further with you during your in-depth study of the proposed regulations. The same also goes for the proposed regulations for part VII of the act tabled earlier this week, which deal with the advancement of equality of status and use of English and French. My team and I will analyze them in more detail in the coming days.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention. I am now ready to answer your questions in the official language of your choice.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Th  berge.

We will now begin our first round of questions.

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

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

Commissioner, first of all, I must say that I'm very happy to see you here again. I will take this opportunity to wish you a very happy retirement if your acting position is not extended. It has been a pleasure working with you.

This morning, we are not necessarily here to discuss the regulations on administrative monetary penalties. We are here to talk about what happened this fall following a Radio-Canada article that noted that the Prime Minister does not speak French very often. Beyond the quantitative aspect, there is the qualitative aspect.

Commissioner, before your term ends, I would like you to tell us what you would have done after that article was published if you had been the President of Treasury Board and the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

I mention those two positions because, as you know, there was some confusion. Unfortunately, we were unable to create a central agency under Bill C-13, which was enacted in June 2023. If you suddenly had the powers of Treasury Board and Canadian Heritage, what would you do?

Also, do you find the way the Prime Minister is playing games with the French language acceptable?

**Raymond Th  berge:** Giving powers right now is a bit dangerous.

**Jo  l Godin:** Let us pretend.

**Raymond Th  berge:** I know.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, it is extremely important for any leader, whether the Prime Minister, a minister or a senior leader, to be able to communicate in both official languages fairly and equally. When we send a message in both official languages, we reach more than 98% of Canadians.

As I also mentioned, the Official Languages Act does not apply to individuals. It is nonetheless extremely important for the institutions that support individuals to be aware of their obligations.

Let me give you an example. In 2020, I think everyone has forgotten that there was a pandemic. Some of the communications from the government were in one language only. We contacted the institutions responsible for those communications and corrected the situation. They have an extremely important role, which is to support individuals and ensure that their obligations are met.

**Jo  l Godin:** Commissioner, you know that our time is very limited, so let me ask you a very simple question.

Do you agree with the way the current Prime Minister has been using the French language since the Radio-Canada article was published?

**Raymond Th  berge:** I think the Prime Minister is communicating more and more in French—

**Jo  l Godin:** I'll stop you there.

He is "communicating more and more". That is quantitative. However, Ms. Tellier, a professor at the University of Ottawa, did an analysis of his speech after the Radio-Canada article came out, noting that he spoke French about 17% of the time. He has increased that percentage. Do you know what he spoke about when he was speaking French? He was talking about things that are not as important. That's what Ms. Tellier came here to tell us. It was where you are sitting right now. So that's the quantitative aspect, but there's also the qualitative aspect.

How can we make the Prime Minister listen to reason so that he uses French fairly? I like your word "equitable". "Equitable" does not mean "equal". "Equitable" means "at parity". What can we do to ensure that the Prime Minister respects the language and sets an example? As you said, it is not up to individuals to do so, but rather to the institutions. In my opinion, the position of Prime Minister, like that of Governor General, is an institution. It's a symbol. There is an individual who wears the mantle, and the mantle, in my opinion, is an institution.

What can we do to make the Prime Minister listen to reason and stop showing disregard for French?

• (1115)

**Raymond Th  berge:** I want to go back to what I was saying earlier. It is extremely important for the Prime Minister, like any senior official or representative of the Government of Canada, to be able to speak in both official languages in order to be heard by all Canadians.

**Jo  l Godin:** I'll stop you there, Commissioner.

In your opinion, is he doing his job well? Does he live up to what you just said?

**Raymond Th  berge:** He has been making efforts over the past few months. I think the people around him need to make sure that he communicates better with Canadians in both official languages.

**Jo  l Godin:** You also know that a minister held a press conference in English. Another minister sent out a press release in French that was full of errors. Do you find that normal and acceptable? Besides the Prime Minister, there is also the Governor General, who doesn't speak French. The Prime Minister comes after her in the hierarchy. He doesn't use or promote French.

Is this an organizational problem? If those at the top of the pyramid don't lead by example, it can't spread elsewhere in the government.

**Raymond Th  berge:** One of the difficulties that have always been noted within the federal government is that there isn't necessarily the political will needed to fully implement bilingualism in federal institutions. This isn't new, by the way; this has been the case for many years.

**Jo  l Godin:** I'm talking about the last 10 years.

**Raymond Th  berge:** We got there at almost the same time.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, your time is up, Mr. Godin. Thank you.

I now give the floor to Ms. Chenette for six minutes.

**Madeleine Chenette (Th  r  se-De Blainville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner and your entire team, for being here with us. I would like to start by thanking you for all your years of service. We're privileged to welcome you at the 11th hour to get your feedback on the situation.

I'll start with a very short question: Are members and ministers, including the Prime Minister, required to be bilingual?

**Raymond Th  berge:** According to the act, no.

**Madeleine Chenette:** Okay. That's the important thing to remember.

It's a social norm that aims to ensure bilingualism and the ability to communicate in both languages, and that also seeks to strengthen the Official Languages Act. I haven't been here for 10 years. However, I've spent at least 35 years in leadership roles across Canada. I've held positions in the private sector, as a diplomat and most recently as a politician. What I've noticed over the years is a logic of constraint in the private sector. I'm a proud francophone and Quebecker. Thirty-five years ago, it was quite rare to work in the rest of

Canada and see someone who spoke French. Today, there are many such people in the private sector.

I want to come back to what you said. This isn't exclusively a government issue; we have to promote our two official languages throughout our beautiful Canada. I have worked as an ambassador with various departments, and we learned from our experts that training is provided, that tests are carried out within the hierarchy to ensure proficiency in both languages before responsibilities are assigned.

From what you've observed, if we want to take that perspective further... I'm thinking of the word "will". Given what's happening with our friends to the south, which is historic, and the fact that we have to work from east to west and have better export capacity, we need to have the will to promote our two official languages. There's actually culture at stake. We have to ensure that people are proud to speak both languages or to speak French.

Apart from the punitive aspect, which is still the Commissioner's role, what do you think should be done to strengthen that culture and pride to promote our two languages?

**Raymond Th  berge:** My office has two mandates. It has a compliance mandate, which you're calling "punitive". It also has a promotion mandate: We must promote duality, and we must also promote official languages within the federal government and among official language minority communities.

The purpose section of the amended act also talks about protecting and promoting French throughout the country, and practically in North America. That means that measures have to be taken in terms of implementing certain programs and certain policies to promote, for example, the learning of French and English in schools across the education continuum.

We also have to make sure that, when the government speaks out, it truly does so in both official languages and that French is truly a language of work within the federal government. It's a challenge because, as I said earlier, French is too often a language of translation. Nothing will change as long as we say that everything can be translated. Translation isn't the only way to respect official languages; people have to be able to use French in communications, in interactions with their colleagues within the federal government and with community members. That means it's important to ensure that French also has a visual presence; there has to be signage in French everywhere. People have to see and perceive that the French fact plays an extremely important role in Canada.

• (1120)

**Madeleine Chenette:** From that perspective, I'm sure that some of my colleagues will look at everything that can go wrong and what needs to be improved. I would like you to tell us what has improved and what levers need to be strengthened to reinforce the pride of sharing our two languages in this country.

**Raymond Th  berge:** I won't go into the history of the Official Languages Act over the past 50 years, but there has been some progress in the federal government. I'm thinking of the creation of bilingual positions, the delivery of services in both official languages, and so on. A lot of training was already being offered to public servants. Now, training is becoming an issue because of budget cuts. If we want to build this capacity within the government, we have to ensure that there is more language training and that people are able to function in their second official language at work.

I'll go back to what I was saying earlier. In the past, there used to be promotional campaigns on the importance of bilingualism; those are being done less and less. There was an amazing game called Oh! Canada. Thousands of copies were sold and distributed in the 1970s. That's the key to promotion, but it was led by the government, not by the office. The office of the commissioner has very modest resources for promotion.

It's important to build on what we have, but, above all, not go backwards. Too often, when there are budget cuts, decisions are made and budget cuts are applied to language training, which has an impact on official languages.

**Madeleine Chenette:** So—

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

**Madeleine Chenette:** Thank you.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu, who has six minutes.

**Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'  le, BQ):** Thank you.

At a time when French is more threatened than ever in Quebec—it's the only francophone state in the anglophone sea of Canada and America—in your report, you said you were concerned about Quebec's anglophones.

Why do you systematically favour anglophones in Quebec?

**Raymond Th  berge:** I don't systematically favour anglophones in Quebec. I have always favoured both official language minority communities and—

**Mario Beaulieu:** That amounts to the same thing. As you say, "minority" is defined according to the province. In Quebec, then, that means anglophones.

**Raymond Th  berge:** The Official Languages Act deals with both official language minority communities. Of course, in Quebec, it's the English-speaking communities that are the minority. In our study on that community, we found that its members wanted to fully participate in the development of Quebec, and that the majority spoke French.

What's important is that it's possible to want to defend—

**Mario Beaulieu:** The vast majority of young francophones—I think it's 69.8% according to Statistics Canada—speak more English than young anglophones speak French. That percentage is even higher in Montreal. Bilingualism is declining across Canada, except in Quebec, where it's increasing by a lot. For that reason, I don't think the English-speaking communities are that....

Do you agree that French is in decline across Canada, even in Quebec?

• (1125)

**Raymond Th  berge:** I said it before; I completely agree with you.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Okay.

However, under the new act that was created by Bill C-13, the federal government is responsible for protecting French as well. A whole series of sections have also been passed.

Does that change anything? I ask this question because, in your remarks, you keep coming back to the concept of "official language minority".

**Raymond Th  berge:** That's the asymmetrical nature of Bill C-13.

On the one hand, it's said that the purpose of the Official Languages Act is to protect and promote French. On the other hand, the existence of two official language minority communities continues to be recognized.

To also answer the question you asked last time, if I look at the government's current initiatives to implement this aspect of the act, I don't see any programs, any initiatives, but—

**Mario Beaulieu:** You mean that the government wants to—

**Raymond Th  berge:** However, that's the kind of initiative that should be discussed between the provinces and the federal government.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Lawyers who work with francophones outside Quebec believe that the government is violating its own legislation, since under a number of sections of the act, it has to promote French in Quebec as well. However, nothing is being done, and that attitude seems to be very difficult to change.

You systematically intervene. For example, you took action against Quebec's Bill 96.

The government also imposes limits. There are twice as many students in English-speaking CEGEPs as there are anglophones. However, the opposite is true everywhere else in Canada. There are far fewer post-secondary institutions than the declining democratic weight of francophones. You still took action against that.

**Raymond Th  berge:** No, we didn't take action against Bill 96.

**Mario Beaulieu:** However, there's a cap for CEGEPs. I'll find it for you.

Let's come back to language obligations.

We talked about the Prime Minister, who doesn't speak much French. There have already been remarks about the Governor General of Canada, who still doesn't speak French.

For 55 years, all the official language commissioners have been issuing the same complaints. It can't be said that progress is really being made. Francophones are increasingly being assimilated.

Do you think it's time for commissioners to speak up more and be more assertive to try to change things?

**Raymond Th  berge:** The Official Languages Act determines what the commissioners can and cannot do. That's why you're going to have some of those regulations before you in the coming months and weeks; they're going to be instrumental in the implementation of Bill C-13. I'm thinking in particular of those that relate to part VII, which specifically concerns communities and the promotion and protection of French.

**Mario Beaulieu:** From what we've seen in the Treasury Board report, it isn't going to make much of a difference. In fact, the same anglophone lobby groups are always consulted when it comes to Quebec.

Going back—

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Okay.

Language obligations were discussed at a recent meeting with officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage. It was noted that those obligations had to be more rigorous, as you yourself noted.

However, we're being told again and again that 95% of bilingual positions are held by people who are functionally bilingual, but that's based on self-assessment.

Is that good enough, in your opinion?

**The Chair:** We need a brief answer, Mr. Th  berge. There are about 15 seconds left.

**Raymond Th  berge:** According to the Public Service Commission of Canada, people have to reach certain levels, which are CBC or BBB, and I'm deferring to the commission in terms of the levels that have been set.

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

Members, we are now beginning the second round of questions.

Mr. Dalton, you have five minutes.

**Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Th  berge, for all the years you have spent as Commissioner of Official Languages. I also want to thank you for your work. It's a very important contribution.

You said that the promotion of both official languages has to start at the top. The highest-ranking person is the Prime Minister. That means he has to set an example.

He just replaced Steven Guilbeault, the former minister of Canadian identity and culture, who was responsible for official languages, with Marc Miller. What I find interesting is that when Mr. Miller accepted this position that's very important for us, his first comment was that he was fed up with debates on the decline of French in Canada. In fact, he didn't want to hear about it anymore.

Do you think there has been a decline in the use of French in Canada?

• (1130)

**Raymond Th  berge:** As I said earlier, if we look to Statistics Canada's figures on the first official language learned, it's clear that

this decline has existed in Canada and Quebec since 1970. I think we have to realize that this decline exists and that we have to talk about it. There's a francophone immigration policy that is trying to address this decline. However, the government still has to adopt a fairly ambitious strategy because if we really want to reach the 6.1% target for francophone immigration outside Quebec, there's still a long way to go. Currently, the target is 9% per year. The government is never going to get there.

**Marc Dalton:** As you know, I don't have a lot of time.

It seems that you don't exactly agree with him, then: There's a decline and action has to be taken.

There's something interesting here. The fact is that the Prime Minister has entrusted this person with what we see as a great responsibility. A number of Liberal members speak fluent French. I know that Marc Miller speaks French, but appointing such a person to this position shows the attitude of the Liberals and the Prime Minister. There are other examples. There's talk about the number of courses he took in French. I know he speaks French, but he could improve it, just as I could.

In July, he took two French courses. In August, he took one, but in September, it was a matter of hiring someone else to teach him French. For several months now, there hasn't been anyone to give him French courses. However, I don't know if another person has been hired in recent weeks.

That said, there's a noticeable lack of effort. According to Radio-Canada, only 17% of its speeches are in French, which is less than what the other prime ministers were doing.

What message does that send to francophone communities, for example?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Raymond Th  berge:** I'm going to repeat myself once more. What's important is ensuring that our leaders can communicate in both official languages and take the necessary steps to be able to do so.

That also applies to institutions that support the Prime Minister to ensure that he's able to properly communicate with Canadians in the official language of their choice.

**The Chair:** I now give the floor to Ms. Mingarelli for five minutes.

**Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is about overall compliance with language obligations.

Taking into account your entire mandate, how would you assess the Government of Canada's overall compliance with its obligations to communicate in both official languages?

• (1135)

**Raymond Th  berge:** It's hard to give the government a grade. As a former professor, I could do so. I think it's important to note that there have been significant changes over the last 18 years. First, the Official Languages Act has been modernized. I think that's a major element. The government is now at the implementation stage, which will show how serious it is.

There was also the official languages action plan, which was there to support official language minority communities. Progress has still been made.

Last year, the government also made it so that supervisors must now reach the CBC level in regions designated bilingual for language of work purposes. That's an important element, too.

However, there are still challenges in terms of compliance. We receive a significant number of complaints every year. There's still a lot of work to be done, particularly when it comes to raising awareness. In 2025, it's surprising that people are still asking us if they have to comply. It's an obligation, and it has been for 50 years. There's still a huge amount of work to be done.

We haven't yet managed to have a truly bilingual public service that operates in both official languages. Of course, there has been progress. As Commissioner, I always have to judge the progress, the small steps. There are home runs, but I'm usually hitting singles. We're hitting singles. We don't have many home runs when it comes to official languages. I think there has been progress, but it's always very slow and time-consuming.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** You had identified certain issues during the pandemic. Outside of that abnormal period, do you find that federal institutions are generally fulfilling their obligations?

**Raymond Th  berge:** Generally speaking, yes, but some nuance is needed, given that there are still a lot of difficulties with achieving compliance, particularly when it comes to language of work, and communications and services to the public. The number of complaints isn't decreasing. It goes down one year, and I tell myself to see whether the trend continues, but immediately afterward, there's an increase in complaints. This year, we're still heading toward a significant number of complaints. There has been an improvement, but there's still room for improvement.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Does the Official Languages Act impose specific skill-related obligations on members, ministers and the Prime Minister, or is it more of an institutional or political agreement?

**Raymond Th  berge:** The act doesn't impose bilingualism on individuals.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Okay.

Finally, is there a clear legal framework that governs the bilingualism of public office holders?

**Raymond Th  berge:** No.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Not at all?

**Raymond Th  berge:** No. That has more to do with the institutions.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you.

I'm done.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for two and a half minutes.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you.

When we talked about language obligations and the requirement for senior officials to know French, one of the issues that was raised was the fact that unilingual anglophones are hired on the condition that they take a French course. Sometimes they take a course for a while, and they forget what they learned because there isn't any follow-up. We've considered that as a potential hiring criterion.

That wasn't passed, but I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

**Raymond Th  berge:** Personally, I would fully support that hiring criterion.

There's currently a section in the act that specifies that anyone at the deputy minister or associate deputy minister level who isn't bilingual has to become bilingual. I don't really understand how it's possible to ensure compliance on that front. We have always maintained that bilingualism is essential for all those types of positions.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Right now, the current government is really obstructing this. Even here in committee, we were unable to get that proposal adopted.

Can we not see that there is a lack of political will for senior officials to be truly bilingual, to be proficient in French?

• (1140)

**Raymond Th  berge:** I would like to add a nuance.

Most deputy ministers come from the ranks of assistant deputy ministers. Assistant deputy ministers are usually bilingual. Now, we have to look at the extent to which both official languages are used at work. It's one thing to say that you've reached the required level. By the way, there is no self-assessment. You have to pass exams at the School of Public Service.

At the same time, you can reach a satisfactory level but never use your second language. We know very well that French is always at stake, not English. It is extremely important, to go back to what I was saying earlier, that the message be very forceful.

Is it resistance or is it a matter of the culture that has always been in place?

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, you have 10 seconds left.

**Mario Beaulieu:** I'm happy to hear you say that French is always at stake, because the reports always talk only about bilingualism. It's hard for readers who aren't used to it to understand that.

Thank you.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Godin for five minutes.

**Jo  l Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, I heard my Liberal Party colleagues trying to make us swallow the idea that it is not an obligation for an MP, minister or prime minister to be bilingual. That's true, but just because it's not mandatory doesn't mean the Prime Minister shouldn't lead by example. It's a moral obligation.

Do you think the Prime Minister is taking the necessary steps to promote both official languages equitably?

**Raymond Thériège:** Speaking of which, Canada wants to host the Sommet de la Francophonie in 2028. The Prime Minister has made gestures toward the francophonie.

Given our current socio-economic and socio-political context, we need to have a say and assert ourselves when it comes to official languages. Obviously, there is a whole set of priorities other than official languages. We have to work very hard to make sure we have a say.

I also think that, while people are not subject to a law, that could be a criterion—

**Joël Godin:** The Prime Minister, Commissioner—

**Raymond Thériège:** To me, the—

**Joël Godin:** It was a simple question.

Has the Prime Minister taken the necessary steps to promote both official languages equitably over the past nine months?

**Raymond Thériège:** I'm really not in a position to say.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you.

Commissioner, you've been with us for almost 10 years. I don't have the exact date, but you and I came here around the same time. We worked together on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

A member from Montreal worked behind the scenes against Quebec's Bill 96. Last week, this member was appointed Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture, responsible for official languages, among other files. That said, I find it odd that there isn't a minister of official languages, but that's another issue.

Do you think that's acceptable? A prime minister who, in my opinion, is very vulnerable when it comes to French, one of the two official languages, appoints a minister who has fought against it behind the scenes. What message does that send? The only one who went to battle was MP Anthony Housefather.

It should be noted that Marc Miller and other Liberal MPs from Montreal were working against francophones. Today, he is responsible for official languages.

Do you think that's acceptable? What message does that send to Canadian citizens?

**Raymond Thériège:** I'm really not aware of that. I find it very difficult to comment on it. In addition, I don't know the criteria used to appoint ministers.

**Joël Godin:** Actually, I'm just going to quote a political analyst, Ms. Lefebvre, who said on TVA that Mr. Miller had worked against his colleague Mélanie Joly.

I would remind you that Mélanie Joly, who used to hold that position, had tabled a white paper talking about the central agency, as I was saying earlier. However, Marc Miller, behind the scenes, worked against her and other people who were working for franco-phones.

Was Marc Miller chosen by Prime Minister Carney because he took that position?

• (1145)

**Raymond Thériège:** I can't comment on that.

**Joël Godin:** You follow the news.

**Raymond Thériège:** Yes, but I'm not aware of everything.

**Joël Godin:** You are aware of it, but you don't want to talk about it because you maintain discretion as Commissioner.

**Raymond Thériège:** As Commissioner, I always maintain discretion.

**Joël Godin:** Commissioner, I appreciate your candour.

Now, with all the information and indicators you have, can you say that the new Prime Minister, who has been in power since April 28, 2025, has demonstrated the will and intent to promote the French fact and give it equal weight with English in a bilingual country?

As I said, we have French and English. His predecessor appointed a Governor General who doesn't speak French. This is a representative title that should be bilingual.

With what he is doing, is the current Prime Minister showing us that he has the will and the intent?

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériège, please be brief, as the time is up.

**Raymond Thériège:** That's an interesting question to which I don't have an answer.

**The Chair:** Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I join my colleagues in congratulating you on your years of leadership in protecting and promoting our two official languages. I am pleased to welcome you to the committee on your last appearance.

For the record, when I was starting my bachelor's degree in 2012 at the Université de Moncton, you arrived at the same time. I was a young political science student and you were president. Now, for your last appearance, I'm a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We're talking about the use of French today. I think raising the bar requires leading by example. The administrative monetary penalties regulations were recently tabled in the House. I'd like to know how you think these regulations will strengthen the capacity of the Commissioner of Official Languages to ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act.

Do you have any comments on those regulations?

**Raymond Th  berge:** It's certainly an important tool in the Commissioner's tool box, especially in the transportation sector, because that's what it mainly affects.

However, as in the document we sent you, there is one aspect that is of great concern to us, and that is the administrative burden for implementing administrative monetary penalties, or AMPs.

There are a lot of AMP regimes that are much lighter. I think it's a huge workload for us to get to the point of imposing an administrative monetary penalty.

Therefore, I think the implementation aspect needs to be reviewed. The whole process people have to go through is extremely cumbersome.

**Guillaume Desch  nes-Th  riault:** Regarding the use of French, I would like to add that a strict approach should be taken with all institutions and businesses, including Air Canada. According to your annual reports, Air Canada has received a number of complaints. The allowed penalties will be between \$25,000 and \$50,000, but will the cumulative effect of multiple offences mean that a number of penalties will be imposed?

Do you think that will have a real deterrent effect on Air Canada and will encourage the administration to take its language obligations seriously?

**Raymond Th  berge:** I don't think any company will want to be subject to administrative monetary penalties. As a result, they might make the necessary efforts. However, the point you raised is interesting, because it's for each offence.

If there are 300, 400, 500 violations....

That said, imposing a penalty will require a lot of gymnastics.

**Guillaume Desch  nes-Th  riault:** I'd like to take you in a different direction.

A few weeks ago, you tabled a midpoint report on the action plan for official languages. As we know, the action plan for official languages is one of the government's main tools for supporting the vitality of our official language minority communities.

In 2023, there was a historic investment of \$4.1 billion. It was the largest investment in the country's history, even after adjusting for inflation. I read the document carefully. At the end, in your conclusion, you said that the report urged us to avoid funding gaps as far as possible and to ensure a smooth transition from one action plan to another.

Since this is your last appearance, I'd like you to tell us more about this message.

• (1150)

**Raymond Th  berge:** Very often, funding over a five-year period as part of the action plan is granted either to the provinces or to organizations. The action plan is coming to an end, but there is no new action plan in place. This can lead to a funding gap for organizations in the field of education, for example. What's important is to make the action plan permanent. These are five-year action plans, of course, but if you look at them carefully, you will still see some continuity in terms of priorities.

It's really important to ensure a transition between the action plan from 2023 to 2028 and the one that starts in 2029. We also have to take into account the recommendations, the suggestions made in the report leading up to the new action plan.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Guillaume Desch  nes-Th  riault:** At the end, you mentioned that we also had to adapt to the changing, specific needs of our various communities across the country.

Can you tell us a bit more about that?

**Raymond Th  berge:** All of our communities have their own unique characteristics. Obviously, they have features in common, but each of them is different.

New Brunswick is not Manitoba. Manitoba is not British Columbia.

I think we have to be aware of local needs, of the unique characteristics of each environment, and have programs that meet their needs.

**Guillaume Desch  nes-Th  riault:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Desch  nes-Th  riault.

Colleagues, we have a few minutes left. We have time for a third round of questions, but a slightly shorter one.

There are three members on the list: Mr. B  langer, Mr. Villeneuve and Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. B  langer and Mr. Villeneuve, I'll give you two minutes and 30 seconds each. Mr. Beaulieu, I'll give you a minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. B  langer, go ahead, please.

**Jim B  langer (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the Commissioner and to our other witnesses today.

We all agree that the Prime Minister plays an important role and that he must be able to express himself in both official languages. It is important to promote the French language within our institutions.

I'm interested in improving bilingualism. I'm trying to understand where we are today to get an idea of the future.

What proportion of federal public servants are sufficiently bilingual to receive the bilingualism bonus?

**Raymond Th  berge:** I don't have those figures, but we can certainly find them for you. I don't know them off the top of my head.

**Jim B  langer:** Let's take the example of a region like mine, Greater Sudbury. If I go to Service Canada offices and want to be served in the official language of my choice, meaning French, what percentage of employees could do so?

Let's say there are six employees. How many of them should be bilingual?

**Raymond Th  berge:** I don't think there's a formula. I think that, in an office, the possibility has to be there. Employees have to be able to respond to clients or the public in the official language of their choice.

I believe that, in an office like the Service Canada office in Sudbury, there have to be a number of bilingual people. However, I don't think there's a formula stipulating that, out of so many employees, there must be a specific number of bilingual ones.

That said, the institution must be able to provide services in both languages.

**Jim B  langer:** Let me flip it around. Let's say I'm in Quebec City. What are the chances that I will be served in English?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Raymond Th  berge:** Listen, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Go ahead. It's better that way.

**Jim B  langer:** Are there any positions in the federal government that don't have to be bilingual?

**Raymond Th  berge:** Yes, absolutely. There's a whole series of positions that are designated unilingual in certain regions.

**Jim B  langer:** If you don't work with the public and if you don't provide service to the public, your position might not be designated bilingual.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. B  langer.

I now give the floor to Mr. Villeneuve for two minutes and 30 seconds.

• (1155)

**Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.):** Thank you.

Good morning, Mr. Th  berge. Thank you for being here this morning.

I'm a new member of Parliament. This is the first time we've spoken. I'm really going to give you a lot of my time. Since this is your last appearance before the Standing Committee on Official Languages as Commissioner—you never know, you may come back to it in another capacity—do you have a specific message to leave us with or any advice to keep in mind to protect and promote our two official languages?

**Raymond Th  berge:** Thank you.

I think what's extremely important is to recognize that the Official Languages Act exists because communities use the official languages.

Having an Official Languages Act solely to have a bilingual federal government is one thing, but the act exists to ensure the development and sustainability of our official language minority communities. It is therefore extremely important to take the necessary steps to ensure the development of our communities, whether through the action plan or through a modernized act with robust regulations to ensure implementation, which will have benefits.

In addition, over the next eight years, it will be extremely important to assess the impact of the Official Languages Act on the communities. In 2033, the act is supposed to be reviewed. We need to

start today. We need to have indicators of what the effects of this legislation will be on our communities.

They will always evolve. My community, the one I knew when I was a little guy in Saint-Anne-des-Ch  nes, Manitoba, no longer exists. Other francophone communities exist. We have to be on the lookout for these changes. The act, programs and policies need to evolve with the communities.

In closing, bilingualism and official languages are all part of Canada's DNA. The two languages have coexisted on this territory, along with first nations languages, for 400 years now. That will always make Canada what it is.

Not only can we not overlook that, but we need to embrace it. We need to recognize the richness of our languages and the importance of French in Canada.

**Louis Villeneuve:** Thank you.

My time is up.

In that case, thank you, Mr. Th  berge.

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

Mr. Beaulieu is up next.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for one minute and 15 seconds.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you.

Not long ago, we heard from the President of the Treasury Board, Shafqat Ali, and he didn't speak French.

Do you find that acceptable?

**Raymond Th  berge:** As I was saying earlier, and I'll repeat myself again and play the tape back, I think it's important for any leader to be able to communicate in both official languages. I would like to think that, eventually, the President of the Treasury Board will be able to express himself in both official languages.

**Mario Beaulieu:** It's all the more surprising since he told us that he spoke six languages, but not French. This shows that, for him, it's not a priority.

Personally, I think what we're seeing is pathetic. For example, a press conference was held on the Defence Investment Agency in only one language, English, and there was no interpretation.

Is that normal?

**Raymond Th  berge:** It is not normal, and we received a complaint about it.

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

**Mario Beaulieu:** In that case, I would like to take this opportunity to say that you often repeat that myths must be debunked. However, to me, those who say that anglophones are poorer than francophones are really perpetuating a myth.

They use language indicators that produce these results, such as the median and FOLS, first official language spoken. However, if we rely on the language used at home or the language of work, the result is reversed. Anglophones have a clear advantage.

What do you think, do you agree with that?

**Raymond Thériault:** I'll leave that matter to the statisticians.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. You've gone well over your time.

That concludes our meeting for today.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Thériault, as well as the members of your team who are here. I know there are a number of them by your side who work with you, but I know there are others who are sitting here and support you every day. Thank you for your work.

I've been the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for only a few months, but I can say that you've done very important work for years to support official languages in Canada.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your service to official languages and to Canada, for sharing your work with us and for helping us all work more effectively to support our two official languages.

On behalf of the committee, thank you. I also want to thank your team for their work, for your work. I think it's fair to say that you've had a very significant impact on our country. I know that the government has announced its intention to appoint a new commissioner. So that's to be continued. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours and in your next job. Thank you very much.

Colleagues, I have just a few words to add. This is the last meeting before the Christmas holidays. Therefore, I would like to thank all of you, from all parties, for the work we have done together. I

look forward to working with you again after the holidays on some very important issues. It's a great honour for me to chair this committee and to work with you.

I would also like to ask that we thank the people who make the work of this committee possible. Yes, there are the MPs. We are the ones who are on camera, in Hansard and so on, but a lot of people work to support us.

I would like to begin by thanking our clerk, Ms. Martin, and our analyst, Ms. Lecomte. I don't know the names of all the people who work with us, but I'm thinking of our interpreters, those who help us on the technical side, on the logistics side, in the room—in short, those who enable the committee to work effectively. Thank you very much.

I would also like to thank, as you know, all the MPs who depend on their own teams, and the staff who work with us. I thank them all for their very important work this year.

Finally, I know that they are not always present here in the House, but I am thinking of all the people who work on official languages in Canada, whether they are minority communities who come to testify before us, other experts or the officials who've appeared before us over the past few meetings. I don't know if they're here, but if they're watching or listening—I'm sure a few of them are listening—I want them to know that we thank them and that we have enjoyed working with them.

Thank you, colleagues. I wish you a merry Christmas and happy holidays.

The meeting is adjourned.

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