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The Honourable Michael Chong

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• (0915)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This is Tuesday, May 27, 2014, and we are holding our 26th hearing. We are here pursuant to Standing Order 108 to carry out a study on the economic situation of Canada's minority linguistic communities.

Today we welcome four witnesses. We will begin with Mr. Thibault from the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada.

Mr. Thibault, you have the floor.

Mr. Laurier Thibault (Director General, Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Laurier Thibault and I am the Director General of the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada. I am speaking to you on behalf of the members of our network and of its board of directors.

I thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for giving the RCCFC this privileged opportunity to highlight the role our postsecondary training and educational institutions play in the economic vitality of minority official language communities. Your committee's engagement is all the more commendable in that you are looking at educational and training institutions such as our own to develop your reflection.

We have had prior to this the opportunity to tell you about the contribution our institutions make to the development of their communities. There are several reasons behind that. Indeed, we work on the ground. We are motivated by the concerns and expectations of our young people, many of whom are adults, and by those of their future employers. We are preparing the skilled workers of tomorrow. We are essential partners of governments in the implementation of their employment, employability and labour force training strategies. In short, we are directly connected to the future of our communities. That is why we are convinced that your deliberations on the economic situation of our communities cannot be separated from a clear and articulate vision of the postsecondary training of our future skilled workers. We are not only the initiators of well-paid jobs, but also creators of wealth.

The current state of the labour market is such that those who hold technical and vocational diplomas from our colleges are often in a better position to find jobs that meet the immediate needs of businesses in their environment. Francophone postsecondary colleges and training institutions fulfil a dual mandate. They must

first of all increase access to postsecondary studies in French in technical and vocational areas. Moreover, through their actions and proactive commitment, they support the development of their communities. We must never forget that young people who have been trained in their environment, in their field of competence and in their native language, will tend to remain there and build their future in their community. That is why our institutions must offer a range of competitive and diverse programs connected to the needs of the labour market and the expectations of employers.

Since 1995, our network has been a pan-Canadian group of 61 French-language colleges in the 10 provinces and territories. Through its collaboration programs and networking initiatives, the RCCFC actively contributes to the development of French-language postsecondary college education and training in Canada, to the advantage of over 30,000 part-time and full-time students every year.

Since its creation, the RCCFC has supported and contributed to the funding of no less than 129 collaboration and expertise-sharing projects in a host of areas that draw on the values of mutual assistance, partnership, creativity and entrepreneurship as levers of economic development. Our colleges are thus essential actors in the economic vitality of our communities. They support entrepreneurs in several ways, in particular through applied research. They allow them to improve their production processes and their productivity while offering students the opportunity of acquiring experience by working on concrete projects.

In 2012, to give you a specific example, our network supported a partnership project between the Collège Boréal of Ontario, the Collège Mathieu in Saskatchewan, and the Gérald-Godin Cégep in the Montreal region, to develop a program aimed at the reintegration of skilled workers in the context of a shortage of skilled labour. The RCCFC acted as a catalyst with these institutions so that they could guide and support older workers returning to the labour force.

I would also like to point to another partnership example involving three of our other members from the Maritime provinces, i.e. the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, Université Sainte-Anne in Nova Scotia, and the Collège Acadie of Prince Edward Island. This partnership involved a unique project to delocalize specialized training in welding, a first for the francophones of the Maritimes.

Indeed, in January 2012, the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, who was at the time the minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, stated that this collaboration involving the federal government and the three French-language postsecondary educational institutions gave students in rural or minority communities a unique opportunity to take part in a shipbuilding initiative in the metallurgical field.

• (0920)

Those were some examples of adjustments to the new realities of the labour market. The same can be said about partnerships entered into by several of our institutions. The purpose is to capitalize on acquired knowledge and competencies, particularly in the area of early childhood education.

Our teaching and training institutions have to learn to train students for jobs and trades that did not exist previously, or have changed radically over the past few years. The new technologies present training challenges, but also represent unexpected opportunities for our institutions. The members of the RCCFC have become masters in vocational upgrading by using and developing communication tools such as webinars and massive online open courses in order to pool resources, expertise and the spirit of partnership of our members throughout Canada. That is the strength of our network.

There is, for instance, the Consortium de l'Ouest et du Nord pour l'éducation postsecondaire et la formation, which groups seven training establishments and was created thanks to the RCCFC. This consortium allows members to pool their experience, expertise and resources so as to maximize their effectiveness and guarantee better quality access to postsecondary education as well as to training in the west and north of Canada. Our institutions thus play a primordial role. They plot the future of their communities by meeting changing needs through adapted means. In education and training, the status quo is not an option. Those who do not take that reality into account run the risk of seeing their very existence jeopardized and their possibilities of economic development compromised.

We wish to point out once again that our communities' economy must rest on physical and virtual infrastructures to improve the program offer. We want to remind you that the offer of quality services and programs through modern and flexible infrastructures is a powerful stimulus for the demand for training in French. In education, there is nothing more attractive to students and their future employers than relevant programs offered through modern infrastructures with learning assistance services and cutting-edge equipment, as well as, of course, quality French-language teaching.

As an organization whose mission is to establish a true partnership between the French-language college-level institutions in Canada, we subscribe to the recommendations that have already been submitted to your committee by some of our partners, in particular the Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne and the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick.

These recommendations cover all or most of the priorities the RCCFC feels are necessary to the development of our French-language minority communities. Education and training are the cornerstones of their future; the colleges and other institutions of the RCCFC are the artisans of that future.

To conclude, we would like to see the standing committee reiterate to the Government of Canada recommendation number 10 of the June 2009 report entitled: *5,000 Bilingual Positions to be Filled Every Year: the Role of Postsecondary Institutions in Promoting Canada's Linguistic Duality*. The report is about student mobility among postsecondary institutions in our country.

I thank you for your attention, and I will be pleased to answer your questions with all of the passion I have for this topic.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thibault.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bossé and Ms. Brown from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Ms. Bossé, you have the floor.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé (Executive Director, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Good morning Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Suzanne Bossé. I am the Executive Director of the FCFA. I am delighted to be accompanied today by Marjie Brown, who is the manager of the immigration file at the federation and is responsible for overseeing, among other things, the support we provide to the francophone immigration network.

We are before you today to talk about the links that exist between francophone immigration and the economic vitality of our communities.

For close to 15 years, the federation has provided the national coordination of the French-language immigration dossier within francophone and Acadian communities. In light of that, the FCFA is a choice interlocutor for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and it supports the 13 francophone immigration support networks, the FINs, which I will speak about more at length during this presentation.

First of all, with your permission, I would like to clarify a concept. The government is increasingly focusing on so-called "economic" immigrants. However, literally, an "economic immigrant" is a permanent or temporary resident chosen because of his or her competencies and capacity to integrate the labour market. We are talking here, among other things, about language skills, education, professional experience, etc. Thus, there are several categories of economic immigrants and, in fact, they only exclude refugees and family reunification applicants.

If we take this broad definition, we see that between 2006 and 2012, 10,406 of the French-language permanent residents who settled in our communities were economic immigrants. Some were indeed investors or entrepreneurs, but the vast majority of them were skilled workers, candidates chosen by the provinces and territories, or temporary workers who obtained permanent residency thanks to the Canadian Experience Class.

These persons contribute to the economic development of our communities by meeting the crying needs our institutions have for labour. I am thinking of our schools that need teachers, day cares that need early childhood educators, or health care services that need medical professionals.

However, as this committee has itself noted on two occasions already, francophone and Acadian communities do not get their fair share of immigrants. If you only look at the figures for 2012, and those of the so-called “economic” immigrant class, you will see that French-language newcomers only represent 1.3% of all the economic immigrants who settled outside of Quebec. That is a very far cry from meeting the objectives set for themselves by the government and communities.

If this situation persists, it is certainly not because the communities did not take themselves in hand. As I mentioned at the outset, over the past decade, 13 francophone immigration networks, the FINs, were created, in 9 provinces and 2 territories. These networks provide to the immigrant and the host community all of the expertise and know-how of active stakeholders in education and continuous training, health, employability, economic development, and settlement services, in addition to the support provided by municipalities and provincial and territorial governments. Altogether, the 13 FINs have more than 250 members and partners.

This network approach is adapted to the reality of our communities, developed by and for them, and the FINs produce results. Insofar as support for economic integration is concerned, the networks and their members have created mentorship services, immigrant-employer twinnings, occupational upgrading, and in Ontario, among other things, language classes based on the needs of the labour market.

Since 2013, the FINs and their partners have also coordinated three liaison tours throughout the country to inform employers about the possibility of recruiting French-language workers abroad. A fourth tour is planned for next month.

Thus, the FINs play a primordial role in economic immigration, one that is recognized by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. However, in order to truly meet the challenge of francophone immigration, be it economic or not, we have to give ourselves the means to reach the objectives and strengthen the capability of the stakeholders who work on the ground.

● (0930)

For instance, although we may be pleased about the number and popularity of the francophone settlement services that have been created over the past ten years, the fact remains that these services do not exist everywhere they are needed. Even if so called “economic” immigrants arrive in Canada with job offers in hand, this does not mean that they do not need support or settlement services.

Moreover, apart from the existence of French-language settlement services, French-speaking immigrants face other challenges in connection with economic immigration. I am thinking among other things of problems related to access to assessment of their French-language skills.

I will give you a concrete example. Recently, a French-language newspaper in Newfoundland and Labrador reported that francophone immigrants in the province had to go all the way to Halifax to undergo French-language testing. I am only talking here of language skills assessment.

And finally, it must be noted that immigrants whose first official spoken language is French experience a higher level of unemploy-

ment than francophones who were born in Canada. Immigrants of African origin also seem disadvantaged in that regard. This situation requires targeted measures to ensure that these newcomers can fully integrate the labour market and are able to contribute to creating wealth for their community.

I will conclude my presentation by making a few recommendations.

Governments should invest in strengthening the capability of the structures and services that have been put in place within francophone and Acadian communities to recruit, welcome and integrate francophone immigrants.

The federal government should take steps to really promote francophone immigration, in particular by doing more active recruiting in French-language source countries such as those of the Maghreb or sub-Saharan Africa.

Governments should put in place measures to strengthen a concerted approach among the federal departments and the provincial and territorial governments, the communities, and the professional corporations in order to facilitate the recognition of foreign credentials and increase access to French-language skills evaluation.

I will be pleased to answer your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bossé.

I now yield the floor to Ms. Mulaire from the World Trade Centre Winnipeg.

Ms. Mariette Mulaire (President and Chief Executive Officer, World Trade Centre Winnipeg): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of the World Trade Centre Winnipeg.

I will tell you my story so that you can have some idea of the ground I have covered and how we came to have a bilingual World Trade Centre in Winnipeg.

I used to work with Joyce Bateman at the Department of Western Economic Diversification, or WD. The francophone community came to the department to obtain funding for the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities, the CDEM.

The first thing the department said to the francophone community was this:

[*English*]

“Oh, that’s a French thing. Go see Canadian Heritage.”

[*Translation*]

The francophone community refused, stating that that organization dealt with economic development and that consequently it should be funded by WD.

WD not only agreed to fund the CDEM—whose director I became, subsequently—but it also made its funding permanent. The CDEM thus found itself at the same level as the Women's Enterprise Centre and the Community Futures Network of Canada, the other groups that received funding to further economic development. The French fact was normalized in the economic sphere. Bravo!

I worked at the CDEM for about ten years. We did local economic development in the municipalities that had adopted a bilingualism policy. Our efforts were fruitful and entrepreneurship was doing very well. This raised a lot of interest. There were several requests from the community asking us to use our bilingualism to help do business at the national and international levels. People in our area were looking for new markets. They were not necessarily thinking about France, Quebec or Belgium.

At that point we set up the Agence nationale et internationale du Manitoba—the ANIM—of which I am also the president. We began to work with different markets, especially those of France and Quebec. We really observed the value added that bilingualism brings. We were able to attract investment to our area, that is to say “French dollars”, as we refer to them. The anglophone majority also benefited from this.

Our main mandate was to work with the markets of the francophonie, but that mandate was quickly broadened. We organized the first international economic forum in Manitoba. The forum was not only held in French and in English, but also in Spanish. In Winnipeg, we little francophones, the seven of us who were in Saint-Boniface, were the ones who brought the first international economic forum there, and the second one, in 2012. It was a manifestation of the economic strength of bilingualism.

We went after other markets. We organized something that benefited everyone, francophones as well as anglophones. Everyone profited from the arrival in Winnipeg of people who came to do business in the language of their choice, whether French, English or Spanish. These people benefited from our bilingualism.

Things went so well that we considered the possibility of attracting a World Trade Centre to Winnipeg. What is a World Trade Centre? Why a World Trade Centre? There are 330 World Trade Centres throughout the world, whose headquarters are in New York—we have all heard about that one. It is a network we can count on.

The ANIM purchased its license fifty-fifty with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, which said that the World Trade Centre of Winnipeg would have to be bilingual. Why would all of the personnel of the World Trade Centre of Winnipeg need to be bilingual? Because when we do business at the international level, it makes sense to speak at least the two official languages of our country. Our team also speaks Spanish, Chinese and German.

Staff meetings take place in French. We speak French at home to keep the language alive. However it is true that as soon as we go out, we also speak English quite a bit.

The Winnipeg World Trade Centre discovered that in the international network, France, Belgium and Algeria are not the only countries that appreciate the French fact. Through the World Trade Centre we have met people from Romania, Italy, Hungary, The Netherlands, and even from China, who speak French. This gives us

an edge. We have something that other countries do not have. The fact of having two official languages has allowed us to become international. Right from the outset, we have a window on the world. Internationally, especially in French, we really saw that our bilingualism had value.

I have learned five things, which I would like to share with you.

Firstly, normalizing the French fact in the economic sphere is profitable.

● (0935)

Secondly, the bilingual Canada “brand” is very well respected at the international level.

Thirdly, the federal government is currently concluding several trade agreements. We hear about them everywhere. For instance, it has just concluded one with South Korea. An agreement is also in the works with the European Union. It has been signed, in principle. This gives us an advantage at the international level. It is an element that differentiates us from other markets. We feel it and see it.

The fact that Canada is both francophone and anglophone is a major asset. I really think that when it comes to trade agreements and investments, Canada should collectively promote its francophonie in all sectors.

We welcome a lot of missions from abroad. They come from everywhere on the planet. Every time, we work to get them to come to Saint-Boniface so that they can discover our francophone appeal. Every time, people are impressed because we have maintained one of Canada's fundamental values. Every time, they go back home impressed by what we have to offer them.

However, for us to be able to get there, we need investments in the areas of the economy, education, culture and the media. Our newspaper *La Liberté* is in a difficult situation. The solution is not obvious. These entities have to be supported. Radio-Canada is our media channel. It speaks to us and speaks about us. These institutions have to be supported so that throughout the world we have a different value to offer than other countries, and so that this opens doors for us.

That is not the only thing. Moreover, this creates wealth, it generates investments and that is good for all of Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mulaire.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Gionet, from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta.

Ms. Angéline Gionet (Director General, Wood Buffalo Region, Association canadienne française de l'Alberta): Good morning. My name is Angéline Gionet, and I am the Director of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, Wood Buffalo region, Fort McMurray. I have been working for that organization since January 15, 2007.

From 2000 to 2011, the population of Fort McMurray increased by 138%. The number of residents went from 56,000 to 116,000. In 2010, the population was expected to increase by 7.2% a year. However, in 2013, the population increased by 9.2%. There are approximately 14,000 francophones in the Fort McMurray community. Over the past 12 months, the birth rate has been 120 births per month.

I would also like to give you a few figures: 30% of the population earns between \$175,000 and \$189,000 a year; 25% of the population earns approximately \$250,000; 24% of professionals hold down two jobs; 21% of the population lives under the poverty line. Over 60% of the population needs to see a distinct improvement in its housing conditions. Renting a room costs \$800 a month, and a two-bedroom apartment costs \$2,000 a month. The average cost of an ordinary house is \$740,000.

Over 230,000 inhabitants are expected to have settled in Fort McMurray by 2020. Over 75,000 employees currently work in the region. In 2030, we expect there to be 905,000 employees. Between 2012 and 2020, \$92 billion will have been invested in the region.

There are more than 300 community organizations in Fort McMurray. However, none of these organizations offer services in French. When we want to refer francophones who have trouble understanding or speaking English to another organization, we have to go with them. The ACFA is the only spokesperson for the development of the local francophonie. We have the responsibility to offer and create services so as to meet the needs of the entire community.

As for the Albertan government, it only offers services in French in two specific sectors, that is francophone school governance and French-language criminal trials. This last aspect leaves something to be desired. No funds are allocated for community movements or primary care.

I am one of the two employees of the ACFA in Wood Buffalo. In addition to English and French, over 135 languages are spoken in Alberta. More than 250,000 residents speak French. After English, French is the most taught language in Alberta schools. On average, one child out of three is registered in a French-language program. Since I took up my position in 2007, the francophone population has grown by 18%.

Among the services the regional Wood Buffalo ACFA offers to the community are bilingual, mandatory security courses to allow francophones to find employment as quickly as possible. We receive telephone calls on a daily basis as well as emails from francophones throughout the country and elsewhere in the world. We offer a settlement service to French-speaking newcomers from other countries. This service has been made possible thanks to a partnership we created with the Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta in Edmonton.

With the assistance service for new francophone entrepreneurs, we have, for instance, helped eight small businesses to settle in our region. They have from two to eight employees. More francophone businesses have settled there, but those are the ones the ACFA supported.

We have a service to support French-speaking victims of violence. The only francophone day care was opened by the ACFA five years ago. We offer that service for children from zero to five years, as well as before and after-school programs. There is monthly coordination of sociocultural activities in French. A women's committee especially for the French-speaking women of Fort McMurray celebrated its fifth anniversary in April of this year.

Since I took up my position in 2007, the ACFA has welcomed over 2,000 clients a year.

● (0940)

In 2011, we lost the only bilingual employment service. It had been managed by our association for 10 years and was in full expansion. The government makes decisions without consulting the francophone community. An equivalent service was attributed to an anglophone agency that has no experience with respect to the needs of francophones. It offers a very poor service.

The seniors' centre is a multi-million dollar project. It was negotiated. An attempt was made to open its doors, but it failed because of a francophone clause regarding the lot. Since there is nothing regarding discrimination in matters of language, we have little recourse, even in the workplace. Our unions themselves are not open to the needs of francophones or to defending their rights.

The Centre des ressources francophones will be supported by the end of May 2014 by the public library. We should have our own resource centre with francophone books and teaching material. No public library service can support our francophone community.

Our French-speaking elders are leaving the region because they have no services. We are working with the Alberta Health Services north zone to establish a bilingual health service. In northern Alberta, 10% of the population is French-speaking. There are still some Alberta hospitals that do not allow bilingual nurses to speak French to their patients, under threat of reprimand.

All the services offered by the ACFA are made possible thanks to the support of Heritage Canada. The cuts to Heritage Canada are going to have an adverse effect on the services offered by the association.

The services the ACFA offers to 2,000 clients a year cost about 70¢ per person in Fort McMurray.

The needs are so great that it is impossible to make a recommendation that could meet all of them.

Thank you.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gionet.

[English]

For everybody's information, I don't think Madame Gionet can see us, but we can see her. If you ask questions of Madame Gionet, could you please identify yourself so that she will know

[Translation]

who asks the questions.

We now have an hour for the questions and comments period.

We will begin with Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

My first question is for Ms. Bossé.

There have been cuts to the funding that allowed the communities to take part in Destination Canada. What resources are available to the communities to promote their needs abroad?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Thank you for your question.

In fact, since the government completely eliminated the promotion budgets for Destination Canada in Budget 2012, the resources that allow us to do the promotion of our communities as host communities have been very curtailed.

There is no support from the federal government. There is some support from provincial and territorial governments. Otherwise, it would be impossible for us to participate in the exhibitions or international employment fairs. I know that the colleges do so, but it is not possible for our community organizations and our immigration networks, except with some assistance from the province.

That said, I know that Citizenship and Immigration Canada has created positions in Africa, in Morocco and Senegal. We hope that the creation of those positions is going to allow for increased promotion of the communities. We would also very much like to see the involvement of the Department of Foreign Affairs as well.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Thank you.

You made some recommendations. I simply want to specify one thing. You said that the government had to invest, and I know it is going to answer that it already does so.

Would you recommend an increase in the funding? I'm not talking only about an investment, but about an increase in the current amounts?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We certainly would recommend an increase in financial support to increase capacity. There are 13 francophone immigration networks whose responsibility is to find partners and mobilize employers. If we cannot promote the communities in foreign countries, we have to be able to work a great deal with the employers to make them aware of the opportunity being able to hire francophone and bilingual immigrants represents.

In light of current resources, it is already very difficult to do that. We would thus need increased support to strengthen those capacities. This necessitates the creation of partnerships with the chambers of commerce and a great deal of awareness-raising work with the municipalities to ensure that they get involved with francophone immigration.

Our current resources are very limited. At this time, in Ontario, there are three networks. Regarding francophone immigration, the networks cover enormous territories. If you divide Ontario into three parts, you can imagine the vastness of the territories each one of these networks must cover. Each network receives approximately \$360,000 a year.

● (0950)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Let's talk about the partnerships.

The federal government and a few provinces have adopted targets for francophone immigration. Why are we still so far away from meeting the objectives that were set?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: The vast majority of provincial and territorial governments have not set targets. If they had one, they would need a strategy to attain that objective. Ontario set its target at 5%. That was announced in 2012. However, we are still waiting for the strategy. New Brunswick is suppose to announce its strategy, we hope soon, on the demographic growth linked to francophone immigration. In Manitoba, there is a strategy and a target. However, a recent decision made by the federal government means that it is much more difficult to act with respect to all of the structures, mechanisms and partnerships that had been set up.

Francophone immigration is going to require an increased, clear, specific commitment. We are talking about a target, a strategy, and concerted work involving provincial and territorial governments as well as the federal government.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Gionet.

I am James Nicholls, the deputy NDP critic for official languages.

Regarding the data you collected, I would like to know if you used the Canadian government census or that of the Wood Buffalo region. I know that with the Canadian census it has proved difficult to determine the exact figures.

Ms. Angéline Gionet: Here in Fort McMurray, since the population increases so quickly, the municipality of Wood Buffalo and the Alberta Government came to an agreement to have the municipality carry out its own censuses in order to follow the development of the community. The province also accepts the figures provided by the municipality.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Clearly that is being done without the assistance of the federal government.

In your presentation, you said that in 2011 you lost employment services for francophones.

What were the consequences of the loss of that subsidy for the francophones who are looking for employment in your region?

Ms. Angéline Gionet: It is as though they had sawed a leg off the table. For us, the francophonie is the ACFA. It is the entry portal for francophones who arrive in Fort McMurray.

The subsidy for that service for francophones was withdrawn and given to an anglophone agency that has no expertise in this area. That agency called me up to ask me for help in setting up the program because it did not know how to go about it.

This has harmed us enormously. The francophones received services from that agency, but for a year and a half, there was only one bilingual employee. The francophones had to line up and wait their turn. When it was their turn, they met an anglophone counsellor and started the process all over again.

It is the same scenario we have experienced our whole lives. It is not the right way to do things. People are not consulted to gain an understanding of the needs of francophones.

Consequently, the francophones come back to see us to obtain that service. An employment service is more than offering help to draft a resume. It is everything that constitutes the support you have to give people who arrive and who have to adapt, need services for their family, etc.

These are funds that were...

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nicholls and Ms. Gionet.

I now yield the floor to Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Chair, Ms. Bateman is the one who is supposed to start.

The Chair: I apologize.

Ms. Bateman, you have the floor.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of the witnesses. Their comments interested me greatly.

One of the premises of our study is that our two official languages constitute an economic advantage. It is one of the objectives of our study.

My question is for all of the witnesses, beginning with my fellow citizen from Manitoba. Can you make some comments on the economic advantages of Canada's linguistic duality?

I thank you for your comments on the economic agreements. When we took power, only five trade agreements had been concluded. Now there are 43 which we have concluded with a large number of countries. Our efforts centre on job creation and economic growth. This is good for your students, Mr. Thibault.

Ms. Mulaire, can you tell us how the conclusion of such trade agreements strengthens our position in the world?

Ms. Mariette Mulaire: First, when I was at the CDEM and the ANIM, we carried out studies on the profitability of investments. Some minimal and truly conservative figures indicated that \$15 was generated for every dollar that was invested.

I'd like to go back to the francophone immigration question.

We receive \$90,000 a year from the Government of Manitoba to take part in Destination Canada, and every time our coordinator comes back with business people, people who come and settle here. For instance, Chez Sophie and Le Croissant are new businesses created thanks to immigration. Is this profitable? Is it ever! With \$90,000 a year, we bring back wealth, we create jobs and we create new businesses. In my opinion it is so obvious that hesitating to invest in francophone immigration is nonsensical.

As for investment in a bilingual Canada, I think I talked about this enough earlier. The federal government concluded some trade agreements, and that is a good thing. We think that this opens up many doors. It is in fact in those circumstances that we see to what extent the people we work with abroad see Canada as an open

country, not only with respect to trade but also with respect to its linguistic duality. It demonstrates that the country has a more international nature. In my opinion these investments generate an excellent yield. We don't have any statistics yet concerning the World Trade Centre, which has been in existence for a year and two months, but we have some on other organizations, especially those of the francophonie. For instance, for Centrallia, which we attracted here, we can see the profitability of the investment.

● (1000)

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Thank you.

Ms. Bossé, what do you have to say about that?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I will be brief.

I think it is very clear. Linguistic duality, the fact of having two official languages, offers very clear potential. The government has recognized its importance to Canadian identity in various speeches from the Throne, when it talked about the two official languages.

However, that potential is certainly not fully exploited. You can see this if you consider school registrations and French immersion programs. There are not enough schools. The francophone perspective is not sufficiently integrated into all of the negotiations of international accords, whether with Europe or other continents. This means that francophone immigration and the importance of meeting our challenges regarding the aging population and the exodus of young people are not sufficiently taken into account...

Ms. Joyce Bateman: More specifically, Ms. Bossé, you mentioned young people. I noted that since the 1990s, your organization has received more than \$25 million for investments.

Do you have some concrete examples to demonstrate how your investments contributed to increasing the economic opportunities for young people throughout Canada, but also elsewhere in the world?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I don't know who received \$25 million...

Ms. Joyce Bateman: It says that your organization supposedly received more than \$25 million...

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Are you really talking about our organization?

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Yes.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: The FCFA is supposed to have received \$25 million for youth?

Ms. Joyce Bateman: The money was supposed to provide help for young people, seniors, women, early childhood, and support for literacy and health.

Could you give me a concrete example of your various activities for your clients and how our investments have contributed to building their economic capacity?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bateman.

Ms. Bossé, you can answer the question.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: The FCFA coordinates the activities and actions of organizations working for the overall development of communities. The federation does not develop programs exclusively and specifically for young people, because a youth federation does that. I would have to find out the specific investments for the youth program.

The Chair: Mr. Thibault, briefly, please.

Mr. Laurier Thibault: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Madam, in order to answer your question or a part of your question, we have to tell you that, at the moment, our colleagues are doing a lot of work with Canadian Parents for French and Canadian Youth for French. Together, they are trying to make sure that young anglophone students registered in French immersion programs can continue their education in French at post-secondary level.

It is important for immersion students to be able to continue their education in French. If they do not, unfortunately, there is a danger that they will lose what they have learned in French in subsequent years. For us, that is very important. That is why we are working in partnership with those two organizations.

Mr. Chair, I have to tell you that I am also grateful to Canadian Heritage; they saw how receptive the colleges were to the importance of immersion. The department has provided us with funds to continue our work in that area.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thibault.

The floor now goes to Ms. St-Denis.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I would like to speak to Ms. Gionet.

My name is Lise St-Denis. I represent a constituency in Quebec and I am vice-chair of the committee.

Ms. Gionet, how do you see the future of French in Fort McMurray and in Alberta?

Ms. Angéline Gionet: I heard what Mr. Thibault just mentioned. The fact that people like that, people outside Alberta, are continuing to train French speakers and continuing to help French immersion students, allows us to get employees here. For example, because of those trainers, the majority of my employees are working here today in an early-childhood daycare service. They are anglophones who have chosen to work in French. We are the only point of entry.

Those French-speakers give us a great deal of support. In other provinces, they have the opportunity to practice what they have learned, whereas here in Alberta, that is not the case for young people who go through immersion.

In my experience, when I go to conventions in order to try to give value and normalcy to the French fact, I meet those kids in immersion. They are so proud to come and tell me that they speak French. So I talk with them, and, four words later, they cannot continue the conversation. It is sad to see that we cannot support them and establish systems that would allow them to continue learning in French, as is done so well elsewhere, from what I am hearing from the other participants.

That is what we are lacking. There is really no openness to the French fact on the part of the provincial government. Normalizing French would be a huge achievement.

Yesterday, I went to the Leading the North conference that is going on here. Everyone was talking about the economy, which is

booming in all sectors, agriculture, oil and gas exploration, food, and so on. They were talking about the wealth from the east of the country that has come here. I was in the room; I was almost crying and saying "Wow!"

Recently, 50 or so of us francophones were taking part in an activity in French. We added up the total number of years of education all of us had, and, for the 50 people sitting in the room, it was a significant number. That is a good deal of wealth too, but we need to wake the government up. I really do not know how that can be done, but we cannot continue as we are.

An awful lot of francophone are assimilating, and very quickly too. Alberta has a high assimilation rate. It takes 99% of the people in francophone communities to pass on the language in order to keep French alive, but here in Alberta, that rate is 79%. So something must be done because the next generation of francophones is being assimilated very quickly.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Recently, we have heard about Quebec workers being duped by bogus employment agencies in Alberta. In that situation, are you able to help people who have been taken advantage of? We have heard, for example, about Quebecers who arrive in Alberta, people who have paid to get to that province, and who end up with nothing. No job, nowhere to live, nothing.

Ms. Angéline Gionet: There is no lack of work here, but, yes, we have seen a lot of cases like that. A good number of Canadian francophones have difficulty finding a job in Fort McMurray because of a number of factors, including a lack of receptiveness to speakers of French. It is difficult for them.

Personally, I welcome people in that situation. We help them as much as we can. We have fed them and put them up in our offices. I have even dipped into my own wallet more than once, especially for single mothers. They are really vulnerable. I could spend the whole day telling you stories like that. It is not a passion or a motivation for us. For us, living in French is a very deep source of inspiration. It is the only thing that allows us to continue operating in the working conditions we have at the moment.

• (1010)

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Thank you.

Mr. Thibault, are colleges in minority situations underfunded compared to anglophone institutions?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: We have always said that we need additional support. Given the percentage of francophones, providing education in French is a lot more expensive, especially if we want to be competitive. If we want to offer the same programs as anglophone colleges, the small ratio of francophones always makes it more expensive to do so.

That is why I was saying in my presentation that we want to be able to keep supporting our colleges through infrastructure programs. The objective is to have modern infrastructure and cutting-edge technology. If students or their parents realize that a college is lacking in tools or that its technology is outdated, they may well choose an anglophone college.

You are right, college education in French definitely implies additional costs.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Do francophones living in minority situations still have to fight legal battles with regard to education?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. St-Denis.

Go ahead, Mr. Thibault.

Mr. Laurier Thibault: School boards in a number of provinces are currently before the courts. Unfortunately, there are too many challenges. Section 23 of the Charter recognizes those rights, but school boards are constantly having to demand them in court.

We are in favour of continuity. We do a lot of work with francophone school boards with a view to bringing in francophone high school and immersion students so that they can continue their studies in French at college level. I believe that it is a plus for them. When they enter the labour market after that training, they will have advantages and employment possibilities that their unilingual anglophone colleagues do not have.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now give the floor to Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us today.

Mr. Thibault, my first question goes to you.

In your presentation, you touched on part of the problem when you said that college programs have to adapt according to the specificities of the labour market. What we are talking about is allowing young Canadians to acquire the knowledge they need to get into the job market as quickly as possible.

Is there a gap between the needs of industry and the way programs adapt to those needs? Can it take two, three or four years to do that? Does industry help you by telling you, for example, that it is about to start using new technologies and that it would probably be important for you to prepare future workers accordingly?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: Our colleges are very close to industry and business. It is essential for them to be connected to the labour market because they have to respond to the needs expressed by business. I have often seen companies ready to cooperate with colleges in terms of equipment, for example. When a piece of equipment is very expensive, some companies will provide financial support to make sure that the equipment is the latest. The equipment that students have at their disposal during their college training really is the same as the equipment in use in business.

We are also very creative. Infrastructure is very expensive. In terms of training in the trades, the three colleges in minority situations are quite well equipped. La Cité has a training centre for the trades in Orleans. Collège Boréal in Sudbury has good equipment for training in the trades. A few years ago, the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick in Bathurst updated and modernized all the equipment it uses for trades training.

As I said in my presentation, your colleague, Minister Valcourt, was very surprised to see how creative we are.

You are announcing a boom in naval shipbuilding policies for the Maritimes, but how will francophone communities be able to take advantage? In Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, getting the

equipment to meet that need is not possible. We asked ourselves whether there was a creative way to do that. So we established a hybrid, decentralized welding program. The theory part is offered online, but, for the practical part, the colleges are looking to see if students in their areas are near an anglophone college. If they are, agreements will be made with the anglophone college so that those students can use the equipment at times that are reserved for them. If no such college exists, the agreements will be made with companies so that the students can do their practical training there. They can do welding in a large company, for example.

This makes a lot of sense. Employers are able to judge the potential of future employees. When the time comes to hire recent graduates, those employers do not have to agonize over the decision. The company internships that the colleges organize greatly facilitate post-graduation hiring. The employers can see the students and that is why, at college level, the student placement rate is excellent. If they see good candidates, they will not waste their time with newspaper, TV or online advertisements, they will hire the student doing an internship with their company.

This hybrid training, whether by distance learning or “in person” in companies or other colleges, is a new, creative way to meet the needs of the labour market.

•(1015)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You are on the front line. Are you able to tell young people that there are high placement rates in the trades they want to learn? If 5,000 welders are needed in Canada in the short term, and if there are only 2,000 students taking welding, sooner or later, we will have to hire immigrants for those jobs. Is that a message you give the students?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: Our colleges are very proactive, and with good reason. Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island looked at those potential jobs and decided that their francophone students needed to be able to take advantage of them. Those provinces are recruiting students very proactively because they know that very good jobs are being created.

I must say that more and more value is being placed on the trades. Previously, the impression was that it was university or nothing. Today, the jobs on offer require more of a technical or professional training. That takes nothing away from a university education, but that is what we are seeing.

Let me give you an example. A few years ago, one of the leaders of the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec was asked why employers were not funding post-secondary education in the province. He said that they paid the government enough in taxes and it was the government's role. He said that if they were ever forced to give money to the post-secondary education system, they would give it to the colleges because that is where their needs were met.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: A lot of Canadians go back to CEGEP, to post-secondary education, at 30, 40, even 50 years of age.

•(1020)

Mr. Laurier Thibault: Exactly, and that is why I would also like to tell you about everything we are doing to recognize previous experience and skills so that we can respond quickly to labour shortages and so that we do not discourage newcomers, or people needing a new career.

Take a two-year college program. If you tell people that they have to learn new skills and that it will take two years, they are not going to be motivated at all. If you tell recently arrived immigrants that they have to do two years' training in order to work in such-and-such an area, they get discouraged and you do nothing for the labour shortage.

More and more, we are equipping our colleges to be able to recognize previous experience and skills. That means being able to evaluate them. Do people have skills related to the training required that they have acquired in the jobs they have previously held? When that evaluation is done, we can most often give credit for 8, 9 or 10 months of training.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Daniel, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

I have a couple of relatively simple questions to start with.

Perhaps Madame Mulaire can help me out on this one. In Canada what are the obstacles for durable economic development in the minority linguistic communities?

[Translation]

Ms. Mariette Mulaire: There are a number of aspects I could mention.

Do you prefer me to answer in English or French?

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: It doesn't matter.

[Translation]

Ms. Mariette Mulaire: So I will keep going in French.

We were talking about immigration. It is a really important topic: we have to give new immigrants the tools they need. Investing in immigration is a matter of economic sustainability for Canada. We see that with Destination Canada, for example. We have to make sure that, when they arrive, they have the tools they need, as Ms. Gionet mention they do in Fort McMurray. We talked about that earlier. If people come here and we do not give them the tools they need to become really integrated, there will be no economic sustainability.

So I feel that the economic aspect is very important. We talk to representatives of colleges and universities about equipping students so that they get what the market most requests. That is another contribution to economic sustainability. Look at everything that is being done in our official language minority communities. We have been mentioning young people; we have to be ready for the

investments that we need in order to succeed. Sometimes, we only provide crumbs, and crumbs do not make for economic sustainability.

In my opinion, when companies decide to invest, they do so for the long term. Governments must think in the same way. They must think in terms of investments, not in terms of costs. You can talk about bilingualism and say that the FCFA has been given \$25 million. But those are dollars invested in our country and in our economic sustainability, more than anything else. We have to change our way of thinking. We have to think in terms of investments, not in terms of costs. That is what successful businesses do.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: You focused on the immigration aspect of it. What about for the local people? There's lots of unemployment. What are the obstacles to local people achieving a sustainable business situation? I hear that illiteracy is a big issue. Are we addressing that in these minority communities? How are we addressing it? What are we doing to make sure that these sorts of hurdles are not there so that they can actually get the jobs that exist?

[Translation]

Ms. Mariette Mulaire: That is along the same lines as Mr. Thibault's comment about universities.

One of our groups, Pluri-elles, focuses on literacy for francophone newcomers and those who are already here. Many Franco-Manitobans who are from the province require help to obtain the tools they need. This might mean literacy. Whether we like it or not, many francophones in Canada—we are still talking about the minority—might be illiterate. However, they still need to invest in getting the tools. Pluri-elles is an example of an organization that works with the local people who are from here, but who need help to get this tool, which will contribute to economic sustainability.

•(1025)

Mr. Laurier Thibault: Mr. Daniel, a few weeks ago, my colleague and partner, Normand Lévesque, the director general of the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, appeared before this committee.

RESDAC works very hard to improve literacy. Unfortunately, we have had some very bad news. We thought that with the picture painted by the study on minorities in particular, we could obtain funding for carrying out this project. In some cases, before admitting students, colleges in a minority situation must raise those students' level of literacy. That is what we do. Poor literacy skills are therefore an obstacle.

Numbers are also an obstacle. As I said earlier, we try to convince immersion students to continue their studies in French because we need enough students to be registered in a given year to be able to offer the program. If immersion students register, we will be able to provide the training because there will be enough students. It is very important for us to have enough students to be able to offer the program.

There is another obstacle. As I was telling Mr. Gourde, it is important to invest in infrastructure. There are only three colleges—two in Ontario and one in New Brunswick—that offer professional training in French. We are trying to support Collège Mathieu, in Saskatchewan, with the help of La Cité, Collège Boréal and the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick. There is significant economic development in Saskatchewan, which is comparable to, and even greater than the development in Alberta. This province needs francophone professionals and tradespeople. We are looking at how we can help Collège Mathieu in Saskatchewan, with our partners and existing colleges in Ontario and New Brunswick.

Manitoba has the same problem. The École technique et professionnelle of Université de Saint-Boniface also says it has needs and wants to know how it can become part of the network and the development of those programs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thibault.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Daniel.

[Translation]

I will now give the floor to Ms. LeBlanc.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My name is Hélène LeBlanc and I am the official opposition critic for co-operatives. Thank you very much for your very interesting testimony.

I also love to talk about investments, sustainable economy and the way the federal government can be a partner in developing a sustainable economy by making wise investments.

You also talked about the added value of bilingualism. This linguistic duality sets us apart and is an added value for all of Canada. It is beneficial for our economy.

Ms. Gionet, thank you for joining us.

Speaking of investments, you have applied for funding under the Canada-Alberta agreement. If my information is correct, you are asking for an investment of \$55,000 from the federal government.

What will the impact be on your organization if you do not receive that funding? What will the impact be on the francophone community in your part of Alberta?

Ms. Angéline Gionet: If we do not receive that funding, our number of employees will have to be reduced from two to one. Over the past seven years, we have managed to set up a number of programs. We will definitely not be able to keep all those programs and services with only one employee.

There is another factor. We have been working at full capacity for seven years. I am not sure how much longer we can keep all those programs afloat with two employees. Our association is so fragile that the slightest decrease in funding puts us in a very precarious situation.

• (1030)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: I think you have also done a good job of expressing the growing needs of francophones for services, given the

population increase. Just think of those who are moving to Alberta for work in particular.

I would like to ask you another question about co-operatives, for which I am the critic. Are co-operatives part of the economic development of your region?

Ms. Angéline Gionet: The Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta is headquartered in Edmonton, five hours' drive from where we are. In seven years, they have come to see us in Fort McMurray once. I see them when I go to Edmonton for meetings. They too are so swamped that they have neither the time nor the resources to support us here. For our part, we are very much in demand, so there is a divide between the two.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Thank you, Ms. Gionet.

Mr. Thibault, there is a lot of talk about small and medium-sized businesses. In Canada, sooner or later, we will be facing a deficit in entrepreneurial renewal. I was wondering whether some of your programs are primarily aimed at entrepreneurship. Since I am my party's critic for co-operatives, I will take this opportunity to promote them. Do you refer to the co-operative model as a solution for entrepreneurial renewal?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: Thank you for your question, Ms. LeBlanc.

Our ongoing objective is to develop a sense of entrepreneurship in our students. Of course, that starts in elementary school and continues into high school. We have some good examples of that. In partnership with the Association des clubs d'entrepreneurs étudiants du Québec, we have provided support to colleges. Club PhénoMènE is a good example. The club is at the Péninsule acadienne campus of the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick and it—

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: That is great, but is it a co-operative model?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: In those entrepreneurial clubs, it goes without saying that the co-operative model is a way to develop the business. I would not be able to tell you whether the concept is emphasized in the training they receive, but it is one of the models.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: I encourage you to do so. We can exchange business cards and I can share some things with you. Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Mulaire.

While I was in Winnipeg, I had the opportunity to go to Saint-Boniface, which is wonderful and very vibrant indeed. You have a provincial NDP government that supports social entrepreneurship and co-operatives and that wants to develop a legislative framework for that.

What is the contribution of co-operatives to the World Trade Centre Winnipeg? How can co-operatives contribute to the economic development of minority francophone communities, especially outside major centres, but also in Winnipeg itself?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. LeBlanc.

Ms. Mulaire.

Ms. Mariette Mulaire: Thank you.

We have been using the co-operative approach for a long time. It is quite natural. Some organizations, such as the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, are working a great deal with co-operatives. There is also the credit union movement, which has been very strong in terms of co-operatives.

At the World Trade Centre Winnipeg, we work with anyone interested in other markets, be they co-operatives or businesses. Our role is to promote trade. Some co-operatives have participated in the Centrallia forum that we organized.

The idea is really to make co-operatives a norm in the economic movement. We automatically do so at the centre, with francophones and anglophones alike.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

I'll give the floor now to Mr. Williamson.

• (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a quick question for you, Ms. Brown. Do you represent the World Trade Centre Winnipeg or—

Ms. Marjie Brown (Manager, Immigration, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): I am from the FCFA.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, thank you very much. That makes things a bit easier for me.

Mr. Thibault, Collège Boréal is one of your member colleges. It is in Sudbury, correct?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: Collège Boréal also has a very large campus in Toronto and many other centres in northern Ontario. It covers more than 75% of Ontario in various ways.

Mr. John Williamson: It has a program under which the college promises to offer a second round of full-time post-secondary training to students who have not managed to find a job in their field 12 months after graduation.

Can you elaborate on the program? I find it remarkable. You are basically telling students to come study at your college and that, if they don't find jobs, you will train them for another job.

Does that cost you a lot of money? How does that work?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: I am sorry, Mr. Williamson, but I don't have that information. The president of Collège Boréal must have it. You can understand that there are various employment support programs at the 61 members of our network. So it is rather difficult to answer your question directly.

However, as I explained earlier to your colleague, Mr. Gourde, the employability issue is significant. Thanks to our support training, we receive a lot of young adults and adults who need to retrain. That is when the recognition of prior learning and skills plays an important role. That is also when our student service can provide support to students who return to school. It is not always easy. It takes motivation for someone to go back to school after being out of

school for a few years. Colleges need to encourage and support those students, and that is what they do.

Let me give you another example of what we are actively doing to promote learning and success. We have funded a virtual assistance program for learning French. The program is offered online 18 hours a day, seven days a week. We are in the process of funding this program so that students struggling with their work can call the service centre. It used to be only for French. It will also be for math now. We are setting up these assistance centres to support students who need help. All the colleges are working hard on employability.

I was saying earlier that it is important to get people up to a certain level of education so that they can pursue post-secondary education. Clearly, our colleges in minority communities accept students who do not have a solid academic background to continue their studies. We therefore make sure to provide them with all the support they need to bring their knowledge up to date before we give them the technical or professional training to complete their diploma. That is part of the work that our colleges do.

I will ensure that the president of Collège Boréal, Pierre Riopel, receives your question so that he can provide you with a proper answer and with all the information you need on this.

Mr. John Williamson: Yes, if possible.

Mr. Laurier Thibault: I will see to that in the next few hours.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you very much.

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

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. John Williamson: Ms. Gionet, my name is John Williamson and I am a member of Parliament for a riding in New Brunswick.

You have huge challenges to overcome because of the arrival of many francophones.

Do you think provincial governments can do more to develop the economy of their own provinces? For instance, instead of sending young francophones and anglophones to Fort McMurray, could part of the solution be to find jobs for them in their communities?

Do you agree that Fort McMurray is not the solution to all our problems?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Ms. Gionet, go ahead.

Ms. Angéline Gionet: I agree with you, Mr. Williamson.

Take me for example. I have sought to preserve my culture my entire life. I left New Brunswick after living there for 50 years. When I arrived in Alberta, my husband and I had to work because we no longer had jobs. We also had to save for our retirement. If I had been able to stay in New Brunswick, I would have.

One year later, I sat down with my husband and told him that I didn't think I was able to get through the situation because it was too difficult. Nonetheless, I chose to stay to support those moving to Alberta the way I did.

If there were jobs in New Brunswick, trust me, francophones would quickly go back there. The same is true for Quebecers and for all the people in the east.

• (1040)

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson and Ms. Gionet.

To wrap up, I will give the floor to Mr. Dionne Labelle.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone.

My first question is for Ms. Mulaire.

I have read the five things you discovered about the usefulness of French. I am particularly interested in your fifth point. You talked about the need to support the francophonie in all areas: culture, education, health and the media. Under media, you mentioned the newspaper *La Liberté* and Radio-Canada.

You must know that CBC/Radio-Canada has been experiencing cuts since 2012. French services specifically are absorbing half of all the cuts in full-time positions at the crown corporation. However, the francophones in Canada do not represent half of the population.

In your view, what impact will these cuts have on your community? How can we reconcile the promotion of the Canadian francophonie with the cuts to the lifeblood of Canadian information suffered by the Radio-Canada French network?

Ms. Mariette Mulaire: We are all friends here. We all care deeply about Canada's linguistic duality. And for that linguistic duality to exist, we need a strong francophone minority community, one whose members talk to one another, see one another and hear one another.

To your question, the cuts are why I included Radio-Canada in my list. Cuts are happening everywhere. I could have cited numerous examples, as this is just one of many. Indeed, they are much talked about, but to be perfectly frank, in this case, they are worrisome.

I hope the committee can convey the message that making such huge cuts to Radio-Canada's budget is really akin to undermining Canada's values. And conveying that message is paramount. We have no other French-language television. We have no other networks. This is the link that unites us, and we need that link all over the country. Radio-Canada plays an enormous role. We all grew up with its services. Without French-language TV and radio, we would have really lost a lot.

So I am asking everyone here to send that message. You all have a responsibility to do so. You at least care about Canada's linguistic duality. So we need a strong national broadcaster. We need to see one another, hear one another and, above all, to be able to communicate with one another.

Therefore, I urge you to do everything in your power to at least bolster that crown corporation's budget. Make sure Radio-Canada has a future. It is too important to our country's values.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Thank you for your remarks, Ms. Mulaire. We entirely agree with you.

I wanted to come back to Mr. Thibault, of the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada.

From your brief, I see that you represent 61 institutions across Canada. If you don't include the French-language CEGEPs in Quebec, how many of your institutions have trouble with recruitment? How many of them have problems of that nature, and could you please describe them?

You stress the importance of recruiting both foreign students and immersion students. Are you facing recruitment problems?

Mr. Laurier Thibault: We aren't necessarily experiencing problems with recruitment because the colleges are growing. The statistics do not show any problem in that regard. The reason we say we have needs is that, if we can't integrate francophiles with francophones, our communities will be dealt a direct blow in short order and suffer a demographic decline. So that is why our communities, colleges and institutions would do well to work with francophiles and interest them in our realities.

I said some programs were in trouble. Sometimes numbers and diversity are to blame. Programs are offered, but sometimes the cohort isn't sufficient. Generally speaking, recruitment isn't the problem. The problem lies in certain programs where a proportion of francophiles and immersion students could provide the cohort needed to be able to offer those programs. That could prevent a student from having to attend an English-language college or a French-language institution in another part of the country.

• (1045)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Chair, I think you're telling me my time is up.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, we're finished.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Very well.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

Thank you, Mr. Thibault.

Thanks to all the witnesses.

[English]

We're going to adjourn here because our witnesses have flights to catch.

[Translation]

Thank you all.

[*English*]

This meeting is adjourned.

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