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• (1605)

[Translation]

The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to meeting number 21 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the order of reference of December 9, 2025, we are meeting today to study the official languages (advancement of equality of status and use of English and French) regulations.

Before welcoming our witnesses, I want to consult my colleagues. We are starting our meeting 40 minutes behind schedule. We have access to resources for two hours, so we could meet for two hours, as planned. However, I know that, often on Thursdays, members cannot stay after 5:30 p.m.

Therefore, I want to ask you how you wish to proceed. Do you want to meet for two hours? If not, when do you wish to adjourn? I would like your thoughts on this matter.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

As you know, there was an important vote in the House of Commons today on a bill you introduced. You won the vote and we are very proud to have supported you. That is one of the reasons why we are late. I consulted my Conservative Party colleagues and, unfortunately, we are unable to extend the meeting because we have other obligations. You know that we are returning to our ridings.

I suggest that we take perhaps 30 minutes to hear from Treasury Board officials and then spend the rest of the time hearing from representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I agree with this suggestion; if necessary, we could invite the Treasury Board representatives again.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Our members agreed to meet for two hours. I see that my colleagues are unable to do so. We understand that, but we feel it is important to hear testimony from both panels. Our suggestion

would be to divide the speaking time into two equal blocks of 45 minutes for each panel of witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Godin and Mr. Beaulieu, what do you think of this proposal? Do you prefer to stick to your motion?

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I told you the Conservative party's position.

Mario Beaulieu: I would stick to the two 30-minute blocks and, if necessary, invite the Treasury Board representatives to come back.

The Chair: I see that a majority of MPs want to spend 30 minutes with our first panel and the rest of the time with the FCFA representatives.

Shall we vote?

Madam Clerk, please hold a recorded division on Mr. Godin's motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: Since Mr. Godin's motion has passed, we will spend 30 minutes with the Treasury Board witnesses and the remainder of the time with the FCFA representatives.

I have a quick reminder for my colleagues. At our last meeting, we had decided to reserve five minutes at the end to conclude our discussion on Kelly Burke's nomination. I will reserve five minutes at the end of our meeting, meaning 5:25 p.m.

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Before we start the 30 minutes, could you tell us the allocation of time per member? How much time will each member get?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

• (1610)

Joël Godin: Indeed, Mr. Chair, I did not know that information before I moved my motion. I will consult my colleagues; they will react if they disagree. Can we add five minutes at the end of the meeting?

The Chair: You want to add five minutes at the end of the meeting?

Is that right?

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): If there is no vote at the end of the meeting, I will not stay. I need to leave at 5:30 p.m.

Joël Godin: All right, forget it, Mr. Chair. There will not be a vote.

Mario Beaulieu: Instead of losing five minutes at the end of the meeting, we are adding five minutes. I agree.

Joël Godin: However, there will not be a vote.

The Chair: I will then keep—

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I move we add five minutes so the FCFA does not get shortchanged.

The Chair: We agree then to add five minutes and conclude at 5:35 p.m. Perfect.

With regard to the allocation of speaking time, I will keep the first round at six minutes for the Conservatives, six minutes for the Liberals and six minutes for the Bloc Québécois, and I will shorten the time in the second round proportionally, like always. I will do the math.

Is that acceptable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Agreed. We are ready to resume.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Treasury Board Secretariat, we have Vidya ShankarNarayan, senior assistant deputy minister, people & culture, office of the chief human resources officer, Carsten Quell, executive director, official languages centre of excellence, people & culture, office of the chief human resources officer, and Annie Proulx, director, regulations and policy, official languages centre of excellence, office of the chief human resources officer.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks. Then we will proceed with a question and answer period with committee members.

Ms. ShankarNarayan, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Vidya ShankarNarayan (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, People and Culture, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): Good afternoon.

Before we begin, I want to express my deepest condolences to the families and community members affected by the tragedy in Tumbler Ridge. Our thoughts are with all those grieving this profound loss and with the first responders and local leaders who continue to support the community during this difficult time.

[*Translation*]

We share the entire community's pain, and we stand with them during these trying times.

[*English*]

Chair and committee members, it is a pleasure to be here today to speak with you about the draft regulations for the implementation of part VII of the Official Languages Act.

On December 9 of last year, the President of the Treasury Board tabled in the House of Commons draft regulations that clarify how

federal institutions must meet the obligations set out in part VII of the act.

[*Translation*]

The part VII regulations are a key element in the Official Languages Act reform launched by the federal government in 2020. This reform includes legislative, regulatory and administrative measures. The cornerstone of this reform is, of course, the modernized version of the act, which was passed in June 2023.

The regulations seek to create solid guidelines and a common framework for the consistent and comprehensive implementation of the part VII commitments by all federal institutions. These commitments include enhancing the vitality and development of English-speaking and French-speaking minority communities; fostering the full recognition and use of both official languages in Canadian society; protecting and promoting French throughout Canada, including in Quebec; and advancing quality learning opportunities in the minority language, from early childhood to post-secondary education.

In order to develop the draft regulations, Treasury Board Secretariat consulted with 23 organizations from francophone minority communities, 17 organizations from English-speaking communities in Quebec, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and federal institutions. It also maintained a dialogue with representatives of the provinces and territories. In total, we held more than 60 meetings, including about ten with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne and with the organization Talking.Advocating.Living in Québec.

● (1615)

[*English*]

Following these consultations, we carefully analyzed each contribution and developed regulatory proposals in close collaboration with the Department of Justice and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

[*Translation*]

The result of this work is draft regulations that we believe are balanced. They would provide federal institutions with a clear framework for complying with part VII.

[*English*]

The key advancement of the regulations will be that, for any federal program, policy or initiative launched by an institution, that institution must seize the opportunity and consider taking positive measures. In doing so, it must consult official language stakeholders, conduct an analysis that takes into account the uniqueness and diversity of English- and French-speaking linguistic minority communities and document the actions it is taking to promote part VII commitments.

[*Translation*]

The draft regulations clearly set out when an institution must consider whether positive measures can be taken or whether the negative consequences of certain decisions with respect to part VII commitments can be avoided or mitigated.

This includes, among others, when developing, restructuring, abolishing, or transferring responsibilities with respect to a program, policy, or initiative.

[*English*]

Federal institutions must consider how their decisions affect part VII commitments, including effects on community vitality, for example in culture, education, health, justice, employment and immigration.

The draft regulations clarify that institutions must provide reasonable notice for dialogue and consultation activities, and that they must provide consulted stakeholders with a summary and an opportunity to provide feedback.

To wrap up, the regulations are not the end of the process. To ensure they are fully operationalized, additional policy instruments such as a directive and guidance are being developed to complement the regulations.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now give Mr. Godin the floor for six minutes.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for taking part in this exercise. I think your testimony is important. Today, you can help us understand the process and the regulations.

First, I would like to know one thing. You said that you had 60 meetings throughout the process before drafting the report. In reading the report, I realized a lot of things were missing. You talked about clarity, guidelines and a clear framework. That's not my understanding.

Can you give us an approximate percentage of elements you heard during the consultations that you included in the regulations?

Vidya ShankarNarayan: I will respond first and then give the floor to one of my colleagues to list—

Joël Godin: I am asking for a percentage, an order of magnitude.

Vidya ShankarNarayan: You want a percentage, not a list.

Mr. Quell, could you provide the percentage?

Carsten Quell (Executive Director, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, People & Culture, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): Yes, however, I would say that it is a bit difficult to give the exact percentage, because it is a qualitative product. I can give a few examples of—

Joël Godin: No, I will stop you there, Mr. Quell. What I want to know is whether you retained many of the elements raised by the people on the ground. That is my question.

Carsten Quell: Yes, absolutely.

Joël Godin: Is it more than 50%?

Carsten Quell: That's hard to say.

Vidya ShankarNarayan: We can provide you with the exact percentage later, if you wish.

Joël Godin: No, that's not necessary.

The second point concerns the application to federal institutions. You indicate, “These regulations apply to federal institutions other than the Senate [...]” and then you enumerate all the exemptions.

Who will enforce the regulations?

Vidya ShankarNarayan: Just to clarify your question, does it apply to the whole of government?

Joël Godin: I am referring to the second point on the regulations, which you probably have on hand. The “Application” section reads as follows: “These regulations apply to federal institutions other than the Senate, the House of Commons [...]”. You then list the institutions that are exempt.

My question is simple. Who will ensure that the various departments, including the Privy Council, will enforce the regulations?

• (1620)

Vidya ShankarNarayan: Everyone will enforce the regulations.

Joël Godin: However, if departments fail to comply, who has the power to intervene? Who has the authority?

Vidya ShankarNarayan: All right. Who has the authority to intervene if someone—

Joël Godin: Yes, if they do not comply.

Vidya ShankarNarayan: Treasury Board will follow up with each department that fails to comply with these regulations.

Is your question about prosecution or—

Joël Godin: No. I want to ensure it is enforced, and that those who fail to comply are brought back in line.

Vidya ShankarNarayan: Absolutely.

Joël Godin: Treasury Board will ensure the enforcement, not Heritage Canada. Neither the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture nor the minister of official languages, who does not exist, will ensure compliance.

Is that correct?

Carsten Quell: Yes, the deputy heads are responsible for implementation of the act within their institutions. The Treasury Board Secretariat is responsible for ensuring oversight and producing compliance reports.

Joël Godin: The Treasury Board Secretariat is responsible for ensuring oversight and producing compliance reports.

Who is responsible for oversight when DND fails to comply with the Official Languages Act and that department does not implement positive measures, such as those set out in part VII?

Carsten Quell: Treasury Board Secretariat, or TBS, has a compliance framework, which allows it to apply measures depending on the degree of severity.

Joël Godin: Can it impose such measures on other departments?

Carsten Quell: We start with persuasion, then we inform the department. We give it the opportunity to identify solutions. It is rare for a department to refuse to take action at that point. That said, the framework sets out other options.

Joël Godin: I understand, Mr. Quell. However, it is true that the departments never refuse the recommendations they are given to ensure their compliance.

What followup does TBS do to ensure that, even if the department agrees, it actually complies with and implements the recommendations?

Carsten Quell: As of last year, we started collecting information on part VII. The departments then provide information in their annual reports. You receive a copy of these annual reports, and TBS asks for supporting documentation if there are any doubts about the statements being made by the departments.

Joël Godin: You are telling me that this is new, that TBS just started doing this last year.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

I will be strict about the time.

Carsten Quell: The annual reports have been around for a very long time, however, since the reform of the Official Languages Act and the commitments set out under part VII, which fall under TBS, questions on part VII were added.

Joël Godin: This started last year, then.

Carsten Quell: Since the act was implemented, there has always been a lag in the reports.

Joël Godin: I will repeat what you said. You said, “as of last year”.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Carsten Quell: We inserted questions to cover the period during which the new version of the act applies.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

Please note that time is short. I will be strict.

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault for six minutes.

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

Mr. Quell, I will get straight to the point. According to the modernized version of the act, federal institutions must take the necessary measures—this is the term used in the act—during negotiations of provincial and territorial agreements to promote the inclusion of provisions establishing obligations with respect to the official languages.

The draft regulations indicate that the parties must be advised of official languages expectations and language provisions must be proposed. Is this the full extent of the necessary measures set out in the act?

Would it be possible to further extend the necessary measures?

Carsten Quell: I will explain what is set out in the draft regulations.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: We have it in the draft regulations, but would it be possible to go beyond what is set out in the draft regulations?

Carsten Quell: The purpose of the regulations is to define the procedure for implementing part VII of the act. In developing the draft regulations, we did what we considered necessary to ensure a proper implementation, with the input that we received from stakeholders.

• (1625)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: For the negotiation of agreements, for example, would it have been possible to define minimum content for language clauses and criteria for the drafting process or another component?

Would it have been possible to go a step further and to define what is meant by “necessary measures” when negotiating agreements with the provinces and territories, since this remains a key issue for the communities?

Carsten Quell: We can't step outside the framework provided by the enabling legislation. We can set the procedure, but we can't overstep the provisions of the act with regard to measures to promote the inclusion of language clauses in federal-provincial-territorial agreements.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: In terms of the necessary measures, I gather that the most we could do was really to provide information and make proposals. The act specifies that the necessary measures must be taken. Our interpretation is that we can make proposals and provide information.

Carsten Quell: We laid out the proposed measures. When the federal government negotiates, it must inform the parties of official languages expectations and objectives and propose provisions to include in the agreements.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Sorry to interrupt you, but my time is limited.

Subsection 41(2) of the modernized act recognizes that, while French and English have equal legal status, their actual position is asymmetrical. We know that French is in a minority situation in North America and Canada. This calls for greater protection and promotion measures. This is stated in the act.

How did the special status of French factor into the drafting of the regulations?

How can the consideration for the distinct reality of the special status of French be factored into the implementation of the regulations?

Carsten Quell: The draft regulations mirror part VII of the act to some extent. However, subsection 4(4) of the regulations lists the components and factors that federal departments and institutions must take into account when considering positive measures.

For example, the asymmetry-related factors include restoring and increasing the demographic weight of French linguistic minority communities. The subsection also talks about supporting the creation and dissemination of information in French that contributes to the advancement of scientific knowledge in any discipline.

You can see the consideration of the need to support the French language in certain areas outside the scope of asymmetry-related matters.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: In terms of reporting, the bill includes a number of components. We've taken note of them.

Would it have been possible to further clarify the key components of the evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to really ensure consistent and uniform reporting across all federal institutions?

Some components have been proposed. However, have other components been considered to strengthen the reporting portion of the draft regulations?

Carsten Quell: I don't want to speculate on this. However, the text of the draft regulations before you takes into account the considerations of federal institutions and the input that we received from minority communities and stakeholders in the office of the commissioner. It reflects our collaborative efforts.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Subsection 42(1) of the modernized act states that the federal government is committed to promoting the French language in its diplomatic relations.

However, as far as I can tell, the draft regulations don't include this aspect.

Would it have been possible to include something to put into practice the implementation of subsection 42(1)?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Carsten Quell: In developing the regulations, our approach has been to ensure that they cover all federal institutions.

We know that the act focuses on certain federal institutions, such as Global Affairs Canada or Statistics Canada, when it comes to the enumeration of rights holders. However, the current version of the regulations was designed to apply to all federal institutions.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mario Beaulieu: The purpose of the regulations is indeed to clarify the obligations of part VII of the act. Is that right?

Do the regulations take into account the purposes of the act as a whole?

• (1630)

Carsten Quell: The regulations take into account the purposes of part VII. The goal is to define and set out the procedure for implementing part VII.

Mario Beaulieu: If we look at the new version of the act, the really new aspects are the asymmetrical components.

Ms. ShankarNarayan also said earlier that the goal was to protect French in Quebec.

What part of the regulations covers this? I didn't see anything about this. All I saw was the usual asymmetrical approach.

Carsten Quell: As I just explained, the regulations reflect part VII of the act. Part VII of the act reflects this new asymmetrical approach. The regulations set out the procedure for implement-

ing part VII of the act. As I did earlier, I'll give the example of support for the creation and dissemination of information in French that contributes to the advancement of scientific knowledge in any discipline.

It's an example of how a federal institution taking a positive step can promote and protect French in Quebec and in other parts of Canada.

Annie Proulx (Director, Regulations and Policy, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): I would like to add that the draft regulations do indeed propose a common framework that would clarify the obligations of part VII of the act. The draft regulations include provisions for federal institutions to implement all these commitments. One of these provisions is to protect and promote French throughout the country, including in Quebec.

Mario Beaulieu: One purpose of the act is to maintain a francophone majority in Quebec and to make Quebec a hub for the French-speaking world. In part VII of the act, subparagraph 41(6)(b)(i) also refers to "the necessity of protecting and promoting the French language in each province and territory...". This includes Quebec. However, all the statements in the regulations refer to the English and French linguistic minority communities, but never to French in Quebec.

During your consultations regarding the regulations, did you consult with people who represent francophones in Quebec?

Carsten Quell: We consulted the Quebec government when developing the regulations. Perhaps more broadly, if I look at a document that we use to provide information to the federal institutions, our approach to explaining—

Mario Beaulieu: You didn't consult any groups, such as the FC-FA, for francophones outside Quebec. Is that right?

Quebec has community groups, and the same thing exists. You didn't consult any of these groups.

Is that right?

Carsten Quell: I don't know whether we consulted with any institutions in Quebec.

Annie Proulx: We did consult with some Quebec government officials. We could give you—

Mario Beaulieu: However, you didn't consult any representatives of the community organizations that advocate for French in Quebec.

Is that right?

Annie Proulx: We met in particular with organizations that advocate for bilingualism in the country. We can give you a more detailed list if you would like.

Mario Beaulieu: I find it unfortunate that the new regulations don't clarify this aspect. So far, when we look at the public accounts, for example, we don't see any new positive measures for French in Quebec. I'm not talking about French outside Quebec.

Yet the act says the opposite. A number of ministers talked about protecting French in Quebec. However, if we look at the public accounts, for example, we don't see anything for French in Quebec.

Will the regulations clarify this issue?

Carsten Quell: No. The regulations will help institutions fulfill their obligation to take positive measures. The positive measures must be taken in three areas. These areas are the vitality of minorities and the promotion of official languages, the protection and promotion of French and, in this case, the recognition that French is in a minority situation.

The focus is on the implementation of the regulations through positive measures on the part of federal institutions.

• (1635)

Mario Beaulieu: Basically, you're repeating parts of the act, but not clarifying them.

This isn't related to Quebec. However, the FCFA said that there were no purpose statements to guide the implementation and interpretation of the regulations.

Wouldn't there have been a way to include purpose statements to clarify things?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left. Please give a brief response.

Carsten Quell: We're now at the draft regulations stage. We welcome all recommendations, proposals and comments. We're waiting for briefs from community groups. We'll certainly make a point of looking at any new proposals for the final development of the regulations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We're moving on to the second round. I'll shorten the round proportionally, as always.

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

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Quell, I find it interesting when you talk about draft regulations. It means that you're open to proposals and comments.

With regard to language clauses, under the heading "Provincial and Territorial Government Agreements", the regulations state the following:

7(1) For the purposes of paragraph 41(7)(a.1) of the Act, federal institutions must take the necessary measures to promote the inclusion of the provisions referred to in that paragraph by:

(a) informing the parties of the expectations [...].

I don't want to read it. That said, I do want to see whether it's possible to add a component. This would probably be a paragraph (c), which would follow paragraph (b). It would state in the regulations that the federal government, in all its negotiations with the provinces and territories, must make public the proposed provisions for inclusion in the agreements.

I don't want to know about what happens at the negotiating table. However, the federal government has an obligation to propose provisions.

Can we know what proposals have been made? When we have the final agreement, we'll know how things turned out.

Is it possible to add this?

The Chair: You have 35 seconds left.

Carsten Quell: I'll take note of your proposal. We'll give it due consideration when we draw up the regulations. I'll invite my colleague to elaborate on this.

The Chair: There are 20 seconds left.

Annie Proulx: We must take into account the specific context and objectives of each agreement. However, the draft regulations specify that the content of the provisions must be based on an analysis, which takes into account a variety of factors.

Joël Godin: I don't have a problem with that.

I just want to know one thing. In addition to the analysis, when you meet with the provinces, you must propose provisions. I would like to see public disclosure of these proposed provisions in the agreements negotiated between Canada and the provinces.

I appreciate your open-mindedness, Mr. Quell. Thank you for taking note of this. I look forward to reading it in the next version of the regulations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Chenette, you have the floor for two minutes.

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

I'm pleased to welcome the witnesses.

I would like to ask a quick question to clarify things. You talk about the importance of consultation and organizations. This week, the FCFA appeared before a Senate committee. During the appearance, the executive director claimed that TBS consulted with the FCFA only twice, which doesn't sound like much.

Is this the case, or were there more consultations?

Vidya ShankarNarayan: I'll start by answering the question. I'll then let my colleagues have their say.

We consulted with all minority communities, including the FCFA, Talking.Advocating.Living in Québec and many others. Just this morning, we had a discussion. It wasn't a formal consultation. However, we invited all the minority communities to speak with our whole-of-government assistant deputy ministers' committee.

This gave us the opportunity to receive recommendations and to continue with our consultations. One recommendation was to have a whole-of-government assistant deputy ministers' subcommittee to properly develop partnership agreements.

Madeleine Chenette: My time is running out. I asked you whether there had been more consultations, and if so, how many. I don't want to know the context.

Vidya ShankarNarayan: We'll give you the information. Ms. Proulx can answer your question.

• (1640)

The Chair: You have 40 seconds left.

Annie Proulx: We've met with over 60 organizations since we began working on the regulations. We've met with the FCFA over a dozen times.

Madeleine Chenette: Okay.

I don't have much time left.

You said that we must respect the regulations and that we can't go any further than this. However, during the consultations, what did you hear that didn't directly concern the regulations, but that could be another useful mechanism to implement?

The Chair: There are five seconds left. Please answer in one sentence.

Carsten Quell: We took into account the many proposals submitted to us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for one minute.

Mario Beaulieu: You said earlier that the consultations were continuing and that you would be reworking your draft regulations.

Is that right?

If so, will the draft regulations come back to the committee so that you can show them to us?

Roughly how much time do we have, and what form might the subsequent consultations take?

Carsten Quell: We've completed the first round of consultations required by the act.

We're currently in the process of having parliamentary committees study the regulations. I'm hearing proposals here. We'll consider them. We're also waiting for community stakeholders to submit briefs.

The regulations will then be published in the Canada Gazette, part I. A public consultation period will follow. The general public will also have an opportunity to make proposals.

After this whole process, the Governor in Council will adopt the regulations.

Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

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

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

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Throughout the text, we see many references—four or five, at a glance—to “other stakeholders”. The text refers to francophone and anglophone minority communities. For example, the second paragraph of section 5, paragraph (a), refers to English and French linguistic minority communities and then adds “and other stakeholders”. This is repeated several times, in particular in paragraph (b).

Why add “other stakeholders”? This concerns the Official Languages Act. This act contains two languages, English and French.

This addition doesn't reflect the act. Why add this?

Carsten Quell: The reason is that the new part VII of the act contains provisions on support for minority language communities.

It also contains a provision on the protection and promotion of French and a provision on the learning of the minority language. I'm thinking of organizations such as Canadian Parents for French and French for the Future. These stakeholders wouldn't necessarily fit under the heading of minority communities.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have 40 seconds left.

Joël Godin: We don't put descriptions of specific organizations in the act. In my opinion, the purpose of the Official Languages Act is to protect the country's two official languages. That's the point of the act. The regulations shouldn't go against this act.

There's never any reference to other stakeholders, other groups. Why do we see this in the regulations?

Carsten Quell: We're taking note of your question. We'll certainly take it into consideration.

Joël Godin: Thank you. That's kind of you.

Paragraph 6(2)(d), the last point, reads as follows:

(d) if possible, after providing the written summary, provide the English and French linguistic minority communities and other stakeholders that participated in the exchange with an opportunity to submit further information in writing.

Why include the words “if possible”? When is it not possible?

The Chair: Please answer in one sentence, because the time is up.

Annie Proulx: If the act states that this is to the extent possible, the regulations will reflect this.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, your time is up.

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Villeneuve for two minutes.

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

The act states that federal institutions must base their analysis, to the extent possible, on evidence-based findings when assessing potential positive measures and negative impacts. Yet the draft regulations don't specify how this information should be gathered or used.

Wouldn't more explicit wording have been helpful to ensure a rigorous and consistent approach across federal institutions?

• (1645)

Carsten Quell: We'll certainly consider this proposal. I gather that you would like more details on how evidence-based findings are collected and used by federal institutions.

Louis Villeneuve: I think that this would indeed be important. Thank you for taking note of this.

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

The Chair: You have 50 seconds left, Mr. Villeneuve.

Louis Villeneuve: The Official Languages Act calls for positive measures to be taken to implement the commitments set out in part VII. Subsection 41(6) specifies that these measures must be concrete and taken with the intention of having a beneficial effect.

The regulations don't seem to provide any further clarification regarding the scope. Would the inclusion of a provision on the purpose of the regulations, clarifying their spirit and goals, be helpful in guiding the implementation?

Carsten Quell: We'll have to look at whether your suggestion goes beyond the framework of the act in terms of the definitions or mechanisms that can be included in the regulations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us.

We've now reached our limit of time.

Colleagues, we normally spend a bit of time chatting with people in the room during the break between panels. I'd ask you not to do that today in order to maximize the time we have to hear from the FCFA representatives.

I will now suspend the meeting for one minute to welcome the second panel of witnesses.

• (1645) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1645)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to meeting number 21 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

As discussed, we are saving the last five minutes of the meeting to talk about Ms. Burke's nomination.

I would now like to welcome the second panel of witnesses.

From the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, we have Ms. Liane Roy, president; Mr. Alain Dupuis, executive director; and Mr. John Mark Keyes, professor, who is joining us by video conference.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Afterwards, we will move to a question period with the members.

Ms. Roy, you have the floor for five minutes.

Liane Roy (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting us today to share our thoughts on the proposed draft regulations on part VII of the Official Languages Act. With me today are Alain Dupuis, our director general, as well as Mr. John Mark Keyes, a former department of justice official. Mr. Keyes has recognized expertise in draft regulations.

I don't need to remind anyone of the number of years spend modernizing the act and the significant effort invested in this endeavour.

This committee played a critical role in improving the bill, which was ultimately adopted in the spring of 2023 by 300 votes in the House of Commons. It was a historic moment, and the magnitude of that vote sent a clear message about the legislator's intention, which was to take strong and bold action to slow the decline of French in Canada.

The proposed draft regulations, as prepared by the Treasury Board Secretariat, do not fulfill the promise of Official Languages Act, and nor do they reflect the intent for change that Bill C-13 intended.

As you know, the modernized act introduces a new differentiated approach paradigm recognizing that French, one of the two official languages, is vulnerable and requires specific safeguards, and promotional measures. And yet, the proposed draft regulations don't seem to take any of that into consideration. Instead, they cling to the old paradigm of symmetry between French and English.

The document also clearly lacks clarity, especially when it comes to how positive measures are adopted. It simply repeats what the act already says. There is such a lack of willingness in this proposed draft to convey the importance of protecting and promoting French that, if it were to be adopted in its current form, the new momentum that you, parliamentarians, wanted would be brutally thwarted.

In light of that, I'd like to remind everyone of four essential FCFA recommendations.

First, the regulations must stress that positive measures should have a positive, tangible and verifiable impact. They must be developed and implemented in effective consultation with official-language minority communities.

Second, positive measures must rely on analyses collected in dialogue and consultation activities, as well as research and evidence. The proposed draft regulations are vague and lax in this regard.

Third, the regulations must include an obligation for federal institutions to develop frameworks and action plans based on specific indicators. That is the only way to assess the gaps to substantive equality for linguistic minorities and take the necessary measures to reduce them.

Finally, regarding co-operation with provinces and territories, the regulations must specify that federal institutions are required to promote the inclusion of language clauses at all stages of transfer agreement implementation, including framework protocols, bilateral agreements and action plans.

Dear members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the FCFA has been following the implementation of the Official Languages Act for 50 years. We spent several years explaining to federal institutions what a positive measure is. We have regularly proposed public policy solutions to improve the lot of francophone communities that have been brushed aside in this proposed draft regulation. Our recommendations, which TBS is familiar with and which have not changed since June, are rooted in our experience.

Not only is it important for the secretariat to go back to the drawing board, it must also listen to the communities. Otherwise, we fear that all this work over the years to modernize the act will have been for naught.

Thank you. We look forward to your questions.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to questions from members. Once again, colleagues, I'm going to be strict on time.

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

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Dupuis, Ms. Roy, for joining us. I know you've been involved in the modernization of the Official Languages Act for a number of years. We've had a chance to work together, and I thank you for the work you do.

You represent a staggering number of official languages organizations and official languages minority communities across the country. I am happy to work with you on this mission to grow both official languages, knowing that, as you said, French is the most vulnerable of the two.

Ms. Roy, I'm going to ask you a very simple question.

Maybe you were here earlier for the Treasury Board Secretariat presentation.

Do you see anything in the proposed draft regulations on part VII any of the elements you raised when your organization was consulted?

• (1655)

Liane Roy: Very few of the elements we raised during the consultations were taken.

Joël Godin: Let's use a percentage, because that's the question I asked the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Roughly, what percentage does that represent?

It's an order of magnitude. I'm not looking for a specific number.

Is 10% of what you proposed in the regulations? Is it a comma in an ocean of words?

Liane Roy: I'll be generous and say 20%.

Joël Godin: From what I understand after listening to your presentation, after all the efforts you've put in, you're really disappointed.

What do you think should be the main priority, the essential element that must be included in part VII of the regulations?

Liane Roy: You'll be able to read our suggestions in our brief, but based on the deficiencies we noted, our priority would be positive measures.

That's why we'd like to add an element to the regulations to clarify the purpose of positive measures, establish a clear process for developing and adopting positive measures, include a process for

considering the negative impacts on our communities, and create and publish performance indicators for positive measures.

Also, community analyses are essential for effective and ongoing dialogue and consultation, but they can't happen without impact indicators and evidence. I can go on; I have more.

Joël Godin: No, actually, I have more questions for you.

From what I understand, you'll be submitting a brief to ensure the secretariat takes your proposals into consideration and keeps more than 20% of them.

Can you give us more details on how to define positive measures, the process and the indicators?

Help them help us, kind of thing.

Liane Roy: Absolutely. We've been doing that since 2023, but we'll keep going.

Joël Godin: You know you have to hit the nail on the head more than once.

Liane Roy: Yes, we'll keep doing it.

Joël Godin: I'll ask you another question.

The famous language clauses are a new concept in the act. I suggested to the Treasury Board Secretariat that it add the obligation to include and make public proposed provisions for all agreements negotiated between the federal government and the provinces.

Do you support that? Do you think that's an essential element that must be included in the regulations?

Liane Roy: I completely agree with you.

Joël Godin: That's excellent.

Alain Dupuis (Executive Director, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): May I add something?

Joël Godin: Yes, go ahead, Mr. Dupuis.

Alain Dupuis: Regarding the language clauses, we'd also like to add that, when negotiating with provinces, the federal government's obligation must apply throughout the process.

As we said in our opening remarks, the framework agreement negotiated between the federal government and all provinces and territories is the first opportunity to include provisions. That said, if the provisions are not included in a framework agreement, there's still the second stage, which is bilateral agreements signed with each province. That's another opportunity to include commitments, because some provinces might, in good faith, want to include commitments regarding official languages.

The third stage we want to clarify relates to the action plan each province has to develop on a three- or five-year cycle. These action plans can also include tangible initiatives to support the francophone minority. It's this process and this obligation that allow commitments related to official languages to be brought to the negotiating table, so we'd also like to add that to the regulations.

Joël Godin: What I understand, Mr. Dupuis, is that, under the act, the federal government is required to propose provisions at all stages, but you want to clarify this requirement so that organizations don't have to go to court because proposals weren't made at all stages.

Is that correct?

Alain Dupuis: Yes, that's correct.

• (1700)

Joël Godin: Okay. I have 40 seconds left.

Beyond the priorities that have been established and the information you've already given us, what else could be included in this proposed draft regulation for part VII regarding positive measures to really protect official languages?

Is there anything in particular you'd like to add?

The Chair: There are five seconds left. If you could give a brief answer, please.

Alain Dupuis: We have to define what an effective consultation is and better define the consultation process so that communities can prepare themselves and collect the evidence.

Notices have to be taken into account, but we also have to make sure there are separate consultations for the francophone and anglophone communities, because they have different needs. We have a number of proposals to flesh out—

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

Joël Godin: Thank you. You can send them to us in writing later.

The Chair: Ms. Mingarelli, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

Ms. Roy, when you appeared before the Senate committee last Monday, you said: "I do not know if it is a lack of willingness or understanding, but certainly the spirit of the act, or of Bill C-13, which we all worked so hard to get passed, is not reflected in the regulations as presented."

How could we define the spirit of the act in a measurable way and how could we operationalize it?

Liane Roy: Our biggest concern is to have regulations that allow for proper implementation of the act. We think effective regulations enable positive measures to be taken, measures that have a tangible and verifiable impact on the vitality of communities, on the protection and promotion of French, and on learning in the minority language.

The regulations must also respect the principle of a differentiated approach. Just to remind everyone, the act acknowledges that

French is vulnerable across the country and that more needs to be done to ensure its protection and vitality. In this case, a public servant who reads only the proposed regulations would never see the expression of a differentiated approach.

Alain Dupuis: I would also add that positive measures must not be incidental to the primary mandate of a federal institution. A positive measure cannot be a small, related initiative that isn't at the very heart of what a department does.

As we saw, the federal budget proposes significant investments in infrastructure and housing, for example. Will these new programs include an obligation to support housing and infrastructure construction in francophone communities?

Right now, there's no such obligation, but these are the types of flagship policies that communities want to get involved in and that have been relegated to the back burner for far too long. I'll give you an example. The Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities could use a very small budget to launch a small initiative that ultimately does nothing to ensure we get our fair share of federal programs and major initiatives.

I think that's the spirit of positive measures. They must not be parallel, but rather at the very heart of everything the federal government does, in all the political programs developed. We have to think about francophone minority communities, target their specific needs and adapt programs and projects to their reality. That is the crux of the modernization of the act.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

You said that positive measures should be based on the institution's primary mandate. Since there's no mention of that in the act, how do you recommend this criterion be included so that it's clear for each department?

Liane Roy: I'm going to ask Mr. Keyes to answer that question.

John Mark Keyes (Professor, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): We think it's important to emphasize that positive measures should be included in the primary mandates and main activities of federal institutions.

As Mr. Dupuis just said, small initiatives that parallel departmental mandates are not going to yield positive results. These measures must be applied within the institutions themselves.

• (1705)

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

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

The Chair: You have a minute and a half left.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Okay.

My next question is for all the witnesses.

You often talk about the consultation process and the need for consultation. We all agree that consultation must take place and that it's necessary to ensure official language minority communities can share their point of view. That said, the consultation requests you make can be a bit excessive.

Do you think the government should consult you, as if clause 35 applied to you?

Alain Dupuis: We make a number of proposals in our brief. I don't know what clause 35 you're referring to says, but I think there are ways to spread out consultations a little more so that communities get reasonable notice and have time to properly prepare.

Before taking part in a consultation, we have to consult our networks, collect evidence, and hire analysts to make realistic proposals that the public service can implement. When we're given insufficient notice, often only a few days, we don't have time to prepare.

Also, federal institutions must ensure that communities have the capacity to take part in consultations. They even have to plan funds in their budget to support the communities, so that they can do all this work to be ready.

Unfortunately, right now, those capabilities don't exist. We've often pointed out that under the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028: Protection-Promotion-Collaboration, there are new consultation requirements, but that we also need to make sure funds are available so that any groups, including those in your ridings, could take part in consultations. At the moment, that's not the case, unfortunately.

The Chair: Mr. Dupuis, I have to interrupt you. We're well over time. Thank you.

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

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Could you give us a specific example of a positive, tangible measure that would meet your expectations, including the objective, the indicator, the timeline, the data source and how it would fit into a department's primary mandate?

Alain Dupuis: Well, for instance, the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, has adopted a francophone immigration policy that sets specific targets and includes initiatives to meet francophone immigration objectives. There's still a lot of work to be done, but we've seen significant changes at IRCC in recent years, as well as the adoption of a separate policy to support the francophone minority.

That's what we consider a positive measure. It's not a small initiative. It's really a consideration of the community's overall needs in relation to a specific mandate.

Mario Beaulieu: That's an example where it's already working, but do you have an example where it's not working and where you'd like to see action taken?

Alain Dupuis: Global Affairs Canada doesn't have a lot of positive measures, or very few. As an example, there's no funding program to help French-Canadian organizations shine on the world stage.

Global Affairs Canada wasn't included in the most recent action plan for official languages, which means the department has very few initiatives to support us, at a time when all our files and priorities, whether it's in education, immigration or culture, now depend on an international component.

We're hoping the regulations can change that.

Mario Beaulieu: It's odd that there's nothing at all about that in the regulations.

You said there should be purpose statements related to positive measures.

Can you give us examples of tangible purpose statements that could be included in the regulations to advise on the interpretation of positive measures, whether they're related to substantive equality, the differentiated approach or something else?

• (1710)

Alain Dupuis: In the brief we sent the committee, on page 6, we propose that the following purpose statement be added to subsection 1.1(1) of the regulations:

1.1(1) The purpose of these regulations is to ensure federal institutions take positive measures that

- (a) are tangible and tailored to the specific needs and objectives of each official language community;
- (b) take into account the purposes and principles set out in clauses 2 and 3.1, and in paragraph 41(6)(c) of the act, as well as the values set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
- (c) effectively implement the commitments set out in subsections 41(1) and 41(3) of the act; and
- (d) have a real and measurable impact on the vitality and development of official language minorities, the protection and promotion of French, and the recognition and use of English and French across Canada.

Mario Beaulieu: What indicators would you use?

Alain Dupuis: We have a number of indicators. We're also proposing to add clause 3.1 to indicate a procedure for positive measures. Proposed subsection 3.1(1) says that positive measures

- (a) stem from the federal institution's core mandate and primary responsibilities; and
- (b) are incorporated into the federal institution's central policies, programs and initiatives; and
- (c) take the form of one or more specific and directly applicable actions, based on clearly defined objectives and means, and are not limited to statements of principle; and
- (d) have a measurable impact....

We listed a series of indicators for measurable impacts, particularly regarding language learning, the demographic weight of francophones, the promotion of languages—

Mario Beaulieu: Say we take the demographic weight of francophones. The act talks about repairing and restoring the demographic weight of francophones.

How do you propose to assess that? Should it be assessed in relation to the first official language spoken or the language used at home?

Alain Dupuis: I think there are a number of linguistic indicators. The mother tongue is definitely one, but there's also the first official language spoken and knowledge of the languages. It isn't necessarily one factor or another. I think it's necessary to take all the linguistic variables into account to see demographic growth.

Mario Beaulieu: What's something that isn't in the regulations that you would really like to see?

You have already named some things. For example, you talked about measures to promote French in international forums.

You also talked about the fact that the regulations don't take into account the differentiated approach. Could you elaborate on that? What does that entail, in concrete terms?

Alain Dupuis: The differentiated approach is based on the fact that communities have different needs. It isn't just a matter of differences between anglophones and francophones. Within the Canadian francophonie itself, there's a wide variety of needs.

Some regions have greater needs for support than other regions do. When institutions consult with communities, they have to take that variety into account.

The Chair: There are 40 seconds left.

Mario Beaulieu: You also propose reviewing the regulations every five years.

Can you explain why? How would you do that?

Liane Roy: The regulations will make changes within the various federal institutions. We believe it would be useful to review its effectiveness five years after its implementation to continue making appropriate changes.

Mario Beaulieu: Overall, do you really think it's possible to restore the demographic weight of francophones?

The Chair: There are five seconds left. Please give a very brief answer.

Alain Dupuis: If the resources are dedicated to it, it's possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We'll move on to the second round of questions.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Dalton for three minutes.

Marc Dalton: Thank you very much for your testimony. I'd like to congratulate you on all the effort you've put in over all these years.

The new version of the Official Languages Act was passed in 2023. It's now 2026.

What do you think of that delay?

Do you think that's acceptable? Does that show a lack of momentum?

Liane Roy: We have to live with the delay, but it's unacceptable. We were told that it would take 18 months, so it's already been several months longer. Still, it gave us the chance to work on what we wanted to see in the regulations. That's why we were so disappointed

when we saw the draft regulations. The elements we wanted to see in it—the ones that were such a priority for us—simply aren't there.

• (1715)

Marc Dalton: You used some very strong words when you talked about the draft regulations. You talked about a glaring gap. You're discouraged because you feel all this work has been for naught.

Why did you say that? What do you think is going on?

Liane Roy: We consulted all of our members, namely, the 25 member organizations of the FCFA, on two occasions. I don't know if you know this, but getting all these people together for consultations is a lot of work. On top of that, the office staff and people from the Treasury Board met on other occasions, perhaps a dozen times.

That's why it's discouraging when we see what they've proposed. It isn't at all in line with what we asked for. We haven't changed our position since 2023. We're still asking for the same things. That's what we wanted to see. So we keep repeating the same things.

The Chair: There are 50 seconds left.

Marc Dalton: This reflects what we see a lot in the Liberal government across the board. The words are nice, but the action is lacking.

Earlier, my colleague Mr. Godin asked an official who was going to be responsible for enforcing the regulations. He was told that it would be the Treasury Board Secretariat.

What do you think about that?

Liane Roy: The Treasury Board was responsible for ensuring accountability so that each federal institution could fulfill its mandate and action plan. So it's up to Treasury Board to do that work. That's something new since the adoption of the last version of the Official Languages Act.

Marc Dalton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Villeneuve for three minutes.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you very much.

Good morning, Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis.

Ms. Roy, this is the second time we're meeting today. If I may, I'd like to tell you that if passion is any guarantee of longevity, you're going to live to be 100 years old.

How should the most relevant contexts for consultation be identified?

I'm thinking, for example, of a decision to protect a species at risk or to invest in national defence as opposed to a decision involving sectors that are key to the vitality of communities.

How do you see that?

Liane Roy: I just want to make sure I understand the question. Does it concern the terms and conditions of consultation activities?

Louis Villeneuve: Yes.

Liane Roy: As we've already mentioned, institutions need to give us reasonable notice so that we can prepare. Some of our groups in civil society have very small teams. So we need notice. The various organizations' human resources and financial capacities must be taken into account. A schedule for consultations needs to be set jointly with the communities and federal institutions. Separate consultations need to be held with the various francophone and anglophone communities.

We also need to then receive the information related to those consultations so that we can continue to build on the evidence and the results. It's very important that reports be produced so that we can continue the work.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you.

I'm sorry to interrupt you, but you know that we don't have much time. I wish I could ask more questions.

You suggested that positive measures should be based on each institution's primary mandate. Since that's not in the act, how would you recommend this criterion be included in the regulations in a clear way for each department?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Alain Dupuis: The purpose of the act talks about substantive equality. That's been recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada. That must be the standard for positive measures and enforcement of the Official Languages Act.

To achieve substantive equality for the official language of the minority, you can't just have related initiatives. Positive measures must be part of the primary mandate and comprehensive initiatives of all departments. Otherwise, the minority will never achieve substantive equality with the majority.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you very much.

You're proposing that these regulations be reviewed every five years. Why do you want a five-year review?

Liane Roy: Because it's a big job and most institutions are going to have to develop action plans and continue to do the work. So we're saying that they could be reviewed every five years.

• (1720)

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for a minute and a half.

Mario Beaulieu: Earlier, we talked about indicators, linguistic vitality and all that. You gave some examples. However, you didn't talk about the language used at home. You talked about the mother tongue. However, we've observed that, over the years, more and more francophones are switching to use English at home.

In your opinion, should that indicator, language transfers, be taken into account?

Should we try to reverse this trend?

Alain Dupuis: I'm going to go back to our brief, because I found the section on indicators. We want the measures to be evaluated based on access to government services in the minority language, the impact on socio-economic inequalities and access to employ-

ment, institutional vitality, access to education, the cultural, language and identity vitality of francophone minorities, the impact on the visibility and promotion of French and the restoration of demographic weight.

Those are all key indicators. In my opinion, what you're talking about is related to cultural and language vitality.

The Chair: You still have 20 seconds.

Mario Beaulieu: Language indicators have often been changed to give the impression that there are more francophones and that we comply with the act, where numbers can justify that. However, there's nothing preventing the government from changing the criteria rather than changing the indicators and skewing the picture a bit. It could reduce the importance of the criteria for the right to services in French.

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

I will now give the floor to Mr. Bélanger for three minutes.

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

Efforts to modernize the Official Languages Act concluded with the passing of Bill C-13 in June 2023. You say that there don't seem to have been many changes so far to protect French. There doesn't seem to be any interpretation or guidance for the officials who will have to enforce the act.

What do you think of the Treasury Board Secretariat aspiring to implement a new culture of impact within federal institutions?

Alain Dupuis: That is precisely the basis of everything we're asking for. We want regulations that won't give us more processes. What we want is more results. Right now, we fear that communities will be part of many more processes with no obligation to have a real impact on our communities and reduce inequality between the minority and the majority.

That's really what we want in the end. We want clearer and better defined processes so that we know unequivocally what needs to be done to get results for the francophone minority.

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

Madeleine Chenette: Thank you very much for being here.

We appreciate your expertise in this area, your leadership and your commitment to this matter.

Regarding the four points you raised in your opening remarks, which I find quite legitimate, I think the reason for the enforcement lag is that the government is very diversified. That's my theory. The various departments, whether we're talking about AI, defence, health or heritage, operate in very different dynamics.

You say that we don't just need a process. However, how realistic is it to ask that there be specific indicators in the regulations, as you did?

You provide a list of indicators, but it would be practically impossible to put certain indicators in place in some departments. However, that doesn't mean they don't have to make use of indicators.

We do need to ask for more evidence and, of course, consultations and indicators. However, should we require specific answers when there is enormous diversity between the departments?

Is that really realistic? At this point, isn't that counterproductive if we want to get things done?

Alain Dupuis: Obviously, a federal institution doesn't have to meet all the criteria I mentioned. However, all federal institutions can have an impact on the use and promotion of French.

• (1725)

Madeleine Chenette: We agree on that.

Again, that's what you're asking for. The principles are not illegitimate, but how realistic is it to ask for clarification in the regulations? At that point, it's like putting things in the hands of departments that may not apply across all departments. They really have to commit if we want them to have an impact on the francophonie.

I'm wondering about your recommendations. What do they learn from one department to another?

A lot of times, departments don't know that they don't know. With all due respect, I'm saying that, when it comes to the francophonie, we haven't really worked on that. How do we go about it? Of course, Treasury Board has work to do, but we can learn a lot drawing inspiration from others. The challenge is not to be too restrictive so they can't say it's impossible to do that and decide not to develop that learning spirit.

In your recommendations, how specific do you want to be while ensuring enforceability?

I understand that these are processes, but diversity must be taken into account.

The Chair: Mr. Dupuis, we have only 10 seconds left, so please provide a brief answer.

Alain Dupuis: I think the vocabulary used in our brief is broad enough to allow all federal institutions to analyze what's related to their mandate and their ability to act for better equality between the minority and the majority.

In our opinion, that's why we want every department to reflect. Right now, several dozen departments have the reflex of saying they have nothing to do with language. That's what needs to change in the culture of government.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chenette.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us. I'd also like to thank them for their testimony and leadership.

The witnesses can now leave, or they are welcome to stay in the room.

Colleagues, we've decided to set aside five minutes to discuss Ms. Burke's nomination. We agreed last time that we were going to report back to the House on Ms. Burke's appointment. We wanted to take some time to think about it and decide what the recommendation would be. We can decide to recommend or not recommend her appointment.

Is it the will of the committee to recommend that Ms. Burke be appointed Commissioner of Official Languages?

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Yes, Mr. Chair, we recommend that Ms. Burke be appointed.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we recommend that the commissioner be appointed. I'd like it to be done in the form of a report, and that we vote on it.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I too recommend that she be appointed and I'd also like it to be done in the form of a report.

The Chair: Is it the will of the committee to recommend that Ms. Burke be appointed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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