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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1550)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis): Please take your seats. The meeting is about to begin.

Welcome to the committee.

[English]

We're sorry for the short delay. We had a vote to attend.

I think we'll try to do it in 45 minutes, so we'll make sure we go straight to the agenda.

You're most welcome.

We have the Quebec Community Groups Network with Dan Lamoureux, president, and Sylvia Martin-Laforge, director general. Welcome.

Not to lose any time, please go ahead in your presentation.

Mr. Dan Lamoureux (President, Quebec Community Groups Network): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee.

The Quebec Community Groups Network, or QCGN, is a not-for-profit representative organization that acts as a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action on the strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of Canada's English linguistic minority communities, which we collectively refer to as the English-speaking community of Quebec. The QCGN's 48 members are also not-for-profit community groups, most of whom provide direct services to members of our community.

Some QCGN members work regionally, providing broad-based services. Some work across Quebec in specific sectors such as health or and arts and culture.

English-speaking Quebec is Canada's largest official language minority community at just over one million citizens whose first official language spoken is English. Although 84% of our community lives within the Montreal census metropolitan area, more than 210,000 community members live in other Quebec regions.

Bilingualism rates are high in our community compared to other English-speaking Canadian cohorts, with an average rate of 66% reporting knowledge of French and English during the 2011 census. That percentage increases among English-speaking youth to more than 80%, reflecting the investment our community has made to ensure our children can live and work in French in Quebec.

The English-speaking community of Quebec has not equitably benefited from the Government of Canada's official languages strategy, nor does our community have an equal voice in the national official languages discussion.

There are three reasons for this.

First, English is not a threatened language. A key purpose of Canada's official languages approach is to advance the equality of status and the use of English and French languages within Canadian society to have French and English from sea to sea to sea. We achieve this in large measure by supporting the development of English and French linguistic minority communities, but policy-makers and leaders often make the assumption that because the English language is safe, English linguistic minority communities need less attention.

Presumptions unsupported by evidence are made about the English-speaking community's vitality. The significant difference within our diverse community of communities is not externally well understood. Our linguistic minority community is not fighting to preserve a language, but it is working hard to maintain a presence in Quebec and preserve our culture and identity, which is unique and distinct from Canada's English majority. English and French linguistic minority communities ensure Canadians have an opportunity to live, work, and play in either or both official languages across our country.

Second, the degree to which English and French linguistic minority communities benefit from Canada's official language strategies depends on the co-operation and engagement of a community's home province or territory. Most areas of public interest that affect our community's vitality are provincial in nature. They include health, administration of justice, and education, to name a few. Federal institutions carrying out their duties to ensure that positive measures are taken to enhance official language minority communities do so while respecting the jurisdiction and powers of the province.

Quebec does not recognize Canada's English linguistic minority communities, and as a result it is the only province or territory without a strategic, legislative, regulatory, or policy framework within which to communicate with and support its official language minority community. Thankfully, this seems to be changing at the political level. The QCGN is grateful for the support and outreach of individual MNAs and ministers.

We have reason to be optimistic that the Government of Quebec will eventually recognize and work with its English-speaking community in Quebec's relationship with the Government of Canada.

The third point is this. The histories of Canada's English and French linguistic minority communities are very different, and unsurprisingly we are dissimilar in structure and capacity. English linguistic minority communities are all located within one province, and our community sector organizations are local or provincial in nature and scope, as are most sector umbrella organizations. Very few have the capacity to engage at the national level, and only one, the QCGN, is funded to do so. As a result, even when a community is present at the national table, it often lacks the policy background and support to effectively engage.

• (1555)

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge (Director General, Quebec Community Groups Network): Canada's official languages strategies since the 2003 action plan have increasingly attempted to address the needs of English-speaking Quebec. Awareness of our community and the obligation of all federal institutions to take positive measures that enhance our vitality is growing. The levels of support we receive from individuals in the Government of Canada are, on the whole, outstanding. We know there is a sincere wish to help us in most federal institutions.

However, some programs remain inaccessible to our community for the reasons outlined by our president. This inaccessibility precludes English-speaking Quebec from receiving equitable federal support and benefit from Canada's official language strategies.

To be clear, the QCGN is not advocating for a bigger share of the current pie for English-speaking Quebec. What we are saying is that because the needs of English-speaking Quebec have not been equally considered by the Government of Canada, the pie is too small. Supporting Canada's English and French linguistic minority communities is not a zero-sum game; the vitality and interests of each are symbiotic, and they should never be placed in competition.

How do we think the committee might help English-speaking Quebec?

First, study how federal institutions can meaningfully consult with Canada's official language minority communities. Talking is not consultation. We expect tangible results that bring real benefits to members of our community and contribute in a meaningful way to our community's vitality.

Second, explore new ways to financially support our community. For the past five years, the QCGN has been actively advocating for and supporting Employment and Social Development Canada's social financing initiative, which we were pleased to see included in the current road map.

While we are still waiting for these funds to be made available to our community three years after the initiative was announced, we welcome ways to work in partnership with the Government of Canada and new stakeholders such as the private sector. We would also like to explore the establishment of community-managed development foundations seeded and sustained by the Government of Canada, an approach that depoliticizes the current grants and

contribution system and makes predictable and organic funding available to the community sector.

Third, find ways to make support for Canada's English and French linguistic minority communities flexible and responsive to the unique needs of each community. One size does not fit all. In the words of Senators Maria Chaput and Andrée Champagne:

...the government needs to recognize that since the realities and challenges experienced by the English-speaking and French-speaking minorities are sometimes similar but sometimes different, each minority must be treated in a way that takes its specific needs into account.

Finally, we would encourage the committee to reach out to the Government of Quebec, and not just on matters related to la Francophonie. This committee can play a leadership role in highlighting the benefits to all Canadians in general, and to Quebecers in particular, of the Governments of Canada and Quebec working together to support the vitality of English-speaking Quebec.

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: We were very pleased to hear that the committee is planning to visit English and French official language minority communities.

In 2010-2011, your colleagues in the Senate conducted a study on the vitality of English-speaking Quebec that included an extensive visit to our communities. We urge you to read the recommendations from that report. The clerk has forwarded you the link.

We must work together to dispel the myth surrounding English-speaking Quebec. Although the Eastern Townships have been mentioned, we would also encourage you to visit Quebec City, eastern Quebec, and our other regional communities. Help us dispel the myths that continue around our community, and focus federal institutions on the needs of English-speaking Quebec.

Thank you for inviting us here today. Please know that the committee and its members can count on the full and continued support of the QCGN.

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. That was great.

I think I'll start immediately with questions. I'll go with Monsieur Gagné.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Gagné (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Many thanks to Mr. Lamoureux and Ms. Martin-Laforge for their presentation.

You talked about the fundamental differences between English and French minority language communities. What were you referring to exactly?

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: One major difference lies in our trajectory as a community.

[English]

We have been in Quebec for hundreds of years and the English-speaking community has built its own institutions. The institutions have been there for many years, built by the community, not the Quebec clergy at the time. Our ways of funding ourselves, funding our institutions, working with our youth come from a different place, because there was no help from government.

In the French-language communities

[Translation]

outside Quebec, there were clearly no institutions. In the rest of Canada, English-speaking communities found a different way to survive.

[English]

You can't compare what happened in Quebec to the English-speaking community to what happened to the francophones in the rest of Canada. That's important in policy-making and program support, because you don't have the same kinds of programs when a community has diminished in size or its institutions have diminished as a result of legislation and what has happened in the province.

A well-known Franco-Ontarian once said to me that in Ontario, for example, francophones are not seen as a threat but perhaps sometimes as a nuisance. I don't even believe that, because I think that in Ontario now, francophones are seen as being a very important contribution to the province.

In Quebec we are still, unfortunately, seen as a threat. It goes to Mr. Lamoureux's point about the fact that we speak English, and that is a threat. People forget that we have communities. I think, Mr. G  n  reux, that would be the most important difference. What are we protecting? We're not protecting a language. We're protecting a historic community and protecting people from other provinces and immigrants who want to come and join that community, not just the historic anglophones.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: I think that in the city of Ottawa right now, it seems that francophones could be a threat right now. Everybody could be treated.... We're a threat, yeah.

[Translation]

I think you have associations in the Gasp   region and the Eastern Townships. But aside from Montreal, where are your association's biggest groups located?

[English]

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: The Eastern Townships is a big one. The   les-de-la-Madeleine is far. It's tiny, but it's important. I think that Quebec City is a fascinating example, because the number is small but the influence is large.

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: I was going to say also the Lower North Shore, Blanc-Sablon, Baie-Comeau, *toute cette r  gion-l  *. Each one has its own specific character. There is Rawdon in the Laurentians, and the Huntingdon-Howick area.

•(1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: You said earlier that your relationship with the Quebec government wasn't easy. Do you feel you are somewhat excluded?

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: Four years ago,

[English]

we opened the doors with the Quebec government of the day. I think with the Parti Qu  b  cois and the Liberal Party as well, we've been able to open the doors to have a dialogue with the respective MNAs. I think they're starting to understand better our concerns as a minority community. The Government of Quebec still does not recognize us as a minority community, and therefore we do not have the same benefits as our francophone partners in the rest of Canada. We're struggling to find a minister who can help us with funding, with our concerns. We're basically quite alone when it comes to our relationships with the Province of Quebec.

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: May I add something?

I think what's important as well is that in Quebec, less than 1%—I think it's 0.9%—of the *fonctionnaires* are English-speaking, so while sometimes political will might be there, you know, it's partisan, or it changes every four years or whatever. You know very well that policy-making is the basis for getting anything done, and there's no legislative framework to get into policy-making. With no legislative framework, at least if you have kind of a policy framework you have a chance.

I have to say that we're starting to see some changes now, especially with the youth policy framework for Quebec, but it's hard work. It's really hard work.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

It is now over to Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivi  re-des-Mille-  les, Lib.): Thank you kindly.

[English]

I welcome you here today.

I will speak to you in French, but I would encourage you to speak to me in English.

[Translation]

Earlier, you were saying that Quebec's English-speaking minority was given less consideration. Could you elaborate on that, please?

I'd appreciate it if you could keep your answer concise, as I have more questions for you.

[English]

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: The anglophone communities in each region have their own particular concerns. For the townshippers, it might have been when the hospital in Sherbrooke gradually became unilingual French. In Quebec City, with the Saint Brigid's hospital there, they've been able to maintain a bilingual presence within the hospital.

Among our anglophone youth, about 80% are bilingual. They want to remain and live in Quebec. One of my sons is in Calgary and the other one I hope will stay in Montreal, but they realize as a minority that we should be able to speak the majority language. That's the reality.

So there's been a different mindset. It has changed, because we want to remain in Quebec but still have our language when we're sick and still have our language to get together for education or for worship. We still want to maintain that part.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Very well. Thank you.

As I told you earlier, my riding, Rivières-des-Milles-Îles, is located in the Lower Laurentians region, which is home to anglophone minority communities you are no doubt familiar with.

You said that every community has its own distinct needs. You talked about Quebec City and the Eastern Townships, where Mr. Paradis's riding is located. I'd like you to comment on the various considerations affecting communities in the Lower Laurentians—the distinct requirements and the health care needs of seniors.

[English]

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I'll give it a shot.

You know, we have 10 regional members. There are some places in Quebec where there's not enough critical mass to have a good understanding of English-speaking Quebecers. There's not a lot of work happening in Drummondville, and there's not a lot of work in some other places. It's not because we don't want to, but because we don't have the capacity.

The federal government is the only one that funds community groups that work in English. It's the only one. Our funding has not changed in over 12 years. It is a very finite fund. Many places have an emerging group of anglophones or people who would like to do something, but there's no funding to help them organize and mobilize.

As you know, it's not always easy to mobilize. You can't mobilize from Montreal to your.... It doesn't work.

[Translation]

You have to be on the ground, in the community.

[English]

So I would say to you that there's just not enough money for grassroots organizations to work locally.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: My riding is home to the 4 Korners centre, which you are no doubt familiar with. I know the federal government gives the centre significant funding, but you're saying that—

[English]

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: It's project funding. It's not core funding.

In the rest of Canada and in Quebec there are groups that get core funding. That is really important to our groups. Core funding is given to 22 groups in the the QCGN. The pot is small, and you can imagine that nobody wants to give anything up. There's a bit of a jockeying for position about who gets what, and how, and whatever. The English-speaking community has many needs. The group 4 Korners does wonderful work, but they don't get core funding. They need core funding.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Very well. Thank you.

I'm going to switch topics.

Next year will mark Canada's 150th anniversary. What kind of support do you think your organization could provide, in order to ensure the celebrations in Quebec are bilingual?

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: I know that in Sherbrooke, they asked—

[English]

Is it the Quebec games? No, it was the Canada Summer Games that were held in Sherbrooke a couple of years ago. The Eastern Townships English community helped with offering bilingual services to those athletes who attended. I think English-speaking Quebecers would be willing to help in making sure that anything that happens in the 150th anniversary is bilingual.

I want to add one little thing. Last year one of our new members was from Rawdon, up in the Laurentians. A small group of anglophones, through their schools and their church, got together and formed a community to make sure services were provided for their seniors, and everything else. This organization does not receive any funding. It was just a group of people within that area who came to us and asked to become a member, just to get some services.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lapointe.

[English]

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Come and visit.

The Chair: Come and visit.

Monsieur Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today. I'm glad you could attend this meeting. I asked for your presence because I think we are here to protect both official languages.

Yes, I saw on the map that you are around 1% of the presence around the centre of Quebec. There is not that much in Drummondville exactly, but there are some communities in my riding, in Durham-Sud and Saint-Félix-de-Kingsey. There is a little community and—

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: There is Thetford Mines too, I think.

Mr. François Choquette: It's not my riding. Yes, it's around Centre-du-Québec also.

My question is.... Those communities are decreasing because the young people don't stay there. Of course, there is Montreal. I think that when people in Quebec see anglophones as a threat, they are thinking about Montreal. When they think about the other communities, I don't think they see them as a threat. On the contrary, there are a plus value, I think.

How can you have those communities not only survive,
[Translation]

but thrive.

[English]

What do you think you need for that?

• (1615)

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: One of the reasons the English-speaking community moves away....

Moving away from one region to Montreal is one issue, but moving away from Montreal to Toronto or somewhere else is the biggest issue.

We have an incredible brain drain of our youth and of our middle class. What we hear from the youth especially is they don't see themselves visibly demonstrated in Quebec through the media. They just don't see themselves. When you don't see yourself, whether it be in Drummondville, Granby, or Coaticook, you don't feel that you belong.

One of the biggest strategies that has been working in Gaspé is increasing the sense of belonging for youth, and the families of youth, to the Gaspé. I come from the townships. You can take the girl out of the townships, but you can't take the townships out of the girl. I haven't lived there for years, but I still think it's home. It's the notion of belonging.

I'm an anglophone from the townships. I spoke English. I spoke French. I think what's important in Quebec is to find strategies to increase the sense of belonging and identity. Now, that's complicated. You need long-range programs. You need five-year benchmarks. You have to figure it out, but these are the kinds of strategies that are needed.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you for that answer.

I think it was in October 2015 that you had a press release about access to justice in both official languages. It's really important. I know that whether in French or in English, we've had to fight for this for a long time. Right now I have a bill that asks for bilingualism for Supreme Court judges. I think it's a first step.

First of all I will ask what you think about this bill and the project to have bilingualism for Supreme Court judges, and about access in general to justice for both official language communities.

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: Personally, I support it very much. As a minority, if I am in front of a judge, I want to be able to speak my own language. I stress that judges must have the capacity to be bilingual. As much as I want to be judged in English in Quebec, I feel just as strongly that francophones outside of Quebec must have that same opportunity as well. To me it's a fundamental aspect of Canada, and we should be moving towards it, definitely. I very strongly feel that.

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: We've been supporting it for years.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much for that.

You spoke about not having financial indexation. I heard that you are going to work with FCFA, who are here today. How will this co-operation be managed and what are the common goals?

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Working together on behalf of minority communities has always been, for the FCFA and the QCGN, important.

We have believed at the QCGN—and this situation should change—that government is not helpful in assisting both communities to find their place in terms of funding, because sometimes the problems are asymmetrical but the solutions that come with funding are the same. When you're trying to apply a “same funding” program or strategy to an asymmetrical problem, it doesn't quite work.

I think both the FCFA and the QCGN recognize that some of our issues are the same but some of our issues are different. I think the government has to hear that and help us work this out, because we certainly don't want to be in competition. Competition is not the name of the game. We want to work together, but the government has to help us work together to come to some of these programming solutions.

• (1620)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Lamoureux, you may go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: One of the other issues has been mentioned, and I think it's a serious one for both organizations. It's the financial issue. Since 2008 our budgets have been decreased. We're still trying to maintain services to our partners, to our community, and it's becoming harder and harder all the time.

On behalf of QCGN I ask, could we please correct that? It's been since 2008.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Since the time is just about up, we are going to end this first round. I will ask Greg to share his time with another member who would like to speak.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Indeed, Mr. Chair, I will split my time with the honourable member for Sudbury.

[English]

Thank you, Monsieur Lamoureux and Madame Martin-Laforge.

As we know, it's not your first time before a parliamentary committee, either here in Ottawa or in Quebec City, so although my question will be brief, I'm hoping you can be very specific. What we don't hear from the witnesses doesn't end up on the record, so it's really important that we do this.

Thank you very much for coming.

As you know, I'm the member of Parliament from western Quebec, and we have an important anglophone community. Just to build on the last point, you were talking about support for francophones outside Quebec or for anglophones inside Quebec. When you talk about federal government core and project funding support, could you be pretty specific as to how we could help strengthen the community capacity and infrastructure for your organizations?

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: It's an operational question. There has to be a recognition that the English-speaking community needs to build capacity in certain files. For example, we do not have any youth groups. There is no youth group that is specifically funded to come and visit you. If you asked for a youth group in Quebec, there's no policy capacity. There are service deliverers, but no policy capacity for youth. They can't talk to you about the numbers and where they are provincially. It's the same thing with regard to seniors.

From a policy capacity, we could be much more helpful to the government if we could give you those numbers. I'll give you a good example. When Mr. Schiefke came on Saturday to our event for youth, he said that you were thinking about having a youth national council. I'm not sure how we would do that in Quebec, because we don't have the policy capacity. A youth person would go, but to speak on behalf of an official language minority community from Quebec would be difficult. That is not so difficult in different provinces in the rest of Canada, from a minority language perspective.

It's capacity. Build our policy capacity so we can help you fund—if it's possible—specific programs to be directly delivered to a target group.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much.

With regard to the second question, I'm familiar with the debate on the potential changes to the English school boards in terms of public representation. Can you talk about how the Quebec committee, the QCGN, feels about that, as well as what role you think the federal government should be playing, if any, on the constitutional issue of minority language school boards?

● (1625)

Mr. Dan Lamoureux: In my capacity as president of QCGN, I am also the chairperson for Riverside school board on the south shore of Montreal. There are three basic areas that we as the QCGN relate to Bill 86.

There is the fundamental question of management and control. In the current context, through Bill 86 the management and control that we have as a minority group will be taken over by the cabinet and by the minister responsible.

I'll give you an example. I was with an MNA, Nicole Ménard, from Saint-Lambert on the south shore. I used an example. I said, "Imagine the Ontario cabinet deciding that they're going to tell you exactly how you're going to manage and control your minority schools. Imagine the uproar from the francophone community in Ontario. They would go bananas." That's what's happening with us in Bill 86.

The other thing is that the governance structure that proposed Bill 86 puts into place is very convoluted. Especially important is section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 23 refers directly to our capacity to manage and control. Having that stripped from us as a minority group is not something that we're going to take that lying down,

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Greg.

Dan, you have two minutes.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Many thanks to the witnesses for their presentation.

The Chair: My apologies, Mr. Vandal, but it was supposed to be Mr. Lefebvre's turn.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): We're all ready to ask our questions.

[English]

The reason you're here today is that we were preparing our priorities for the years to come and we wanted to hear from the people on the ground.

I appreciated your presentation, Madame Martin-Laforge. You have identified three or four priorities that we should get on immediately. I appreciate that. You were very succinct with that.

I'd like to go to how you're funded and your road map, *la feuille de route*. Maybe you can give us a bit more information on what percentage of the funding of the road map you receive, as well as what other sources of funding you have.

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: We've calculated that we get 23% of the road map funding.

I'm going to be really clear on the road map. Since its initial inception in 2002 with the action plan, it has not been able to capture and give the English-speaking community what it needs. The gaps have been there since the beginning, and they are policy gaps that have not been able to be fixed ever since.

People are working on it. They're trying, but there's no quid pro quo.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Can you give us an example?

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I'll give you a big example. It's the biggest one. It's the elephant in the room. It's immigration.

The immigration department cannot do anything for Quebec, it would seem, and this has been going on since 2002. In the first road map, it was \$9 million; in the second road map it was, I don't know, \$20 million; and now it's whatever it is. I know that because I was there.

That's okay, I get that, but there's no quid pro quo. When the last road map was launched, it talked about education, community, and immigration, but we're not even in immigration. I had asked for the next road map to be called diversity, because at least they could do something with diversity, but it was never taken up.

If you say "immigration", that tells the English-speaking community that we are excluded from a whole pillar of the road map, and you don't want that. That's my example.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Paul.

[English]

I'd like to thank you very much for your appearance here.

We'll probably discuss it in committee, but we might have a session in the Eastern Townships over the summer. I'm not sure where, but maybe we can continue the discussion then. I'm sorry that we had to cut your time a little because of that vote today.

Thank you to both of you, and thank you to the people who are with you.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

We will now take a two-minute break.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: Order, please. We are resuming the meeting.

I would like to welcome Sylviane Lanthier and Suzanne Bossé, respectively, the president and executive director of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA for short.

We will have 50 minutes together, as I have another meeting and will have to leave around five o'clock, or five to, at which point I will ask Mr. Nater to take over.

Without further ado, you may go ahead with your presentation. Then we will move on to questions and answers.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier (Chair, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to speak to the major issues facing francophone and Acadian communities, as well as their priorities. We are very pleased to be here this afternoon.

Two weeks ago, the FCFA was invited to appear before your colleagues on the Standing Committee on Finance. I shared two pieces of good news with them, and now I'd like to share them with you.

The first piece of good news is that there have never been so many people wanting to live in French in Canada, so the demand for French-language activities and services in our communities continues to grow.

The second piece of good news is that, across the country, we have a network of community builders who have taken things into their own hands to build the infrastructure we need to live in French. Led by the FCFA, the network is constantly on the lookout for innovative solutions to better serve the 2.6 million French-speaking Canadians across 9 provinces and 3 territories, and meet their needs more effectively.

I deliver my remarks to you today against the backdrop of next year's milestone, the 150th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada. The celebrations in 2017 are a perfect opportunity to showcase everything that makes us unique, as a people, and to clearly assert our core values, which attest to the importance of Canada's linguistic duality.

The very existence of French-speaking communities in every region of the country means that we can talk about genuine linguistic duality in Canada. The celebrations in 2017 are an ideal opportunity for the government to take historic steps to reiterate the importance of the country's linguistic duality by supporting the vitality of our communities and the ability of Canadians to live in French.

I would like to point out that, upon reading the transcript of last week's committee appearance by Canadian heritage officials, the FCFA was surprised to learn that there appeared to be no plan to showcase Canada's linguistic duality or francophonie during the celebrations in 2017. We are depending on the department to demonstrate leadership on that front.

I'd like to discuss three key priorities with you today.

The first is strengthening community capacity, especially with respect to infrastructure, services, and agencies and institutions committed to promoting French. There is no longer any doubt about the added value of our community and cultural centres, schools, settlement and employment assistance services, community media, and local francophone agencies. However, those organizations have now done everything they possibly can with the resources they have.

Many of our agencies receive funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage, through official languages programs, but that funding has neither increased nor been indexed for 11 years. Taking into account the increase in the cost of living, that corresponds to a 30% to 35% decrease in agency resources. Other organizations are also in trouble because some funds under Canada's roadmap for official languages have yet to be released three years into the plan.

Another matter of serious concern to us is the erosion of our community media, as I told your colleagues on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage yesterday. It won't come as news to you that the Radio-Canada cuts have significantly crippled regional stations serving our communities.

With respect to community media, last year, Ottawa's *L'Express* newspaper ceased publication and Saskatchewan's *L'Eau vive* newspaper suspended publication for a number of months. Our newspaper and radio organizations have experienced a significant decline in revenue. At a time when the entire media industry is struggling to transition to a digital-based business model, our community media services are in need of support to make that transition.

In short, strengthening the capacity of our communities is paramount if they are to continue fostering life in French by providing places where people can go about their lives in French. Our communities need better, more modern infrastructure in order to face the growing demand for services. Our media groups need to be able to make the digital transition. Our agencies and institutions need to be able to meet emerging needs, especially as regards francophone immigration.

That brings me to the second priority I wanted to discuss with you today, population growth.

Last week, in honour of the day of reflection on francophone immigration, we met with Minister McCallum, informing him of the key issues facing us. He clearly understood that, from our standpoint, francophone immigration was a matter of not just delivering services to individuals, but also strengthening the capacity of our communities. He recognized that it is a collective effort driving us.

Making that effort a success means overcoming numerous obstacles. The government hasn't really given our communities the resources to succeed when it comes to francophone immigration.

• (1640)

In 2012, we lost the ability to participate in Destination Canada, the only showcase we had to promote our communities as welcoming places for potential French-speaking immigrants to settle and live. In 2014, the government eliminated the francophone significant benefit program, the only measure that gave employers a genuine incentive to hire French-speaking workers from abroad.

What's more, our French-language settlement services definitely lack the resources they need to do the work of helping francophone newcomers settle and integrate into our communities. We would therefore expect the government to put tangible measures in place soon.

Our third key priority will hardly surprise anyone. I'm talking about full compliance with the Official Languages Act. In recent years, the implementation of the act has been significantly eroded. In the absence of a single authority mandated to ensure consistent government-wide application of the act, a number of institutions have been content to do the bare minimum, and sometimes even less than that. As a result of budget cuts, some institutions no longer have the capacity to fulfill their language obligations as they should.

As was highlighted in the Commissioner of Official Languages' recent report, Treasury Board had absolutely no qualms about letting federal institutions off the hook when it came to their contribution to the 2012 deficit reduction exercise and its impact on their official languages obligations and official language minority communities. That speaks to a broader and, I would even say, endemic, problem across the federal government—institutions' compliance with their official languages obligations under part VII of the act.

Specifically, I am referring to federal institutions' duty to take positive measures to enhance the vitality of linguistic minority communities, and support and assist their development. On that front, as well, federal institutions often do the bare minimum. Many make decisions without any regard for the impact on our communities or even community consultation. Many federal institutions see their duty to official language minority communities as beginning and ending with the initiatives in the roadmap for official languages. We are a long way off from the 2003 Dion plan, which was meant to hold federal institutions accountable for supporting communities.

It's now been 10 years since part VII of the Official Languages Act was amended, on the initiative of Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier, whose goal was to replace the legislation's lapdog status with watchdog clout, as he used to say. The FCFA's first recommendation is that the committee undertake an in-depth study on the manner in which federal institutions' obligations under part VII of the act have or have not been incorporated into the institutional culture. The study would lay the groundwork for a more effective official languages plan the next time around. As part of that study, I would also encourage the committee to examine how the Department of Canadian Heritage performs its coordination function under part VII of the act.

When department officials appeared two weeks ago, they talked about providing motivation and inspiration, but not about ensuring leadership or accountability. If compliance with part VII depends on the goodwill of each federal institution, we are no further ahead than we were in 2005. The need to designate an orchestra conductor, if you will, who can compel every institution to produce results has not changed.

The FCFA's second recommendation is that the committee put pressure on the federal government to take measures to actively promote Canada's linguistic duality and francophonie during the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Confederation of Canada. The government must, at the very least, send a clear message reiterating the importance of linguistic duality as one of Canada's core values.

Honourable members, even though the challenges are many, we at the FCFA, as well as our network partners, remain optimistic. As I said earlier, community building is an integral part of who we are. We appear before you today committed to being part of the solution. We intend to contribute to every step of the evaluation and consultation process to make sure the new plan truly meets our communities' development needs. Please know that you have our full co-operation in that regard. Our vision is to pass on a modern, diverse, and engaged francophonie to the next generation and the generation after that, as well as to all those who are "franco-curious", as MP Randy Boissonnault so cleverly put it. We know that, with good faith, hard work and co-operation, we can turn that vision into a reality.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you kindly, Ms. Lanthier. That was a wonderful presentation.

I'm now going to turn the floor over to Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good afternoon and welcome. I'm glad to see you again. It's always a pleasure to sit on the official languages committee.

As everyone knows, we've seen a massive influx of Syrian refugees into the country. I'd like to know where your organization stands on that.

Have you met with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and if so, did he assure you that you would play a key role in helping those refugees integrate into our society? Were you given assurance that you would have the necessary infrastructure and supports to assist the Syrian newcomers?

Would you mind telling us what the experience has been like for French-speaking agencies over the past few months since the first refugees began arriving, positive or negative?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: That's quite a broad question, Ms. Boucher.

We met briefly with Mr. McCallum, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. We gave him a general sense of our communities' capacity to take in Syrian refugees and help with their settlement.

At this time, our communities do not have any dedicated resources or funding to support the refugees. That's a specific issue for the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, except in St. Boniface, Manitoba.

We would like to work alongside all the organizations helping Syrian refugees settle into our communities, but we need measures in place to do so.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé (Executive Director, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): I have something to add since you asked about useful practices or positive experiences.

Communities have really come together. Whole parishes, towns and families have joined forces to help Syrian refugees. Only

St. Boniface has French-language centres to assist Syrian refugees with settlement. Unfortunately, in many cases, all the families and communities who have rallied together haven't had an easy time accessing referrals, whether family- or school-related, or employment assistance. That kind of thing has been very difficult.

It's a shame, but we have often had to rely on English-language services. The Syrian refugees are often referred to English-language services because our communities are very deficient in that kind of support. We told Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship officials that we were counting on their leadership, in terms of asking English-language settlement service providers to refer any Syrian refugees who may wish to learn French back to the French-language service providers in our communities.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: What types of infrastructure do French-speaking minority communities need in order to support franco-phone immigrants who want to live their lives in French?

• (1650)

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Immigration-wise, the needs are tremendous. First, we need to be able to administer French language testing, which not all communities are. And the cost to access that testing needs to be reasonable, which isn't the case. As things stand, immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador wanting to undergo French-language testing have to travel to Halifax. On top of that, French testing is not available on a regular basis anywhere in the country. And that's just for language testing.

Second, language training is an entirely separate issue. I could talk at length about the continuum of settlement services. We developed a map of all French-language settlement services available in the provinces and territories. We would be happy to share that information with the committee members.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That would be appreciated.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: You will notice that Manitoba and central southwestern Ontario are the most equipped in terms of French-language services. You will also see where all the settlement service gaps are.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Do you know the exact number of French-speaking Syrian refugees who arrived or, if not, the percentage of Syrian immigrants who spoke French?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: No, we don't have that kind of data.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: You would have to ask the department for that information.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I will ask the department. It would be useful to know the percentage of Syrian refugees who speak French.

The Chair: Ms. Boucher, the parliamentary secretary is here with us. Perhaps you could address your request about the number of French-speaking Syrian refugees to him.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Having that information is important. It would benefit all the committee members.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, you may go ahead.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, I am going to have to leave while you ask your questions, but it doesn't mean you're boring.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We'll forgive you, but I don't want to spend too much time on the subject and waste my time.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'd like to welcome my two colleagues, Suzanne and Sylviane.

We've known each other a long time through education circles and francophone and Acadian communities. I had a quick look at the work you've done and the presentations you've given over the past few years, and I must say it's quite impressive. Kudos to you on the job you've been doing. You've raised important issues such as funding for agencies, francophone immigration—which is vital—judicial appointments, and services to the public. All of them are crucial issues, and I commend you for addressing them.

Before I get to my question, I would like to assure you that, when it comes to the 150th anniversary of Confederation next year, the government will respect Canada's linguistic duality for the duration of the event or, I should say, celebration, because that's exactly what it is. The celebration will last all year long, just like at Disney World.

I'm going to fire off five questions and give you 45 seconds to answer each one. I know you're more than capable given how knowledgeable you are about the issues.

As regards the current roadmap, in 45 seconds, could you describe what isn't working so well and what you are the least satisfied with?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: This is what I would say in 45 seconds: immigration, immigration, immigration. The community component is another issue, because the community-building programs currently offered are not meeting the needs.

I could elaborate, if you like.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I have no doubt.

Tying into the first, my second question might pick up on the answer you just gave.

What are your expectations for the next roadmap in 2018? You just mentioned a few points, but is there anything else?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Right now, our greatest expectation is to be able to make a real contribution to every step of the next roadmap, as well as evaluate every step of the current roadmap. In other words, we want to help evaluate current measures in order to shape the next roadmap.

• (1655)

Mr. Darrell Samson: As far as evaluation is concerned, is that how it worked the last time around?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Actually, the last time, we were thrilled because the FCFA was consulted on the development of the indicators for evaluation and on the evaluation method. This time, however, there was no consultation.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: It wasn't done.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It wasn't done.

Very well.

We'll take that under advisement. Thank you.

And now, very quickly, for my third question. As regards the mandates of the ministers responsible for the various portfolios that concern you, is there anything specific that could be done to better meet the needs you described?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: We care about anything having to do with full implementation of the Official Languages Act. As we mentioned in our remarks, we feel very strongly about the need for the government to truly implement part VII, the part of the act addressing the vitality and development of our communities. We believe that the spotlight needs to once again be on community vitality and development. That objective should underlie all government efforts in the next few years to implement the Official Languages Act. Services are also important, but community vitality is something we are passionate about. With that in mind, we would be in favour of anything in the ministerial mandate letters to support francophone communities and capacity building.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Very good.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I would add two departments, as far as that matter goes.

When it comes to Treasury Board, it would be wonderful if you could make sure that all of its policies took the Official Languages Act into account, which is not currently the case. The program evaluation policy is completely silent on the act. For example, francophone immigration does not appear anywhere in the objectives.

Mr. Darrell Samson: My fourth question is a very important one. It has to do with the federal census.

One is currently in the works, but we need to work on the next one, which will probably be in 2021. What are your thoughts on a more in-depth analysis of the issues? I'm not sure that the census will provide us with the information on our communities that we want.

Could you kindly tell me where you stand on that?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: That's a great question, Mr. Samson. We were just talking about that this afternoon, pointing to the need to revisit the definitions of the terms “francophone” and “francophonie”, to give them common meanings that make sense. That includes for the census.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I applaud you for raising the language issues as they were one of the FCFA's concerns during the last census.

As regards the exercise in 2021, it's clear that we need a post-census survey, something that was done a number of years ago. That's information that we are sorely lacking and that would help us build a detailed profile of small communities.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In three words, how would you describe Senator Chaput's bill?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Pass it quickly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Mr. Choquette, you may go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bossé and Ms. Lanthier, thank you for being with us today. I'm very happy to have you here.

The committee decided to undertake a study on immigration in official language minority communities. I think that's good news. We haven't decided when we will undertake the study but we will do so soon.

You said that you hadn't been consulted on the roadmap indicators. I know you talked to the government about that. What was its response? Are you finally going to be consulted on the indicators? Will they be changed to reflect your recommendations? What's happening right now?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: At the beginning of October, the FCFA was informed that the roadmap evaluation process was getting under way. The evaluation method had already been decided. A request for proposals was posted on MERX, and we weren't at all consulted.

We asked the Department of Canadian Heritage for a meeting with its evaluation managers, which we had in November, I believe. At that time, we learned that the indicators for all programs delivered under the roadmap had been defined in the fall of 2013 when submissions were made to Treasury Board.

Not a single organization from the country's francophonie, not even the FCFA, was consulted to help identify the method for determining whether roadmap initiatives met their objectives. We are talking about the department responsible for implementing part VII of the Official Languages Act and ensuring coordination across all departments. The department made no effort to ensure that the objectives and obligations of the act were met.

• (1700)

Mr. François Choquette: I hope that the government paid attention to your concerns and that you will be consulted when the time comes to review the indicators for compliance with part VII of the act and so forth.

I have many questions, but since I'm short on time, I'm going to focus on the translation bureau.

We are currently doing a brief study on the future of the translation bureau. As you know, the bureau has been using attrition to reduce the size of its workforce since 2011-12 and has lost numerous translators. We learned that the bureau intends to implement a controversial new automatic translation tool on April 1.

You spoke of the importance of implementing the Official Languages Act and doing things the right way. Given that people have the right to work in the language of their choice and that most

translations are from English to French, what's your reaction to the decisions made by the translation bureau? Do you have any thoughts, opinions, or recommendations regarding the translation bureau's staffing cuts or its planned April 1 installation of a translation software tool on the computers of all public servants?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: We haven't talked much about that thus far, but it's an excellent question.

Both official languages should be on equal footing. We should be very cautious about any measures that diminish the status of French and ensure that we aren't about to embark on a path that diminishes the importance of the French language. I'm not so sure that the translation bureau is sending a very positive message about the value of French as an official language.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you.

The justice committee is currently studying access to justice in both official languages. You may have been invited to appear or you no doubt will be.

It's an issue that's very dear to my heart, as it was for my former colleague Yvon Godin. He did a lot of work in that area, repeatedly introducing a bill requiring Supreme Court justices to speak both official languages, to make sure official language minority communities had equal access to justice.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on the principle behind his bill.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: We have long supported the principle of official language minority communities having the right to express themselves, as well as be heard and understood, in their official language when appearing before a judge. We think it's a wonderful bill and sincerely hope it will be passed.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much.

I have very little time left.

Are you going to be able to return to Destination Canada?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: That would be great. Destination Canada gave us a gateway into source countries, enabling us to reach out to people wanting to come to Canada to live. We were able to let them know that our official language communities existed and could offer them a hospitable place to live, and that we could accommodate them.

Mr. François Choquette: So it was an excellent marketing tool for you.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: In losing Destination Canada, we lost the only marketing tool that gave us that kind of exposure.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Vandal, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sylviane and Suzanne, thank you kindly for your presentation.

Suzanne, I see you more in Ottawa than I do in St. Boniface. It's always a pleasure to see you.

I'd like to talk dollars. You said that you represent 22 organizations and that the FCFA receives government funding. How much does the government give you?

• (1705)

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: The FCFA?

Mr. Dan Vandal: Yes.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: The FCFA receives \$950,000 annually.

Mr. Dan Vandal: You receive \$956,000?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: No, we receive \$950,000 from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

We also generate revenue through the dues paid by our 20 members. Every FCFA member has to pay annual dues of \$6,000.

The FCFA is also responsible for the joint action network. We have 20 members, but a few times a year, we gather for a leaders forum. It brings together 42 francophone organizations active in all areas of people's lives, from health care, education, and municipal stakeholders to economic development and youth groups. Of the \$950,000 we receive, \$100,000 goes to consultation activities organized by the FCFA, in conjunction with all francophone community networks.

I'm not sure whether that answers your question.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Are you getting more funding or less funding than you were six years ago? Or has it stayed the same?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We are getting the same amount.

Mr. Dan Vandal: So there hasn't been the slightest increase.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: That's exactly right, and I've been with the FCFA for seven years.

Mr. Dan Vandal: It wasn't even adjusted for the cost of living?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: No, not for the past 11 years.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What impact does that have? It actually amounts to a decrease in funding.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: That is our day-to-day reality. In fact, we just talked about it before coming here today. It has a tremendous impact.

We are a team of eight people, and as soon as we are short one person, it becomes quite challenging to meet our objectives—do our work with the organizations and communities, and provide guidance to the government. We do indeed provide support and guidance to federal institutions. The people at foreign affairs, the CRTC, and fisheries and oceans, among others, turn to the FCFA for assistance with integrating the Official Languages Act into their departmental operations.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I see.

Are the organizations you represent in the same boat?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Absolutely.

Mr. Dan Vandal: If that's the case for 22 organizations, it's a problem.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Yes, and in some cases, it's even worse. Under the new roadmap, early childhood education was excluded as an issue of national interest because it was decided that it fell solely in the provincial domain. So that's \$4 million.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I see.

What are the biggest challenges to French-language education across the country?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: It's the infrastructure.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Yes, the infrastructure. Successful identity building is the other one. Our two biggest challenges are successful identity building and infrastructure.

School divisions in some regions have trouble providing access to community members whose first language is not necessarily French and who are not, strictly speaking, considered to be entitled to French-language education.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Immigrants are another consideration.

Mr. Dan Vandal: You may have already started to answer my next question. You mentioned community infrastructure but you certainly weren't referring to streets, alleys, and sidewalks.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: No. I meant community and cultural centres and the health of our institutional infrastructure. For example, cultural infrastructure is needed. Some areas have no place where people can go to have French cultural experiences. So we are still very much in need of infrastructure.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Schools are another dimension of that. There are appealing high schools that offer good sports programs, for example—gymnasiums and so forth. The students who attend them transition from elementary school to high school in French, not English. It's the same for post-secondary education. We need to keep students in a French-speaking environment.

• (1710)

Mr. Dan Vandal: In St. Boniface, people often bring up the fact that the francophone significant benefit program was eliminated. You, yourself, mentioned it. Where do you stand on that?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: The francophone significant benefit program was part of a broader immigration program that made it possible for employers to recruit temporary workers. When the government did away with the overall immigration program, it eliminated the francophone significant benefit program at the same time, without any consultation or consideration of the community impact.

It was the only program at the time that gave employers the ability to hire French-speaking workers. It attracted a lot of people. It was a huge incentive.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Outside Quebec.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Yes, outside Quebec.

The loss of the program has had a major impact on employers' ability to recruit and hire French-speaking foreign workers.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Thank you.

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

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Ms. Lanthier, in response to my colleague's question about Senator Chaput's bill to amend the Official Languages Act, you answered yes very quickly. Why?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: We encouraged you to pass the bill because it sets out a more modern definition of the term “francophone” and the vision or manner, rather, in which the government must provide services in both official languages. I think the bill would bring the government's approach in line with our reality, in 2016.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Wonderful. Thank you.

When you appeared before the finance committee, you called on the government to release funds that had been committed under the roadmap but not yet provided.

Would you mind telling us what roadmap funding has yet to be released, as you explained to the finance committee?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Specifically, the \$4 million in funding under the social partnership initiative in official-language minority communities.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: So that money hasn't been spent yet. Is that what you're saying?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Precisely.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Is the money for one program, in particular, or multiple programs? Is a specific department or agency responsible for the initiative?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: The Department of Employment and Social Development administers the program, or the social partnership initiative in official-language minority communities. The \$4 million in funding that was previously earmarked for early childhood education was shifted over to this initiative.

What the department has had trouble with is determining the initiative's objectives and desired outcomes. Currently, of that \$4 million, some \$3 million is supposed to go to francophone minority communities and \$1 million is supposed to go to English-speaking communities in Quebec.

On the French side, four national organizations have joined forces. They came up with a plan and project to meet the specific objectives of the initiative, as set out by the department. The four organizations are the Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada, the Commission nationale des parents francophones, the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, and the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne. They put together proposals, and for the last year and a half, they have been waiting for an answer from the department.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What impact has the department's failure to release the funds had? Does it mean nothing is happening?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Some organizations have had a very hard time getting by, the Commission nationale des parents francophones and the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne, in particular.

Our anglophone counterparts talked earlier about core funding and project funding. Multi-year agreements and the timely release of funding by departments are crucial to our survival. Any uncertainty means we lose staff. If we can't tell them whether they are going to have a job in a month, we lose them.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What do you think the reason is? Is it that an evaluation has still not been done?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We don't know. We have no idea. Department representatives are constantly asking us more questions. They seem to still be missing information.

• (1715)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Fine.

You have repeatedly talked about the importance of Radio-Canada to French-speaking communities outside Quebec. As you know, our government has committed to increasing the public broadcaster's funding.

Do you talk to the people at Radio-Canada about the needs of francophone communities outside Quebec?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Two weeks ago, we met with Radio-Canada executives. The crown corporation produces an annual report on the initiatives it undertakes in support of official language minority communities. Not only did we want to discuss that, but we also wanted to talk about their goals for the future and their plans for the additional \$75 million in funding if it came through.

Our understanding is that, for the time being, Radio-Canada is not providing any guarantees that it will spend funds directly on regional stations in our communities. And yet, there is no denying the cutbacks these stations have endured or the fact that, aside from daily news programming, they produce little in the way of television content, whether programs for children or young people, or variety shows. On the news side, things are lacking: you need reporters on site, for instance. Other types of programming are also lacking.

We recommend that the government attach conditions to the funding increase in order to ensure that some of the money goes to our communities.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The roadmap, which I'm familiar with, is a frequent topic of conversation.

Could you describe what was going on before the roadmap was introduced? What concrete results has the roadmap produced? Does the roadmap matter? Is it an approach worth keeping or not?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: As I understood the situation, when Mr. Dion was the minister, he considered the idea of having an official languages action plan. He wanted to set a new objective for the government, in addition to what it was already doing. Specifically, that meant providing support to such sectors as health care, something that was new at the time. No significant efforts were being made in the health care arena back then, so he wanted to create a measure that would have real teeth.

The plan also included targets around the number of Canadians who would learn both official languages, in terms of students graduating from immersion programs and so forth. Objectives were attached to that official languages plan, which brought together all of the government's initiatives under a single banner. That's what was done in the first incarnation of the action plan. My understanding is that subsequent governments did more or less the same thing, but in a different way.

The government's efforts should not end with the roadmap. Other measures are surely needed, hence the importance of properly evaluating the roadmap's impact. That means figuring out exactly where the money was spent, what it was spent on, and what impact it had, in order to determine whether the tool is meeting communities' needs, not to mention the government's. If not, the government will need to think about how it can do a better job under the next action plan, if there is one.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Thank you.

Mr. Gagnéux, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us today, ladies. We had the chance to meet this week, which I quite enjoyed. I mentioned to you quickly that I was confident, in terms of the needs you could potentially fulfill going forward, and that I stood in solidarity with you.

You said you received \$950,000 in support from the federal government, but do you receive any funding from the provinces?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: In her answer, Suzanne was referring specifically to the FCFA's funding. The only support she didn't mention was the funding we receive from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for the immigration initiatives we oversee. Otherwise, the FCFA does not receive any provincial funding.

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: Very well.

Since we are meeting this week and you are here today, I'd like to take this opportunity, with the permission of committee members, of course, to put forward a bit of an unusual motion. I'm not sure what the protocol is, but perhaps the clerk could enlighten me.

I'd like to take advantage of your being here today to put forward a motion to acknowledge all the work Mauril Bélanger has done over the years in support of the francophonie and official language minority communities.

I'm not sure how to go about it, but I'd like to know whether it's possible for the committee to put forward a joint motion with your organization and the QCGN—in short, all of the advocates for official language minority communities across the country. I'm not sure if anything like that has been done before, but I think we should all recognize Mauril's hard work.

I jotted down some text for a motion on the edge of my paper. I'll read it to you, but there's surely room for improvement. It reads as follows: "That the committee recognize the tireless work, dedication, and passion of the Honourable Mauril Bélanger in support of official language minority communities throughout his entire career as a member of Parliament".

I'm not sure whether we should add the title "minister", seeing as he used to be one. The motion goes on to read: "That, together with the organizations representing francophone and anglophone minority communities, the committee publicly acknowledge his dedication."

We could probably tinker with the motion a bit. Perhaps Mr. Boissonnault could help us with that. I don't imagine it would be too difficult to get the committee's unanimous consent for the motion. While you're with us today, I'd like to get your support. I

don't imagine that will be too difficult either. It's important to acknowledge the work that people like Mauril do.

• (1720)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Is the committee in agreement?

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'd like to begin by thanking Mr. Gagnéux for his motion. I completely agree with the idea of acknowledging everything Mr. Bélanger has done to help official language minority communities around the country, throughout his career in Ottawa, and even before he entered politics.

Mr. Chair, can we entrust the proper wording of the motion to the subcommittee or planning committee? If so, we could vote to adopt it at our next meeting.

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: Again, I'm not sure whether the committee has the authority to do this or not.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have put forward a similar motion in the past.

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: I'm unsure as to whether associations representing official language minority communities can contribute to this motion, since they are witnesses, not members of the committee, and have no formal ties to the committee.

It would be wonderful if it were possible, as it would be a public show of everyone's support.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Thank you.

With the committee's permission, Mr. Boissonnault would like the floor.

Is the committee in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Go ahead, Mr. Boissonnault.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): That's very kind. I think this is the first time I've spoken about something not related to an event involving my colleague Mr. Choquette.

Thank you, Mr. Gagnéux.

There were a lot of tears today in the House of Commons and the Hall of Honour, as we paid tribute to our dear friend Mauril.

My preference would be for us to spend a bit of time outside this room to find the right wording for the motion. We can't ask the groups here today to vote on committee business, but we can invite groups all over the country to send Mauril flowers and kind words, as long as he is able to read them and do things on his own.

We can refer the motion to our planning committee. I will make the services of the Department of Canadian Heritage available to the committee in order to find the right words to express our sentiment to our dear colleague.

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: We are running out of time.

Regardless, we'll have the opportunity to meet again in the months ahead. I think the committee has already decided that it will take a trip out west, to visit St. Boniface, Manitoba, and probably Edmonton. No doubt we'll see each other again, at which point, you can probably come before the committee for another appearance. I'll end on that note. Even though I have more questions for you, I'll hold on to them until we see you out in the trenches.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Yes, thank you.

Mr. Fergus, you have six minutes.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being with us today, ladies.

I wasn't aware that francophone communities outside Quebec were lacking funding support. You mentioned 30%. When the Quebec Community Groups Network made its presentation, you heard me say that it was important to get that information on the record.

Can you describe the situation? Even if funding were to go up by 30%, I imagine there would still be challenges to overcome. Could you speak to the importance of continuing to promote official language minority communities outside Quebec, even with a funding increase?

• (1725)

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: It is certain that those needs are quite pressing in our communities. We are talking about building environments that really allow people who want to live in French to live a maximum number of aspects of their life in that language. That means having extracurricular activities, for instance, that allow young people to play soccer in French or to play volleyball in French. My daughter is 17 years old and has played volleyball her whole life. She went to a French school, but all of the volleyball terms she knows are in English, because that is the way it is.

In my community, a small organization was created by a youth group and was then set up. This is the Manitoba Sport Directorate, whose mandate is to allow people of all ages to participate in sports activities that take place in French. The organization has very little funding, but what it does is important. A lot of small organizations like that one do things to make it possible for life to be lived in French as much as possible, and they do it with very few resources and very little funding. These people aren't trying to become millionaires. Nor will they become millionaires tomorrow either with the activities they manage, but they want to have the means to succeed in their undertakings and have some impact thanks to the activities they set up. They want their activities to have an impact and change people's lives and allow them to really be included in our francophone communities and to live as much of their lives in French as possible. I am referring here to cultural and sports activities. I am referring to health services. Sometimes it is difficult for a senior to be greeted in English when he or she goes to a hospital or to an emergency ward, and francophone specialists are not always available. There are also needs in that regard that must be taken into account and where action needs to be taken.

In a lot of sectors we talk about economic development, we talk about culture, we talk a lot about helping our young people build what we call their francophone identity, so that they can take part in their community and want to continue to live in that community and promote French.

There really are a lot of needs that cannot be met fully when we don't have the appropriate resources. Indeed, organizations that do not see any increase in their funding year after year, and sometimes find it more and more difficult to meet the conditions to obtain that funding, wind up doing a lot of administrative work and doing less work in the field. Proportionally speaking, they pay too much for their rent and do less work on the ground, whereas what they want to do is be present in the field.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'm going to be brief.

I imagine you would also like to have multi-year funding in order to ensure some stability.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Yes. Anything that reduces the administrative burden and facilitates the work, that is to say an injection of funds into activities as such and multiplies their impact is important.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses very much for being here with us today. I appreciate their presence here.

Earlier, the representatives of the Quebec anglophone minority community indicated that they have a lot of trouble keeping their young anglophones in their community. Is it an issue for you to keep your young people?

You spoke earlier about education at the primary, secondary and university levels. I know that there is higher education in Saint-Boniface and also in your area. Is that an issue? I'd like to hear your views on this.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Yes, that is an important issue, and more so in certain regions. The FCFA recently did some research with the Quebec Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes on the migration of young people.

We would be pleased to share the results of that study with you. The study is currently in its second phase. It looks at the reasons why people move and attempts to determine where the deficiencies are in our communities. The third phase will consist in offering a toolbox and programs that will facilitate access to schooling in French and access to jobs. In that last case, it would be in French or in English, but in our communities, the objective is to live in French. Five provincial governments are contributing to that study.

• (1730)

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much. That is important.

I don't have much time left, but I am going to give it to my colleague Dan Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I would simply like to move a motion once question period is over.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): I thank the witnesses.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Is the meeting over?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): If you have a question, it has to be very brief.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Concerning the services offered to the public in both official languages by federal institutions, you are questioning the methods used for calculating what is known as “significant demand”.

What do you mean by that?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I was referring to the regulation regarding the application of part IV of the Official Languages Act, which defines how the number of francophones is calculated. The enforcement of that regulation costs every federal institution hundreds of thousands of dollars. After the census, it can take up to three years to apply the results. It is very costly.

And the fact that we function according to predefined numbers or regions means that some emerging communities may be missed. Because of immigration, some very new communities in western Canada need access to French schools, but they cannot obtain French services from the federal government because they are not located in one of the geographic areas defined by that regulation. That is why Senator Chaput's bill is so important.

I don't know if I've answered your question.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes. The issue is important.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): I thank the witnesses.

Mr. Vandal would like to move a motion.

Is the committee in agreement?

An hon. member: Agreed.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Suzanne and Sylviane, thank you very much for your presentation. I will see you again in Ottawa in two weeks.

I would like to move that we invite the Minister responsible for Official Languages to come and meet with us on April 20 from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. so that she may share her vision and ideas on these matters with us.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: We should specify that this is the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): That is confirmed for April 20.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When we receive the minister or other ministers, it would really be important that the meeting be televised. We rarely have that opportunity in this committee. I would like us to make an effort to reserve a room where the meeting could be televised.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): It will be.

Mr. François Choquette: May we have a reply from the clerk on that? Will the meeting be televised?

It will be. Very good. Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Nater): The meeting is adjourned.

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