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## **Standing Committee on Official Languages**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, March 19, 2018**

**Chair**

**The Honourable Denis Paradis**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Monday, March 19, 2018

• (1635)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)):** Welcome everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we will continue our study of the review of support programs for official language minority community media.

Today, we are pleased to welcome Martin Th  berge, president of the F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise, Maggy Razafimbahiny, its director general, and Marie-Christine Morin, its assistant director.

We also welcome Marie-France Kenny, president of the Coop  rative des publications fransaskoises.

Finally, we welcome Melanie Scott, editor of the *Low Down to Hull & Back News*.

Good afternoon, and welcome everyone.

We will proceed as we usually do, meaning that we will give each group 5 to 6 minutes to give their presentations. We will then have a round table with the MPs so that they may ask questions, give comments, and so on. It will all finish around 5:30 p.m. I will try to manage the time as best I can.

We are listening. I think that the first group on the agenda is the F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise.

**Mr. Martin Th  berge (President, F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise):** Thank you.

We see the local media's potential as vectors for change and openness. The government needs local media, because they play a pivotal role. They give the government access to our fellow Canadians' living rooms and kitchens.

Good afternoon, my name is Martin Th  berge and I am the president of the FCCF, the F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise. As the chair already mentioned, I am accompanied by Maggy Razafimbahiny, the director general of our organization, and Marie-Christine Morin, its assistant director. On behalf of our network, thank you for inviting us to appear before you today. We hope to be able to give you the tools to defend our local media. We congratulate you for having taken the initiative to address this issue, which is of fundamental importance to us.

The FCCF is the voice of the Canadian francophonie for the arts, culture and cultural industries. Its vision consists in inspiring, mobilizing and transforming Canada through the arts and culture. The FCCF, founded in 1977, is a national organization dedicated to promoting the artistic and cultural expression of the Acadian and francophone communities. Its network has 22 member organizations, seven of which are national groups at the service of artistic disciplines and cultural industries, and 13 are organizations dedicated to developing the arts and culture in 11 of Canada's provinces and territories. The FCCF also includes a group of networks that broadcast the performing arts, and an alliance of community radio stations.

The issue we are discussing today is a window into seeing the different essential pieces of the official languages puzzle come together. All of them can influence the francophone and Acadian communities' chances of success for their development and their vitality. The Official Languages Act is to be modernized, and the Action Plan for Official Languages is on the verge of being released, not to mention the "Creative Canada – A Vision for Canada's Creative Industries" roadmap that puts us on a path to innovation.

We all have reasons to hope that these particular circumstances will have a real impact on the official languages issue. In his budget, Minister Morneau announced new investments of \$400 million to implement the next Action Plan for Official Languages. Considering the work ahead of us, this promise was timely. We must get back on track as soon as possible, and give our media the tools to optimize their contribution to our fellow francophone and Acadian citizens' wellness across the country.

Official language minority communities are above all cultural constructs, and local media are indispensable to their success. The government must encourage the application of positive measures and a global framework aimed at fuelling collaboration between all stakeholders at all levels. Local media are rooted in our communities. They understand us, and listen to us because they evolve with us, in our communities. They are strategic partners to our organizations, because they help us to build relations with our communities through information, involvement and participation. They are catalysts for our actions and our activities. The statistics bear this out: The penetration rates of community media into the communities' households vary between 54% and 83%, depending on the area.

We believe that minority communities truly need wide-reaching media. Having access to locally produced and broadcast radio content builds pride in our identity and pushes us to express it, share it, and make it flourish around us. We also believe that community media influence social cohesion and the welcoming of new members to our community.

The FCCF believes that we must create opportunities, first, by inviting all stakeholders to participate in a global conversation how the country's media are evolving; and, second, by encouraging and believing in the potential of our communities' local media to create jobs and offer experience-based learning. Out of respect for their expertise and unique abilities, we must also invite local media to participate in the development of a global strategy to promote the francophone and Acadian communities. This strategy would be jointly designed by the government and the communities, as key strategic partners. Furthermore, users would be central to the process and to the strategies developed from it. We also need to increase the government's awareness of minority language communities; local media play a key role on this front.

The FCCF is proud to include the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, the ARC du Canada, in its membership. The ARC is the nationwide manager of broadcasting in French-minority communities, and we echo their beliefs.

• (1640)

Here, I am quoting from its brief on minority community media, jointly presented with the Association de la presse francophone, the APF, and the Association des journaux régionaux du Québec, AJRQ, during the cross-Canada official languages consultations led by the Department of Canadian Heritage in 2016.

...minority community media make a direct contribution to the vitality index of their communities. They cover topics that the major media do not and they have a direct link to the daily life of the communities. They can cover broader topics, but they always do so by establishing links with the issues in their local and regional communities.

Beyond their mission to inform and entertain, local media recognize their duty to support the development of the communities. We might think, for example, about the technical and professional training that they provide to their staff. The value and the contribution of local media as a venue for professional and technical learning must be better recognized. It is an example of convergence that should be further explored.

Beyond the social health, the dynamic activity of local media is vital for arts and culture, in whose name we speak. No other participant in Canada's communications ecosystem is in a position to provide us with as much value. Our local media act as a catalyst for our distribution efforts. They also have a direct impact on the development of our emerging artistic careers, which would not otherwise be seen as having value by the mass media.

**The Chair:** The time is quickly running out. Could you speed up a little and go to the most important points?

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** Okay.

Local media are in a very precarious position, which presents an obstacle to their ability to fully play their role. The federal government's strategy in placing advertising over the last decade has undermined the network. Local media are in a financial crisis;

reinvestment is required and it cannot come too soon. We have seen some closures and others are likely in the short and medium term; others are barely holding on.

It is critical to focus our efforts on a coherent short-term investment strategy, with the goal of stabilizing our asset base in local media, media with no access to stable and ongoing financing.

In presenting our brief jointly with the APF and the AJRQ, the FCCF supports the measures proposed by the Alliance des radios communautaires.

The community media network, our vital communication tool at local level, is struggling. Large numbers and commercial interests win the day, to the detriment of the essential contribution those media make. Radio-Canada, our only national French-language broadcaster, is less and less able to serve our regions and to have them part of the development of their own content.

The abilities of those who develop our French-language content must be preserved. That is the vision that the government invited us to share last fall when it announced "Creative Canada – A Vision for Canada's Creative Industries". "This is the time for Canada to step confidently forward, to set a new standard". Those were the words spoken by the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Using them, the FCCF is positioning itself as a catalyst that is ready to rally the sector's driving forces and steer them in the same direction.

We urge the Government of Canada to commit itself to innovation and to undertake the tough task of designing solutions with local media and appropriate national organizations. Community media must be given the means to fully play their roles, to see their contribution valued, and to be able to see the beneficial effects of their actions multiplied.

We are putting our faith in the scope of your work and we would be happy to work with you.

Thank you for the time you have given us.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Thériège.

We will now hear Marie-France Kenny's presentation.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny (President, Coopérative des publications fransaskoises):** Mr. Chair, Mr. Parliamentary Secretary, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, my sincere thanks for your invitation to the Coopérative des publications fransaskoises, which has been publishing our newspaper, *L'Eau vive*, in Saskatchewan since 1971. My name is Marie-France Kenny and I have been the president since May 2017.

First of all, let me tell you about our newspaper. Our newspaper was a weekly until March 2016. Because of a lack of financial resources, we had to close for some months and reorganize ourselves. Thanks to the great generosity of the Centre de la francophonie des Amériques, of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise and of Zachary Richard, our community really mobilized and we raised \$49,000. Let me show you the extent to which our community is committed to our newspaper: on a per capita basis, that would be like Ontario raising \$1.7 million. So we relaunched the paper with the help of committed volunteers and a dedicated staff. However, we reduced the number of issues to two per month from one per week.

We have one and a half employees. We serve 13 remote communities. It takes eight hours to travel from the most remote to the other end. Our staff therefore has to coordinate the content of the paper, cover the news, write and edit the text, manage the stringers, update social media each day, work with the designer on the layout, proofread, liaise with the printer, digitize everything, apply for grants, prepare reports for the donors, monitor the budget, sell advertising and subscriptions, answer the telephone and the mail, just to mention a part of what they do.

Some of my colleagues in other provinces and in the APF who testified before me have given you a lot of excellent solutions, including a tax credit for producing original Canadian information, a partial reimbursement or tax credit program for digital investment, and reimbursing the GST for those who produce original Canadian content, as is the case for books. I agree with these solutions completely. You have also been told about government advertising, and that is where I would like to spend some time, in order to explain to you exactly what is going on between the government and our community media.

I am sure you will agree with me that the Government of Canada has a mandate to communicate with all Canadians. Moreover, the Official Languages Act requires it to do so in both official languages.

At *L'Eau vive*, we have 650 subscriptions, of which only 30 are exclusively digital. Personally, I just see the digital edition. Apart from those 30 subscribers, everyone has chosen the online and paper editions. That means that the majority of our readership prefers the paper edition, even though some of them take the digital editions. Otherwise, they would unsubscribe from the paper edition and only take the digital one.

Saskatchewan is big. A number of our communities are located in small, remote rural areas and have no high-speed Internet access. We are the only media outlet in Saskatchewan that publishes in French. So a large swath of our community has no access to federal government advertising. Why is that? It is because, in November 2013, at a meeting of the Consultative Committee on Advertising and Official Language Minority Media, the Advertising Coordination and Partnerships Directorate confirmed, in a way, that there would be a shift to the Internet for advertising. That shift was later confirmed by a directive from the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

I see no problem prioritizing online advertising. But, in my opinion, and in the opinion of the Commissioner of Official Languages at the time, it is a breach of the Official Languages Act to

do so without first consulting the communities and taking into account the habits of our subscribers, and of the population of Saskatchewan, an aging one at that. It must also be recognized that a number of francophones in minority situations have no access to high-speed Internet and will therefore not be able to see government advertising. If they had continued to be able to buy advertising on our websites and in our newspaper, they would still have been able to reach that readership.

The problem lies in the fact that, with this shift to the Internet, the federal governments has decided to advertise, or not advertise, on websites based on their traffic. You must understand that our newspaper is in Saskatchewan, and it has 650 subscribers. So I will never compete with Google, Facebook, the *Journal de Montréal*, or even with other francophone newspapers in other provinces and territories. The more traffic on the sites, the more advertising there will be. Federal advertising has therefore disappeared from our francophone media. It has actually happened.

• (1650)

I understand there is a directive for that, but there is no directive to ensure that the government systematically continues to advertise in newspapers to give francophones access to that advertising. The legislation states that the federal government must advertise positions in both official languages; it's the law.

For our small newspaper *L'Eau vive* alone, that's a loss of \$50,000 in revenue per year. The loss of \$1.5 million for all the community newspapers and radio stations is not huge, but it is for small newspapers and radio stations. That's what a number of people and I think. We are talking about the survival of our media. With the exception of Radio-Canada, we are the only francophone media outlet that reaches people in Saskatchewan.

In her 2017 investigation report, the acting commissioner of official languages ruled in the favour of the communities who had complained. Before making decisions, the government should have consulted the communities and put in place measures to mitigate the impact on all the communities. I am not talking only about money, but about the possibility of members in our community having access to federal advertising.

There is an immediate, simple and inexpensive solution in my opinion: issuing a directive to ensure all federal advertising on the Internet must be systematically placed in our newspapers in both print and digital formats, as well as in the community radio stations in official language minority communities. The Government of Canada will be able to say that it is fulfilling its official languages obligation by advertising in both languages in order to reach the entire population. As I said before, we are talking about \$1.5 million a year.

I would like to briefly talk about the digital shift.

My colleague from *La Liberté* newspaper talked to you about it. While some newspapers have already made this shift, others have not done so yet. We have the equivalent of one and a half employees. Since more people subscribe to the paper version, the digital version is not the quickest one for us.

I know that we are planning to invest in digital, especially according to those much-touted think tanks, but *L'Eau vive* newspaper does not need to think before going digital; it's a must. However, to be able to do so, we need resources. We have a portal that we are struggling to update because we do not have the resources we need. Creating a fund to help our media transition to digital would be more effective than sitting down and thinking about it.

We feel that an investment of \$50,000 would enable us to take the necessary step for *L'Eau vive* to become digital, while keeping the paper version.

On budget night, I received a call from Minister Joly's office. I was asked what I thought about the measures announced in the budget for official language minority newspapers. I then talked about the federal advertising and I was told that it was not Minister Joly's responsibility.

Let me read an excerpt from Minister Joly's mandate letter: "Work with the President of the Treasury Board to ensure that all federal services are delivered in full compliance with the Official Languages Act." The President of the Treasury Board's mandate letter also says "in full compliance" or "*en parfaite conformité*" in French.

Clearly, by not considering the impact on minority communities, the directive issued by the Treasury Board Secretariat does not comply with part VII of the Official Languages Act.

We have had the official languages legislation for 50 years. In 2009, I came before this committee—which was not made up of the same people—and I asked when we were finally going to enforce the law. I think it is time to do so, especially since tomorrow will be the International Day of La Francophonie.

Today, right now, this committee has the opportunity to quickly right a wrong that seriously affects our official language minority communities and that contravenes the Official Languages Act. The committee must recommend that a new directive be issued to ensure that all federal advertising is systematically placed in both print and digital media.

Ladies and gentlemen, I urge you to take this concrete action and make a recommendation in your report. The future and vitality of our communities depend on it.

Thank you.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kenny.

Ms. Scott, go ahead.

**Ms. Melanie Scott (Editor, *Low Down to Hull & Back News*):** Thank you.

My comments are along the same lines, but from the perspective of anglophones.

[*English*]

Thank you for the invitation to speak.

I'm Melanie Scott, editor of the *Low Down to Hull & Back News*, a weekly community paper based in Wakefield, Quebec, just north of

Gatineau. We serve a minority anglophone population. Having lived abroad, I can attest to our success as a nation in working to develop and maintain a bilingual society.

Many communities do not have the resources to provide services in both official languages and many communities, like our Municipality of La Pêche, do not have access to high-speed Internet. Local newspapers are critical to the communities they serve. We connect people. We provide critical information that no one else provides. In the case of the *Low Down*—one of few community newspapers to remain independent, vibrant, and vital to its readership—we are the one reliable anglophone source of news and information in our area. There is no other source people can turn to for objective, well-researched reporting.

We are not the same thing as a big daily. Dailies have lost their audiences; we have not. We know our communities better than anyone else because we live and work in them. We are read cover to cover every week.

Social media is not to be confused with the real media. User-driven content will never replace real news because users are not put out on the street interviewing people. They are not attending municipal council meetings. They are not asking the hard questions that reporters ask. We all know about fake news and its negative side effects. It's absolutely critical that real news outlets are supported to ensure that Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are not the go-to sources for news, no matter what language it's presented in.

Social media platforms, along with aggregate news services, are taking our work and repurposing it, sometimes changing it in the process, without considering where it came from and without paying for it. In the beginning, the discussion was about whether or not to go online. News outlets made the mistake of offering their content for free without looking ahead. I know. I was there.

The world of online news is now a chaotic mess. Despite the fact that we're constantly reminded that online is where we need to survive, online does not pay the bills. We're being forced to evolve into a medium that is more likely to bankrupt us than to ensure our survival. As a journalist, my writing has been published in dozens of major newspapers and magazines, but it's my work as an editor of a small-town newspaper in a very small town that has been more rewarding than any other work I've done, because I see evidence of our connection to our community every day.

I'm going to talk very quickly about the Canada periodical fund. It has been fundamental in keeping publications, both anglophone and francophone, alive, including ours. Despite its much needed support, it has given grants to publications that are defunct or are no longer publishing under the terms that the grants were awarded. A few cases in point, as revealed by Canadaland, which obtained this information through an access to information request, *Maclean's* weekly magazine received \$1.5 million in 2016, then cut 75% of its print edition; *Chatelaine*, both English and French editions, received close to \$2.5 million from the CPF and subsequently cut their print runs from 12 to six editions per year. Rogers Media, a subsidiary of Rogers Communications, which is listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, is a media powerhouse that received 16 grants worth close to \$9 million from the Canada periodical fund in 2016-17 but summarily suspended publication or sold off or reduced publication schedules for all 16 of the publications for which it had received funding.

These examples illustrate how the CPF is not fulfilling its mandate, and I quote:

The Canada periodical fund provides financial assistance to Canadian print magazines, non-daily newspapers and digital periodicals, to enable them to overcome market disadvantages and continue to provide Canadian readers with the content they choose to read.

Rogers is not overcoming market disadvantages. Rogers is making money. Its stock closed at \$58.72 on Friday.

We need a review of the CPF to ensure that anglophone and francophone publications that are vital to the communities they serve and are truly in need have a shot at surviving. The CPF needs to take a close look at what's happening out here in the real world of publishing.

We also need the federal government to respect independent publications by buying ad space for public service announcements that impart critical information to Canadians. As mentioned, many people in rural communities are unable to access information online and newspapers are their lifeblood for being informed about what our government is doing.

Believe me, no one goes into journalism for the money or the glory. The hours are ridiculous, the pay is atrocious, and the stress is constant. No, we're not brain surgeons, but if you're an editor and you fail to get the newspaper out on time, it's quite simple. In the words of Donald Trump, you're fired. We have gotten our newspaper out on time without fail every week for 45 years. That's 2,250 editions of the paper. That long history of serving our readers may come to an end because of outside forces we can't control.

I hope I've shed some light on an industry that needs help so that Canadians can get real news in the language of their choice, no matter where they live.

● (1700)

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Melanie.

[Translation]

My thanks to all the presenters.

We will now go around the table, starting with Alupa Clarke.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

Good afternoon, madame.

[Translation]

I just want to tell you that, in a non-partisan way, the committee understands the difficulties facing the media, especially in OLMCs, or

[English]

minority linguistic groups in Quebec. Just be aware of that.

[Translation]

We understand. As to whether we have the right solutions, I do not know. That's what I want to discuss with you.

First, Ms. Kenny, you talked about *La Liberté*, this major newspaper. Is it a daily or weekly newspaper?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** It's a weekly.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Its representative, who appeared before us three weeks ago or a month ago, told us that the government was asking them to go digital.

However, the newspaper is very present everywhere in the digital world. Nevertheless, this changes nothing in terms of advertising volume. It would be the same with your newspaper. Even if it was doing very well in the digital world, you would not have more ads, would you?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** No, and it's because we don't have the traffic or a sufficient number of clicks to justify—

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** So the digital shift does nothing for your budget.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** No. We want to access the digital world. I must say that going digital would make certain things possible.

I must tell you that we are dealing with another major competitor, Radio-Canada, which is now on all platforms. We also want to circulate information as quickly as possible. You understand that we have the equivalent of one and a half employees.

My newspaper is full of potential, I see it. I'm a volunteer. I have a job that helps me make a living and I have expenses, like everyone else. The equivalent of one and a half employee cannot do everything. We should run a subscription campaign and look for advertising. We could do a lot of things, but that can't be done with so few people. All we do is put out fires, and we are not even fully able to do that.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Let me go on to another comment you made. It did not surprise me, but I'd like to talk about it with you.

About two years ago, in 2015-16, the federal government provided \$140 million a year to all newspapers in Canada. Right now, the amount is about \$40 million annually. You said that only \$1.5 million would be needed for the advertising in all the newspapers in OLMCs.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** What I said is that the \$1.5 million would fill the gap created when the directive was issued in 2013.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Okay, I understand.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Simply adding the advertising back would right the wrong. Should there be more? All the ads should be for all Canadians.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** In our case, seniors read the paper version of the newspaper, so the government should advertise in the paper version. It cannot simply be calculated based on the number of clicks.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** This does not mean that—

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** —it would solve everything. No.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** In the best of all worlds, we would have to go back to that \$140 million a year in advertising in all the media.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** I speak on behalf of official language minority newspapers. Without mentioning the fact that we would have to do a lot more, addressing this gap would already be a good start. The legislation is being contravened right now. We have known that for two years, and we have been talking about it for two years. Let's stop discussing it and solve the problem. An amount of \$1.5 million is not a huge sum.

• (1705)

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Thank you, Ms. Kenny.

Mr. Thériège, I have a question for you, but it can be for anyone.

You talked about a “consistent investment strategy”.

I'm looking at the the 2018-19 budget. How time flies! The election is in one year. The government's strategy is to invest in Canadian content first. The Canada media fund no longer receives as much funding as it used to. Canadians, through their individual choices, use x, y or z platforms, which does not necessarily bring money to those who make access to the services possible.

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** I'm sorry to interrupt you.

The Canada media fund is for television production, not journalistic media.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Yes, that's right.

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** Television production means soap operas or documentaries, for example.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Are you saying that you are not at all supported by the media fund?

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** We are not at all supported.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** To support local journalism, the government is proposing \$50 million over five years, starting now, for independent agencies. What do you think? Is that a minimum? Do you welcome it? Is it enough?

How do you see it? What does this amount mean to you?

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** I am going to refer to our own news release that basically said that \$400 million for the action plan for official languages sounds good, but how will the money be used? The same goes for this. It sounds good, but how will it work?

The money must go directly to community media, whether through an independent agency, as you said, or directly to community radio stations.

Those organizations already exist. For instance, in terms of radio, the Community Radio Fund of Canada already exists. There are three Canadian community radio associations, including the ARC du Canada, for OLMCs. There are associations already well equipped and well aware.

I think we are starting to be on the right track. It's a start, but the money must go directly on the ground, all the way to the media organizations.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** So you would favour an approach that allows for direct cash flow, such as advertising, instead of a dedicated funds approach.

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** Yes, advertising might be one way, but it is important to understand the challenge facing the media. Some community radio stations have difficulty paying their telephone and Internet bills, renting space for the antenna tower, and a part-time employee to look after the management.

Choosing project funding in addition to the day-to-day management of community radio is not an appropriate way of resolving the situation. However, if media revenue goes directly to the radio station, and the radio station can do what it wants with it—since it is revenue that it has generated itself, basically—we have an approach that has potential.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Arseneault.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Is that it?

Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here.

[English]

Ms. Scott, thanks for being here with us.

[Translation]

Ms. Kenny, I'm going to come back to my colleague Mr. Clarke's question about the \$1.5 million that would help to make up for the 2013 cuts.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** It's not just the cuts.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I want to understand what it is. Please answer quickly, since I have a lot of questions to ask.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** It's about access to advertising for all Canadians.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** For all print media and radio?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Yes, for print media and radio, and we are talking about \$1.5 million.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** For all the media in a minority setting?



**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** That's what we need just to bring us back to where we were in 2013. I'm not telling you to do more advertising, but to place the ads you have in our media. In this case, we are talking about \$1.5 million.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay. So, in 2013, the government's advertising in the media, not the funding, was reduced. That's what you are telling us.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** No. It was reduced in the media, but the agency in charge of buying advertising was told to go where people clicked the most on the Internet. It goes without saying that we will never reach such a level.

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** There were no cuts in the government; the \$1.5 million was simply invested elsewhere.

• (1710)

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** And “elsewhere” does nothing for our communities.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I have a quiz-type question.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** You might not get an answer.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** How was your situation in Saskatchewan before 2013?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** It was better in Saskatchewan. We are talking about \$50,000 a year.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** How many employees did you previously have?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** I wasn't there in 2013. I was here. But I can tell you that we had four or five employees at certain times. I am very honest and transparent when I tell you that, at *L'Eau vive*, we faced management challenges at one time. I think it was before 2013. However, since 2013, we are talking about \$50,000 in lost revenue. I would like to add that there has also been a decrease on the part of the provincial government, which has also turned toward the Internet, the number of clicks, and so on. However, it has no obligations under the legislation.

I spoke earlier with Minister Joly and the President of the Treasury Board. I would like to point out that the Official Languages Act is not the concern of just two ministers, but the government as a whole.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Absolutely. We understand this.

Having said that, could you explain to me why you are the one the minister's office called?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Probably because I'm the president of a newspaper. I don't know.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** I was the president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne for six years. I have appeared before this committee previously. Maybe that's why. I don't know.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Right. As for radio, we are hearing from a lot of witnesses. As you say, \$400 million is good, but what will happen?

Fifty million dollars is also good, but what path will it follow, and how will it be traced?

For community radio, I am familiar with the organizations in question because I, myself, am part of that community. There is the ARC du Canada and the ARCANB in New Brunswick.

Is there a national alliance for the small French-language newspapers?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** There is the Association de la presse francophone. My fear is that if another organization is chosen, rather than one of ours, we are going to have to do business with an organization that is not familiar with us and our reality, which will be very difficult for us. And we're talking about \$50 million over five years for all regional media. That means that the *Regina Leader-Post* will also receive money.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** The big and small will receive some.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Exactly. So where do we stand? What is this going to look like in reality?

**Mr. René Arseneault:** However, if we, in the government, want to make sure that the money is truly used to do what needs to be done in minority communities, in Quebec or in Saskatchewan, for example, where should we turn?

There are many small community newspapers and radio stations. What should be done to make these people heard and to find out where and how the money is to be distributed?

I'll repeat my question: is there a national organization that represents you?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Yes, the Association de la presse francophone represents all French-language media and newspapers.

[English]

**Mr. René Arseneault:** In English Quebec, how does it work? How many local papers would there be in all the province?

**Ms. Melanie Scott:** In the whole province? Are we talking about minority anglophone papers?

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Yes.

**Ms. Melanie Scott:** There are about 40.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Is there a provincial organization that represents each and every one of them?

**Ms. Melanie Scott:** Almost everybody is a member. You were speaking about it earlier. It's the Quebec Community Newspapers Association, which has also had its fair share of challenges over the past few years because of the digital movement. It is still in existence and the papers are still in there. One reason is, as I mentioned in my notes, people rely on local newspapers. It's the only place they're going to hear about shows by local artists, for example.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** You don't have to convince me of that. I know exactly what you're talking about.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** I would like to add that, for the entire file, our three organizations, the AJRQ, the ARC du Canada and the APF, have joined forces.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Ms. Kenny, you said you have 650 subscribers.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Yes.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Yet you only have the equivalent of one and a half employees. Commend them for me. They are angels, super employees.

You put out 50,000 publications a year?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Pardon?

**Mr. René Arseneault:** You put out 50,000 publications a year?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** No. We lose \$50,000 in advertising revenue a year. It's an important number, but it doesn't relate to publications. We publish twice a month.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Right. So you have 650 subscribers. Let's start over.

How much money does \$1.5 million represent for you?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** It means \$50,000 a year. I calculated the average.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** We're talking about \$50,000 for *L'Eau vive* alone?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Essentially. For the government, \$1.5 million isn't a large amount, but for us it's huge.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Choquette.

• (1715)

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

[*English*]

Thank you very much for being here.

[*Translation*]

I have in my hands the Commissioner of Official Languages' final investigation report on media of the official language minority communities.

In the second recommendation, Public Services and Procurement Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage are asked to analyze the impact on these media of the reorientation of the Government of Canada's advertising.

To your knowledge, has this impact analysis been done?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** I saw that Public Services and Procurement Canada had done a study to find out Canadians' media habits. We were talking about Canadians in a minority situation. However, if I remember correctly, 42% of the respondents weren't in a minority situation. I can also tell you that there were no data on the respondents' age and place of residence.

Are they from Zenon Park, Saskatchewan, where high-speed Internet isn't yet available?

Are they 72 years old or 16 and already seasoned users of social media?

We can't know.

**Mr. François Choquette:** I was asking this question because—

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Discussions have been held since this report came out. Some people invited us to sit down with them and chat. But chatting doesn't let us publish our newspaper. Nor does it allow it to survive.

Can we stop chatting and thinking and simply do?

For me, action is concrete, easy and simple.

**Mr. François Choquette:** I think it's important. This recommendation was made in June 2017. In my opinion, there has been enough time to do the impact analysis and consult with you on this. You have already mentioned these impacts. However, if we don't really know the consequences, we can't take action and correct the mistakes. You said that you were contacted.

In addition, you have seen the 2018 budget. Does it offer anything to counter the crisis being experienced by the media in minority communities?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** As I told the employees of Minister Joly's office, it is too early to say. In my opinion, the question is how this will translate on the ground. I am encouraged that we are talking directly about the media in the official languages section. I hope that means that there will be an additional investment to support community newspapers and radio stations in minority communities, which means anglophones and francophones. However, beyond all that, how will that translate on the ground? We don't know. So it's difficult for me to say because I don't know.

**Mr. Martin Thériège:** I agree with Ms. Kenny. I think there are two elements to the answer.

First, there is the \$50 million that Mr. Clarke spoke about earlier. There is potential there, but we don't yet know how this will play out.

Then, we are often told that the Action Plan for Official Languages will sort this out, but it involves a document that we still have yet to see. That's why we can't really answer. Having said that, we are eager to see it.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Okay.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Very eager.

**Mr. François Choquette:** What does this business of the number of clicks mean? Is it that the government simply wants to make sure that its information and advertising is seen and distributed? It uses Facebook and other similar platforms. We have seen the controversy surrounding the agreements with Netflix. So the government is leaving the more traditional advertising space. The problem is the one you mentioned: by doing this, the government is not respecting its obligations to official language minority communities. That's what I understand.

**Mr. Martin Théberge:** I started by saying that the government can't do without the local media as hubs. The problem is that today's approach is often a business approach. It is based on the number of clicks or listeners, for example. Of course CKOI in Montreal has more listeners than CKJM in Chéticamp, that's for sure. However, if the government applies this approach, it forgets the pivotal role that community media plays in our communities.

**Mr. François Choquette:** As for the famous Canada Periodical Fund, how would you suggest changing it? I understand that this fund needs to be improved. What exactly should we do with it?

• (1720)

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** It's set out in the act. I hate always talking about the act because, I think it's common sense: let's see what this newspaper does, what its needs are compared to others. The act makes it clear that in the official language minority community media, when a program or service is put in place, you must make sure that the reality of those communities is taken into account. This is the legislation, and there is jurisprudence to that effect. The meaning of the act therefore requires us to see what the particular needs of our communities are. Of course, I personally do not have access to a host of advertisers in my province. I don't have the same access as the *Journal de Montréal* in Montreal, and I don't have the same access as *Châtelaine*, as just mentioned. However, we see that these are people who make significant profits. My newspaper has made a profit of \$2,000 over the last two years, but it has a debt of \$48,000. Today, the debt is \$44,000. That's our reality, given that we have the equivalent of one and a half employees. I must tell you that our volunteer board is very committed.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Ms. Scott—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

If I may, I will move on to the next speaker, Linda Lapointe, who has four minutes.

I will then reduce the speaking time because time is running out.

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

[English]

Thank you for being here.

[Translation]

I represent the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, north of Montreal. It includes Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand et Rosemère.

[English]

I have an anglophone community there. They publish *North Shore News* up there. I'm sure you know, you're one of the 40.

[Translation]

I understand very well when you say that, in the Montreal area, you don't exist in the suburbs to make news. You need local media, and you don't need to convince me of that.

There are two local newspapers in my riding. The Groupe JCL publishes a French-language newspaper, and the *North Shore News* covers the anglophone communities. Actually, 20% of the population I represent is anglophone. It's a hub.

As for news and advertisers, you mentioned the *Journal de Montréal* earlier. If people in Saskatchewan read the *Journal de Montréal*, the advertisers won't reach consumers. Given the population base, if advertisers want to reach clients, it takes social media.

As a small aside, if you want to add anything you didn't say, anything that would help the committee with its report, you can send it to the clerk in writing.

I had a discussion with the Groupe JCL. Yes, it's media in a majority community, but here's what it's done recently.

You always talk about turning to a digital version. The digital platform needs to be fed, provided, of course, that people have high-speed Internet. Even in the northern suburbs of Montreal, there are some places where people don't have access to high-speed Internet.

A digital platform is expensive because you have to constantly feed it news. We were told here that it was more expensive than publishing a paper version of the newspaper every two weeks or every week.

The Groupe JCL has changed the way it does business. It has decided that if the content isn't in the paper version, it won't put it on its digital platform. *The North Shore News* publishes everything at the same time.

What do you think about that?

**Mr. Martin Théberge:** In general, we are very much in favour of digital, but in a very simplistic way, I would say that we aren't able to make this shift. As I said earlier, if we are struggling to pay for the space on the antenna to put a transmitter and for Internet fees, the website and its feed become less of a priority. Community media needs recurrent and stable funding, but they don't have it.

A community radio station closed in the past year. According to the ARC du Canada, of its 27 members, eight will face a threat of closure in the coming year.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I understand that once closed, these media won't open anymore.

**Mr. Martin Théberge:** The issue isn't just shutting down. When you have trouble getting your head above water, you don't think about building a new dock.

[English]

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Okay, here's another question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** If I may, I would like to share with you my fear about this way of operating.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** This group started doing this to reduce costs.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** I want to, except that if people don't find the desired information on French-language media, they will go and get it from English-language media. That's my big fear, especially when it comes to young people.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I have another question, and it is for Ms. Scott.

We have heard the comment that, to continue to have journalistic content

[English]

to get the news for your population,

• (1725)

[Translation]

there would have to be a tax credit to help journalists to make sure there is content. Is that something you would like to see?

[English]

**Ms. Melanie Scott:** I think giving breaks is a great idea, but I think what is really needed.... I'm just going to go back to the Canadian periodical fund because we wouldn't be publishing without it. It is a very important part of what we receive in terms of income. I think, for community newspapers to thrive, there are a few things that need to happen. What we say at the *Low Down to Hull and Back News* is that if I can read it somewhere else it doesn't go in the *Low Down*. If there were a dedicated fund to community papers that served their specific communities in either language.... There are actually a lot of papers in the QCNA that publish in both English and French. If you read it there, you don't read it elsewhere. That could be a guideline for the Canadian periodical fund in terms of creating a community newspaper fund that is geared just toward that. When you compare what's given out to major media outlets like Rogers, like *TV Guide*.... *TV Guide* gets money from the Canada periodical fund. As a journalist with many years of experience, I find that surprising.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I agree.

**Ms. Melanie Scott:** In relative terms, what small community papers receive is so minimal that in order for there to be genuine news—we are a very spread-out country—the only way for people to actually be informed about what's going on is via real journalists. It's just as simple as that.

[Translation]

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

[English]

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I will let Mr. Samson, Mr. Généreux, and Mr. Vandal ask one question each, in that order.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** My preamble usually takes three minutes.

**The Chair:** Look at the time. I am trying to direct our discussion accordingly.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Samson, just ask your question.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Make an effort.

**The Chair:** Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** If I can ask just one question, I will divide it into two parts.

First, does one of your key messages for us pertain to core funding? Second, do you conduct surveys in your communities to find out how many people from the minority read your newspapers to get the news? The local media do a fantastic job of course. In

Nova Scotia, *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse* and local radio do an excellent job.

Do you all agree that core funding is needed? Is there some way to demonstrate to the government that you need it?

**Mr. Martin Thériage:** For the first part, the answer is yes.

For the second part, you have to remember that community media come from the community. Their boards of directors are made up of people from the community. The content on the radio is produced by journalists and freelancers, who are from the community.

Should a survey be a priority? I'm not sure of that.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** We could certainly conduct a survey if our staff was not just 1.5 full-time equivalents. I would really like to do one, in fact. I have the platform to do it, but I simply don't have the time. We do not have the time.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I would also like to get an answer from Ms. Scott.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Scott.

[English]

**Ms. Melanie Scott:** We do regular surveys of our readership. Of the 40,000 residents in our reading area, we reach up to 10,000 in our readership every single week. We may only sell 2,500 to 3,000 papers, but our readership is very powerful. We did a survey last year. We discovered that in fact what we're producing is exactly what readers want. Everyone said, "Don't change a thing."

**A voice:** Yes, I agree.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Melanie.

[Translation]

Mr. Généreux has the floor, but for one question only.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Chair, I move that we extend the meeting by 10 minutes, if everyone agrees. We have a vote at 6:30 p. m. so we have plenty of time.

**The Chair:** Yes, but I have to attend another committee meeting at a quarter to the hour.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** We could take an extra five minutes.

In any case, thank you very much for being here.

Ms. Razafimbahiny and Ms. Morin, would you like to add anything? We did not bring you here for nothing.

Is there something you would like to say that we have not had the opportunity to hear?

Ms. Razafimbahiny, you are the director general of the FCCF. I would imagine there are certain situations that your president is not aware of.

**Mrs. Maggy Razafimbahiny (Director General, Fédération culturelle canadienne-française):** Well, of course I agree with everything that Mr. Thériage and Ms. Morin have said thus far.

I would add, or rather emphasize, an extremely important aspect of the government's role and duty to support community media. It is something Mr. Théberge mentioned in his presentation: social cohesion.

Our society is being transformed with the arrival of many newcomers. Having been a newcomer myself, about twenty years ago, I can say that local media play an absolutely essential role in helping newcomers adapt to the new society to which they belong, and also in developing a sense of shared identity that we want to have with other francophones here. The community media are really the only ones that can help us in that way.

As to the economic and budget considerations, our colleagues from the APF and the ARC du Canada will be appearing before you in two days. They will no doubt go into great depth about their plans and suggestions for strengthening financial support.

To answer Mr. Samson though, I would say yes, we definitely need that funding. It is essential for the development of our media.

• (1730)

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Ms. Kenny, I really appreciate your input.

Ms. Scott said earlier that there are 40 strictly anglophone community newspapers in Quebec.

If we gave each of those newspapers \$50,000, that would be over \$2 million. That is more than the \$1.5 million requested and we have not even addressed the needs of the francophone media.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** I don't know if everyone has lost as much as we have. For our part, it amounts to \$50,000.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** You had a lot of revenue, at \$50,000.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** It is \$50,000, but if you consider—

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Those are good revenues.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Yet the Commissioner of Official Languages said in his report that it was \$1.5 million.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** That is not a lot. I do not think that is a large amount.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Could that possibly be for all francophone newspapers? Perhaps that should be checked.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** How many are there? If we divide \$1.5 million by \$50,000, that is not very much.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** That is for francophone radio and newspapers.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** So that means roughly 30. There are more than that in Canada.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** No. How many community radio stations are there?

**Mr. Martin Théberge:** There are 27.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** There are also ten or maybe twelve francophone newspapers.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** In all of Canada?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Yes, in the whole country. I am referring to those in minority communities. There is one in Yukon. There is just one per province.

That is something else. If *L'Eau vive* were to disappear, there would be no community newspaper. It is sad to see *La Presse* or another newspaper disappear, but others take their place.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Do you agree with Ms. Scott's suggestion of having a special fund for that? There is a difference between *TV Hebdo* and your media.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Definitely. As to the Canada Periodical Fund, you will agree that a company that makes a lot of money does not need more.

**Ms. Melanie Scott:** Exactly.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** If you give us more money, we will build the potential, generate more revenue, and be less dependent on federal government funding.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Kenny.

We will now go to the last question, from Mr. Vandal.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you all for your presentations.

A month ago, we heard testimony from Ms. Sophie Gaulin, from *La Liberté*, a newspaper in Saint-Boniface. She said something that surprised me. When she shifted to digital, created her web page, and hired someone, her weekly became a daily. In response to pressure from comments on Twitter and Facebook, she started producing content daily or every two days.

Have you had the same experience?

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Definitely. With the equivalent of 1.5 employees, we do not have the resources to do that and also be as quick as Radio Canada, *La Liberté* or other media outlets.

If we do not inform our readers that one of our artists is going to the Festival international de la chanson de Granby, the risk is that they will read about it in an English-language newspaper. That is a risk for our people.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** If you wait too long, it is no longer news.

**Ms. Marie-France Kenny:** Exactly. Radio-Canada is now a competitor for us on this platform.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

I want to thank all the witnesses: Ms. Kenny, Ms. Razafimbahiny, Ms. Morin and Ms. Scott, and Mr. Théberge.

[English]

Thank you very much, everybody.

[Translation]

All your presentations were excellent and there was some great discussion with committee members.

We will adjourn until Wednesday afternoon.

The committee is adjourned.





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