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Chair: Yvan Baker



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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number 18 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 23, 2025, we are meeting today to conclude our study on the use of French in government communications and federal institutions.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

We first welcome the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages.

Welcome, Minister.

Second, from the Department of Canadian Heritage, we welcome Francis Bilodeau, deputy minister; Julie Boyer, assistant deputy minister, official languages, heritage and regions; and Sarah Boily, director general, official languages.

Minister, you have five minutes to give your opening statement. Then, there will be a question and answer period with members of the committee.

The floor is yours, Minister.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, committee members.

[*English*]

Good afternoon.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that the land we're on is the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*Translation*]

I'm happy to be here. I have known some of you for a very long time. This is my first appearance in my fairly new role as Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, and I presume it will not be the last. Thank you for having me.

Culture is a pillar of our shared identity, a source of pride and a key driver of our economy. In a world undergoing profound change, it is more important than ever to protect and promote what

defines us as Canadians. Official languages are at the very heart of our identity. Ensuring their vitality is an integral part of a strong, united and resilient Canada.

Here in Ontario, we had an excellent example of this when we celebrated 50 years of the Franco-Ontarian flag this fall. This celebration showed us the extent to which our francophonie and our two official languages are linked to our past, our present and, obviously, our future.

In Canada, the francophonie is more than just a language. It is a history, a culture, a source of strength that makes us unique in North America. Our government knows this, and my role as minister is to promote what nurtures Canadian identity and the collective pride of Canadians.

[*English*]

In his mandate letter, the Prime Minister set out several priorities for our government to protect our sovereignty, strengthen our country on the world stage and build a Canada worthy of our children and our grandchildren. In recent months, we've shown through our actions that we take this mission seriously.

In November, we reinforced our commitment to protecting what makes Canada unique and brings Canadians together through the 2025 budget.

[*Translation*]

In November, we also introduced in Parliament draft regulations on the system of administrative monetary penalties to ensure that people travelling in Canada can receive services in English and French anywhere and at any time.

On Monday, the government tabled the certificate of nomination for the next commissioner, Kelly Burke. I had the opportunity to speak with her and I am convinced that she will be a commissioner who can meet all of the expectations of both of the official language minority communities.

Each of these measures represents another step toward true equality between our official languages, a goal that our government has been actively working toward for 10 years now. We are proud to promote bilingualism across the country.

[*English*]

Our government is committed to creating a work environment in which officials are free to choose to work in English or in French and to receive supervision in the official language of their choice.

[*Translation*]

When the federal government issues communications, we work to ensure that all Canadians are able to understand important announcements and press releases. That is why every press release is available in both official languages. The process of modernizing the official languages regime did not end when the modernized Official Languages Act received royal assent, nor will it end with the tabling of the orders in council to implement the regulations. No, it will take time to achieve the changes that we all want to see, namely the promotion of French and true equality between the two official languages.

[*English*]

Rome wasn't built in a day, nor can the change we seek to effect in this country happen overnight.

[*Translation*]

The change we are seeking to implement is a cultural change. We need to continue promoting French within our teams, in our meetings and in our interactions with the public. We also need to talk about official languages as a common asset that belongs as much to official language minority communities as it does to the entire population of Canada because by defending and promoting our languages, we are investing directly in the vitality of our communities and thus in the prosperity of our beautiful country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

We will now move on to questions and comments.

Mr. Godin, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you for being here, minister.

I want to thank the officials who are here with him.

Minister, you know that we have limited time in committee so I may have to interrupt you if I am not satisfied with your answer. I want to be upfront about that.

Just so you know, this will not be your last visit to the Standing Committee on Official Languages because during the work of the committee I proposed to the chair that we receive you for two hours. The first hour was meant to be reserved for the presentation of your mandate letter and the second hour was supposed to be devoted to today's topic. Unfortunately, there was not enough room in your schedule for you to appear for two hours, but I assure you that you will be invited again, very soon, I hope, to talk to us about your mandate letter.

As you know, minister, you are here because of a Radio-Canada article about the rather minimal use of French by your Prime Minister, which indicates to us your government's willingness to sprinkle a little French here and there to give the illusion that French, one of the two official languages, is being used fairly. That is not my interpretation.

Minister, you have been in your role since December. Can you tell me what measures have been taken by yourself or your predecessor to address the correspondence from the Privy Council? What has the Minister of Heritage, who is responsible for official languages, done to increase the use of French, both by the Prime Minister and all the federal departments and agencies?

• (1540)

Hon. Marc Miller: Mr. Godin, I would say right off the bat that whether we are ministers or ordinary members of Parliament, we all have a duty to set an example, both in the workplace and in public, in the way we express ourselves in both official languages. It is extremely important. The work I have been doing within this department for the past six weeks or so—obviously it is a rather short period of time—consists of continuing the work we have done by investing \$4 billion—

Joël Godin: Minister, I have to interrupt you, I know the whole story. I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for a long time. I know the story of the Action Plan for Official Languages. I don't want to know what has been done about that. I want to know what your government, your predecessor and you have done about the very specific case reported in the Radio-Canada article I was talking about.

Have you been informed about what has been done? Are there any indicators and new tools to avoid repeating the same thing over and over again?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think that the Prime Minister himself has publicly acknowledged that he should do better and he should set an example. It is no secret that the Prime Minister's French has improved immensely over the past year and I think it will continue to improve in the future.

Joël Godin: I understand, Minister. I am not talking about the quality of the Prime Minister's French. I am talking much more about the proportion of French he uses in his public interventions. You say that he acknowledged that he needs to do better, but let's not forget that during his pre-budget speech at the University of Ottawa, a bilingual university, the topics he addressed in French were very simplistic—I mean no disrespect—compared to the topics he addressed in English, which were much stronger, much more important for society and more focused on the economy. He made that speech in a bilingual setting where he had the opportunity to speak French.

My question is simple. What did your predecessor do? What is going to be done? What have you done? I understand that you just got here, but what are you going to put in place to require the Prime Minister and other government agencies to use French?

Minister, you said that the Prime Minister was committed to a work environment where one can use the language of their choice. In that case, his choice is English.

Did I get that right?

Hon. Marc Miller: I can't tell you what happens in cabinet but I have seen a significant improvement in his use of French. You can simply see for yourself in his statement during the Prime Time conference last Thursday where, in a largely anglophone environment, he decided to speak in French. It is significant, but there is still work to do. Of course, the evidence will follow.

Joël Godin: Minister, you are aware that one of the problems with the Official Languages Act is that it doesn't give you any tools. We're still in a grey area where it seems that nobody can take responsibility and force the machinery of government to use French more.

What can you, as the new minister responsible for official languages, do about it?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have 30 seconds.

Hon. Marc Miller: If you take a good look at the recent overhaul of the Official Languages Act, there are certain obligations that clearly apply to the public service.

Joël Godin: What will you do to enforce these obligations?

Hon. Marc Miller: You may also carefully review the regulations that have just been tabled and draw your own conclusions.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Joël Godin: Thank you. We will see again you soon.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

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

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

Minister, thank you for being here with us today.

My questions today will be very simple.

First, in your view, does the Prime Minister speak French?

Hon. Marc Miller: You have seen it yourself. Yes, and there has been a significant improvement since the beginning of last year. It is very promising. He is a very intelligent person. People can see that he put in great efforts to improve the quality of his French. I have witnessed this myself. I am sure that all other members have seen it as well.

• (1545)

Giovanna Mingarelli: Indeed. Thank you.

Should the Prime Minister speak more in French?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think that he has acknowledged that himself, that he should make additional efforts. The Prime Minister, like all members and all ministers, should lead by example in terms of using both official languages.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

Is it important for ministers and members to speak both official languages?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes. Building on my previous comment, I would add that it is very important for every member to make an effort.

Languages don't come easily to everybody and not everybody has had the opportunity that I've had to be raised in English and French. We can understand some members' situations. I know that, regardless of the party, many members make great efforts to take lessons in Quebec every year. I think that some of them are making great progress. They deserve credit for that. I understand that it can be challenging for an adult to learn a new language—in fact, I have done this—but we must make that effort.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Of course.

Do you think that speaking French should be a requirement for a member or a minister?

Hon. Marc Miller: I wouldn't say that it should be a legal requirement. I would like all Canadians to speak French. However, the reality is quite different. We face a challenge to always stand up and defend the French language, particularly when we are in a sea of English. The reality is that many members only speak one language. That is a fact.

Having a requirement where every member must speak both official languages would pose a major challenge across the country.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

After you were appointed Minister responsible for Official Languages, you made some comments on the debate about the French language, saying that it had become too politicized.

Could you clarify your comments please?

Hon. Marc Miller: I have noticed that—and I think this is the reality—among politicians who care about French, who speak French, who are francophones and francophiles, there is sometimes a competition to see who can best defend French. I think we can all agree that we will all defend the French language. In my case, I will do so until the end of my life. I was raised in this language and my education was entirely in French, except for law. I believe I have proven myself, but in reality, whenever someone speaks out about the reality of this politicization, they are accused of all kinds of wrongdoing.

This is unfortunate, because we fundamentally care about French precisely because it is part of our national identity.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

Just before the Christmas break, we were discussing the importance of celebrating both official languages and all the efforts our colleagues are making to learn both official languages. So, I think that's very important too.

Are you concerned about the future of French?

Hon. Marc Miller: Immensely. We are in North America, after all. English is used everywhere. The way English can creep into French usage, into everyone's daily lives, can be insidious. Obviously, Quebec is not immune to this, and I would say that franco-phone minority communities are even less so. It is difficult in these communities to spend one's entire life, or rather one's days, in French. We must therefore be extremely vigilant. I believe that the federal government has an immensely important role to play in ensuring that French continues to thrive in Quebec and outside Quebec.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much, Minister.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Chair.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

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

Minister, at the beginning of your term, you said you were tired of the debate on the decline of French, which is overly politicized. You said that, as a Quebecker, you were tired of this debate, which is generally about identity and electioneering.

How do you think people who defend French felt about that?

• (1550)

Hon. Marc Miller: Mr. Beaulieu, with all due respect, I think you are proving my point.

The reality is that French is under threat. I will defend the French language until the end of my days, as I have said many times before. I believe that people who care deeply about this beautiful official language can come together to work toward improving it in Canada and Quebec. The federal government has a role to play. It is not a role that should be abdicated to another level of government.

Mario Beaulieu: Many people look at this and consider that French is more threatened than ever in Quebec, and these are not necessarily people.... This is not a more identity-based point of view than that of those who have been saying for years that everything is fine and that there is no problem.

Hon. Marc Miller: I'm not saying everything is fine. I'm definitely not saying everything is fine.

Mario Beaulieu: You said, partly in response to your critics, that you were part of a government that recognized the decline of French across Canada, including in Quebec—you just reaffirmed that—and that amended the Official Languages Act accordingly.

What has your government done? It has had this contact since 2020, and the new law came into force in 2023. Under the Official Languages Act, what has the government done for French in Quebec?

Hon. Marc Miller: First of all, we imposed more obligations on the use of French. The 2023-28 Action Plan for Official Languages includes an unprecedented \$4 billion investment. Mr. Godin mentioned that earlier. I think that's significant. As you know, in my previous role I was the Minister of Immigration. I more than doubled the number of francophone immigrants in communities outside Quebec. That's a big deal. The federal government hasn't always been very supportive. That changed 10 years ago. There's been a lot of investment and an extensive overhaul of the Official Languages Act.

These are very important measures that were put in place under our last government.

Mario Beaulieu: From the start, the Official Languages Act has focused exclusively on protecting English in Quebec. That made no sense, because at the time, Quebeckers were emerging from a period of francophone institutional underfunding, among other things. The OLA maintained the historical privileges of anglophones.

You talked about \$4.1 billion—I think you were mistaken and meant to say \$4.1 million—but nothing has changed. I analyzed the Action Plan for Official Languages and it contains nothing new for French in Quebec. Most of all the positions go to anglophone lobby groups or the anglophone education system. A very small portion has always gone to French-language instruction in the anglophone education system. However, it's quite minimal overall. The percentages haven't increased. There's nothing new for French in Quebec.

What might that represent in the context of the Official Languages Act? More could be done.

Hon. Marc Miller: You spoke about the fact that anglophone communities have privileges, but anglophones in Quebec have constitutional rights. These are not privileges. I understand that they might be perceived that way, but that's not at all the case.

I have a duty to represent official language minority communities whether they're anglophone or francophone, and I think I can do both at the same time. To answer your question directly, I think you're going to tell me that this misses the point. However, \$150 million in funding for CBC/Radio-Canada and \$150 million in funding for Telefilm Canada are not insignificant. Second-language education in Quebec receives \$30 million in funding as well.

Mario Beaulieu: Once again, you're stepping outside the context of the Official Languages Act. That's what you always do.

Hon. Marc Miller: I think we need to look at the big picture, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mario Beaulieu: We see the millions of dollars handed over every year to anglophone lobby groups who label everyone who stands up for French as xenophobes or identitarians, as you have. On the francophone side, not a penny is being spent in Quebec to help francophone organizations. That's what's really unfair.

Moreover, the language rights of anglophones have always been respected. What I mean is that anglophone elementary and secondary schools were over-funded in the beginning. That situation has been corrected. Some may argue that this is still the case, but since 1973, a change has occurred and funding has been more evenly distributed. Anglophone CEGEPs receive twice as much funding as anglophone demographics would warrant. In universities, the rate is three or four times as much. That's what I mean. Anglophone institutions are much more heavily funded.

In the rest of Canada, francophone universities are underfunded in relation to the demographic weight of anglophones. Representatives of francophone colleges who came to testify on the education continuum told us that they didn't have enough schools or that existing schools were dilapidated, among other things. There really is a double standard. In my opinion, the modernized Official Languages Act reflects a number of positions asymmetrically favourable to French in Quebec, yet nothing has changed.

• (1555)

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Minister, I would appreciate a brief response.

Hon. Marc Miller: I understand that there are no questions, but this is still a discussion, Mr. Chair.

I would note that it might be useful for you, Mr. Beaulieu, to have a breakdown of the amounts paid to francophone organizations specifically, such as—

Mario Beaulieu: Are you talking about organizations outside Quebec?

Hon. Marc Miller: No. There's the fund dedicated to Quebec's anglophone communities for French-language learning, amounting to \$6.8 million. There is also support for teaching French as a second language in Quebec. It's significant, at \$32 million. In my previous role, I allocated more than \$800 million for French-language learning for newcomers. We don't know what happened to that money, but it was specifically for French-language learning, under the Canada-Quebec Agreement on Minority-Language Education.

The Chair: We have to finish the discussion. We're well over time. I allowed a little more time for the minister to answer, but that's it.

We'll move on to the next member, who is Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Dalton, you have five minutes.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Good afternoon, minister, and congratulations on your appointment.

Some of my questions require a very brief answer. You can answer them with yes or no. After that, I will have a number of questions to ask.

Raymond Th  berge, the former commissioner of official languages, explained that the federal language regime imposes obligations on federal institutions, not on individuals. It is therefore the institutions that must ensure that their official communications, including the Prime Minister's speeches, are accessible in both official languages. As a result, the commissioner stated that the people around the Prime Minister must ensure that he communicates more effectively with Canadians in both official languages.

To your knowledge, has the Prime Minister's Office taken any steps in this direction? Yes or no?

Hon. Marc Miller: I believe so, especially since many francophone Quebecers work in his office.

Marc Dalton: Okay, I'll continue.

Despite the legislative framework, the Commissioner of Official Languages believes that it remains desirable for the Prime Minister to embody this symbol of Canadian identity and linguistic equality in the course of his daily duties.

Do you agree with the commissioner's statement?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think we should all agree on that, whether we are ministers, the Prime Minister or backbenchers.

Marc Dalton: Okay, thank you.

Nicole Gagnon, conference interpreter and spokesperson for the International Association of Conference Interpreters, Canada Re-

gion, stated that the Prime Minister's use of French was an important symbolic measure.

Do you agree with that statement?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, absolutely.

[English]

Marc Dalton: Minister, you said recently that you're sick and tired of hearing about the decline of French.

Do you think the French language is part of Canadian distinctiveness and culture?

Hon. Marc Miller: What's the question?

I'm trying to follow what the statement has to do with the question.

Marc Dalton: Do you think the French language is part of Canadian identity, distinctiveness and culture?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, absolutely.

Marc Dalton: Okay.

There's a lot of concern about a point of view that has been expressed by your government, including leaders. There were comments, for example, by Trudeau that we're in a postnational state and that we have no core identity.

Many Canadians feel that our history is not valued. There has been a rash of statues being toppled under the Liberals' watch. We can talk about the tremendous disrespect and hostility that Liberals—and you in particular, Minister—have shown to people of all faiths, denigrating their beliefs and scriptures and wanting them muzzled.

Right after you made these comments as chair, Prime Minister Carney appointed you minister and changed the ministerial title from minister of heritage and minister responsible for official languages to Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages.

Conservatives believe in Canada's history and culture. Why does the minister, and by extension the Prime Minister, seem to be so inclined to undermine the heritage, culture, faith and belief of Canadians?

• (1600)

Hon. Marc Miller: If that was a question, it was more of a veiled statement. The reality is, the bill that your Conservatives are blocking in committee, Bill C-9, aims to protect religious freedoms by protecting the institutions around them. You're blocking this.

Also, I don't think—to address your comment regarding hate speech directly—that people should hide behind scriptures to protect hate speech. That's the reality. Anyone can read the Bible, the Torah and the Quran. In fact, I encourage them to do so. I do myself.

The reality, however, just to conclude quite briefly—

[Translation]

Jo  l Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Hon. Marc Miller: This may be off topic.

[Translation]

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, it's important to remember that, according to the notice of meeting for today, we're supposed to be dealing with the use of French in the machinery of government. Right now, we're a long way from that discussion.

Can we get back to the—

[English]

Hon. Marc Miller: It's your own member.

[Translation]

The Chair: We're dealing with a point of order.

I would ask all members, when they're asking questions, to keep in mind what Mr. Godin just said, which is that we need to stick to the topic at hand.

In my opinion, the minister was responding to Mr. Dalton's question, which deals with the subject of our study.

Mr. Dalton, you have 30 seconds remaining.

Marc Dalton: You know that Mr. Carney had only two French lessons, in July and August. By September, he didn't even have a French teacher. He wasn't interested.

Do you know whether that's still the case or is he continuing with his French lessons?

The Chair: We're almost out of time. Please give a short answer.

Hon. Marc Miller: I would simply say that I can see with my own eyes that his French is improving day by day.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault for five minutes.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Minister, thank you for being here with us today.

Supporting the vitality of francophone communities contributes directly to increasing the use of French in the public sphere, especially by strengthening institutions, services and living environments where the use of French happens naturally and can continue into the future. One of the main tools we have for supporting the vitality of our communities is the action plan for official languages. As you mentioned, the action plan for official languages 2023-2028 includes a historic investment of \$4.1 billion, the biggest investment any government has ever made in official languages.

We're about three years into the implementation of this plan. I wonder if you could tell us what measures have been taken to assess the impact of the 2023-28 action plan and gauge the progress we've made toward achieving our objectives. Could you please comment on that?

Joël Godin: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Joël Godin: I have exactly the same comment as earlier.

According to the notice of meeting, the committee invited the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages to discuss the use of French in government communications and in federal institutions. Now is not the time to be talking about how the official languages action plan is going.

Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, but the question that my colleague just asked is not relevant to the study topic stated in the notice of meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, do you have a response for Mr. Godin?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Yes.

As I said in my preamble, the action plan for official languages contributes directly to the vitality of our communities. If we want French to be used in the public sphere, in services, including government services, if we want to increase the use of French and have a public service that can provide services in French, we need to support the vitality of our communities. The action plan is the federal government's main tool for supporting the vitality of our communities, so I think there's a direct link between the measures set out in our action plan for official languages and the vitality of French in Canada.

Just to clarify, I'm not using up my speaking time right now, am I? You stopped the timer? Okay, good.

The Chair: Let me remind all members that they need to stick to the study at hand.

In my opinion, what Mr. Deschênes-Thériault is talking about is related to the study, so he may continue.

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I wonder if you could tell us about the implementation of the action plan for official languages, the assessment measures and the progress made toward the objectives.

Hon. Marc Miller: Without adding to the earlier debate, I would say that it's clear that, as you know, the action plan also affects federal institutions, including in relation to the use of French. There are 19 federal partners that need to respond to and consider the 82 initiatives. Forty-nine of those initiatives are ongoing initiatives, and the rest are new.

As for assessment, we obviously can't fix and correct something we can't measure.

The Department of Canadian Heritage has taken a number of steps to assess the impact of the action plans. Consultations with public authorities and key stakeholders have just been completed as part of the midpoint review. I believe the report will be published this spring, in 2026. Furthermore, there's going to be an evaluation, by which I mean a horizontal audit, in accordance with the requirements set out in the Treasury Board policy.

In that context, we are seeing some results, including some related to funding. First of all, community organizations are getting about \$63 million to support their operations. In addition, 22 post-secondary institutions are offering 1,200 French-language or bilingual programs, and seven post-secondary institutions have programs for training bilingual health care workers. Lastly, \$50 million is going toward creating a network of early childhood stakeholders and rolling out the initiatives in the communities. This funding is extremely important, especially for small communities.

• (1605)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: To support the vitality of French in the public space, high-quality community infrastructure tailored to needs is also required. These spaces can be used for service delivery, in particular, but also as places for exchange and gathering, where francophones in minority situations can come together and receive a range of services.

I can attest to the effects of this funding, particularly in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche, where several organizations have already benefited from funding for official languages infrastructure.

I would like you to tell us about the government's investments in these community spaces and their impact on francophone communities across the country.

Hon. Marc Miller: As I said earlier, these are not necessarily the largest communities in the world. They are obviously vulnerable, because they do not attract people like big cities.

We need infrastructure. Since 2019, 135 community infrastructure projects worth \$52 million have been built in this area, which is important. The goal is to create spaces where people can learn the language in those communities, instead of having to travel long distances to big cities to learn their language.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: We are studying the administrative monetary penalties regulations, which will support the implementation of the modernized Official Languages Act. When the regulations were tabled, we found that the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority was excluded from the administrative monetary penalties regime because it is funded exclusively with public money.

That said, could you share your views on how this institution could benefit from a strengthened framework to better meet its language obligations under the Official Languages Act?

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have 30 seconds left.

Hon. Marc Miller: Ideally, we would certainly like the regime to apply to that institution.

Other instruments in the act can be used. The commissioner can use other powers granted to her, such as entering into compliance agreements and issuing orders. Keep in mind that the Treasury Board Secretariat has accountability mechanisms in place to ensure the compliance of institutions, such as the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority. In addition, under the modernized act, the Treasury Board Secretariat can conduct assessments and audits, as needed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

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

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Earlier, you gave a few examples, and we can come back to them later, but I would like the data to be sent to me eventually. I use the data from the Public Accounts of Canada. Other ways to get data are available, but they will not fundamentally change anything.

The fact remains that the federal government's support for official languages in Quebec is granted essentially to promote English. The support is given to groups that promote English. There is no doubt that no group advocating for French receives a penny from the federal government. That is why I believe that at a time when French is more threatened than ever and when we have a new amended version of the Official Languages Act, it is essential that the federal government change its approach.

Let us go back to the use of French. According to the Office québécois de la langue française, of all the workplaces in Quebec, such as banks and businesses, federal institutions are the ones where French is the least used as a common language. It certainly does not help the situation of the French language.

What do you think? Is there a way to change that?

• (1610)

Hon. Marc Miller: First, we can all do better.

The new version of the Official Languages Act has definitely changed the landscape for federally regulated institutions.

Mr. Beaulieu, if your concern is not to unduly target the anglophone community in Quebec, but rather to find equity, then I am on your side and we can provide you with supporting data. However, we must look at the big picture. Let us not lose sight, for example, of the comprehensive agreement with Quebec, which was concluded just before the elections and which provides for money to be paid to Quebec and forwarded to francophone organizations.

Since there is very little time left, I will conclude by saying that the new version of the Official Languages Act gives us these tools and that we can all do better.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mario Beaulieu: The French-speaking organizations you mention are, in part, the French-language education system, which receives funding to teach English. That kind of thing.

We'll talk about it again. It's an important debate because, as long as the federal government continues to be a major factor in the anglicization of Quebec, things can't continue this way.

The Chair: I'm sorry but your time is up.

Mr. Godin, you have five minutes.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'd like to hear your opinion on the use of English in Montreal.

Hon. Marc Miller: Where are we talking about? At home or in public spaces?

Joël Godin: All around: at home, in the workplace, in businesses, in tourism.

What is your opinion on the use of English in Montreal, the metropolis of Quebec, the only province whose common language is French?

Hon. Marc Miller: Having grown up in Montreal, I'd say that a lot has changed in 40 years.

Joël Godin: Have things improved or worsened?

Hon. Marc Miller: To be perfectly frank, I think there are a lot of challenges, and of course, there are historically anglophone communities who speak English and who have every right to do so.

Joël Godin: I'm not talking about rights, Minister. I simply want to know your opinion.

Hon. Marc Miller: You're talking about Montreal's anglophone community.

Joël Godin: No, I want to know your opinion on the use of English in Montreal. Do you view it as a good thing or a bad thing?

I'll ask you a simpler question. Is the use of English on the rise on the streets of Montreal, among Montreal families, in short, everywhere in Montreal?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I have a point of order.

The Chair: The floor is yours, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Today's study is on the use of French in government communications and in federal institutions. How is the use of English in Montreal relevant?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, what do you—

Joël Godin: It's an introduction. Members need to give me a chance to get to what I'm saying, and then they'll see how it connects to the topic at hand.

The Chair: And how does it connect, for those who haven't been paying attention?

What's the connection? We'd like to know what it is.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I simply want to know the minister's opinion on the situation regarding the French language in Montreal. Then I'll ask him why he opposed....

Listen, I won't reveal my questions ahead of time, but there is a connection, Mr. Chair. Trust me.

The Chair: I trust you.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue.

Mario Beaulieu: If I may interject, if linguistic vitality is important outside Quebec, then it is also important in Quebec, especially in Montreal.

Joël Godin: What a wonderful display of solidarity over here.

This concludes the debate on the point of order.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have three and a half minutes.

Joël Godin: Okay.

Actually, Minister, what I want to know is whether, in your opinion, the use of French is on the rise in Montreal. I turned my question around.

Hon. Marc Miller: You asked me another question earlier that I haven't answered yet.

Joël Godin: It's okay. There was a point of order. Let's forget about that one.

I turned my question around and asked you a new question about French.

• (1615)

Hon. Marc Miller: I would say that, since I was a little boy, the situation of French has improved in Montreal, thanks in part to Bill 101.

Joël Godin: When you were appointed, Minister, the Premier of Quebec called it a shameful appointment. Why is that?

Hon. Marc Miller: Last I checked, I'm not the premier of Quebec. Odds are I'll never be. You would have to ask him that. He's actually a constituent in Île-des-Soeurs, in my riding, so I could ask him myself.

Joël Godin: Now, Minister, I'd like to know how many anglophones and how many francophones there are in your riding.

Hon. Marc Miller: In my riding, roughly 40% of the population is francophone, 30% is anglophone and 30% is allophone.

Joël Godin: Why did you oppose the official languages bill? You were one of four MPs, along with Marc Garneau, Anthony Housefather and Emmanuella Lambropoulos, who stood against your own government and Mélanie Joly, who presented the white paper on official languages.

Hon. Marc Miller: First of all, that is not true. I was a minister and I voted for that bill, which I supported.

Joël Godin: I have an article, Minister, that tells me otherwise.

Hon. Marc Miller: Fine, you have an article. Congratulations.

Joël Godin: I understand that you were following ministerial instructions. I can understand that.

Hon. Marc Miller: No. I would like to clarify something because it is very important. As you were a member of this committee, you'll recall that it was dominated by the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives. I didn't necessarily want to leave the overhaul of this legislation to people whom I may respect, but who are not in government. So I wanted—

Joël Godin: Minister, I'm going to stop you right there—

Hon. Marc Miller: Perhaps a Liberal member could let me answer the question, because it is very important—

Joël Godin: No, Minister, let me stop you there.

You said earlier that you didn't want people to politicize the debate. Are you politicizing it?

Hon. Marc Miller: Not at all.

Joël Godin: Oh, really? Okay.

I would also like to know which government official can take responsibility for ensuring that the Prime Minister.... Which official can impose concrete measures on the department to improve the situation of French as described in the article? Who in the government can impose this?

The Chair: You have 35 seconds left.

Hon. Marc Miller: What is the question? Do you want me to impose something on the Prime Minister?

Joël Godin: No. Listen to me carefully, Minister. I'm not talking about you. You are supposed to be the expert on the issue of official languages, along with Treasury Board. At least, that's how it should be.

Who in the government can impose rules and concrete actions on the Prime Minister and the departments to achieve results, to slow the decline of French, and to protect and promote both official languages?

The Chair: Excuse me. Your time is up.

Minister, I will give you the opportunity to respond.

Hon. Marc Miller: I will respond very briefly.

You should know that. It is the act itself.

Joël Godin: So there is no individual, no minister to do it.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Godin. I'm sorry.

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

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

Minister, I want to go back to what you said at the outset about people having a knack for languages or not. Since I arrived here in Ottawa, I have also started learning English. I don't have a knack for languages. I'm one of those people. However, I'm very surprised and really happy to see that a number of my colleagues from across Canada approach me and ask me to speak to them in French. They take French courses and do French immersion. I really feel that they want to learn French.

I'm telling you about my personal experience. As a government, you said that we need to improve things. I don't think things are perfect all the time. However, when there is a will to change things, they will change.

By extension, I am inspired by local media. Through local media, we can get information in French from one end of the country to the other. It contributes to the vitality of the language in the public sphere.

Can you tell us about the efforts our government has made to strengthen the capacity of local media and community radio stations? It's extremely important for the francophone community.

Hon. Marc Miller: First, I would like to commend all members for their efforts to learn the other official language, with the goal of

eventually mastering it. It's very difficult. People can feel very insecure, especially as adults, learning a second language, but it's important to our country's identity. I would like to acknowledge every member who makes the effort. I was lucky in that I didn't have to, but I deeply respect people who are outside their comfort zone. I commend you, Mr. Villeneuve, for that.

Local media outlets are extremely important because they are the ones who provide local information. I am very aware that they have been struggling for a number of structural reasons that are not necessarily the responsibility of the federal government, but we need to support them. We want to not only strengthen local media outlets, which are often newspapers, but also help them thrive, particularly through \$21 million in funding until 2028. The funding comes partly from the local journalism initiative, which is managed by my department. I also think that, across the country, the government could make additional efforts to inject funds into local initiatives. It's not my department's responsibility, but that's my opinion.

• (1620)

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you. It matters to me, because I come from the regions and I see that. I think it's very important.

As part of the action plan, our government has also invested in strengthening the education continuum by supporting the provinces and territories in minority-language education. What mechanisms are in place for the funds to be used effectively? It's important to support French-language education outside Quebec in order to truly meet the needs of francophone communities.

Hon. Marc Miller: Money is important. As you know very well, by entering into bilateral agreements, we invested more than \$1.4 billion to give organizations, educational centres, schools and so on the money to do what they need to do to teach the second language. Each bilateral agreement includes an annual accountability mechanism to justify the way the funds are used.

Louis Villeneuve: Minister, I have one last question for you. You sit in caucus with the other ministers. Do you feel there is a direction set to improve French throughout the administration?

Hon. Marc Miller: I can answer the previous question from the Conservative member. I wasn't making an actual objection. I simply wanted the federal government to assume its role of defending the French language and not abdicate it in favour of a provincial government.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you.

The Chair: The minister will be here for another five minutes, so we have time for one more round. There will be two minutes for the Conservatives, two minutes for the Liberals and one minute for the Bloc Québécois.

I'm going to pass the floor to Mr. Dalton for two minutes.

Marc Dalton: Thank you.

[English]

Minister, after Trump stated his desire to make Canada a 51st state, Elon Musk tweeted that Canada isn't a real country. Why don't you take a stand for Canada's history, heritage and distinctiveness, including French? There seems to be a real feebleness in this.

[Translation]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes-Thériault has a point of order.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: What do tweets from an American have to do with the use of French in government communications and federal institutions?

I just want to make sure there's an actual connection to the subject at hand.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor on the point of order.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I think we've been very lenient. I understood what my colleagues said. I understood and accepted it. Also, I didn't raise a point of order when Mr. Villeneuve spoke on a completely different subject. Let's let my colleague continue. Then we will determine whether it was related to the subject.

The Chair: I've given latitude to all members.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor.

Marc Dalton: I'll continue with another question.

[English]

Hon. Marc Miller: I can answer the last one.

Marc Dalton: You can answer both when I get this question in.

When over 100 churches had undergone arson, Prime Minister Trudeau said it was understandable. How can you sit here and deny that the Liberals are failing to defend our heritage?

Hon. Marc Miller: I'd say you're failing to do that by not adopting Bill C-9. I don't know what echo chamber you're living in with respect to the 51st state, but we ran and won a campaign on that federally.

• (1625)

[Translation]

The Chair: I will now give the floor to Ms. Chenette for two minutes.

Madeleine Chenette (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I want to thank you for being here. As a parliamentary secretary, I have the pleasure of working with you. We always speak to each other in French, which I greatly appreciate.

How can the government, in all its complexity, ensure that communications are increasingly done in French? In my previous role as ambassador, I spoke to the departments and saw with my own eyes the extent to which people genuinely wanted to learn French and contribute to the effort. In your position, how can you have more influence over the government? The bill will no doubt help you, but do you have other perspectives?

Hon. Marc Miller: Unusually for me, I'm going to compliment a well-known sovereigntist, Jean-François Lisée. I encourage every-

one to read his book about Pierre Elliott Trudeau and René Lévesque, which accurately describes the state of the public service back then. He covers it well. What went on in the 1970s is shudder-inducing. I know it was 50 years ago, but I encourage everyone to read his book to see the state of the public service when Trudeau entered federal politics. It was abysmal. Much has changed since then. I wouldn't say that everything is great now, because it isn't, and there is still a lot of work to be done. I think we need to be vigilant. We can pass and review all the legislation we want, but the fact remains that everyone, every member of Parliament, whether a minister or not, needs to take the initiative to ensure that French persists and flourishes in the public service.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left.

Madeleine Chenette: You say that things have improved and that French must be used. You do that on a regular basis to encourage others to speak French.

Hon. Marc Miller: I'm doing my best.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chenette.

Mr. Beaulieu has the floor for one minute.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

I think saying that the status of French in Montreal has improved is really disconnected from the opinion of all francophones, at least according to all surveys and language indicators, including French as the language spoken at home. I know you don't like that indicator, but it's the one that best predicts the use of French in the public sphere and at work. In 1971 in Montreal, the indicator stood at 61%. In any case, that's the oldest data we have. In 2021, it was 51.5%. There's been a real decline that we can see on the ground. I see it myself in my riding. You seem to think that the status of French is improving in Montreal.

The Chair: There are 10 seconds left.

Hon. Marc Miller: What I said was that, since I was a kid, it is a clear and obvious fact that the use of French among anglophones has improved as a result of Bill 101. I don't agree with you that French as the only language spoken at home is the best indicator. That means that me speaking three languages at home would be—

Mario Beaulieu: I didn't say the language—

Hon. Marc Miller: That's the indicator you're referring to. I think there are nuanced improvements, but, as I told your colleague, we need to be vigilant.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Colleagues, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the minister, the deputy minister and the other officials for coming to talk to us about their work.

We will suspend for a few minutes to bring in a new panel.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: Welcome to meeting number 18 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to the order of reference of November 26, 2025, we are continuing our study on the proposed official languages administrative monetary penalties regulations.

I would like to welcome the witnesses.

From Air Canada, we have David Rheault, vice-president, government and community relations, and Marc Barbeau, executive vice-president, chief legal officer and corporate secretary.

Mr. Rheault will have five minutes for his opening remarks. Afterwards, we will proceed to a question and answer period with the members of the committee.

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

David Rheault (Vice President, Government and Community Relations, Air Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, members.

I would first like to acknowledge my colleague, Marc Barbeau, who is executive vice-president, chief legal officer and corporate secretary of Air Canada in addition to teaching at McGill University's Faculty of Law for the past 30 years. In other words, Mr. Barbeau is a busy man.

[English]

I want to thank all the committee members for the invitation to appear today.

[Translation]

Air Canada serves 50 airports in Canada and nearly 150 around the world. We operate approximately 1,000 flights per day on over 400 routes and carry 50 million passengers per year.

[English]

We are proud to connect Canada to the world.

[Translation]

Air Canada fulfills its linguistic obligations in the context of a unique, complex operation. On average, each passenger's journey includes five to six points of contact with our staff: buying tickets, checking in, airport reception, boarding, in-flight service and collecting luggage. Each of these stages involves official languages. Using and promoting them is an integral part of our values and priorities. In particular, on each designated bilingual flight, employees are assigned to serve customers in the official language of their choice. In fact, staff on all Air Canada flights are bilingual.

Air Canada is fully committed and has implemented a series of initiatives to improve its service delivery in both official languages. One of them is prioritizing the recruitment of bilingual employees across the country. Today, nearly 50% of our employees who serve the travelling public are recognized as bilingual, and approximately 65% are able to express themselves in both official languages. We have also implemented awareness and training measures for our

employees. Lastly, we set up an official languages management committee to integrate our action plan.

The Commissioner of Official Languages regularly reviews Air Canada's activities and also handles passenger complaints. Without downplaying the importance of complaints, their number remains limited given the scope of our operations. In 2024-25, for example, there were 85 complaints against Air Canada when we carried close to 50 million passengers. That figure is a testament to our ongoing commitment and efforts. In total, the commissioner received 1,200 complaints that year. As you know, Air Canada is subject to obligations that do not apply to any other airline or any other private company that serves the general public.

While the regime may have been justified when Air Canada was privatized in 1989 and had over 80% of the domestic market share, the reality today is quite different. Our domestic market share is around 40%.

WestJet serves every province and has close to 35% of the domestic market. Porter Airlines also serves all the provinces and, here in Ottawa, for example, has about 35% of capacity. The Ottawa airport is important for the francophone community. Lastly, nearly 70 foreign carriers serve Canada without being subject to French-language service obligations.

The Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act, or UFPBA, provides that the obligations will apply to other carriers. For consistency, the remedies have to be the same.

I will now quote the Commissioner of Official Languages:

This means that the public they serve and the employees who work for them will have different rights, and different remedies, depending on which act applies. Ultimately, Canadians will find themselves in a fragmented and sometimes inconsistent language environment....

Greater harmonization is therefore required.

• (1640)

[English]

These regulations will maintain and reinforce an unlevel playing field in which Canadians do not have a guarantee to be served in the language of their choice.

[Translation]

We also note that the government is exempting itself from the penalties, even though a number of its entities play a major role in providing services to travellers, including CATSA, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, the Canada Border Services Agency and the Canadian Transportation Agency.

However, as the commissioner also pointed out, there are many examples in federal law of monetary penalties that apply directly to the government or its agencies, for example, in environmental or safety matters.

In terms of penalties, I want to assure the committee that our commitment to official languages is real, that it has been part of our culture for a long time and that it is not based on potential financial penalties.

However, the \$50,000 per infraction could be a really significant amount for a company that carries 50 million passengers per year on 400,000 flights. I repeat: No other airline will be subject to penalties.

In conclusion, we support any measure aimed at promoting French and ensuring that it thrives. However, monetary penalties will not help overcome issues related to providing services in both languages, such as the availability of bilingual labour across the country.

That said, if this measure were implemented, it would have to apply to all businesses and organizations, including government agencies, that must provide services in French to travellers, either under the Official Languages Act, or OLA, or the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act, or UFBPA.

We thank you for your attention and are available to answer your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rheault.

We'll now go to questions from members.

I'll start with Mr. Godin, who has the floor for six minutes.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Barbeau and Mr. Rheault, thank you for taking part in this study. I think it's important.

I should point out that Air Canada has never shied away when it was invited to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. That is to your credit.

Now, Mr. Rheault, I listened to what you said, and, honestly, when I received the notice of meeting, I wondered why Air Canada was going to appear here. We're talking about administrative penalties. Let us be clear, they're actually fines. It sounds like the government wants to confirm with one of the four organizations identified in the proposed regulations that what it's proposing is correct.

I'm sorry, but the government has to take responsibility. I think that to determine whether it's appropriate, it should have consulted lawyers or citizens rather than an organization that would potentially have to pay fines.

I find that rather strange, and I think it was the Liberal Party that invited you here. Thank you for being here, but how do you explain that?

• (1645)

David Rheault: I thank the member for his comments.

We're here today because we were summoned. I don't know exactly how summonses work, but when we're sent for, we tend to show up.

We're also here because we think we have an important perspective to share on this issue, which is very important for the country, and to raise the point, Mr. Godin, that the strange thing about it—we agree with the commissioner on this—is that the new regulations would apply to a very limited number of entities that provide services to travellers. If an approach or measure is appropriate or effective, it should apply to all businesses and organizations involved in transportation, including those that belong to the government. In fact, the government should set an example, whereas today it is exempting itself.

Joël Godin: You're right, Mr. Rheault.

We just met with the Minister responsible for Official Languages, and he's unable to say who will be responsible for enforcing the use of French within government or the Prime Minister's Office. We have quite a problem, then; you're right.

The proposed regulations list the following entities under the headings "Designation" and "Crown corporation or corporation": "Air Canada"—your company is mentioned in the act—"designated airport authorities, as defined in subsection 2(1) of the Airport Transfer (Miscellaneous Matters) Act"; "Marine Atlantic Inc."; and "VIA Rail Canada Inc."

For Canadian taxpayers who care about both official languages and want to ensure greater use of French, which is one of the two official languages and is in decline, can they be served in compliance with the Official Languages Act only by these four entities?

David Rheault: Look, we have shared our positions on this. We believe that these regulations should have a broader application and cover all businesses and organizations that provide services to travellers.

Joël Godin: Mr. Rheault, I'm going to calculate the number of pages of these regulations.

I want to remind the people who are listening to us or who are going to read what we commonly call "the blues", or the verbatim record, that the Official Languages Act received royal assent on June 20, 2023.

These regulations came out at the end of the previous parliamentary session last year, in early December. I find it strange that this is what we're coming up with.

You, Mr. Rheault, if you could help us be better.... I really feel that you're making an effort at Air Canada. Honestly, I use your services, and I'm always pleased when a flight attendant comes to see me near the emergency exits to ask if I want the instructions in French or in English. The majority say that they want the instructions in English. I, the obnoxious one, say that I want them in French. Well, in 95% of cases, the person speaks French. They can give me the instructions in French. If not, I'm told that I can see someone else. At that point, I tell them it isn't necessary. As long as someone else on the plane can speak to me in French, if I need information or instructions for safety measures, French is always there. That's to your credit. Keep up the good work, because you know the rules constantly have to be reiterated.

That said, how could we do even better? Help us out.

We will be tabling recommendations for the analysis of those regulations. If you don't have the answer today, can you provide us with potential solutions, suggestions for amendments to the regulations or for new sections? That would be deeply appreciated.

The Chair: There are only 15 seconds left.

I would ask the witness to give a very short answer.

David Rheault: First, thank you for your comments on your travel experience. It speaks to the fact that we have procedures in place. Indeed, if a flight attendant is unable to deliver service in French, the procedure is to find a colleague who can.

• (1650)

Joël Godin: There's a missing 5%. I said, "95%".

David Rheault: Yes, but if the procedure is followed, the other person will come. We're aware that things aren't always perfect. That's why we're working to improve—

The Chair: Please answer very quickly, Mr. Rheault, because the time is up.

David Rheault: We'll follow up on the recommendations, perhaps in writing. That would be wiser on our part.

Joël Godin: Yes, we would like to have it quickly so that we can include it in our report. I would appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Rheault.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, I would like to reassure you. When I travel with my fiancée, Amanda, she almost always asks for service in French, and she isn't obnoxious.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I wanted to reassure you.

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

Madeleine Chenette: Thank you very much to Mr. Barbeau and Mr. Rheault for being here today.

In my life, I have had the privilege of having your company as a client. I have had the privilege of sitting on airline boards of directors. I know how complex it is to have to meet commitments, every day, every minute, and do so safely, when it comes to your flights.

That said, I would like to understand one thing.

In the context of the project to modernize the Official Languages Act, what do you think is really the purpose of administrative monetary penalties?

David Rheault: That's a very good question, actually. However, I think it would be up to the government to respond.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, at Air Canada, we say that it's a part of our culture to comply with and meet our legal and regulatory obligations. For that reason, we have measures in place to ensure that we meet our obligations. Now, it's complex, as you know. It's complex. We're working not only to reduce the number of complaints as much as possible, but also to increase the number of satisfied customers. That's what we want.

I can tell you that, in our opinion, it isn't a matter of having monetary penalties or not. It's a matter of the company's priorities and values.

Madeleine Chenette: I'm going to pick up on what you just mentioned.

Indeed, our government is currently saying that we have to control what we can control. Okay. Basically, you're one of the jewels in the crown of businesses. That's why there are four that have been targeted at the outset.

Air Canada has the word "Canada" in its company name. In a context where people have to be increasingly proud to be Quebecers but also proud to be Canadian, you have a competitive advantage by having the word "Canada" in your name right now.

That being the case, in terms of this logic of valuing, shouldn't you reinforce this culture and these values? It shouldn't be out of obligation or for the pleasure of responding to a francophone that services offer both official languages. Instead, French should be even more prominent from the very first contact to promote our two official languages to all travellers who come to Canada or whom you take abroad.

Isn't this an opportunity for your company to stand out from the competition and see this as a risk and a cost, since you're already very efficient?

David Rheault: Indeed, this aspect enables us to stand out from the competition. We're confident that we provide service in both official languages and that we do so much more than any other airline. In fact, we're the only ones with that obligation. What we're saying is that failure to comply with that obligation shouldn't result in penalties.

You mentioned that our company name has the word "Canada", which is true. In all, four institutions are subject to these penalties, and we're the only private company in this competitive environment. Air transportation is very competitive in Canada, as I said in my opening remarks. That means we find ourselves with official language obligations that can result in penalties if we fail to comply, whereas other carriers don't have those obligations. They don't even face consequences if they don't have a compliance system. That creates a kind of asymmetry in the environment.

Madeleine Chenette: I understand your point, but I repeat that your company is called Air Canada.

The government has always been sensitive to Air Canada's development, its positioning and, of course, the competitive environment in which we find ourselves. With that in mind, we heard from representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, in December. They spoke to us about the cap on penalties. They actually wanted it to be even higher.

I have two questions for you.

I understand the possible impact of multiple penalties of up to \$50,000. Given the fact that you're already well equipped to address this aspect and set the example you can—we're no doubt currently in the first stage—what should the penalties be right now?

As some people mentioned, the penalty amounts should be higher because you already have a good track record in that area, so you shouldn't be concerned about that.

• (1655)

David Rheault: I'll go back to the first part of your question.

First, our compliance rate is very high: We're making a lot of effort. Instead of penalizing a company that isn't perfect, it would be better to start by looking at what obligations other companies might have.

As for the penalty amounts, the act provided for \$25,000. That was doubled in the regulations. As I said in my opening remarks, that can be very significant when it comes to transporting 50 million passengers a year and having 400,000 flights a year. Yes, that amount can become significant. In the case of certain routes, it can lead to higher costs.

We have a compliance program, and we're going to do everything we can to avoid fines. In other words, we aren't looking to get them. For us, paying fines because we don't comply with obligations isn't a business model. I have heard comments to that effect, and I just want to clarify one thing. Our business model doesn't include any sort of regulatory obligation.

I don't know if Mr. Barbeau would like to add anything to that.

Yvan Baker: You have 30 seconds left, Ms. Chenette.

Mr. Barbeau, you have the floor.

Marc Barbeau (Executive Vice President, Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary, Air Canada): I would add that there's another dimension. What's the equivalent in the Quebec environment? The Charter of the French Language provides for a judicial system, that is, appearing before a judge. Those aren't administrative penalties, as the federal government is proposing. In that case, the maximum amount is \$30,000. There are distinctions to be made, but, on the face of it, that amount can go as high as \$30,000. However, as I told you, there are exceptions in cases of repeat offences and so on.

An amount of around \$25,000 seemed consistent with what's being done in Quebec. However, the regulations provide for an amount of \$50,000. According to statistics from the Office québécois de la langue française, or OQLF, very few fines have been issued in the past five or six years, and the amounts have been around \$2,000.

The Chair: Mr. Barbeau, time is up.

David Rheault: I just want to say that we mentioned the comments on that.

The Chair: Mr. Rheault, I'm sorry, but your time is up. You may have a chance to come back to that in the next questions.

I'm now going to give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to come back to what was said.

Given that Air Canada was a Crown corporation for a long time, isn't it normal for it to face higher expectations?

David Rheault: We're aware that there are higher expectations of Air Canada.

The market has evolved since Air Canada was privatized. Wouldn't it also be desirable for legal and regulatory obligations to apply to the industry in a more uniform way?

I'd like to come back to what the FCFA representatives said. They commented on the amount of the fines, but they also asked that the penalties and obligations apply to the industry as a whole.

Mario Beaulieu: I quite agree with expanding the scope of the obligations. I think that imposing monetary penalties is a good idea, but it's extremely complicated to get to that point, so I don't think it would be very costly for Air Canada.

When you talk about expanding the obligations, do you mean imposing them on all airlines, including private companies?

David Rheault: Yes. In fact, when the bill was introduced, the Commissioner of Official Languages recommended standardizing the system for the industry in Canada.

Mario Beaulieu: Isn't it inconsistent that the draft regulations don't apply to the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and its officers?

David Rheault: Obviously, if we want to improve the traveller's experience, we have to make sure that the remedies are consistent. The commissioner said that there were complaints against Air Canada, but also against other institutions.

Mario Beaulieu: Since the adoption of Bill 96, all businesses, including those under federal jurisdiction, have been required to comply with Bill 101 and implement a francization process.

Was that new for you? Did it go well?

David Rheault: Thank you for your question.

We began a voluntary francization process because, obviously, we were in a special situation, unlike other federally regulated businesses operating in Quebec, which don't yet have language obligations. In our case, we have a framework, the Official Languages Act, that provides for the equality of both languages, whereas the Charter of the French Language provides for the predominance of French.

We therefore began the process voluntarily, with the understanding that if there was a conflict between the plans, the federal regime would apply. The best example is signage. In Quebec, French must be the predominant language in signage, but at Air Canada, both in our facilities and outside, both languages are equal.

• (1700)

Mario Beaulieu: That's also the case in Quebec.

David Rheault: Yes, because we have to comply—

Mario Beaulieu: You're caught between the two regimes, so you don't have to.... However, it will be different for private companies.

David Rheault: Private companies don't have—

Mario Beaulieu: It's a new thing that federally regulated private businesses are required to—

David Rheault: That's correct. Obviously, I don't work for one of those companies, but my understanding is that the legislation will allow them to opt for either regime.

Mario Beaulieu: When the regulations come into force, perhaps—

David Rheault: For our part, we've found a way to reconcile the two regimes.

Mario Beaulieu: By the way, has your CEO improved his French?

David Rheault: Our CEO continues to take French courses. He has already taken over 300 hours of courses.

Joël Godin: Could you lend your French teacher to the Prime Minister?

David Rheault: I won't comment on that.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu's time is up, so let's move on.

David Rheault: We submitted a letter to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities outlining our CEO's efforts to learn French. I could submit it to this committee as well.

Mario Beaulieu: Among senior management, would you say there has been an improvement in the use of French?

Marc Barbeau: Six of the seven members of Air Canada's management team speak both official languages.

Mario Beaulieu: They speak both languages, but do they use them?

For example, are board meetings conducted in French?

Marc Barbeau: Meetings are conducted in the language that allows for greatest efficiency. Some of our board members don't speak French and come from outside Canada. Nine of the twelve board members are able to speak French.

Mario Beaulieu: In many cases, things take place entirely in English if one person doesn't speak French. That doesn't apply only to you, but if you're like most others—

Marc Barbeau: Our rule is that everyone can speak in the language of their choice, and we provide interpretation services if necessary.

Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Rheault, I said I wouldn't raise a particular issue, but I found my example.

In 2023, a businessman by the name of Jean-Pierre Beaudoin was travelling in business class, if I'm not mistaken, and, after settling in, he realized that the flight attendant didn't speak a word of French. Mr. Beaudoin asked to be served in French, but she refused and said she did not speak French. He insisted, and she came back with a security guard. Even though there were other flight attendants who spoke French, they supposedly couldn't serve him. He was given a choice to get off the plane or agree to be served in English.

You may not have been aware of this at your level, but I think it deserves to be penalized, because it's really unacceptable.

The Chair: I would ask you to keep your answer brief because you only have 10 seconds left.

David Rheault: That approach really isn't consistent with our practices. In such cases, the practice is to go and find another flight attendant who is able to serve the customer in the language of their choice. This type of incident is always reported, and we meet with employees to ensure that kind of thing doesn't happen again.

I can assure you that that is not the service we want to provide to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

I will now go to Mr. Bélanger for five minutes.

Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Rheault and Mr. Barbeau.

I want to start by giving Mr. Rheault a chance to finish his answer to Ms. Chenette's question.

David Rheault: I think I had a chance to answer that question when I responded to Mr. Beaulieu. We were talking about the FC-FA's recommendations. They proposed raising the cap on fines and applying it to other offenders.

Jim Bélanger: Air Canada relies on the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority as the first point of contact for many travellers. Given ongoing concerns about the offer of bilingual services at security checkpoints, what measures is Air Canada putting in place to ensure that passengers can receive services in the official language of their choice throughout their travel experience, including in areas managed by the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority?

David Rheault: The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority is an independent organization that reports to the government. It is therefore up to CATSA to put measures in place to ensure an active offer of service in the passenger's language of choice.

However, I know that organizations talk to each other and have groups set up to establish best practices. They learn from each other through dialogue. These things are done on a regular basis.

I won't comment on CATSA's record.

● (1705)

Jim Bélanger: Since the regulations governing fines were put in place, have you been fined? If so, how many times?

David Rheault: It's not in place yet, actually. The regulations have yet to be adopted or amended.

Jim Bélanger: Okay.

I'm told that 50% of your employees are bilingual. Is that correct?

David Rheault: For employees who are in contact with the public, yes.

Jim Bélanger: How many complaints have you received in recent years?

David Rheault: In 2024-25, we received 85 complaints.

Jim Bélanger: Okay.

How are you addressing those complaints?

David Rheault: That's a good question.

For each complaint, we look at what it's about, we look at the circumstances, such as the flight and the airport in question, and we try to identify the employees involved. At that point, the complaint is forwarded to the supervisors, who meet with the employees. We also try to get the employees' side of the story.

Of course, some complaints are a little more subjective. For example, when there's an interaction between a customer and a passenger, it can be difficult for the employee to remember, because our employees serve hundreds of people a day. In some cases, we actually receive the complaint three or four months later.

However, some complaints may be more objective. Yes, there have been times when translations were done poorly or not done at the same time, or when systems didn't work well in both official languages. We resolve those situations as quickly as possible.

Jim Bélanger: Okay.

From what you've said, I get the impression that you're at a disadvantage compared to your competitors because of your official language obligations.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

David Rheault: I must say that we don't see the service we provide in both official languages as a disadvantage. Ms. Chenette touched on this. We're proud to offer service in French across Canada. We don't see that as a disadvantage.

The harder part for us is that the government is creating a system in which we can be penalized for failing to meet the requirements. That creates a non-level playing field in terms of the cost structures that may apply to us but not to anyone else in the industry.

Jim Bélanger: That's exactly what I wanted to talk about: what it costs your organization to hire bilingual employees.

How many fully bilingual employees are you looking to hire? Is it always an asset to be fully bilingual, or does it depend on which part of the country?

David Rheault: Many of our employees are bilingual, but they don't necessarily speak French and English. For official language bilingualism among staff in contact with the public, we aim to hire as many employees as possible who speak French and English. For example, over the past three years, we have hired some 1,800 flight attendants; 1,200 of them are bilingual. When I say that they're bilingual, I mean that they have taken tests. To pass our test, they must be able to make an impromptu announcement in French on a plane without needing to read a text. There's a larger percentage—

The Chair: Mr. Rheault, I have to interrupt you. I'm sorry, but we're out of time. Perhaps we can revisit this topic in a future discussion.

Mr. Villeneuve, I understand you're going to share your time with Ms. Mingarelli. You have the floor for five minutes.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you very much.

Good morning, gentlemen.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that efforts have been made.

I'll tell you quite frankly that I myself have filed a complaint against Air Canada because I wasn't served in French. I've had the opportunity to travel with Air Canada a few times over the past year, and everything went very well, so things have clearly improved.

When the FCFA representatives appeared before the committee in December, they talked about the cap on sanctions, which we've been talking about for a while now. They wanted it to be higher. My colleague asked a question about that, and I have another question.

What are your thoughts on the administrative monetary penalty regime that these regulations introduce?

• (1710)

Marc Barbeau: Do you want me to speak to that from a legal standpoint?

Louis Villeneuve: Yes, and there's also the financial aspect.

Can the commissioner issue one or more fines? What are your thoughts on that? You also said that you now provide service in both official languages and that everything is going well, which suggests you're not as worried about being fined.

Marc Barbeau: Yes, absolutely.

First, in terms of our perspective on the regime, the same thing exists elsewhere. It exists in other federal and provincial legislation. So, from a legal standpoint, this is not a new regime per se. It has been tested in other jurisdictions. Since it's an administrative penalty regime, it doesn't go through the courts. It's administered by the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Then, for designated corporations like ours, the act removed due diligence as a ground for defence. For any violation of the act, we would not be able to demonstrate the efforts we've made to avoid such a violation.

Under the Charter of the French Language, by the way, that defence exists. It's a similar regime, but different in some ways.

So, after a violation of the act is ascertained, the next step is the penalty determination. The regulations include criteria that establish the conditions under which a penalty can be applied. Certain factors can affect the amount of the penalty, such as efforts to correct the situation, the nature of the offence and so on. It's not automatically \$25,000, as set out in the act, or \$50,000. The commissioner will have to say that they have determined an offence occurred and explain why they're asking that a fine of \$1,000, \$2,000 or \$5,000 be imposed. We'll have to see how this plays out.

Should there be a \$25,000 cap, as set out in the act, a \$50,000 cap, as set out in the regulations, or something else? This has to do with the question that was asked earlier. In a way, you'll be able to see how it works as it plays out. You and the commissioner will see if it produces the results you're looking for.

As my colleague said, we hope we never find ourselves having to answer for a violation or, worse still, being penalized.

Louis Villeneuve: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I want to share my time with my colleague.

Marc Barbeau: Yes, I understand how it works.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you for your answer.

Marc Barbeau: Thank you for giving me so much time.

The Chair: There's a minute and forty seconds left.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much, Mr. Barbeau and Mr. Rheault, for being with us today.

My riding, Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, in eastern Ontario, is very francophone. Access to services in French is often more difficult for Franco-Ontarians, not only in Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, but also elsewhere in francophone Ontario.

In your opinion, how could this penalty system concretely improve access to services in the minority language for my constituents?

David Rheault: The impact will be very limited because the number of institutions covered is very limited. First, it will affect only passenger services and only one air carrier, Air Canada. It's also important to know that Porter Airlines accounts for 35% of capacity at the Ottawa airport, which serves the region. I think it might even have a 40% share of the Canadian domestic market. The point is, the regulations have very little potential to improve services for all your constituents.

As I said in my remarks, no other government institution is subject to these sanctions, and nor is any other government department.

Giovanna Mingarelli: That's it, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mingarelli.

I'm now going to pass it over to Mr. Beaulieu for two and a half minutes.

Mario Beaulieu: My understanding of the regulations is that, before imposing a penalty, the commissioner has to issue a warning and then put together a case, which can take years. In my opinion, the amounts don't pose a major financial threat, even if this is expanded, but so much the better if it is. The process is too cumbersome and too complicated. I don't think a \$50,000 penalty can be imposed multiple times; it may happen once, after a lengthy process.

Is that how you understand the regulations?

• (1715)

Marc Barbeau: Thank you for your question.

According to my reading of the regulations, there are no limits on the ability to issue multiple penalties, as long as there are separate violations. For the same violation, of course, there will only be one penalty. If there are multiple violations, that can result in a

number of measures, and it will be up to the commissioner to decide, in theory, whether there will be multiple penalties. It will be up to him to decide how to administer this.

As for the cumbersome nature or length of the process, as I mentioned, it's a well-established regime. That's my impression, but again, I'm not in the decision-makers' shoes. This is a well-established practice elsewhere in the federal government and elsewhere in Canada. I think the commissioner could learn from what's being done elsewhere and draw on the expertise of others, but it will be up to him to decide how he will manage this.

David Rheault: I would just add that it's entirely reasonable and desirable in law that there should be a regulated process before a penalty is imposed, and that those subject to the law should be given the opportunity to contest it.

We're fortunate to live in a country where we can contest penalties issued by the government.

Mario Beaulieu: Yes, I think that in the commissioner's case, it won't be too difficult.

Basically, as far as the mechanism is concerned, it's really the issue of penalties that bothers you. There's an article in the media—

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

David Rheault: Yes, and it also maintains and even accentuates a two-tier system among air carriers, when we should be aiming for consistency. In that regard, we agree with the commissioner.

Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

It must therefore be expanded.

David Rheault: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Beaulieu.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Godin, but before I do, colleagues, I would like to inform you that after discussing it with the vice-chair, I have decided to set aside five minutes at the end to discuss the committee's report.

Do I have everyone's agreement on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you again, gentlemen.

Would you agree that these regulations create unfair competition for Air Canada? The airline has to bear the costs associated with bilingualism, while Porter Airlines, WestJet and the 70 other airlines that serve Canadians do not.

David Rheault: What we have said, and what we're prepared to admit, is that this creates a clearly asymmetrical environment. It results in potential costs for one carrier that are not incurred by others, as well as potential penalties.

Joël Godin: I don't want to put you on the spot, but I'll repeat my question: Is this unfair competition?

My opinion, as a parliamentarian and legislator, is that it's unfair. In fact, it's the reciprocity of requirements to operate the same type of service that poses a problem. WestJet doesn't have to pay as many bilingual human resources, nor do other carriers. Speaking of carriers, on the list, it's funny, but Canadians are transported by buses like Keolis Canada and all the others of that kind.

You seem uncomfortable answering my question, but help us to help you.

Go ahead, Mr. Barbeau.

Marc Barbeau: This law has applied to us since we were privatized, and even before that, when we were a Crown corporation. So it's at least 50 years old. I forget when the law was passed.

Indeed, as mentioned, the name Air Canada has been around for 60 years. That means we proudly represent our country in this regard. We've been conveying and promoting the values included in this act for 50 years. We are fulfilling the obligations we're discussing right now.

Joël Godin: It's cultural, in a sense, isn't it?

Marc Barbeau: We've had these obligations internally for 50 years. I can't tell you that establishing regulations will make a difference, because in itself, it simply reflects the obligations that already exist.

What we're seeing is that, as Mr. Rheault said, it's asymmetrical. It simply regulates something—

Joël Godin: You decided that instead of saying “unfair competition”, you would say “asymmetrical”.

David Rheault: The concept of unfair competition refers to the practices of another company, whereas here, it comes from the government.

• (1720)

Joël Godin: I understand.

David Rheault: However, it could be said that this is unfair, both for carriers and passengers, incidentally.

Joël Godin: Absolutely.

David Rheault: First and foremost, it's unfair to passengers.

Joël Godin: The purpose of this law is to serve bilingualism in Canada.

Would you be comfortable if we recommended in this report that penalties be introduced for government bodies that would work in much the same way as penalties in the environmental field?

David Rheault: I'm not familiar with what's done in the environmental field, but we agree that there should be sanctions against government institutions. In fact, the Charter of the French Language provides that government institutions be subject to sanctions.

In Quebec, I believe that municipalities, which are government institutions, have paid penalties.

Joël Godin: Yes, absolutely.

Part II provides that businesses operating in Quebec, such as Air Canada, which has its headquarters in Montreal, have the option of coming under the jurisdiction of the Office québécois de la langue française.

David Rheault: That's not the case for Air Canada, because our company is clearly subject to the Official Languages Act. We have no choice.

Joël Godin: Okay. Maybe that's where the asymmetry comes from.

Marc Barbeau: That's why we're proud to be subject to the Official Languages Act and to be voluntarily registered with the Office québécois de la langue française.

Joël Godin: We, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives, fought a battle here that we lost at the last minute. We were stabbed in the back to force federally regulated companies to use the French language in Quebec, but that's another story.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor for five minutes.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Rheault and Mr. Barbeau, for being here today.

I think the purpose of this meeting is precisely to hear from various stakeholders who will be affected by the implementation of the regulations. It also helps us do our job better when it comes time to make recommendations, to better understand how those affected are reacting to the regulations and how it will affect their activities or their ways of doing things.

In your remarks, you mentioned that you will do everything you can to avoid paying penalties and that you've already put in place various compliance measures with a view to continuous improvement.

The primary purpose of imposing a penalty is not to punish, but rather to promote compliance with the Official Languages Act.

Would you agree that the mere existence of an administrative penalty regime encourages greater compliance?

David Rheault: I disagree, because the modernized act removed the due diligence defence, a legal standard for recognizing litigants' efforts to comply. This is quite exceptional.

In criminal law, there is a principle that if a company or a litigant, who is not necessarily a company, makes every reasonable effort to avoid breaking the law, a penalty will not apply, because the reasonableness of the effort has been demonstrated.

This defence has been removed from the act, which is quite exceptional because, on the one hand, the number of institutions subject to this section is limited as much as possible, and, on the other, their defence is also limited, whereas all other companies and institutions have no obligations or penalties.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I want to take a brief look back. The modernized Official Languages Act received royal assent in June 2023. Let's look at the context at the time of the 2022 report by the Commissioner of Official Languages. I recognize that there have been improvements since then, but a year before the modernized act was passed, we read that Air Canada was one of the main sources of traveller complaints and that there had been no significant improvement since Commissioner Fraser's 2016 special report.

In 2023, in the report published in the same year as the act was modernized, we read that the number of complaints against Air Canada had reached a 10-year high. The public expected improvements because they wanted to see their rights respected at all times.

I would like to hear your comments on this, because you yourself mentioned that there have been improvements over the past two years and you've put various compliance measures in place. Could the fact that there is a system of monetary penalties have had an impact on recent improvements when it comes to compliance with language obligations?

David Rheault: I can tell you that, since 2018-19, the commissioner has been sending us an average of nearly 100 complaints a year. Some years, like 2023-24, we received more.

That year, a change in the reservation system caused a problem with the language selected for communications between travel agencies and the system. Many customers didn't receive their notifications in their chosen language. In fact, a number of MPs reported this problem to me. We made those changes. Technical issues do happen. We correct them, but that can increase the number of complaints. So we didn't wait for monetary penalties to correct that. It's not related to monetary penalties. For us, it's a matter of principle and priority.

I will now report what the commissioner said publicly at one of our recent meetings:

I applaud Air Canada's commitment to continuing the conversation with us on its official languages initiatives, which shows the airline's willingness to cooperate and work toward full compliance with the act.

That's what the commissioner said, and it reflects our goodwill.

• (1725)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: The goal is not to impose regulations so that you receive penalties. The goal is to foster compliance with the regulations almost all the time and, in an ideal world, not impose penalties.

David Rheault: The purpose of the regulations is to impose penalties.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I have one last question for you in the time I have left. As an Acadian member from northern New Brunswick, I would be remiss if I didn't ask you.

This past October, the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick or SANB filed a complaint with the commissioner's of-

fice alleging that Air Canada violated its obligations under the Official Languages Act in evaluating its decisions on the vitality of francophone communities. The complaint referred to the abandonment of air service at Bathurst Regional Airport, which has repercussions on Acadian communities in northern New Brunswick.

I would briefly like to hear your comments on how you received this complaint. What's your opinion on the complaint filed by the SANB?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

David Rheault: It was a very tough decision for Air Canada. It had been a difficult route for us for a number of years. We talked to the airport and the communities well in advance. In addition, we met the notification requirement under the Transportation Act, so the community was able to look for another carrier to resume service the day after our shutdown. Both the Government of New Brunswick and the federal government supported this new carrier being chosen.

We therefore met our obligations to give another carrier operating smaller aircraft more suited to the realities of a smaller market the opportunity to take over that market with a higher frequency. We couldn't offer that to the people of Bathurst.

The Chair: The time is up.

I'd like to thank you for being here, Mr. Rheault and Mr. Barbeau.

That would suggest to me that you work hard to comply with the act, so we can expect no more complaints or penalties. Thank you again for being with us today.

Colleagues, we have just a few minutes of work to do together on the report of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure. I will therefore suspend the meeting for a minute.

• (1725)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

The Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure has developed a work plan presented in its report, which has been distributed to you by the clerk.

Has everyone received the report? Are we ready to adopt it? Is there any discussion?

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, to my colleague's great surprise, I'd like to say that we agree with the work plan as submitted and that we, the Conservative Party members, are voting in favour of it.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Marc Dalton: Thank you.

Did we not have something on Thursday, from 5:30 to 6 p.m.? It was something that—

The Chair: Yes, you're right. It's mentioned in the report.

Joël Godin: We agree with what you proposed, but based on discussions with my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, whom I forgot to speak with, once again—

The Chair: You trust him.

Joël Godin: In full transparency, I must say that it happened so fast earlier.

We propose not to extend this Thursday's meeting. We propose that we postpone our work to next Tuesday, because it might be easier for everyone.

Mario Beaulieu: Perhaps it's better to extend Tuesday's meeting.

The Chair: I want to make sure we're all clear on this. We want the clerk to request resources for an extra half-hour at the end of Tuesday's meeting. Is that correct?

Is everyone in agreement?

Joël Godin: That would be easier than Thursday, since many of us get ready to go back to our ridings on Thursday.

The Chair: Very good. I'll speak with the clerk.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Dalton, for pointing that out.

The Chair: We don't know yet whether resources will be available. If not, we have a few options.

We can take 15 minutes from the meeting on the commissioner's nomination, or we can add the half-hour to another meeting.

Joël Godin: What do we need the time for? Is it to provide instructions?

The Chair: It's to give Ms. Lecomte, our analyst, instructions.

Mario Beaulieu: It would be better if everyone were here.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Marc Dalton: We should be able to get it done during the two-hour meeting. We could cut the discussion short by a few minutes. That's my preference.

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, go ahead.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: If you agree, we could do it Thursday. How many witnesses do we have that day? I think it's five.

The Chair: Yes, it's four or five.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: If we meet with the five witnesses on the administrative monetary penalties for 90 minutes and spend the last half-hour on instructions, it will leave more time for our analyst. We need a draft report by February 12, so if we push it to next Tuesday, she'll have just two days.

Would that work?

The Chair: I want to clarify Mr. Deschênes-Thériault's suggestion, to make sure everyone agrees.

Is Mr. Deschênes-Thériault's proposal plan A or plan B? Do we just want to go ahead with Mr. Deschênes-Thériault's suggestion, or do we follow his suggestion only if we can't get the half-hour on Tuesday?

Joël Godin: I think Mr. Deschênes-Thériault's proposal should be plan A.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mario Beaulieu: If memory serves me correctly, it seems to me that we used to have more informal subcommittee meetings, where we didn't necessarily need to have all the equipment. I'm not sure whether all the other committees always need to have interpretation services.

• (1735)

The Chair: What are you talking about?

Mario Beaulieu: It seems to me that a few years back, when René Arseneault chaired the official languages committee, we held more informal meetings, and there were just three or four of us.

The Chair: Is that different from what we did last week?

Mario Beaulieu: I just wanted to make sure. It makes things easier sometimes if we can do it that way. We won't do it this time, but we can talk about it later.

The Chair: All right. I will—

Joël Godin: I don't know the procedure.

Mario Beaulieu: Subcommittee meetings always have to be recorded.

The Clerk of the Committee (Madeleine Martin): Every time the subcommittee meets, it has to report its recommendations to all committee members. They must endorse the subcommittee's decision and can make changes to it. The subcommittee's proposals are subject to the full committee's approval and any changes it makes.

It's another way of doing things. In subcommittee, you can do the same things you can do in committee, but if you go the subcommittee route, you have the extra step of adopting the report, as we are doing right now.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Godin, you may go ahead.

Joël Godin: Here's my question. According to House procedures, do we have to hold subcommittee meetings during the same time slots as committee meetings?

The Clerk: No.

Joël Godin: Nevertheless, the report has to be adopted. Is that right?

The Clerk: That's exactly right.

Joël Godin: Let's take a real-life example. Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, Mr. Beaulieu and I met on our own for a subcommittee meeting. We made a recommendation to the chair, but we could have done the same thing during a regular committee meeting.

Is that correct?

The Clerk: Yes.

Joël Godin: That means we would've lost a meeting.

Mario Beaulieu: We met informally. The meeting wasn't recorded.

Joël Godin: It's good to know going forward.

The Chair: It's a good question.

My understanding is that we adopted the committee's report with an amendment, and we are going to adopt what Mr. Deschênes-Thériault proposed. On Thursday, then, we will spend an hour and a half with the witnesses and a half-hour on the report.

Joël Godin: Before we make a decision, I'd like to know who the witnesses are, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Do you have that information, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: The committee will be meeting with representatives from CATSA, Marine Atlantic Inc. and the Canadian Airports Council, and Érik Labelle Westin-Eastaugh. That's four different groups of witnesses.

Normally, two hours would be allocated to meet with them, but at the committee's request, all four groups can appear for an hour and a half. They will all be at the table together.

The committee will spend the next 30 minutes in camera discussing drafting instructions.

The Chair: Does that work? Can we adjourn?

The meeting is adjourned.

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