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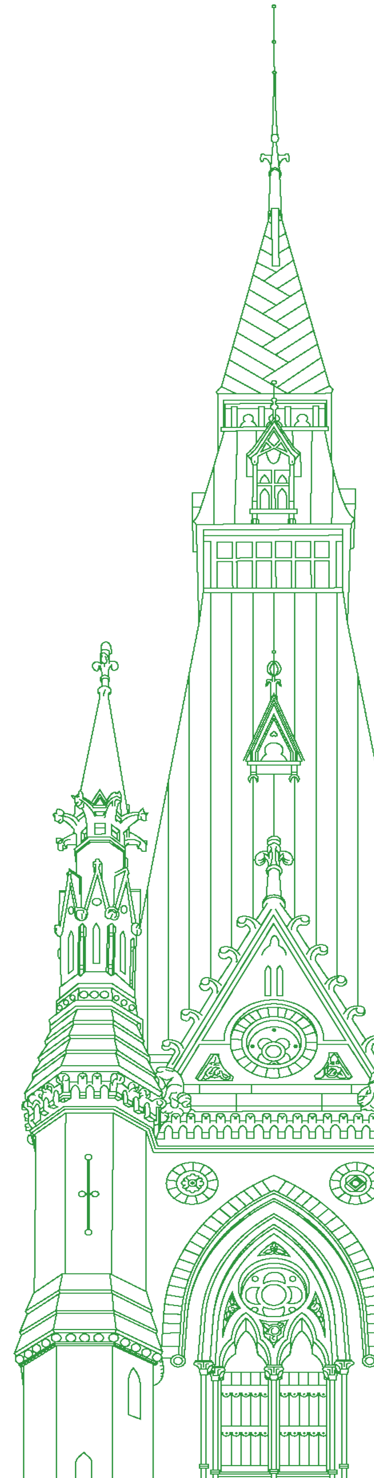

Standing Committee on National Defence

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● (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair (Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 16, 2025, the committee is meeting to study the situation of francophones and indigenous members in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Before we continue, we ask participants to consult the guidelines on the table. These measures are here to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of our interpreters.

I'd like to remind witnesses and members to please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

For interpretation, you can use your earpiece and select the appropriate channel of floor, English or French. That's also available on Zoom for our witnesses participating virtually.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses.

We have Stéphanie Chouinard, associate professor. I believe retired captain Hélène Le Scelleur is also available. We also have Lieutenant-General Michel Maisonneuve and Eric Sauvé.

I will now open it up to the witnesses to provide their opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Stéphanie Chouinard (Associate Professor, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me. Since this is my first time testifying before the Standing Committee on National Defence, I will briefly introduce myself.

I have been an associate professor of political science at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston since 2017, and am co-affiliated with Queen's University and the Canadian Forces College in Toronto. My research focuses on the rights of linguistic minorities and the constitutional, legislative and political aspects of Canada's language regime, as well as, to a lesser extent, the rights of indigenous peoples. I would also like to note that I am here in my personal capacity, as a researcher, and that my remarks do not necessarily represent the official position of the Royal Military College of Canada.

I have listened to the testimony of the witnesses who have already appeared before you as part of your study, and I would like to add my views on the issue of official languages, focusing on the broader challenge of cultural change within the Canadian Armed Forces. The change that needs to be made, in my view, is for all members of the Canadian Armed Forces to embrace official languages. As things stand, official languages and bilingualism remain largely the domain of francophones.

One point I feel is important to highlight is the difference between the representation of francophones within the Canadian Armed Forces and the representation of the francophone community and official languages within the forces. As you already know, in the Canadian Armed Forces, francophones are overrepresented relative to their national demographic weight. Yet, the Canadian Armed Forces are unable to fill all positions where French is a language of work—that is, positions designated as bilingual or those for which French is essential—with individuals who are proficient in the language.

It should also be noted that many members of the forces operate primarily in an English-speaking environment and rarely have the opportunity to work in French. This leads to persistent unilingualism among anglophones. In fact, only 9% of them are bilingual. For the 59% of francophone members who are bilingual, this leads to a phenomenon of subtractive bilingualism. What is meant by subtractive bilingualism is that continuous exposure to an English-dominated work environment—and, more generally, to an English-dominated living environment—causes francophones serving in the forces to assimilate into English, to the point where it can become difficult for them to work in French when the opportunity arises. Furthermore, they do not always have access to the services to which they are entitled in the official language of their choice. Depending on their rank in the military hierarchy, requesting these services may be perceived as insubordination.

A study by the office of the director general responsible for research and analysis for military personnel also demonstrated that bilingualism rests very largely on the shoulders of francophones, while less than half of them say they feel comfortable using the official language of their choice during work meetings and less than two-thirds say they feel comfortable speaking in their language with their immediate supervisor.

Measures to support the recruitment of francophones, particularly in the navy, which lacks a natural recruitment pool among this population, will be beneficial in meeting the needs of the forces.

However, a cultural shift regarding what it means to respect and promote official languages within the forces is also necessary. This translates not only into greater use of the French language, but also into increased opportunities for English-speaking members to learn French, to learn it early, and to use it consistently throughout their careers.

The new ministerial directive on modernizing the Official Languages Act appears to be moving in this direction, but we must monitor the progress of its implementation to ensure that the new objectives are officially achieved.

Furthermore, support for learning the other official language should not be limited to studying to pass a test to obtain a BBB or CBC rating; one must truly be able to interact with other colleagues in the other official language. This is a type of learning that takes place throughout an entire career and which, in my view, must begin as soon as a member joins the Canadian Armed Forces.

In short, if we make bilingualism and linguistic duality a matter of respect and leadership, and if all members of the forces feel they have an equal opportunity to learn and use their other official language throughout their careers, we will create a virtuous cycle that will enhance operational capability and cohesion, and prevent resentment toward bilingualism. Moreover, not only will this enhanced proficiency in both official languages be useful at our bases and during domestic operations, but, in the current geopolitical context where Canada is seeking to diversify its alliances, the presence within our forces of a strong contingent of soldiers capable of working in French is also an added value that will allow for closer collaboration with NATO member countries that also have French as an official language.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to continuing the discussion.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chouinard.

[*English*]

I will now pass it over to Hélène Le Scelleur, please.

You have up to five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hélène Le Scelleur (Retired Captain, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, members of the committee.

Serving one's country should never mean having to choose between one's career and one's rights, between one's health and one's language, or between one's identity and one's sense of belonging. And yet, that is exactly what I had to do.

I served for more than twenty years in the Canadian Armed Forces. I served with loyalty, discipline and commitment. But as a francophone and as a member of the first nations, my institutional experience was marked by systemic barriers that can no longer be ignored. Today, I would like to highlight three concrete dimensions of that experience.

First: training. When I became an officer, I was required to complete a mandatory university program delivered exclusively in English. There was no support for francophones. No adaptation. No recognition that we were expected to perform, succeed and be evaluated in a second language within a demanding academic context.

When I raised this issue through my chain of command, I was told I could file a complaint, but at the cost of delaying my career. In other words: assert my rights, or move forward. I chose to continue, in English, as many francophones do. But adapting is not the same as being included. It is compensating.

This experience reveals a troubling reality: Access to career training is not equitably guaranteed in both official languages, and francophones bear the burden of that gap.

Second: access to services. Upon returning from Afghanistan, I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Shortly thereafter, I was posted to Ottawa. In a moment of significant vulnerability, I had to receive care in English, not by choice, but because there was no timely access to services in French. Services in French existed in theory, but not within a time frame compatible with my condition.

Expressing trauma in a second language means losing nuance, losing precision, sometimes even losing meaning. In practical terms, it means receiving partial care. The choice I was given was simple: receive inadequate care or wait indefinitely. That is not equitable access. It is a systemic barrier.

Third: institutional experience. Within the health services, I was directly involved in reviewing linguistic profiles. I saw, first-hand, how requirements were applied. Francophones were expected to be fully bilingual in order to advance. That expectation was not applied with the same rigour to anglophones. Promotions were granted despite incomplete linguistic profiles but rarely, if ever, to the benefit of francophones. This creates a quiet but persistent reality: a structural inequity in career progression.

There is also a deeper dimension. I am a member of the Pekuakamiulnuatsh Nation. Throughout my career, I never put that identity forward. Not because I lacked pride but because I understood the environment I was in. I was already a woman. Already francophone. Already serving in the combat arms and elsewhere. Adding my indigenous identity meant exposing myself further in a context where denigration, prejudice and intimidation were part of the daily reality. So I chose silence.

And when an institution leads its members to silence a part of who they are in order to succeed, that is not an individual issue. It is an institutional signal. Today, we speak of inclusion. But inclusion is not measured by what is written in policy. It is measured by what members actually experience. And my experience highlights a clear gap: The principles exist but their application remains uneven.

Allow me to conclude with three essential recommendations.

First, make the full delivery of all career training in both official languages mandatory, without exception, prior to implementation, and suspend any non-compliant training.

Second, guarantee immediate access to health services, particularly in mental health, in the official language of choice, including priority transfer mechanisms when such services are not available locally.

Third, condition promotions on the equitable application of language requirements for all, and publish annual comparative data on the career progression of francophones and anglophones.

Because serving one's country should never mean having to translate oneself, silence oneself or transform oneself in order to be recognized.

Thank you.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Lieutenant-General Maisonneuve, we'll go to you for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Lieutenant-General Michel Maisonneuve (Ret'd, As an Individual): Ladies and gentlemen, the orders are as follows: Today's mission is to storm Hill 1221, bypassing the enemy on the right. Canada's 12th armoured regiment will lead the way until the goal is achieved.

[*English*]

I asked the interpreters not to translate the mission above to make a point: If you didn't understand the orders, you will find it very hard to attack the objective you were given without endangering lives.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your invitation to testify before you.

I completely support your efforts to study the situation of francophones in the Canadian Forces in our country, which has two official languages.

I would like to quickly highlight three points in the five minutes I am allotted.

[*English*]

First, I will provide a bit of background on my personal experience with bilingualism.

My family moved from Saint-Jérôme, Quebec to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in the summer of 1967 when I was 14 years old. I went from grade 8 in a French school to grade 9 in English. It was very difficult.

I was fortunate to retain my French language and my 35 years of service in uniform saw me serving in both English- and French-speaking units. I've commanded troops of both. I've served across Canada and outside the country on different missions and postings. I commanded French conscripts for two years while serving in France.

I believe I have the reputation of being a defender of bilingualism, as recognized by the Vimy Award in 2020.

I've made it my crusade in my whole career to promote and always use both languages in whatever scenario when speaking publicly. I've also tried to make all of my anglophone friends and colleagues understand the importance of saying a few words of French when they address any gathering. I'll have more on that later.

As you can imagine from the importance of understanding the operational orders I gave at the beginning, I believe bilingualism is an essential part of leadership within the Canadian Armed Forces. Our young men and women who agree to serve their country deserve leaders who can communicate with them in either official language.

[*Translation*]

In 1974, my armoured officer course was given entirely in English. Since then, the Canadian Forces have made a lot of progress, and the vast majority of trade courses are available in both official languages. However, there is still a long way to go.

When I left the military in 2007, senior officers and senior non-commissioned officers were required to achieve a functional level of bilingualism before being promoted, and I believe that is still the case. Nevertheless, some people still question the need for such a requirement and think that it gives an advantage to some people in the decisions of promotional boards.

● (1645)

[*English*]

The way I prefer to look at it is that the requirement is well known. Just like any other requirement for promotion, if the individual did not make an effort to become proficient in their second language, they do not deserve to be promoted. It's part of simple meritocracy, just like the results on our career course.

Learning a language as an adult is tough. In the military, opportunities are made available and we obviously need more to learn a second language throughout our careers. Many complain, but the policy is clear. If those who complain would spend as much time doing their best to learn their second language, they might achieve the standard.

Bilingualism in the Canadian Armed Forces is a leadership issue. Bilingualism definitely provides our military with an operational advantage.

Finally, let me go beyond the military.

[*Translation*]

We have two official languages in this country. It's part of who we are as a country. We are not a post-national country without an essential culture. We should celebrate the fact of official bilingualism. This aspect of our country sets us apart from many other countries and gives us a competitive advantage.

[*English*]

Though expensive, it's one of our competencies and a national advantage as a country.

The best defenders of bilingualism are anglophones. If a francophone defends the French language, it's seen as normal behaviour. An anglophone defending the French language will have a much greater impact.

Bilingualism is part of respect. Just as many believe we should perform land acknowledgements, in any forum we should acknowledge the bilingual nature of our country.

As I've said many times, any anglophone can say this:

[*Translation*]

“I'm sorry that I can't speak French. I will make my remarks in English.”

For example, I was completely stunned by the appointment of a Governor General who was unable to speak French. I find it incredible that Ms. Simon, who had a long career in public service, was able to rise to the level of Canada's ambassador without being able to speak both of our official languages. I found the appointment disrespectful, but I was willing to give her time to learn. We now know that she was unable or unwilling to do so.

[*English*]

The situation with the CEO of Air Canada provides another interesting case study. Indeed, you can live without any trouble in Montreal without speaking French, but why would you want to? My problem with Mr. Rousseau is that after his speech five years ago, he committed to learning French. He either lied or did not put in the work as promised. In my view, this is a failure of ethics and leadership, not only of French-language ability.

In conclusion, I reiterate my belief that bilingualism is a military leadership respect issue and a national competitive advantage for our country.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That's great.

[*English*]

Lieutenant-General, your points to this committee were well made. Well done.

Monsieur Sauvé, it's over to you for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Eric Sauvé (As an Individual): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I served my country as an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces between the ages of 16 and 39. When I retired in 2014, I travelled the world for a year with my children. We visited 21 countries in one year. In every country we went to, I'd ask them to learn two words in the local language: “hello” and “thank you”. In Brazil, it was *bom dia* and *obrigado*. In Laos, it was *sabaidee* and *khop chai*. They knew nothing else in Portuguese or Laotian, but saying a few words in the other person's language is a basic level of respect.

I worked for months, if not years, for anglophone superiors who never said *bonjour* or *merci, Eric*. I watched a chief of the army staff present his vision of the future to hundreds of officers and non-commissioned officers without even bothering to say *bonjour* as his introduction. Orders come from the top, as does the example. The culture of the organization depends on its most senior leaders.

Before testifying here, I put out a call on social media. I didn't want only my voice to be heard, but that of many francophones who serve or have served their country. I asked them not to tell me about their struggles, but to offer me solutions. Their accounts confirmed to me that at National Defence, there is a double standard when it comes to recognizing language rights. It doesn't require an anglophone to learn much French, but the assumption is that a francophone will be able to manage well in English, as if learning a second language was natural for one and too demanding for the other.

We are dealing with a cultural problem, a problem that is notoriously difficult to resolve, I'll admit. It's going to take time, but also political will. You have a real lever: the law. Military personnel are conservative by nature and not inclined to change, but they obey orders, and your laws become orders. If you ask that a certain level of bilingualism be achieved for people to access command positions, they will achieve it. If you ask that all training courses be offered in both official languages, it will be done. If you impose quotas, they will be fulfilled, because your laws are orders and orders are carried out.

However, legislation alone is not enough. We also need to provide the means to implement laws: clear directives, set budgets, deadlines to be met and, above all, large-scale training.

If I can draw a military parallel, you don't hand a gun to soldiers and expect them to instantly become skilled shooters. They are trained regularly so they can feel confident in their effectiveness. That's the only way to make them skilled and confident. I've never known a soldier who enjoyed looking incompetent. If they need to use a weapon, technique or language, soldiers first want to master it. Otherwise, out of fear of failure and ridicule, they won't use it.

It's exactly the same thing for a second language. Asking soldiers to speak a language they rarely practise will have little effect if they don't have the resources to learn it and practise it regularly. You wouldn't expect a soldier who took a first aid course three or four years ago to be effective in an emergency. The same is true for using a second language. It should be taught at the basic training level and everyone should get ongoing training throughout their career. In addition, we need to create real opportunities to use it, for example in briefings, courses, assessments and transfers. Training comes before the test, not the other way around.

Yes, it will cost a lot of money, but if Canada can commit to dedicating 5% of its GDP to its defence, it can certainly invest some of that money so that its soldiers, both francophone and anglophone, as well as their families, can serve their country competently, confidently and with dignity in both official languages.

[*English*]

Thank you for listening to me.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sauvé.

[*English*]

We will now start our first round of questions.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus, you have up to six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

This year, it will be 39 years since I enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces. I think we need to make a distinction when it comes to the work environment. When Quebeckers work in Quebec, they are obviously in their environment. At 5 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group in Valcartier, French is typically spoken. Where it gets complicated is when you have to be transferred outside Quebec, when you receive a promotion or when you're not in Quebec.

In short, what we need to remember today is that, when you're a francophone soldier from Quebec and you work outside Quebec, things get complicated.

Ms. Chouinard, in 2020, you mentioned that the real problem with bilingualism in the army was the lack of language training. In my time, there were courses at the Canadian Forces Language School. We went there for a number of months.

Is that still the case today? Is there still a lack of training? What is the situation?

Stéphanie Chouinard: These courses still exist, of course. However, the timing of these courses presents certain challenges. These courses aren't offered at the start of a member's career. Instead, they're provided when they become necessary for a promotion. At that point, we send the member to take courses. On the one hand, this delays their career advancement, which obviously creates some resentment. On the other hand, the courses focus on test-taking, and not necessarily on the actual day-to-day use of the language with subordinates or other team members. In my opinion, that's where the issue lies.

Having the classification on file is one thing. However, having the capacity to really integrate bilingualism into day-to-day activities will make all the difference.

Pierre Paul-Hus: You made an important point. The type of language training isn't adapted to the reality of the job. Elected officials are trained to speak the language and hold conversations, while military members are trained to learn by rote in order to answer questions. However, they don't necessarily have the ability to converse.

● (1655)

Stéphanie Chouinard: In other words, it comes down to checking a box.

Pierre Paul-Hus: I think that this is a key point to bear in mind.

I'm moving fast because we don't have much time for questions.

I'll turn to you, General Maisonneuve.

I remember that, when we carry out operations, especially abroad, and when we leave Canada to deploy to other countries, some situations arise where francophone Quebec officers, for example, must work in English. Have you faced situations where a lack of proficiency in English posed a security issue?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: Yes. When I did my training, the courses were exclusively in English. We lost many excellent leaders because they couldn't speak English. For me, it's essential for operational needs. While on a mission outside Canada, often French or English will help us communicate with the people in the country where we're serving. It's really quite important. I fully support everything that Ms. Chouinard and Ms. Le Scelleur have said.

There's also a lack of capacity. The issue is that, naturally, many more English speakers need to learn French. As a result, we need many more language courses. Francophones often learn on the job, so they don't need as many courses as anglophones. So there's also a capacity issue.

Pierre Paul-Hus: Language training is vital. However, we also need to consider the capacities of the various branches of the military, meaning the army, navy and air force.

In terms of the army, in Quebec, it's much easier for francophone Quebeckers to serve in 5 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group, as I said earlier, unless they're deployed to other locations for different duties.

However, the navy, for example, is a different story. I'll give you the example of my son, who is in the naval reserve. He joined when he was 17 years old. He had to go to Esquimalt or Halifax, where everything was in English only. He didn't have a choice. He told me that, if he didn't understand the slightest bit of English, he couldn't be there.

Is it still normal, in 2026, for young reservists such as my son—I don't know about the regular force—to deploy somewhere without having the opportunity to speak in French?

Eric Sauvé: I would like to bring up a point regarding your first question.

We've spoken at length about the army in Quebec, since Quebec operates in French. However, a major change is coming. There will be three divisions. One will handle the regular force, one will take care of the reserves and one will provide support. The divisions will bring together people from across the country.

How will things work at headquarters where unilingual anglophone reservists, unilingual francophone reservists and bilingual reservists sit around the table? I'm concerned that it will be easy to switch to English as the basic working language. I come from the Royal 22e Régiment, which has advocated extensively for the rights of francophones. The same applies to the 12e Régiment blindé du Canada, which Lieutenant-General Maisonneuve referred to. I'm concerned that, at some point, we'll lose this. The higher up the ranks we go—according to the reality of the army, which I'm more familiar with—in the divisions, the more we absolutely must be bilingual. We'll want to work across Canada. Yet I'm not sure that, in western Canada or in the centre of the country, people will be asked to speak in French during meetings. There will still be an army in Quebec, but its command will inevitably be bilingual or anglophone.

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: Colonel Paul-Hus, I'll add that the navy and air force also have different approaches. When I visited the HMCS *Ville de Québec*, and even the HMCS *Ottawa*, I noticed that many anglophone members were serving and that the working language was often English. If you visit Bagotville, you're bound to find that many anglophones are there too and that English is often the working language.

Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

I'll finish by saying that Captain Sauvé made an important point. The process of restructuring Canada into three divisions will result in the closure of the 2nd Canadian Division in Quebec. This will have a major impact on francophones working in the Canadian Forces.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Maisonneuve, I'm delighted to hear your view that an anglophone is the best advocate for the French language. I'll say it in a mixture of the two languages. I think that I'm the poster child for an anglophone who learned French. I was lucky enough to be sent to a French school by my parents when I was a small child. Every day, I thank them for the gift that they gave me. I consider the opportunity to speak both languages a gift given to the people in the Canadian Armed Forces. I'll start by saying this.

I would like to dig a bit deeper into the personal experiences of the people who served.

Perhaps I'll start with you, Major Sauvé. Have you faced discrimination as a result of your language during your service? If so, how did it affect your career path?

● (1700)

Eric Sauvé: As I already said, I started out in the infantry, in the Royal 22e Régiment. I did my training in French and continued my career in French.

I then went to work in intelligence, which is a unilingual English-speaking field. Since we work within the Five Eyes, meaning with England, the United States, New Zealand and Australia, I understand the need to work in English. I never questioned this. As an intelligence officer, I wanted the allies to be able to read my report.

So I can't say that I personally faced discrimination.

That said, I spoke in my opening remarks about how, before I came here, I asked people to share their stories with me. We would need more than two hours to hear them. Sometimes, especially in the navy and air force—as discussed— but also in other places, people are asked to work only in English as if this were normal. Yet I'm not aware of the opposite situation where an anglophone has been asked to work in French and to get by.

One person wrote me a long email to say that, every evening, on top of her training, she had to understand what she had learned in English during the day.

When I started working in English, like just about everyone else here, I used to get a headache after spending a day working in English. The same thing happened when I learned Spanish.

At some point, it's easy to turn the switch off and say that we've had enough. You can imagine the potential impact on someone who is taking a course, who must learn, who will be tested on their training and who also has trouble understanding the language and who needs to spend more time on it in the evenings and on weekends.

We've spoken a great deal about training, and it's important. However, as I said, the test is after the training and not before.

Tim Watchorn: Indeed.

Captain Le Scelleur, I'll ask you the same question.

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: I wouldn't say that I necessarily faced discrimination on a personal level, but rather through a group effect. I vividly remember when our French-speaking platoon was working with an English-speaking platoon and we were called French frogs and all kinds of things. We could clearly see that we weren't necessarily well accepted in the group. How many times did we hear that we weren't following orders like the others, that our way of thinking was always different and that we weren't following instructions? We always heard this type of comparison between francophones and anglophones. So I would say that I saw this type of discrimination instead.

Aside from that, I've seen it more in the medical field. I've seen the careers of my anglophone colleagues, who didn't necessarily have the proper linguistic profile, advance much faster. We had to wait a bit longer for promotions. We had to accept this and we had no choice if we wanted to advance and move forward. For example, if I had chosen to wait for my career course, I might have waited over two years. No program was available in French.

At a certain point, we have no choice. We must accept it and move forward. We must accept the fact that we have no choice but to live with this, even though things shouldn't be that way.

Tim Watchorn: General Maisonneuve, my friend from Saint-Jérôme, what was your experience?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: It's a bit like Ms. Le Scelleur's experience. As I said, when I started my training, I saw groups of people who didn't speak French. They were supposed to listen to the radio, respond to orders and give orders on the radio in their second language, even though they hadn't been trained to do so and they lacked the necessary knowledge. It was always quite a challenging situation.

I spoke about the idea of recognition and about the need to make these courses available in both languages. Let me explain what often happened. People would come in and there would be, for example, about twenty young anglophone officer cadets and three francophones. We wondered whether we would split the course in two. Since we couldn't do that, we used a francophone assistant. All the courses were held in English and a bilingual francophone would give a bit of help to the unilingual francophone next to him.

As you said, it will be expensive. However, we can do this if we want to. We're allowed to do this. In my opinion, it's a competitive advantage for our country and for the Canadian Armed Forces. I have no doubt about this. We just need to put in the necessary time and effort.

By the way, congratulations on learning French, Mr. Watchorn. It's fantastic.

● (1705)

Tim Watchorn: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Chair: You can have one question.

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn: I'll be brief.

I would like to ask the people who served more recently whether they saw any improvements over time.

Major Sauvé, you can answer first.

Eric Sauvé: There have certainly been improvements.

I started at the Royal Military College Saint-Jean in 1992. I saw people learning French. I apologize for using this expression, but I had a “Newfie” in my room, and he learned French. Today, he speaks fluent French. However, when the military college in Saint-Jean was closed in 1995, we were transferred to Kingston. I had an uncle who was a French teacher and who was transferred there. He said that it was worthwhile because the anglophones weren't coming out of Kingston bilingual.

So there have been some improvements, but some setbacks. Certainly, things have improved in terms of respect for the individual and respect for others. I've given courses on diversity, inclusion and so on. I don't want to get into a debate about equity, diversity and inclusion here. My point is that openness has been shown to the different people there. They're no longer treated as a single entity.

Tim Watchorn: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sauvé and Mr. Watchorn.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor for six minutes.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for their remarks today.

Ms. Le Scelleur, I would like to start by saying that I was in the House on Monday when my colleague, Ms. Gaudreau, paid tribute to you. I would like to join her in saying how much I appreciate your service.

You spoke of the sometimes difficult and bumpy road in the life of a francophone or, ultimately, any soldier, military member or member of the forces.

However, let's talk specifically about cases of trauma. In your experience, are the support mechanisms, particularly in the area of mental health, for active members and veterans—I imagine that the two situations differ—available and accessible in both languages? I must point out that accessibility isn't the same thing as availability.

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: Thank you for your question and especially your comment.

When it comes to trauma, as everyone knows, it's not possible to access psychologists directly within the Canadian Armed Forces, or CAF. That occupation doesn't exist in the ranks, so people often request outside support when it comes to psychiatrists or social workers.

As for my personal experience, I was treated by a francophone psychologist, but the psychiatrist and social worker overseeing my case were anglophone. I remember having to explain my story over and over again to the psychiatrist and not being able to find the right words to express what I was going through. He said he understood, but just how much did he understand what I was experiencing? On top of that, I was in Ottawa, a region that actually has a lot of services. Francophones on isolated postings in the regions have no access to French-language resources. They get virtual services, but when you're not doing well, virtual contact isn't what you need; you need human contact, connection with a person. I think there's still a long way to go, especially when it comes to mental health services.

There's a point I'd like to come back to. Earlier, Mr. Paul-Hus asked whether the inability to speak the language could put CAF members at risk. When I was deployed to Afghanistan, we had to change our process for evacuating casualties from the field to the military hospital. We had to follow the Americans' process, called 9-Line Medevac Request. The whole process had to be carried out in English. However, on the ground, in combat, you don't necessarily know who's going to be affected. The person who has to transmit the message over the air could be a private or corporal who can't necessarily speak English. Will the message be communicated properly? Will they be able to do it? The answer is yes, not being able to speak the language can put people at risk.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: That drives home Mr. Maisonneuve's interpretation joke at the beginning of his remarks. The point is more or less the same: when you don't understand the order, it puts everyone in danger.

I want to make sure I fully understand what you said. You said there weren't any psychologists and you had to rely on outside services. I imagine that involves shopping around, checking Google to see whether there's a psychologist belonging to the Ordre des psychologues du Québec close by. I hope the CAF has good insurance coverage for service reimbursement. You said that you had access to a psychiatrist but that the psychiatrist didn't speak French. That means the person in the CAF directly providing the service couldn't serve you in French. Is that correct?

● (1710)

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: Yes, exactly.

I asked whether I could see someone who spoke French, but I was told that the wait-list was very long and that there weren't necessarily any French-speaking psychiatrists. They asked me what I wanted to do. What is someone supposed to do in that situation? Do they neglect their mental health and wait, further jeopardizing their health, or do they try to cope as best they can with the English-speaking provider available to them?

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: You didn't have any other option, then. Obviously, unlike psychologists, the psychiatrists seldom have a private office where patients see them.

Still, did they offer you anything, for instance, in partnership with a hospital or clinic? Was there an alternative?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: No, absolutely not.

I didn't have access to interpretation services either. Sometimes you see that in hospitals, someone who can provide language help to patients in French or English, as was mentioned earlier. I wasn't offered anything like that. To try to make myself understood, I really had to rely on myself. That's how I managed to get anywhere. Later, I had the help of my psychologist, who was able to send my English-speaking psychiatrist clearer requests.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I want to ask the other witnesses who served in the forces the same question.

Does that reflect things you've heard before or experienced yourself?

Eric Sauvé: There aren't enough mental health services in the CAF, period. After I left the forces is when my mind opened up to the issue of mental health. I became aware of anxiety and depression, which I was completely hiding.

I would say that awareness opened the floodgates. I think about 40% of people in the armed forces struggle with a mental health issue. I was in the special forces, and I think the number in that organization could easily be as high as 90%. You can't tell. It's a hidden illness. It's taboo. People are professionals, so they keep going. They carry on as best they can and look for any available services.

Personally, I had five psychologists and two psychiatrists, and they didn't necessarily have the specialized training to address my specific needs, given what I had been through. That was extremely hard.

I will say that what helped me was opening up, talking about my issues, be it on social media or to command. I highlighted the importance of talking about it, of needing to break the taboo. It did me a world of good, and I gather that it did the same for those who heard my story.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Before I go to Mr. Maisonneuve, I want to ask you this. You experienced the long wait-list and everything else Ms. Le Scelleur talked about, did you not?

Eric Sauvé: In my case, I had already been out of the forces for a long time, but I can connect my mental health issues to the CAF. I sought professional help on my own, using my own insurance, as a civilian. I do know, however, that there aren't enough resources, having educated myself afterwards.

We train a soldier. If they have a physical wound, we fix it. If they have a mental wound, we also need to help them.

One big improvement is that now, people with anxiety are allowed to join the armed forces. I know about anxiety. I lived with it for two years. It's not a lifelong problem. It's like a broken arm; it gets better. The armed forces didn't used to let people with anxiety in. Some people still have doubts about that. Personally, I was highly effective in my role, and I still am. For a period of time, I was no longer effective and I needed help, but I got better.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Maisonneuve, do you have anything to add?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savard-Tremblay. Your time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Sauvé.

We now go to Mr. Anderson.

[*English*]

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Thank you very much to all of the witnesses who came today.

General Maisonneuve, I want to play the devil's advocate a bit here. Professor Chouinard said that French should begin in BMQ, and/or BMOQ, I assume. BMQ is really a culture change. It's taking young adults who have spent a couple of decades in the civilian world and turning them into soldiers.

I'm wondering if, in your view, BMQ is the best place to start language training, adding that task to the culture shock that they're enduring.

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: I don't think so, and I don't think that's what Professor Chouinard.... We should ask her what she really meant by that.

I think what we're talking about here is providing the opportunity as people go up in rank. In terms of non-officers like soldiers, there's no doubt that in their career as they move up they're going to serve in units where, if they're anglophone, they're usually going to go to an anglophone unit, and the same with francophones, who will go to a francophone unit, like Major Sauvé did. However, as they go up in rank, as they get to the sergeant and warrant officer ranks, they might be going as instructors in one of the schools, or they might actually serve outside their own regiment, for example, in Ottawa. In those cases, they do need to have language training earlier in their career. As I have said before, I learned English when I was 14. I still dabble in it now because I have to. Really, the earlier you can learn it, the better it is, so that's a great thing.

As Major Sauvé was saying, when you go to military college even today, what they try to do—and what we tried to do in the 10 years that I was in Saint-Jean—is put a francophone cadet with an anglophone cadet to be roommates. That's fantastic. I dare say that all the cadets in Saint-Jean who leave Saint-Jean are usually very close to being functional, if not functional. I am talking about anglophones and francophones. Francophones are not usually an issue.

I know for a fact that in Kingston there is a requirement now if you want to graduate and be on parade with your peers after four years—or five years if you started in Saint-Jean—you need to have passed the four different pillars, of which one is bilingualism. If you haven't passed it, you get to stay back until you pass it, and that's the way it should be.

● (1715)

Scott Anderson: Okay. That was the same requirement they had in grad school at the University of Manitoba. You had to be bilingual, at least nominally.

In your view, at what point during the rank progression should the officer stream, first of all, and the non-commissioned stream, second of all, begin to learn French?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: You have to understand that I have been out now for quite a few years, but essentially, I believe the requirement to be functional happens at the lieutenant-colonel level or the equivalent in the navy for officers. I don't know what it is for non-commissioned members, but I know there is a requirement eventually. If they go in as chief warrant officers and go into the higher tiers, if you wish, of chief warrant officer positions, they need to achieve their functional ability.

What's very interesting is that if you look at the Canadian Forces general orders that come out about officers being promoted—the general officer plot and the colonel plot, for example—you'll see very often that they're promoted as interim. I can't remember what they call it now, but it's not a substantive promotion.

Very often, the reason they're not substantive is that they have not passed their functional level in bilingualism. The functional level is actually not very difficult to get to. You just need to work hard and you can get to it. The next level is integral, which is more difficult, but I believe that if you're going to be a general officer in our Canadian Armed Forces, you ought to be integral in both languages.

Scott Anderson: My question is really about at what point in the training. Is it early in the qualifications after BMQ? At what point do you suggest that you begin to force people to learn languages?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: Well, as an officer, immediately and as a non-commissioned officer, a private or corporal, etc., I believe there's really no need unless you have a need.... If you're a francophone going to an English-language unit, obviously you should get the training before you get there.

Usually what happens at the lower levels, as a private or a corporal, is that you end up going to a unit of your own language, if you wish. To me, the requirement is only there to be, for a master corporal or sergeant, when you get to a point where you're going to be teaching, for example, at the recruit school or at one of the trade schools, etc.

Scott Anderson: Thank you very much.

Professor Chouinard, I should ask you, is that what you meant?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Yes, I agree with Mr. Maisonneuve. I don't think BMQ is necessarily the proper timing for soldiers coming in, but if they have any ambition to leave their unit and go elsewhere, they should know that they're going to need that proficiency in their second official language, and that should be provided much earlier than it is at this point.

Scott Anderson: Okay.

Major Sauvé, do you agree with the assessment as to when both non-commissioned and officer streams should begin training?

[*Translation*]

Eric Sauvé: Yes, absolutely.

When you go to military college, you have to complete four pillars: academics, military, physical fitness and bilingualism. A person has four or five years to become bilingual. Similarly, if someone fails the physical fitness test, they're given additional training support so they can improve. They get help.

For non-commissioned officers just starting out, yes, going to RMC Saint-Jean is a shock. It's a lot to learn. They are taught certain things to become familiar with the language. It's not a test or a PO check. They won't need to say “bonjour” or “merci” in their second official language, but they're told that they're going to meet French-speaking and English-speaking troops. They may get a few sessions a week to familiarize them with the language; people will speak a bit of French or English to them, but they don't have to pass a test. That's one of the shocks they'll experience, like their first time in the gas hut.

● (1720)

[*English*]

Scott Anderson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anderson. We're done.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lapointe, you may go ahead for five minutes.

Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Chouinard, given the armed forces' unique operational context, what are the most important strategic elements to ensure respect for official languages obligations in everyday military activities such as training and operations?

Stéphanie Chouinard: As the only one of the four witnesses who has not served in the armed forces, I will humbly refrain from commenting on the operational dimension. I don't think I'm qualified to answer that.

As for training, I think what's necessary is what's already being provided to cadets at the two military colleges.

As a professor, I should also highlight that there is very little research on this, so it's extremely difficult for a researcher to find any evidence-based information.

For example, one of the things I'd like to know pertains to those who are working towards their officer's commission while attending a civilian university and doing their military training at a base on weekends. Not all officers go to the Saint-Jean or Kingston military college. Is it harder or easier for them to learn the other official language, since they didn't receive the same support? Those are the types of questions we don't have answers to. We're really lacking that basic understanding, so I can't really give you a clear answer.

Viviane Lapointe: Do any of the other witnesses have any thoughts on the matter?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: I'll just pick up on that.

When it comes to training, I can say that, personally, I worked a lot with people in support trades. A lot of those trades require specialized training. The people in those trades have to operate at different levels, not just the unit level, but also the brigade or division level in some cases. Oftentimes, they have to be bilingual from the outset.

As for trades that are not combat trades, where francophones go directly into a francophone unit and anglophones go directly into an anglophone unit, people might work in administration or the medical field or as mechanics or radio operators. Everyone in a support trade always works in an environment that is virtually bilingual.

It would be wrong to say that non-commissioned members, non-commissioned officers, shouldn't have access to second-language training from the start. Language training should be based on people's occupations and working environments. That should determine the type of second-language training people get, so that they can support the operational level.

Viviane Lapointe: Thank you.

Professor Chouinard, I have a question about how to measure official languages progress in an organization like the Canadian Armed Forces. What indicators should we look at to see whether changes have actually made a difference for members?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Do you mean individually?

Viviane Lapointe: Yes, but I'm also talking about the system.

Stéphanie Chouinard: In terms of the individual impact, I'm not qualified to answer your question. I'm not a linguist. I'm a political science professor.

At the system level, we obviously need to look at the percentage of members who meet the requirements, according to their personnel file, checking whether they have their BBB or CBC proficiency. That information is in their personnel file.

In addition, when we survey members of the armed forces, questions include whether they feel comfortable speaking in the official language of their choice in their day-to-day interactions with superiors—that's an extremely important component—or when they need certain services. As Ms. Le Scelleur clearly showed, that is quite the challenge.

It's also important to think about how all those issues affect a person's mental health. Something that tends to get overlooked but also factors into the official languages equation are the families that go with members on postings. They sometimes find themselves in a minority language context. The member's spouse may not speak the other official language, so that affects their family life, but it isn't necessarily something that's talked about.

A myriad of factors can be examined to ascertain whether things are really improving, but the questions have to be put to members themselves.

● (1725)

Viviane Lapointe: Mr. Sauvé, in terms of ensuring that supports for francophones are consistently implemented across all units, what factors would make the biggest difference? Where are the biggest gaps at the practical level?

Eric Sauvé: As I said at the outset, training is important.

If you give me a program like Excel and expect me to be able to use its 300 functions but you don't train me, I'll make very basic use of it or avoid using it whenever I can.

The same goes for a weapon and an official language. You have to give people the opportunity to become proficient and the confidence to use those skills. Confidence matters.

If all we do is say that things have to change and impose quotas without giving people training, there's no point.

I want to comment on something Ms. Le Scelleur explained. It's hard to complain in the armed forces. It's hard to question things. Something funny I used to say was that trying to understand was like being disobedient. When that's the mentality, imagine what it's like if you ask for things. When you're in training, whatever it may be, but especially basic training, the last thing you want is to stand out. You have to stay anonymous. You have to keep your head down. You don't want people to know your name. Because of that mentality, people don't tend to complain.

However, to really understand where things are and determine whether something is making a difference, you need what I call a 360° review. In other words, you can't just ask those in leadership where things stand. You also have to ask those at the lowest level.

The organizational climate is a command responsibility. You have to be able to tell the commander that even if they think their unit is bilingual, the results on the ground show otherwise.

Checking boxes and filling in forms is well and good, but if members were actually interviewed and asked whether they felt comfortable speaking in their second language, they would probably say no. Those same members, however, might say yes on a paper form, precisely because they could be perceived as challenging the system. It's not easy in the forces to question the system.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next we have Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I have a question for those who've served in the military.

I don't remember the term you used earlier Mr. Sauvé, whether it was “hierarchy”, but there's a very hierarchical culture within the armed forces.

Does it discourage members from filing complaints? Does it scare people who feel their rights are being violated? Obviously, we're talking more specifically about language rights here.

Eric Sauvé: Hierarchy is obviously extremely important in the Canadian Armed Forces. There's a commander who makes decisions, so a single person who gives the orders. That said, the flip side is that the hierarchy is very weighty. People at the bottom aren't necessarily listened to, precisely because they're at the bottom of the hierarchy.

You're talking about people feeling wronged. Training is extremely important. People want to complete their course and get back to their unit. There's nothing worse than going to take a course, even if it's not an important one, and coming back to the unit having failed that course. We're going to do everything we can to succeed, which means we spend evenings reviewing the English terms we didn't understand. That's what it means. Generally speaking, the last thing we do is question the system, because that'll make us stand out and it'll cause issues with the staff.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I don't know if any of your colleagues want to weigh in.

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: May I add something?

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Yes, go ahead.

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: You're right. The Canadian Armed Forces is a hierarchical organization, and for good reason.

It's also a matter of leadership. It's not because there's a hierarchy that no one's listening. I think in any hierarchy, good leaders are the ones who listen, and I'm not just talking about listening to their direct subordinates. Often, they'll go in the field to see their troops, talk to them individually, ask how things are, if anything is going on, if everything is going well. It's a matter of leadership.

I'd also like to add to the comments some of my colleagues made, particularly around indicators. I think there's also the issue of course availability, which both Ms. Le Scelleur and Professor Chouinard talked about, and opportunities to practise the second language.

I often refer to the Canadian Forces as a social experiment, and the government often uses them as such. I think if there were more exchanges, more anglophones would be able to serve in Quebec and more Quebeckers would be able to serve outside Quebec. I think some units do that. I know the armoured corps is trying hard to do that. We had a lot of anglophones who did very well in Valcartier and the regiment. They came for a few years and, when they left, they were bilingual. I think we should do more of that.

However, it's often difficult to convince people, because they have to move to another place with their families. It's hard to do even when you're going somewhere people speak your language. When you ask a family to move to a place where they speak another language, it's very difficult.

• (1730)

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: I'd like to add something, if I can.

When I did my career training in my second language, I told myself I couldn't let things go this way. I went to the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman to file a complaint so that things would change, and things were done. At the time, Ryerson University, which had the language training contract, was given a trial period to offer a bilingual program. It was unable to do, so it lost the contract and the government moved on to another option.

So, yes, there are potential solutions. I think people may not use this tool enough in contexts like these.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Gallant, it's over to you.

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Ms. Le Scelleur.

You were a witness when this committee studied Bill C-11 last year. Tomorrow, the bill will be moving to report stage in the House, where the government has removed several amendments from witnesses with a Speaker's ruling.

Given your experience, which you mentioned in your testimony today, if all these amendments that were removed thus far go forth, do you still believe that Bill C-11, in its form without the recommendations, looks to be flawed, given what you told us here today?

Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: There's a point of order by Ms. Romanado.

Sherry Romanado: Chair, we're doing a study on francophone and indigenous members of the Canadian Armed Forces, so the relevance of the question from the member opposite is not related to this study. Given the importance of the experience of members of the Canadian Armed Forces, francophone and indigenous, I think we should stick to the topic before us.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Romanado.

Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): I believe, though, that during opening statements, Ms. Le Scelleur said that in her experience, after her trauma in the CAF for PTSD, she lacked services in French, so I think it is relevant.

The Chair: I don't believe this is a point of order. If it's relevant, it's been brought forward.

Is there any further debate on this issue?

Let's try to keep to the point at hand. Thank you.

We'll go back to Ms. Gallant.

Cheryl Gallant: Ms. Le Scelleur, based on your experiences that you had with PTSD and being denied treatment in French for your trauma, as this bill changed, do you feel that the changes that were taken out, based on the recommendations, would in any way impact the treatment you should have received?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: I will be really honest. I haven't read the new proposition that has been made, so it would be really hard for me to express what I think about it. I still believe we should have a choice. It's exactly what I was saying. When we're talking about accessing services for mental health, it should always be a choice of the member to have the service in French, if it's desired, or if it's okay, to be in English, but not to impose a service in a second language if the person is not capable to do so.

● (1735)

Cheryl Gallant: You mentioned having a choice. If this bill were to go forth, it would go to the civilian system and there may be language impediments. There may not be interpretation necessarily or it may be delayed. We have Jordan's Principle, which could deny victims the chance to have their case in court at all.

With that in mind, do you believe we should keep the amendments, because they're still there right now, giving victims the choice on whether or not they want to go through the civilian or military system?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: The choice is important, because as a member of a first nation, for example, I need to recognize my culture. The military culture is really unique. Going into the civilian world, my fear is that at some point there's going to be a lack of understanding of this culture to really grasp the experience a person went through. For me, choice also means respecting the culture the person comes from. The francophone and anglophone cultures are also different.

Cheryl Gallant: When you were in Afghanistan, were there any other issues besides the trauma where you found it difficult to be deployed and to not have everyone speak your official language—or everyone who should have?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: I'm lucky, because I was able to receive the training and develop my capacity in my second language, so I did not necessarily face any problem when I was in Afghanistan. I think I was well prepared. It was mostly my subordinates who suffered from that lack of training or that lack of practice. They were in Valcartier, Quebec, so they were mostly always speaking in French. When you're starting an operation where everything is done in English and you're not practising, it's really hard. I saw them struggling with that at some moments.

Cheryl Gallant: When you first reported the incident that brought you through the trauma, did you have the opportunity to report it in your first language?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: As I said when I testified previously, I did not report the sexual misconduct. It was a choice to not report, because it was a person directly commanding my chain of command. It was a brigade commander, so for me, it wasn't possible to make this report.

My trauma is related not to military sexual trauma. It's related to the fact that my vehicle exploded on an IED in Afghanistan, which is different.

Cheryl Gallant: Were you able to talk with anybody with you at that time in your first language?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: Yes. My unit was mostly francophone. My boss, who was a physician, was a francophone too.

Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Malette, it's over to you for five minutes.

Chris Malette (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Unlike my colleague, who was fortunate to learn French at an early age, I did not have that, despite the fact that my French Canadian father was very much fluent. It was his first language. My Polish mother had other ideas, so I'm unilingual. I'm getting there. This time next year, I will be conversing in French.

As I frequently mention here, I'm proudly representative of the Bay of Quinte riding, which houses 8 Wing CFB Trenton. I know from conversations and observations—I've spent almost 40 years in that area—that it's a largely Anglo area, as are probably two-thirds or better of our bases. I do see a lot of largely unilingual CAF members and their families quite often struggling to communicate and assimilate into the communities in these areas.

Professor Chouinard, and I guess perhaps Monsieur Sauvé, what would you suggest we could do to better help in this transition and to better support francophone CAF members and their families, whether on base or not?

● (1740)

Stéphanie Chouinard: I think one of the main things is to make sure that the families who are moving in those circumstances with the member have access to all the services they need and to the family services the CAF provides in the language of their choice. That includes information about things the family will need that the CAF does not provide, for example, schooling, which comes pretty much first in line when you are moving your family and you have kids. Where is the closest French school to the base? Virtually all of them, except for Gander, I think, have French elementary and secondary schools nearby.

Obviously, that's not the responsibility of the CAF, but having that information available for the families would be tremendously helpful. Fostering those community ties with people who are in similar circumstances I think would be helpful as well.

Chris Malette: Monsieur Sauvé, do you have any observations?

[*Translation*]

Eric Sauvé: Thank you for your question regarding families. In the military, a family's a team. My wife didn't choose me because I was in the military; she chose me, and I was in the military. She had to live with the consequences of that.

I was deployed to Afghanistan for nine months while she was home pregnant raising a three-year-old and a one-year-old, and that winter, in Quebec City, they got 4.5 metres of snow. It was a lot harder for her than for me during those nine months. Then we were transferred to Ottawa and Washington. My wife had to learn English and find jobs working in English. My children had to learn English. Also, one of the reasons I left the forces was that I had four children, and travel and transfers were getting hard on them.

The least we can do is offer families services in their language. That means going through family centres, which are a very good initiative. As Ms. Chouinard said, you have to tell them where these services are.

According to some of the testimony I've heard, some families have trouble adapting. I saw it in Valcartier where anglophone families who were moving to Shannon or Valcartier were having a hard time. As a supervisor, when a subordinate was having problems at home, I felt it, and I had to help. If we can't help when it's the family having issues, then it might be better to send them somewhere else. Families are really a team, and we have to help them. We need spouses. To a certain extent, we also need to help the children go through that. For many families, and I went through this, when kids are 9 years old or 10 years old, they don't want to leave their friends, they don't want to have to build a new life, they don't necessarily want to have to study in another language. These people leave, and that has an impact on the effectiveness of the military.

Chris Malette: Thank you.

[*English*]

I'm going to pass the remainder of my time to the thoroughly bilingual Mr. Watchorn.

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn: Thank you, Mr. Malette.

I have a question for everyone.

We're talking about culture change. Since the beginning of this Parliament, about 11 months ago, the committee has been talking about culture change. Right now, we have a chief of staff, General Carignan, who's a francophone woman. Do you think this will have a positive influence and help advance culture change?

Let's start with you, Professor Chouinard.

Stéphanie Chouinard: As Mr. Sauvé said, the example has to come from the top, but as was also said, it doesn't have to come from a francophone. When it comes to bilingualism, when the example comes from anglophones, the impact is often stronger.

Let me give you an example. Jeremy Hansen, who just went to space, is an alumnus of the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees. We'll take advantage of that while we can. His demonstration of bilingualism was a huge gift, and it started from his training as an officer cadet at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston.

Having examples like Ms. Carignan is absolutely important, but it's also important to have examples of anglophones who make it a point to speak French in public, even though their level of French won't open the door to the Académie française. It's important that they show why it's a matter of leadership and respect and why it's important for them, but also for the model they represent, to speak the other official language. I think that's fundamental. It starts at the top and then works its way down, but the rest of the hierarchy has to follow.

● (1745)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC): Thank you.

Mr. Maisonneuve, you spoke kindly about people who do what I'm doing, but forgive me, I'm going to speak to you in English today.

I also want to say that I will be studying in Quebec this summer for two weeks.

Now I will continue in English.

[*English*]

I had the pleasure of meeting you in Hamilton at the CPCOE symposium.

I agree with you that bilingualism is an important factor of leadership. I agree that this should apply to all rank levels.

You mentioned this, but do you feel every rank level should be bilingual immediately or at some point in the training process? I know we explored this a bit earlier.

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: I just want to reiterate that I think at the officer level it ought to start right at the beginning. Every officer should start learning his or her second language right from the get-go. Obviously, the higher you go in rank, the more bilingualism, I think, is required. From the NCO, non-commissioned personnel point of view, as I said, I think most personnel will serve in a unit of their own language at the beginning of their career. As I think Professor Chouinard said, if you're going to be serving outside, and if you wish at some point to leave and to go on different missions, or to off teaching in a different place in Canada, you need to start early to learn your second language.

I really think this is a question of attitude. Coming back to the previous speaker and the question that was asked by Mr. Watchorn, I've sadly seen many times in Ottawa, at sometimes very senior meetings of all deputy ministers, etc., where a speaker will stand up and speak strictly in English. I find that so disrespectful. As you said very well, a couple of words in French make all the difference. The issue is acknowledging that this country is bilingual, that there are two official languages, and those languages are French and English. Even in Calgary when a senior person is talking, they often say a few words in French. That's why we have bilingual officers in the forces.

Jeff Kibble: I'm going to jump in. I want to talk a little bit about what you said about meritocracy within the framework of French and English, and I agree. Did you agree with the current policy in recruitment where recruits are no longer screened for language skills in either official language?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: No, I disagree. I think they ought to be screened.

Jeff Kibble: Are you aware right now that about 20% of the permanent residents are not being screened, and the majority struggle speaking either official language? In a meritocracy, maybe you could speak to the impact this would have on capacity, respect and on the institution. You said it was very important within the framework of French and English. Would you agree also it's not just both languages, but any language?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: I think if you're going to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces you ought to speak French or English. Certainly I think that's something that needs to happen. Again, the whole permanent resident thing is just an effort to widen the pool. To me, the reason why recruitment has not worked—we could get into it if you want—is more of a question of our country promoting service to country, the honour of serving; our country making an effort to bring people in and then talking about serving, and the importance of having the Maple Leaf flag on their shoulder. It starts there, and it has to start right at the top.

I've also heard something recently that we still have a problem with the capacity of getting people through the training system. Of course—

● (1750)

Jeff Kibble: I just want to quickly get to Madam Le Scelleur.

Yes, you're right about getting personnel through. In recruiting they've announced wonderful numbers, but those are only for the people entering the system, and about 25% of them are being lost through training issues through the system, so there's a big challenge there.

Madam Le Scelleur, I would like to thank you for sharing your story. Very quickly, on the support that you received while you were in the military, not just in theatre, could you make a quick comment on whether you got the services in English and French as you preferred? Also, is that continuing now that you are with Veterans Affairs? I'm aware you're now a veteran. Are you able to access services in your preferred language through their process?

Thank you for your service and your answer. I think I'm out of time after that.

[*Translation*]

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

In the military, the time I was in Valcartier, service was available in French. The minute I transferred to Ottawa, that was different. Not everyone was bilingual there. There was a sign for bilingualism on the counter, but they had to go and search for the only person in the office who could talk in French. If the person was not there that day, then you would have to speak in English.

As for Veteran Affairs Canada, when you're calling a case manager who is no longer your case manager because you're on deck, for example, the person who will respond to you is supposed to be bilingual. Normally, I'm able to receive what I need in French; if not, I will do it in English. We know that all services are not available for people in their first language. Most resources are for anglophones, but, as I said, for an anglophone family or person who is living in Quebec City, for example, they might struggle the same way as a francophone will struggle in an English area.

Yes, for sure, it's supposed to be bilingual. It is on paper, but not in reality.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado, you have the floor.

Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses who are here today.

As a member of a military family—I have two sons and a daughter-in-law, all francophones, currently serving in the Canadian Armed Forces—I know exactly how hard it is to obtain services in both official languages on military bases.

When my children went to the Royal Military College Saint-Jean, they spent half the month studying in English and the other half in French. So they had the opportunity to learn both official languages with the other officer cadets.

Ms. Chouinard, are courses at the Royal Military College Saint-Jean offered in both official languages or only in English?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Are you talking about the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston?

Sherry Romanado: Yes, I'm sorry.

Stéphanie Chouinard: Under the Official Languages Act, in theory, all programs must be offered in both languages. Unfortunately, what we've seen, particularly since the Royal Military College Saint-Jean opened, is a dwindling number of francophone students. It's becoming increasingly difficult to offer education of equal quality in both official languages, as there are far fewer elective courses available. Sometimes, we can't even offer the required courses because the numbers aren't high enough for us to be able to offer those courses every year. I can't speak for all faculties, but in political science, we need at least three officer cadets to give a course. That's not that hard to do.

So, if we look at the total figures, we see fewer and fewer francophones are studying at RMC in Kingston since RMC Saint-Jean opened, because a number of francophones have decided to enrol in programs offered in Saint-Jean rather than Kingston. Unfortunately, bilingualism in Kingston is de facto declining as a result. I'm just talking about the educational component here. First, it's because it's becoming increasingly difficult to offer the same range of courses and programs of equal quality in both official languages. However, it's also because there isn't a sufficient demographic pool of francophones at RMC Kingston and in the city of Kingston. That is a designated region under Ontario's French Language Services Act. I recognize that there is a francophone community in Kingston. However, the fact remains that if we don't have a strong francophone demographic pool at RMC Kingston, bilingualism as it's experienced outside the classroom and second-language courses, is going to take a hit.

● (1755)

Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sauvé, you talked a bit about the impact on military families. I co-chair Seamless Canada, which brings together the federal, provincial and territorial governments to discuss the challenges that military families face, including during transfers. We're in the transfer season now. Sometimes a family member can't find a job because the province doesn't recognize their licence or diploma. It can also be difficult to find child care services, a family doctor, and so on. We're in discussions with our provincial counterparts to find ways to remove these barriers, but there's also an official language barrier. I spoke with a francophone family in Alberta who even had trouble finding things in French in the stores.

Families live in communities, but they're not always on a military base. Based on your experience, what can we do better to help them?

Eric Sauvé: As I mentioned earlier, the family really must be treated like a team. As members of the military, when we're transferred, we have access to a team, which is the base, or the unit. We have clerks and people who help us. Spouses and children don't have access to that. Finding a job in your second language, finding a family doctor and finding courses for young people is an extremely arduous process for the family when they have to start all over again every two or three years.

Spouses are often understanding, and so are children up to a certain age, but they need help. They have to receive services equivalent to what the member receives. When the member arrives at the unit, there is someone who helps them fill out the paperwork, and so on. However, oftentimes, someone gets left behind. They also have to find friends and support in their community. Ultimately, they have to build a new network. It's not always easy. Sometimes things go very well, sometimes not. When things don't go as well, that has a real impact on the operational effectiveness of the member and their unit.

Sherry Romanado: In a way, it's a matter of retention. After five or six postings, the family starts to get fed up with military life.

Eric Sauvé: Absolutely.

I was posted to Valcartier, Ottawa and Washington, going back and forth a bit. However, friends tell me they've had five postings in six years. They had to find a house and take care of everything that entails.

When I was transferred out of the country to Washington, I practically didn't work for six months, because I spent my time filling out paperwork and doing everything. It really takes support, and we have to offer it to the family as well. The family is as important as the member of the forces.

Sherry Romanado: I totally agree.

Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: No, that's it, Mrs. Romanado.

Thank you, Mr. Sauvé and Ms. Chouinard.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor for three minutes.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Chouinard, I know you had to leave at this time. Are you available to answer one question?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Yes.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Perfect.

You testified in 2018 before a Senate committee to which you made two recommendations: Review the mandate of the Commissioner of Official Languages and establish an administrative tribunal to hear cases involving alleged non-compliance with the Official Languages Act. The Official Languages Act has since been modernized.

Do those recommendations still suffice today?

Stéphanie Chouinard: There were two possible paths to modernizing the Official Languages Act with respect to the commissioner's mandate: Either give it more teeth or establish an administrative tribunal that would handle certain things such as monetary penalties. Parliament chose to grant those powers to the commissioner, and the regulatory process is under way. In both cases, I believe that work has been done. Now, the big part of it is the implementation. We have our feet firmly in it right now.

● (1800)

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: So I imagine it's too early to assess the benefits, whether in general or in the Armed Forces, of course, which is the case before us today.

Stéphanie Chouinard: Absolutely. It's too early to say what impact the latest version of the act will have on the new commissioner's mandate, since the regulatory process is still under way and has not been completed.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: You said that there were two possible paths. Even if the proof is in the pudding, can we say that it was the right thing to do?

Stéphanie Chouinard: Personally, I would have liked to see an administrative tribunal established to deal with delinquents who are the subject of repeated complaints, that is to say the Air Canadas of this world, not to mention any names. However, the other option also made sense. Now, as you said, we'll have to see what happens on the ground once the system has been implemented and fine-tuned.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: A tribunal would essentially be used to receive complaints and then rule on them.

I'd like to take this opportunity to make a connection with a question I previously asked those who have served: Does the hierarchy culture create a kind of fear of going to that option?

Stéphanie Chouinard: I'm not sure I understand the question. I apologize.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Does the hierarchy culture intimidate people and discourage them from filing complaints?

I understand that this must not be the case in a number of circumstances. In the case of military culture, which is very particular and very unique in itself, the idea of establishing a tribunal might look good on paper, but the tribunal could be inaccessible, at least in the eyes of many members of the forces.

Stéphanie Chouinard: The way it was interpreted in 2018, the tribunal would really have been used to deal with problem and systemic cases. It wasn't going to be one person versus another, but rather versus the system in a broader sense.

When we talk about official language complaints in the Canadian Armed Forces, much like other types of complaints, one issue is that it's a small community. Even if the process is anonymous, it's possible to identify the individual who filed the complaint. At that point, it may be seen as insubordination and there would be reprisals. As Mr. Sauvé said, it can be quite an issue when you're moving up the ladder in your career. You don't want to look like the troublemaker or the killjoy. It discourages the person who is in the forces and would like to file a complaint because they have not had access to the services to which they are entitled.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savard-Tremblay and Ms. Chouinard.

[*English*]

We'll go over to Mr. Bezan for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

James Bezan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for their participation and their service to Canada.

[*English*]

I want to start my questions by following up on the questions Ms. Gallant asked Madam Le Scelleur.

You mentioned how you were denied service in French when you came back and sought treatment for PTSD. When we look at the problems with Bill C-11, if there is a charge that happens in Canada—if you were on exercises and training in western Canada, say, out in Wainwright and the charges are laid there—Bill C-11's original intent before the amendments came in, which we will start debating tomorrow in the House, said you would be put in the civilian courts in Alberta, which may not provide you with services in French.

Do you see that as problematic? Is that one of the reasons that we need to have a choice in determining which system best suits your personal needs in dealing with military sexual misconduct?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: I totally agree that we should have the choice. As I said before, when we're talking about really specific things related to trauma or sensitive issues, I don't think I would be doing it in my second language, because when you're vulnerable, you don't have access to all of the vocabulary you would normally have.

I would rather have the option of choosing the military way to make sure that I am going to have services in French, instead of the example you provided of staying in Alberta and having my case dealt with there when I'm from Quebec.

● (1805)

James Bezan: Within the military justice system, you would be given the option of whether or not you have access to both the judge advocate general's office and your victim liaison officer. You would be able to choose someone who is proficient in French to ensure that you get the best representation possible.

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: Again, on paper, we're saying all services are bilingual. I guess I would receive some service in French, but is that really the case? I'm not sure.

Again, can we think about an option in Alberta where I would receive service in French? Is that something that is going to be offered to the person? I'm not sure. For one, is it available? It's a problem, for sure.

James Bezan: It is for sure, and I appreciate that. I appreciate your testimony today and what you did for Bill C-11 in bringing your experiences forward.

Let's talk a bit about functionality. This question will be for you, Lieutenant-General Maisonneuve, because I believe you've had a chance to look at the new Canadian Army restructuring proposed by Lieutenant-General Michael Wright in “Inflection Point 2025”.

They are going to be talking about a restructuring and reorganization of divisions. The reserve units, in particular, are all going to be under one division and function as a Canadian land force. We have the more expeditionary forces in a secondary division, which will include groups like the Van Doos as a brigade being added into the overall structure, along with the PPCLI and the Royal Canadian Regiment, the RCRs.

How is that going to impact operationality? How will that impact the francophone soldiers who are serving in those units?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: I believe it can work.

First of all, let's look at the regular force. In the regular force, there are three brigades currently: in Valcartier, in Petawawa and in Edmonton. The one in Valcartier is the francophone brigade. Obviously, it will remain francophone, but the point is that one commander will command all three brigades and that commander will need to have staff who are able to work in French and English. Everything will have to be bilingual to ensure that both the English brigades and the francophone brigades get their orders in their language.

As far as the reserves go, I would say that's a bit more difficult. As Hélène said, there is a difference between francophone soldiers and anglophone soldiers. I've commanded both. We could talk about what those differences are, but it has to be recognized that there are differences.

In the reserves, they also have a huge cultural identity. The reserves in Quebec do their own thing, and the reserves outside.... I would say the reserves are probably the groups that are more culturally identifiable by province. We're talking about, I think, 12 or 13 reserve brigades across the country. All of those are going to come under one division commander, who I believe will be in Montreal. He or she is going to have a heck of a challenge commanding all of those reserve brigades.

Again, because the division will command francophone and anglophone brigades and units, everything will have to be produced bilingually, certainly at that level, to get it down to the brigade, which will then, if it's a francophone brigade, pass on orders in that language. It's going to have an impact and it will be something that has to be recognized immediately to ensure that the staff at the division level are able to work in either language.

James Bezan: You would suggest, then, that we'd be moving more towards a bilingual service, especially at the leadership level and the non-commissioned officer level. With the way things are getting restructured, they will really need to be proficient in both official languages to ensure that we have that consistent delivery of service across the armed forces—or do we look at what they do in the navy?

The HMCS *Ville de Québec* is a fully francophone frigate. We know the HMCS *Montréal* is supposed to be bilingual, and the rest of them are mainly anglophone. I guess the air force tends to be more bilingual than any of the other ones.

Do you have any comments on that? Are we looking at three new services?

● (1810)

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: My sense is, actually.... First of all, I think at the division level, there will need to be the ability in both languages—bilingual, no question—so that they can serve the brigades at the lower level in their language.

You say the navy has a francophone ship. My experience with the navy is that it's the furthest behind as far as bilingualism goes. I would say the air force is also probably quite a way behind, but you'd have to ask the commander of the air force and the commander of the navy those questions. I have knowledge because I have a boy serving in the navy.

It's going to be important to ensure, certainly at the divisional level, that those folks are bilingual.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's it. It's been over eight minutes already.

[*English*]

You went over by quite a bit, but I allowed it to have a great and vibrant discussion.

Mr. Watchorn, it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn: Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

I want to swing back to culture change.

We talked about General Carignan. Last week, we met with official languages co-champions, including Major-General Martin Gros-Jean. He and Geneviève Binet, who is the assistant deputy minister of public affairs, were specifically assigned to effect culture change in the area of official languages.

Mr. Sauvé, if you had to guide these two co-champions, what would be the first recommendations you would give them to bring about this culture change?

Eric Sauvé: I know Major-General Gros-Jean very well. He's a friend of mine. I can't see myself guiding him at all, because he's very competent.

That said, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, the organizational culture is very deeply rooted. Culture is like an iceberg: There's what you see and there's what you can't see underneath. It takes a long time to change.

What's unique about the military realm is that things often change much more quickly than in other realms. For example, when we allow long hair, blue hair or painted nails, some people don't like it, but they follow orders. This is an example of a culture that is changing very quickly.

Again, there are struggles or friction underneath, but in our military culture, which I was part of for a long time, there's a culture of following orders and whatever comes from on high. As I mentioned, when you ask for quotas or bilingualism ratings, among other things, things change, and the culture follows afterwards. It's not the other way around. You can't change the culture first; that takes too long. You have to change the requests that come from above, and then the culture will follow suit.

I witnessed it, because I did serve in the forces for 22 years. I've seen the culture change. In particular, there is more openness towards the people we command. Culture takes time to change, but we need leaders to lead by example.

I'd like to mention one thing with regard to General Carignan. They said she is a francophone woman, but they forgot to mention her career as a combat engineer and the fact that she's also the mother of four children. She's very qualified for her position.

I have an Australian friend at home who is a lieutenant-colonel. In Australia, a woman is commander of the army. She's fully qualified for her position.

It's important to have examples like that of people who have earned their position and who have a different take on leadership.

Tim Watchorn: Ms. Le Scelleur, what would you recommend to the co-champions?

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: At this point, I think it's a question of accountability. New directives are being issued, but to what extent are they going to be checked to see if they are being followed and what impact they have? In my opinion, clearly, conducting analyses and requesting that data be released every year on the career trajectory of francophones and anglophones could be the first thing to do to assess where we stand each year.

● (1815)

Tim Watchorn: Mr. Maisonneuve, I'll ask you the same question.

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: The instruction I would give would be to give a kick in the rear end.

Voices: Oh, oh!

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: You have to do it radically. I think it was Napoleon who said that one person needs to be imprisoned to set an example for others.

You have to be tough at first. I think Mr. Sauvé is absolutely right that the beauty of the Canadian Forces is that you can impose something on them and they're going to implement it right away, and then their culture is going to change. Sometimes, too, it's unfortunate that people use them to set an example or as guinea pigs.

In short, I think we need to be radical. The government needs to walk the talk. Oftentimes, that doesn't happen in the Canadian Forces. As Ms. Le Scelleur and Ms. Chouinard said a number of times earlier, people say things are like that, but they're not really like that. I think we need to kick people in the rear end. That's what needs to be done.

Tim Watchorn: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Bezan, it's back to you.

James Bezan: Actually, Cheryl's going to go first.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Ms. Gallant.

James Bezan: We're going to do one question each. It's rapid-fire.

Cheryl Gallant: I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Anderson.

This is for retired lieutenant-general Michel Maisonneuve. How necessary is it, if at all, that the Canadian Rangers leaders be functional in both of our official languages?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: That is an interesting question. I believe it depends on what group they're leading. Obviously, I would say in these cases that having some knowledge of a first nations language would be useful as well.

It comes down to a question of leadership. Let's say it's the rangers in Quebec. A lot of them are anglophone. Some of them are francophone. Obviously, they all speak their own first nations language. It behooves the leader there to have the ability to communicate with his or her subordinates.

If you take it from just that point of view, it's not a question that you would even be asking. Do you know what I'm saying? It's a leadership question. It's a respect question. It's exactly what Professor Chouinard said at the beginning, and what I tried to say as well.

Cheryl Gallant: I'll give the floor to Scott.

Scott Anderson: Thank you very much.

General, I have another question for you.

During the Afghan deployment, about a quarter of the people who went over were actually reserves, including junior and senior officers. What's your prescription for the reserves, given that in a kinetic situation they are quite likely to supplement and be integrated into the force structure that's being projected.

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: If you have a couple of hours, I'll talk to you about the reserves.

The first thing I would tell you is that I think the reserves are absolutely essential to our country. I believe we are not putting enough emphasis on the reserves. I believe the problem with the reserves is the regular force, which doesn't respect the reserves as much as they should.

I have lots of prescriptions that I could provide to you, but one of the things, for example.... I know there's lots of good work being done by the commander of the army and his staff to kind of restructure right now, but I think the reserves are very successful when they're given the proper support by the regular force. I'll just leave it there.

For example, in terms of numbers of regular force serving among the reserves and integration and respect by the regular force of the reserves, let's face it. In World War II and Korea, the people who went over were reservists. They were not the permanent force. They saved our bacon, so we should understand that and give them the support they need.

Scott Anderson: Thank you very much, sir.

I'm going to pass the rest of my time to my colleague, Jeff Kibble.

Jeff Kibble: Mr. Sauvé, in your statement earlier, you said that approximately 40% and possibly as high as 90% of CF members are seeking mental health support. Are you aware that recruits now are no longer screened for mental health? What impact do you think this will have on training going forward?

[*Translation*]

Eric Sauvé: The figures I mentioned come from me. They aren't empirical; they're anecdotal.

However, having experienced this myself, I know that anxiety and depression are not permanent states, in my view. Just because a recruit is anxious doesn't mean they won't do their job properly. It's something that can be treated; we know that very well. During a difficult time in my own life, I didn't think I was going to make it, and I can tell you that I may actually be better today than I was before.

[*English*]

Jeff Kibble: Thank you.

General Maisonneuve, could you comment on the impact as well? I appreciate that this can certainly be treated, but we're sending people into recruit school who don't have mental health training. What is the impact, in your opinion? In that statement about meritocracy—

● (1820)

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: If you're saying that people are not being screened at all for mental abilities, I think that's an issue. Obviously, there's just a milieu here. You need to make sure that the people who are coming in meet the basic standard. The basic standard should include being able to speak one of our two official languages and having the mental capacity that will allow them to progress. Otherwise, you're wasting time. You're wasting the recruiter's time and the training time.

Jeff Kibble: I'm going to jump in because Mr. Bezan has a question, but thank you for your comments.

James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Kibble.

Witnesses, this is a study and we are going to be writing a report, so I will ask each of you to please make one recommendation that you want to see in the report.

We'll start here in the room with Mr. Sauvé. Then we'll go to the two online.

[*Translation*]

Eric Sauvé: As Mr. Maisonneuve said, regulations and quotas have to be imposed, and training must then be provided. It's not enough to ask people to be bilingual or to speak both official languages well. We need to provide them with training, and we need to start as early as possible. Mr. Maisonneuve mentioned that this should be done as soon as a person assumes a leadership position. Accordingly, this should begin at the outset for officers, and perhaps also for master corporals and sergeants. We ask a great deal of leaders, and it's normal that we do so. We ask them to be pillars within various training programs, and we also ask them to be pillars of bilingualism. As a result, the example must begin as early as possible.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's over our time. I did want to allow Ms. Romanado....

You're over time, but I want to provide Mr. Savard-Tremblay with the last word. We'll give the other witnesses the opportunity to respond to that question, and Mr. Savard-Tremblay will wrap it up.

James Bezan: Do you mean on the recommendations?

The Chair: Yes, it's the recommendations.

Proceed.

[*Translation*]

James Bezan: Lieutenant-General Maisonneuve, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: I think it's to make it an integral part of the leadership. If you do that, I think you're going to have no problems. You're going to have people who get into it and have the right attitude about getting in there.

The Chair: Ms. Le Scelleur, we'll go over to you.

Capt (Ret'd) Hélène Le Scelleur: For me, it's about equity. Chances should be the same for anglophones and francophones—promotions, access to training and health services. It should be all about equity.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, we'll go over to you.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In fact, I will have just one question, which will be quite brief. Well, the question will be, but as for the answer, that will depend.

Mr. Maisonneuve, there are destinations around the world where fluency in French is an operational asset. We can think of Haiti, Mali, Niger or Congo, for example.

Do you think this is an asset that is being used appropriately?

LGen (Ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve: In fact, if everything were going very well and everyone was bilingual, that would be very useful. I'm not just talking about serving in Haiti, where the languages are French and Creole. I'm talking about any operational position in any country.

Often, we will encounter someone who speaks either English or French as a second language. Often, knowing a Romance language or a Germanic language also helps you learn and gain some understanding of the language of the country where you are serving.

That's why I say that being bilingual is an operational asset.

The Chair: I want to thank you all for your service to Canada, as well as for strengthening the value of Canada's two official languages. That's very good.

[*English*]

Sherry Romanado: You did a good job.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Portuguese would be better. I don't speak French.

[*English*]

We are going to wrap up our meeting with the concurrence of the members. If there's nothing more, I'll adjourn.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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