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• (0940)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)): First of all, I would like to welcome you to this session of the Official Languages Committee held as part of our national tour. Perhaps I should be saying that you are welcoming us to Newfoundland, because we are in your region.

The Official Languages Committee has been in existence for about 25 years. This is the first time in its history that the committee has undertaken such a visit in order to meet people on the ground and find out what they are thinking about the Official Languages Act, as well as the services provided to them under this legislation.

We are very pleased to be here today. In the past, the Official Languages Committee was a joint parliamentary committee but, for the past few years, the House of Commons and the Senate have each had their own Official Languages Parliamentary Committee.

I will begin by introducing the committee clerks: Mr. Samy Agha—which is a far cry from for an Acadian name!—and Ms. Louise Thibault. I would also introduce you to our researcher, Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré.

The Conservatives members—the party in power—who are part of this committee are Sylvie Boucher, Daniel Petit and Pierre Lemieux. We also have Raymond Simard, from the Liberal party, and Guy André, from the Bloc Québécois.

As you know, a five-year plan was prepared two years ago. The purpose of our National tour is to find out, from the people on the ground, whether or not this plan is working and whether or not you are satisfied with it. We would also like to hear any advice or suggestions you may have.

At the start we decided to give every witness three minutes, but given the number of witnesses present, we can give you up to ten minutes. That will give each of you an opportunity to make a detailed presentation.

We will then go to questions. For the first round, every member will have seven minutes to ask questions and hear the answers from the witnesses. We will continue with rounds of questioning until we have used up all of the time we have set a side for this region.

My name is Yvon Godin and I am the member for the riding of Acadie—Bathurst, which is located in northeastern New Brunswick. I am proud that my riding contains the word “Acadie”, because it is very representative.

I hope that we will have an enriching meeting and that will be able to discuss the issues facing francophone minorities in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We will begin with Ms. Poirier. Please introduce yourself and state your title.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier (Interim Director General, La Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador): Good morning. My name is Cyrilda Poirier. I am the Interim Director General, La Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador.

First and foremost. I would like to welcome to St. John's. Last week, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Lemieux when I was in Ottawa with the Francophonie Team. Mr. Lemieux, I would like to thank you once again for your hospitality and attention.

We have a little time to tell you who we are, although my presentation will be ten minutes long. Nevertheless, I hope that by the end of the morning you will know exactly who we are and you will also have a better appreciation of our victories and challenges.

Before I get into the heart of the matter, I would like to state that I have been working at the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador for 20 years and that I have only been in the position of Interim Director General since April 1st. Unfortunately, because of the scarcity of Human Resources in our office, files are often dealt with on a reactive rather than a proactive manner. I have a better handle on some files more than others, since I have spent more time on some issues, and there are some files that I am not as familiar with. I feel somewhat like a sponge, because over the past few months, with every opportunity that I am afforded, such as my participation in the Équipe francophonie last week, I have had a chance to learn more. So I wanted you to know at the outset that I will not necessarily be able to answer all the questions that you put to me. If I feel that one of the colleagues who are sitting around the table may be able to give a more accurate answer, I will turn the floor over to that individual.

To begin with, allow me to give an idea of the size of this province and the challenges that this may represent. In order to travel to the Port-au-Port Peninsula by car, it takes eight hours; by plane, a little more than an hour. It is a three hour plane ride to travel to Labrador City, if you do not have to go through Goose Bay. In order to travel to the nearest province by car, and that will be Nova Scotia, it takes you ten hours on the highway and six hours on the ferry. That gives you an idea of the size of our province and the challenges that travelers represent. Moreover, that explains to some extent why our volunteers were able to travel here today in order to meet with you.

Our federation speaks for the provincial organization, which is composed of five members: the Association communautaire francophone de Saint-Jean, the Association francophone du Labrador, the Association régionale de la côte ouest, the Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador and Franco-Jeunes de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador. The three associations have a regional mandate whereas the two federations, the Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador and Franco-Jeunes de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador have a provincial mandate.

The francophone and Acadian population in the province represent 0.5 per cent of the population. There are approximately 1,500 people in the Port-au-Port Peninsula region and some 750 in Labrador City and about 750 in St. John's in the surrounding towns. These are not exact figures; they are only very rough figures.

It is often said that the Port-au-Port community is the community of “real” Franco-Terre-Neuviens. They are entitled to this because, historically, this community, as well as some others, was founded in the Peninsula in 1504. Moreover, in 2004 we celebrated 500 years of francophone existence in Newfoundland. In Labrador City, ever since the mine opened, during the 1950's, we have had a francophone presence which came, for the most part, from the Gaspé and Acadie region. In St. John's, the population is a little bit more diversified, composed mainly of Québécois, Acadians, people from Saint-Pierrais as well as from France. We also have a few immigrants from francophone countries.

If my memory serves me correctly, since 1997, we have been responsible for the management of our schools. In addition, we have two schools and community centres, one located in Grand'Terre, which was the first one; and the other here in St. John's. Moreover, I think that I understood that you will be visiting it this afternoon. We also have a school in Labrador City and one in Goose Bay. I know that we are working on a fifth school project in the southern part of Labrador.

The Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve is currently piloting two projects that I would qualify as structured projects, mainly the Réseau du développement économique et d'employabilité—the coordinator for this project Josée Dalton, will be providing you with a more detailed presentation—, and the project called the Réseau Santé en français de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. I will be discussing this project a little bit later on in my presentation. In addition to these two projects, the federation is currently working on a few one-off projects, including a cultural position project which we are hoping will be part of our structured projects in April.

● (0945)

For your information, by “structured projects”, I mean projects that are managed autonomously by our coordinators. In the case of the Réseau du développement économique et d'employabilité, this project is supported by a team of employees.

The Réseau Santé en français is mandated to implement the recommendations found in the report *Setting the stage*, which was tabled with the Santé en français organization last April. By the way, I did bring you some copies of this report. I should point out that because of our limited logistic and financial resources, we had to prepare and table this report in English.

Out of the 13 recommendations found in this report, six are about improving the delivery of primary health care services; the other seven recommendations pertained to the principles for the model of primary health care delivery in our francophone communities. Phase II of this sweeping project, namely primary health care and action, is the beginning of the implementation phase for the health care models. By March 31st, the network will be tabling, with the Santé en français organization, a clinical model that could be adapted to meet specific needs, depending on the community where such a clinic would be set up.

One word of caution. When I say the word “clinic”, I am not necessarily referring to bricks and mortar. Today a clinic might mean an existing health care centre with access to a videoconference unit or an adapted motorized vehicle.

A third project which we are hoping will come into being here by April 1st is one pertaining to culture. Although culture has always been a priority in our development plans or in our annual programs, we have not always had full-time human and financial resources assigned to this file in particular. Culture, since this was my file before becoming the interim director general, was done through financial administration and this part of the infamous sentence “performs other duties at the request of management.”

Phase I of the cultural position project sponsored by the Fédération culturelle canadienne française made us realize that we have a relatively diverse and vibrant cultural and artistic life. We have musicians, story tellers, painters, writers, poets, gallery curators, as well as guardians of our history and heritage. We want to give them a voice, we want to give them tools and, in particular, we want to promote them.

You are not only, in my humble opinion, in the most beautiful province of Canada, but you are also in the province with the richest and most diversified cultural and artistic life. We are anxious for phase two of the project so that we continue making progress.

Immigration is the next file which is starting to become important. We have already submitted two initiatives. One, which is exploratory in nature, has already been accepted and should be carried out this winter. The other initiative, which pertains to welcoming services, has also been accepted and will be put into effect during the next fiscal year. The exodus of young people and the shortage of skilled labour — we could even add the aging population — are becoming more and more of a problem in our region.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, and this applies to the whole population, it is difficult to recruit and retain people. So you can just imagine the challenges facing the francophone and Acadian population. We are therefore counting a great deal on these two projects being successful.

I realize that I have gone beyond the three to five minutes that I was given for my presentation. I apologize both to you and to my colleagues. However, I do believe that it was important to give you this guided tour of our province, our organization, our reality and, finally, our projects. Thank you.

● (0950)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Ms. Poirier.

I would now ask Ms. Dalton to give her presentation.

Mrs. Josée Dalton (Coordinator, Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador):

Good morning everyone. I am very moved by the fact that you have begun your tour here in Newfoundland and that you chose to make this your first stop in this province before all of the others. As I said earlier to a few of you, it is unfortunate that there are not more participants. We got organized at the last minute, because we found out about this a bit late. This will not, however, prevent us from providing you with a wonderful overview, so that you have a better idea of what is happening in our beautiful province.

I am the coordinator for the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, the RDÉE. I do not know if you are all familiar with this project, but it is a project and our sponsoring organization is the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador.

There is an RDÉE in every province and territory of the country. This is an initiative of the National Committee for Canadian Francophonie Human Resources Development, the NCCFHRD — a very long acronym —, which was established in 1996. The NCCFHRD set up the RDÉE along with Human Resources and Development Canada, HRDC — which is now called Services Canada — in order to help minority communities. This was an effort to deal with employability and all of the problems Cyrilda mentioned earlier, such as the exodus of young people. Communities in minority situations required assistance. Each province and territory had its own RDÉE so that, using all of these measures, a little more vitality could be injected in places that already had some. Some of our communities already have a great deal of vitality.

The organization that oversees our RDÉE is the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. You will note that the sponsoring organization for most of the provinces and territories that have an RDÉE is an economic development agency. Moreover, this is why this is known as the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité. We are not focused solely on economic development, as some people may believe. We exist to help with employability measures and to facilitate development initiatives.

Our province and each of our francophone regions are very well represented as far as that is concerned. I also manage my own team. This is what the director referred to earlier. Working with me are four economic development officers who each focus on one sector in particular. We have a youth sector, which is a priority, an economy and knowledge sector, a tourism sector and a rural development sector. One officer works in our francophone community in Labrador City — Labrador City/Wabush is one of the three francophone regions in the province —, one officer works in the Port-au-Port Peninsula and two others are based here in St. John's. In addition, we have some administrative support. This team is there to assist communities and facilitate economic development initiatives. We do not work directly with the private sector, although the private sector can be a partner. We work a great deal with our francophone communities and organizations.

Earlier, during the question period, I may turn the tables on you and ask you what you know about the RDÉE. Indeed, this may be a difficult concept to grasp, because it is a relatively new organization.

To assist and support all of the RDÉEs in the country, there is an organization called RDÉE Canada, which oversees everything that is happening in the country. This organization also knocks on the big doors in Ottawa to try to find financing for other national projects. Indeed, provinces and territories can work together to initiate projects that have an impact on all of us. For example, the four RDÉEs in the Atlantic region tend to work together to initiate common projects, to try to find common links because, as you all know, even though we are all francophones working in francophone communities, there are at times certain differences. Demographics may, for instance, be different. However, we do have many points in common. Among other things, we may initiate projects in cooperation with the provinces, even though at times we do not believe that we necessarily have these things in common. Right now we have a project with Saskatchewan to set up an electronic business and support site for communities, in order to further entrepreneurship.

I believe that we really rely a great deal on the strength of the network. That is why there are organizations such as RDÉE Canada, which oversee all of that to some extent, but the fact remains that we are still, if we can call it that, independent from them. We are still attached to our organization, which I would call the delegate organization.

Here, since we do not have as many francophones as in other areas, as I was saying earlier, we are linked to the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. At present we do not have a francophone Chamber of commerce or economic council. We will be looking into this matter since it is becoming necessary, since there is a demand for it.

The enabling fund enables us to work with the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, but it does impose some limitations on us. Nevertheless, the main priority is still — and God knows how high the unemployment rate is in our province — to help our communities living in minority situations.

I think that we have, in certain cases, moved on to the next phase. Some regions are growing. There was a time when we talked a great deal about the survival of our community. I sincerely believe, and I am saying this to you in all honesty, that we have moved on to the next step. I believe that we are really going through a time where we are aware of the projects and we are aware of our strengths, and we can in fact draw from this in order to develop. Obviously, there is a lot of work to be done. I was pleased to hear, a little while ago, my boss giving you a bit of a description — albeit only a geographic one, of the province. You can see that we are facing challenges. You were all able to experience for yourselves what transportation, for instance, is like here and you say how difficult it is to get here. Another challenge we are up against is the threat of assimilation: in some regions, assimilation is not far from our doorstep whereas in other areas, the problem is greater. This is precisely why we have to remain united. We are a community — someone pointed this out earlier, which pleased me — which remains very active despite everything. We could use as an excuse the fact that we are so scattered, that there are three regions that are so far apart from each other and so we cannot do this or that. We are, however, strong and united.

Moreover, I would like to take this opportunity if I may, Cyrilda, to mention that the AGA will be held soon. So if some of you would like to attend, you would be welcome, because, as part of our activities, we will be holding a community forum where there will be other participants aside from us three. All of the provincial organizations will be in attendance, as well as guests and government representatives. If you are interested, the AGA will be on November 17 and 18.

That is, in a nutshell, what I wanted to say to you about the national and provincial network. If you have any specific questions, we could discuss them later on.

Thank you.

● (0955)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Ms. Dalton.

We will now move on to Mr. Watt.

Mr. Steven Watt (Editor and Director General, *Le Gaboteur*): Good day. My name is Steven Watt. I am the Editor and Director General of *Le Gaboteur* newspaper, which is the only French-language newspaper — and almost the only francophone media channel — in Newfoundland and Labrador. Of course, there is a Radio-Canada radio and television journalist here, in St. John's, but Radio-Canada tends to produce more news stories about what is happening in Newfoundland for the rest of Canada. For our part, we provide Newfoundlanders with true coverage of activities here in Newfoundland.

We are an independent organization, but we of course work in close partnership with regional community and provincial organizations. It is our mandate to support those organizations, particularly by covering their activities and projects.

Generally speaking, we have a two-pronged mission. We have to serve as a window on the francophonie of Newfoundland and Labrador. Over the past 23 years, *Le Gaboteur* has also compiled the most complete historical archive of Newfoundland's francophone community. The newspaper is therefore a major witness to the province's francophonie. The other component of our mission is to inform francophones and those who wish to receive part of the news in French.

It is not always easy to be the voice of and to inform this community, given its small size, but especially its diverseness and the fact it is so scattered. You have already heard about the three major concentrations of francophones in the province, which are very remote from one another. I especially want you to understand that there is not one francophone centre in Newfoundland, as if the majority of francophones were established in a same location. Rather, francophones are divided into three groups living mainly in three diverse regions that are remote from one another.

In fact, we are talking about a very rural population on the west coast; a rather urban, but very isolated group in Labrador; and more urban and cosmopolitan citizens in St. John's. Some live in regions where the economy is rather sound; others live in areas that are rather depressed. It is almost impossible for someone living in Labrador or

on the west coast to travel to St. John's to attend events; it is just not feasible.

For a small organization with a limited budget and rather little flexibility in terms of human and financial resources, it is quite difficult to reflect the life of francophones in Newfoundland, whether in general or in detail, with a 12-page newspaper that is published every two weeks.

That is why the newspaper relies heavily on the Official Languages Act, particularly the part dealing with federal ads, i. e. the national publication of federal ads in both official languages. Based on what I had just said about the francophone communities, there is also a problem with regard to advertisers. It is very difficult, almost impossible, for us to develop a local advertising market.

● (1000)

Our distribution is already limited, owing to the small size of the francophone community. Consequently, an advertiser in Stephenville, in the Port-au-Port region, for instance, will not want to place an ad if only one third of our readership is in his area. The same thing goes for the City of St. John's, which also accounts for one third of our readers. As a provincial newspaper, it is very difficult to develop a local advertising market. We also do not have the necessary resources to publish a newspaper in each of the three regions.

The newspaper is the only means the government has to directly reach the provinces francophones, and we are basically the only professional representatives of the francophone press in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I spoke about the importance of the Official Language Act for the newspaper; I would now like to say how important the newspaper is for official languages. I just mentioned the services that the newspaper provides to the government, and this is something I firmly believe in. If we want the federal government to be a bilingual institution, it has to be able to reach francophones in their own language in a mostly anglophone province. The written press is a very effective tool to do so. Currently, in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is the only tool, given that we represent the only francophone media in the province.

Josée has just spoken about the strength and solidarity of the francophone community, but that does not remove the problems it faces. You always have to keep in mind that our community is very spread out and diversified. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in all its beauty, is a borderline case in terms of Canadian bilingualism. I believe it accounts for one of the smallest francophone minorities.

If Canada is to be a bilingualism country and if the Official Languages Act is to be implemented, then we must consider our case as the ultimate test of that policy. It is relatively easy to be a bilingual government in Eastern Ontario or Northeastern New Brunswick, for example. However, in our province, not only is bilingualism more difficult to achieve, it is also fundamentally different. We have to find alternative and creative solutions. “*one size fits all*” solutions, which are implemented across the country, should not be considered because a number of linguistic minority communities experience fundamentally different circumstances.

Developing programs and initiatives requires flexibility, so that they can be applied not only to a minority community that represents 20 per cent of the population, for example, but also to the community in Newfoundland and Labrador.

• (1005)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you very much, Mr. Watt.

Our three witnesses made their presentations in nine and half minutes. Thank you for your input.

We will begin with the first round of questions, starting with the honourable Raymond Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to thank our guests for being here today.

I am a little embarrassed to say that this is the only province I had not yet visited. Last night, when I arrived, at 1:30 a.m. I saw the nice houses and said to myself that I had to come for a visit: It is wonderful. I am originally from Manitoba and I understand the challenges that you face as a linguistic minority.

During the first round of questions, I would like to focus on education. As you know, in the Action Plan on official languages, over 50% of funding was official languages earmarked for education. I was wondering whether you could provide us with a clear overview of the situation.

Ms. Poirier, you spoke about the management of your schools over the past few years. How have things worked out since you have obtained the right to manage your own schools? And what about the immersion programs? Is immersion as popular as it is elsewhere? I know that immersion programs are extremely successful in Manitoba and British Columbia. I would like to get a sense of what is happening here with regard to immersion. Do you have organizations like Canadian Parents for French? Do they exist here? Are they well organized and are they partners of yours? Elsewhere in Canada, we have seen that they are extremely resourceful and help support francophone communities.

I will speak a bit more about literacy in a few minutes.

• (1010)

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: I will begin, but I may have some bits of information missing.

Yes, we did win the right to manage our own schools. As I said, I think that was in 1997 or thereabout. That was not an easy battle, as is always the case to establish any kind of institution of this type, but victory was greatly appreciated. Of course, that's one example of success that we obtained through the Court Challenges Program. Here in Newfoundland, this seems to work very well. They have control over five schools in the province. They too have a large territory to cover, much as we do.

I don't know exactly what information you want with regard to school administration. It is a paraprofessional organization.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Are the community school centres part of the school network?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Absolutely.

Hon. Raymond Simard: When you refer to the five schools, the two community school centres are included?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Absolutely.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Where are they located?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: We have one community school centre in the Port-au-Port Peninsula, which is called the Centre scolaire communautaire Sainte-Anne, and we have the one in St. John's, which is called the Centre scolaire et communautaire des Grands-Vents.

Again, in the Port-au-Port Peninsula, there is another school, l'école Notre-Dame-du-Cap. So in fact there are two schools in the Port-au-Port Peninsula. There's a homogenous school in Labrador City and another in Goose Bay. I know there's a sixth school project in southern Labrador. I would have liked to have my colleague from the parents' federation to discuss this with you a bit, but it's my understanding that this case is currently before the Court Challenges Program.

Mr. Steven Watt: I think there's currently an agreement under which students in the l'Anse au Clair region go to a Quebec school in Blanc-Sablon.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: This gives you some idea of how this is managed and how it works.

Let's move on to immersion. Immersion has always been a very strong phenomenon here. I arrived here in 1984 and I remember that one had to line up every September to register children in immersion classes.

Immersion courses have served the francophone population, for better or for worse, before schools were established and before we had French-language education in our communities. We've lost contact with the immersion section to some extent because in the final analysis, that is not our clientele. Having said that, I want to open a parenthesis here, because before we had our schools, we lost many francophone students to immersion programs especially at the high school level.

There are still people who have the following perception. I'm thinking particularly of Quebec parents who arrive in Newfoundland. They settle here and they decide that they want their children to be bilingual. So instead of sending them to a francophone school system, they send their children to an immersion program. So in this way we lose part of our clientele, and I find that unfortunate.

We do have school planning councils, the SPC. Once again, we have established some partnerships with them, but they operate autonomously. They mostly help us to organize cultural or extracurricular events. This is when we are in contact with them.

I'll put on the hat that I wore when I was in charge of cultural issues for the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. What hurt us to some extent, was the redistribution of school boards particularly when immersion programs were amalgamated. They put them in the mainstream of anglophone schools. So we more or less lost track of the schools where children were going because they were absorbed into the English-language system. To my mind, this is one of the weaknesses of our system.

Having said that, as we speak, we are trying to re-establish contact with immersion schools. Moreover, I know that a show is in the works for December. The person responsible, Xavier Georges of the Association communautaire francophone de Saint-Jean, has contacted them, and over 400 students will attend that show. It's far more pleasant for an artist to perform for a student audience of 400 rather than 20 or 50 as is the case at our school.

In essence, that's what I can tell you regarding education.

• (1015)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. André, you have the floor.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning, Ms. Poirier, Ms. Dalton and Mr. Watt. It's a pleasure to be here today.

This is a bit like déjà-vu for me, since I used to sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. But I am now a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade. On that committee, in Ottawa, I realized that if you are not bilingual, you cannot understand what is going on. There is the Canada-US Parliamentary Association where everyone speaks English. I say this to point out the fact that assimilation happens everywhere. The reach of the English language is growing and it is being promoted in most institutions. I therefore understand how important the fight for our cultural diversity is.

I have several questions for you. To begin, Ms. Poirier, you referred to ways to promote culture. Of course, if we want more people to speak French, an excellent way of doing that is through culture. Under existing programs, is enough being done to disseminate this culture throughout Newfoundland and even in the rest of Canada?

I also want to connect this subject to something Ms. Dalton said. As far as I can see, you work in the local economic development sector. Are there any social economy projects, or other ones, which provide an opportunity for francophone artists to promote this culture?

I'll leave it at that for now.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Is enough being done to promote French culture? The answer is no, at least for now. I said earlier in my presentation that we would like to have enough financial and human resources to make progress. People are increasingly realizing that to survive, they have to work together, and that includes artists. In fact, our francophone artists cannot live from their art alone. That's unfortunate. They need to also be in another line of work, such as fishing, teaching or consulting.

Mr. Guy André: They are part-time artists.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Indeed. That's too bad, but they can't dedicate themselves entirely to their art, and I mean that in the broadest sense of the term.

As I said during my presentation, we need financial and human resources to bolster the project. By this we don't mean an independent organizational structure, but rather simply having one person in charge.

Phase 1 of the cultural positioning project helped us realize that there was a need out there. As an example, I mentioned Mr. Georges,

who surveyed every school and immersion class, and then contacted them all via an e-mail link to announce upcoming shows. He did this on his own time and on part of his association's time as well. But this wasn't fair to the association's members. When I was working on this file, I also worked on it when I could find a moment between my administrative duties. But that's not how you get the job done.

Here is another example. We have always taken part in the Dictée des Amériques. Our students always did extremely well. Even though we live in a small province and manage our own schools, and are being assimilated at an alarming rate, as is the case in other provinces, two of our students won the Dictée des Amériques: one in the junior category and the other in the senior category. I am extremely proud of that.

Again, this event requires an enormous amount of time. We need to organize regional qualification rounds by letting people know about them; we need to send out documents and make sure that everything is ready, and that the community does its job. This all takes time. But if two people were hired for this type of work, we could save at least two weeks worth of work. You might say that two weeks out of 52 is not a lot, but it is if you have other work to do. So these are more concrete examples of what we are accomplishing in the area of culture.

You mentioned creating a link with the economy. Josée could speak to that more at length. We have something called the Francoboutique. I am not an Internet surfer, and I apologize for that. It is not my preferred way of communicating or of getting information.

• (1020)

Mr. Guy André: Talk to your kids about it.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: I don't have any.

Mr. Guy André: Young people will help you.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: This summer, I went to two events, and Ms. Boucher was at one of them. The RDÉE had organized a happy hour. On a table, there was some local artwork and cultural products. All of the items were available at the Francoboutique. I was frankly impressed by the quality, quantity and availability of those products.

I'm going to ask Josée to take over here.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): There's only 30 seconds left. You can give us more details next round.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: You've just used up 10 of them.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'm still going to give you your 30 seconds.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: I should begin by saying that the community economic development projects are not entirely social economy projects. Our role is really to meet the needs of the community. That's what happened with Francoboutique, which Cyrilda talked about. We found a financial partner, in that case Industry Canada, to help us get the project off the ground.

The happy hour Cyrilda referred to was organized when the board of directors of RDÉE Canada was visiting St. John's. Each time, they visit a different province, a different RDÉE. It's different from Ottawa, and it's a chance for the host organization or province and — as was the case for us in June — to put on an exhibition. In our case, we exhibited our products and discuss them.

I'm talking fast, but it's because I see the clock ticking.

• (1025)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We're going to let you keep going.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: Thank you. That's very nice of you.

As I was saying before, the idea is to reflect the vitality of the community. In this case, there were artists and craftspeople exhibiting their work, but it was also about selling products and services. As was mentioned earlier, it's a website, but it's more than e-commerce. God knows we've all seen lots of sites like this. It's a way of doing business online, but it's also a tool to make everyone more aware of the business scene and what's going on in French in the province.

Actually, I found out a bit late that I would be coming here, but I wanted to say this. I have a list, in both languages, of all of the projects and project initiatives our RDÉE is currently working on. It is in the process of being updated. It includes the names of financial partners, the amounts involved and project descriptions. I'd like to know if I could send it to you later. Someone mentioned that organizations that weren't witnesses could send their brief later. I am going to undertake to send you that so that everyone has a copy in hand.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Fine.

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning.

I'm very happy to be here in Newfoundland. I think every one here at this table feels the same way. I had the opportunity to meet some of you on a previous trip.

Mrs. Dalton, you said a lot about your accomplishments. I'd like you to tell me about the one you are most proud of, the one you are particularly happy to have carried out.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: When I first started as RDÉE coordinator, four years ago, a feasibility study on the tourism development potential of the Port-au-Port Peninsula had just been completed. As Cyrilda said before, that is kind of the cradle of francophonie. You had a pretty quick look at St. John's, but I can tell you that the Port-au-Port Peninsula, on the West Coast of the Island of Newfoundland, is even more beautiful. At least, that is what I think. It is a beautiful mix of mountains and ocean. Back then, it had untapped potential. That is still true today.

When I took up my duties, that study confirmed there was a need. So we set up a project to develop tourism infrastructure on the Port-au-Port peninsula. It looked like a tourism undertaking, but in fact, it led to a series of 12 initiatives that subsequently became projects. The most important one was a network of hiking trails.

Eventually, a network of snowmobiling trails may be added to it. Together with the Association régionale de la côte ouest, or ARCO, the local organization there, we are working to establish the Émile-Benoît Interpretative Centre. I don't know if any of you know of him. This symbol of Newfoundland francophonie was a violinist, storyteller and dentist to boot. There was nothing unusual about that back then. He even received an honorary doctorate from Memorial University.

The Interpretative Museum is going to create jobs, which is crucial, but it is also going to showcase the richness of this region and the contribution of francophones. Eventually, a wild animal mini farm will be built at the Interpretative Centre. In addition, the École des ancêtres, an old school house that was used at the end of the 19th century, will be converted into a museum. It will showcase all of the attractions, artifacts and items that may tell us a bit more about this region.

Three trails have already been completed. This summer, we worked with some Basques to learn how to build bread ovens. I don't know if you are familiar with this method. Personally, I was not familiar with it. That is another project the Federation wanted to do with the Société 2004. We relied on the expertise of those people to build a bread oven on one of the trails. It is a tourist attraction, but I should point out that the oven actually works. It is not just a decoration.

As you probably know, there are a lot of fishermen in this region. In one community, there are 20 francophone fishermen. There is also a huge harbour development project worth millions of dollars. It involves, among other things, upgrading the docking infrastructure. As I was saying before, we are not directly involved in pure economic development. However, that is going to make things easier for francophone fishermen. It will also have a unifying effect on these fishermen. When you distinguished between crab fishing and lobster fishing, that raises another aspect of their situation. This project will be a new way of tapping into the potential of these people.

There is also the development of Île Rouge, which is a real island, but with a bit of a mystical side. It is located directly across from the School-Community Centre. Given that we are talking about an island, there is obviously some water between them. However, there were some French fishermen. When people came to settle in the area around 150 years ago, there were Basques and French fishermen who had already settled there. In fact, some research was done, and artifacts were found that testified to their presence.

• (1030)

In one of our infrastructure development projects we will first use fishermen who are seasonal workers, which means that they do not work at certain times of the year because there is no fishing. And we will use them as guides or for boat trips in view of eventual archaeological excavations that are planned for Île Rouge.

We are already in touch with the archeology department of the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Basically, we want to have this site declared as a provincial historical site. In the vicinity, there is also Gros-Morne. This is not in the peninsula, but studies are being made at Gros-Morne, which has been designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. So we would like to have a second site, but this one will be for the francophone community.

I think that I took up more than my allotted time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have 20 seconds.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You answered my question. All this is being done for the francophone community.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: I did not even mention the francophone portal, which was the last project to be approved. We will deal with it next time.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We will certainly have time to discuss it.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): You mentioned a place whose name I did not recognize.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: I am talking about Gros-Morne. It is a national park.

Mr. Daniel Petit: All right.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Usually, Yvon Godin would be sitting with the other members and putting questions.

A member: Things are quiet today.

The Vice-Chairman (Mr. Yvon Godin): I think that I have never seen such a quiet committee meeting. I have a few questions for you. I would also like to take part in the discussion.

Ms. Poirier, you spoke about a legal challenge. I know that at this time, francophone minorities are working to raise awareness all over Canada. It began in the East, and according to yesterday's news, it has already spread to the West.

First, I would like to hear what you have to say about this matter. Then, I would like to put a question to Mr. Watt.

Now what did legal challenges obtain for you here in Newfoundland? You used them more than once, and what were the results? What would have happened if you did not have the Court Challenges Program?

•(1035)

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: You have many questions.

Yes, in fact, people were mobilized; this was recently discussed in Ottawa. Thus, I am very glad to know that the country is awakening to this issue.

Yes, Newfoundland used the Court Challenges Program several times. To my knowledge, this probably dates back to 1985 or 1986, when they wanted to have French-language schools in St. John's. Then, once we won that case, the movement slowly spread to other places where people wanted schools. I think that even some Goose Bay residents used the program and, as I said, there is a case currently before the court in southern Labrador.

We must not forget the school management issue. You can ask any current or former member of the *Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-du-Labrador*: without this program, we would probably not be managing our schools yet. The battle was long and hard. Without the program, we would not have won.

I cannot tell you exactly how many times we used it, but I know that we did use it without any doubt.

I do not know whether I have answered all your questions. I took some notes, but were there any other details you wanted to know about?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I wanted to know if you have used it in Newfoundland. I know that in New Brunswick, we have used it often. I think that all of the successes that we have had have been thanks to the Court Challenges Program. In our opinion, a single person, and individual acting alone cannot be successful.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Therefore, it is thanks to the Court Challenges Program that this was done.

I would like to ask my other question of Mr. Watt. Earlier, you talked about your newspaper and the fact that in order to sell advertising, one needs to have a lot of readers. The people who buy advertising want to get their money's worth, they want to have a broad readership. I believe that is how it works.

It is sometimes said that asking a question is to also give the answer, but in this case, I do not have the answer and so I will ask you all the same. Before the sponsorship scandal in Ottawa, there was the Sponsorship Program.

Did your newspaper receive money from the federal government for government advertising? Has that stopped over the last few years?

Mr. Steven Watt: I started working at the paper approximately three and a half years ago, just before the scandal was launched. I therefore have limited knowledge of the program, but as far as I know, we had little or no demand for advertising under the program.

However, we regularly published campaigns for various federal departments, which has disappeared with the launching of the scandal. The purchase level for government advertising has not recovered since. It is beginning to re-establish itself, but we will have to wait a year in order to really assess the situation, because the buying level varies from month to month. We have seen an increase in the last few months, but we will have to wait in order to see if the trend continues.

The moratorium on federal advertising was a decision taken in the wake of the scandal that did not really affect us. The purchase of federal advertising started to decrease immediately following the ad scam, and that trend has continued.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I have another question regarding the Action Plan for Official Languages, which received \$700 million in funding.

Has the action plan produced concrete benefits? Has it made a difference?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: That is one of the questions I do not have a clear answer on.

In the province, the greatest beneficiary of the action plan has been the school board. I cannot speak to the impact the program has had on the community, because that is one of the aspects I have not yet had time to study. All I know is that the school board benefited from the program and will continue to do so.

Last year, the school board was able to fund the project that it called the *Francochoralies*, which was an incredible success. This year, a mobile team made up of expert teachers among others is touring the three communities. But I cannot say for sure whether or not the action plan has had direct benefits for our communities.

• (1040)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): So no one is following up on it? Is that because it is not your responsibility?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: I cannot say because I am missing some information. The Director General left quite quickly and we have not been able to follow up on several issues, of which the action plan is unfortunately one. That is why I cannot answer your question.

I regret that; I should perhaps have done some research, but time constraints did not allow me to do so.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): My time has expired.

Mr. Simard, you have the floor.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you once again.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): What about a 5 or 10 minutes break?

We will reconvene in 5 minutes.

• (1050)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We will continue with the second round of questions.

I would like to inform the witnesses that they may table their documents with the clerk at the end of the meeting, so that we can have them translated. The members of the committee would appreciate that, as it will assist them in the drafting of their report.

Mr. Simard now has the floor.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to come back to the action plan. If there is anything that the committee should do, it would be to recommend to the government—whether it is the Conservatives or ourselves, although we obviously would have a preference—it will be to renew the action plan. It is crucial.

When we developed the action plan, \$750 million seemed like a lot of money to us, but the needs were and continue to be great.

In reviewing the said plan, we realize that the emphasis was really put on education. Indeed, more than 50% of the funds were dedicated to the education. That worked quite well. In terms of health, it worked very well. However, there were shortcomings in the areas of immigration and culture: there was not enough money. We often assume that culture will take care of itself.

Could you comment on that? Should the action plan be renewed, which sectors, in your opinion, should be emphasized here in Newfoundland?

• (1055)

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: All the sectors.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Where are the shortcomings?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: They actually exist in all four sectors. I am unable to tell you which one I would prioritize over another. As I was saying earlier, as far as education is concerned, we know that there was an injection of money, that it is working and that it is being well used.

In terms of health, the project has already been launched, but we are about to enter the concrete phase of its implementation. I apologize, because I do not always use adequate parliamentary and legal language. However, it is clear that health is an area of jurisdiction that the provincial government considers as its domain. As a result, it is always rather reticent in this respect. The Provincial Ministry of Health supports us, and our cooperation with it is certainly excellent. I would absolutely not want you to think otherwise. But the fact remains that we are obviously always in competition with the anglophones.

If, through the action plan, the money was directly allocated to the francophone community, that would of course be an incredible benefit for us.

Immigration, as far as we are concerned, is a very delicate issue. As I said during my presentation earlier, we have a problem: there is a labour shortage. Everyone knows that our workers, our youth and our labourers, are going to Fort McMurray or somewhere else in Alberta. Our population is aging. We have problems within problems, and not only are we suffering, but anglophones are suffering as well. We are trying to make up for the shortage of labourers through immigration. That is our first proposed exploratory mission. We will get off the beaten path, we will not be recruiting in France; we will be recruiting in Eastern European countries, such as Rumania, etc. We have already established some connections in this regard.

As far as the cultural sector is concerned, I will repeat it once again, that is my case, it is somewhat my pet cause, and I really want it to work. I spoke to you about the distances we have to cover. Imagine a theatre group wanting to travel with their sets. They cannot do so. We have to be content with an artist playing with one guitar. I would really like to see something else, some other form of art and culture travelling to my area. The problem is not necessarily some issue of production delivery, but rather one of the programs themselves: we must have enough funding so that the artists can travel both inside and outside of our province.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Watt, earlier, you talked about communication. Obviously, getting our message out to the public is important. You said that the francophonie here in Newfoundland and Labrador is concentrated in three regions or three centres. Your newspaper is delivered to those three centres. It is a weekly newspaper and you said, if I am not mistaken, that it is a biweekly publication. Also, community radio stations seem to be working very well in the rest of the country. Our region hosted the annual general meeting of Envol 91 last week. It had a rocky start, but it is very successful now and it is extremely popular with francophone listeners.

Is community radio something being discussed here? Is this one of your projects?

• (1100)

Mr. Steven Watt: Yes, our provincial newspaper is published 21 times per year, on a biweekly bases, except during the three summer months and at Christmastime, when the newspaper is published only once a month. Subscribers received the newspaper in the mail. Since francophones are concentrated in three major areas, our subscribers are located in three major areas: here, in the Port-au-Port Peninsula, and in Labrador City. I also want to add that because the newspaper is not based in one particular region, it has the major advantage of reaching francophones who are not necessarily integrated into a community network or who live in even more isolated regions. For example, a number of newspaper are sent to Goose Bay, Labrador, where there is no francophone community organization but where there is, nevertheless a school and several francophones.

There is also enormous potential, that we are more or less successfully tapping into, which is reaching the bilingual anglophone population and providing it with a window on the provincial francophonie. An attempt to reach this audience is to provide it with something in French on Newfoundland—and it is almost the only French publication in Newfoundland—but it is also to provide this window. They are very interested in information about a community organization and events.

As for community radio, to my knowledge, the only one in existence is located in Labrador City. I don't know very much about it because it is located in Labrador City, however it does exist and many volunteers worked there.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Your time is up.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Good morning. I would like to ask Ms. Poirier a question.

You answered another question about federal spending here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I just reviewed the action plan and I noted that, our government is spending a great deal here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have invested \$1.4 million in francophone communities and \$2.9 million in francophone schools, for a total of \$4.3 million.

I would like to know whether you have a system to collect data on community associations and organizations, in order to know when the federal government directly supports associations with funding.

I am asking because additional agreements have just been announced. For example, in education \$1 billion has just been announced, a four-year agreement, for the period ending in 2009. This is a 44% increase. Some \$64 million will be spent on services, a 25% increase. Communities will receive \$120 million, an 11% increase. I would like to know whether your associations have a system to determine how the federal government provides them with financial support.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: That's a good question. As I said earlier, I don't have all the answers. In a couple of weeks, we will be updating our overall development plan on the basis of the condition of our community forum. We plan to establish follow-up mechanisms. That said, I don't necessarily want to say that the assistance was not there, it's simply that I don't have the information. That is why I don't want to venture too far here.

I know that this summer we started taking a look at all our organizations, focusing on results-based management. We asked them exactly how much money they had received and what results they had achieved with that money. In June of last year, I began this initiative, which arose from a request by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. I made a commitment to implement this mechanism, and to ensure that the process is applied every year. These are statistics we do need.

Perhaps my predecessor kept all those figures in his head. However, I am more the visual kind and I have to see them on paper. We will get them.

• (1105)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's good, because personally I would like organizations to be aware we are helping them. If no one is aware we are helping, people will think the government isn't taking care of them. However, if the government does take care of them, then it would be useful if associations could share key information among one another.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Naturally, we will indicate all the amounts received when we submit our annual report. Normally, community and provincial organizations also submit annual reports. I am sure we will be able to compile those reports and present the figures. However, at present, I have no chart that provides an overall picture.

But I can tell you that if you ask me the same question next year, I will have an answer for you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Watt, you have the floor.

Mr. Steven Watt: Private organizations, and particularly local organizations, know perfectly well that we receive government assistance. We simply don't exchange figures enough at the provincial level. However, we do not necessarily know under what federal initiative we receive assistance. We know we receive a funding from Canadian Heritage, but we don't know for certain under what initiative the funding is provided. Is it under the Action Plan for Official Languages — or should I say the inaction plan?

Some Hon. Members: Ah ah!

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's good, because my question did not go that far. What I meant was that, if the government is involved and provides assistance, that should be made known.

Mr. Steven Watt: The problem is that the information is currently distributed among five or six different annual reports.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André: Good morning.

It's very pleasant to be here with you again.

Ms. Poirier, you talked about the Court Challenges Program. You know that the future of the program is very much in doubt at the moment. You said that the program made it possible to establish French-language schools in St. John's and to settle the school management issue.

Given that the program is being questioned, or cut, are there any demands you would like to make? If the program were cut, you might find yourself unable to move forward with efforts to help la francophonie develop and flourish.

I have a second question. Mr. Godin, is this the last round?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I think we might be able to fit in another round.

Mr. Guy André: What are the most numerous complaints you receive from francophones about the health and social services system? Given the aging population, I would imagine the pressures are increasing.

Could you answer my first question? If there is time, I would like you to answer the second question as well. If not, we can come back to it.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: I would like to start with the Court Challenges Program. I know that the Labrador South school district intends to file a submission related to a school project. Our lawyer spoke to me about a second project; the situation is worrying. I am sorry, but I do not recall the name of the second project.

I understood that matters already before the courts would be addressed. That is what we hope, but we have no guarantees. Furthermore, what would happen if a given case had to progress beyond the initial stage of the process? The program is not only for school management cases, it includes any...

• (1110)

Mr. Guy André: In the act...

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Exactly. The program is even used in cases involving health care. There is no doubt that it ought to be reinstated. I think that the nationwide reaction to the cuts speak volumes about how necessary the program is.

That being said, I would like to return to the matter of health care system...

Mr. Guy André: Can we expect to see petitions about the Court Challenges Program?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: An online petition has been organized in the Atlantic region, on the Café Acadie web page at Acadie.net. For various reasons, our Federation has not yet made any representations.

Firstly, our AGM is coming up soon and we decided to wait until then to properly address how we should react. Secondly, our

president has been unwell, although he is slowly convalescing and will be able to attend our AGM.

Mr. Guy André: You were also going to speak about health care.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Exactly.

Mr. Guy André: The reason I bring it up is because I have a sty and I wanted to know whether I could...

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: The health care system is so vast that it is difficult to focus on a particular aspect. I can, nevertheless, say that there are problems in recruiting and retaining both English-speaking and French-speaking health care professionals. That is why negotiations are being held with the provincial government on this matter.

It is difficult to get hospital services in French. They are not always available. Services are provided thanks to an agreement the hospital reached with Saint-Pierre et Miquelon. We provide interpretation services. It is a shame that this is not provided elsewhere in Canada, but we are doing our best to make it more accessible to the public.

The situation on the west coast is worrying. I was told about a young woman who had to see seven different doctors during her pregnancy. That is not right. We are trying to improve the situation.

I recently attended a seminar organized by the New Brunswick Medical Training Centre. Mr. Godin, you are probably more familiar with the acronym of that organization than I am. I was most impressed by the services the centre offered.

One of the objectives of the Newfoundland Santé en français is to organize internships for our young trainee doctors. The west coast is one of the places where we would like to send our interns.

If you have any further questions, I will do my best to answer them.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Since you are offering, I will ask another question; it is after all my turn.

One-third of New Brunswickers are francophones, and, I believe that things are going fairly well in terms of the services that are provided under the auspices of the French-language health services group. However, as I have often said here in committee, we are losing ground in terms of the provision of health care services in general. French-language hospitals have been closed in northeastern New Brunswick. I am sure that you heard in the news that hospitals in Lamèque, Caraquet, Dalhousie and St-Quentin have been closed.

The citizens of Caraquet organized protests, but to no avail. I believe they managed to save six beds in St-Quentin. I remember that when I said six beds, or *six lits* in French, people misunderstood my Acadian accent and thought I had said silly. I had to explain that I was talking about the number six and "*lits*" as in beds in which we sleep. They managed to save six. Another hospital was closed in the Saint-Léonard region at the same time as an English-language hospital was built in the southwest of the province.

But, tell me, what is the challenge that your organization will face in the future? Or perhaps I should ask what will your challenges be in the future, be it in terms of health care or education?

In my region, we have also been granted control of school management. We now have independent school districts. There is the French-language school district and the English-language school district. They had to be separated in order for us to be granted control of schools management.

What are the challenges that will be facing Newfoundland in the future?

• (1115)

Mrs. Josée Dalton: It would be remiss of me to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages without bringing up Bill S-3.

Earlier, we were discussing the importance of the Court Challenges Program. I am only going to make a brief aside, because I am glad that monsieur Godin raised the issue of the challenges that await us.

I would just like to issue a reminder as to the federal government's commitment to official languages. As you know, we do not have the critical mass that was previously used to justify the obligation to provide services in French. And that is the nub of the problem. I am speaking to you as the network coordinator. One of our most important partners is ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. I mention it by way of example, but there are many others as well. I simply wish to underscore that we always have to be vigilant in making sure that the need to provide services in French is understood.

Before I talk about priority issues such as the economic development of French-language communities, health, and immigration, I would like to go back to basics and stress the need for the provision of French-language services. I have had many discussions — always amicable, as you can imagine — with ACOA on parts IV and VII of the OLA.

I just wanted to remind you of these provisions of the act and say that we cannot afford to let down our guard. We always have to be vigilant. In some places people never have to stop to wonder whether they will be able to speak French. I mean places other than New Brunswick, which has the privilege of being officially designated as a bilingual province. Here, however, we face a daily struggle. Some battles have been won, but with great difficulty, and only because they were well planned. I just wanted to draw your attention to this situation.

Mrs. Cyralda Poirier: You were asking about future challenges in health care. We face every possible challenge you can imagine.

Our job is to ensure that ultimately we have proper health care services for people in their own language, and there is no doubt that this is urgent.

If a person is French speaking and ill, it is no easy matter to go somewhere and ask for healthcare and to end up speaking a language that is not one's own and trying to explain or discuss matters to ensure that one gets proper health care. If there is a translation service, there is a danger of misunderstanding. It is also no easy matter to consult a doctor and to explain the problem through another person. That is not what we feel like doing when we are lying on a stretcher. So, as I say, we face challenges.

We want to give priority to the west coast for a number of reasons, one being that the population there is very old, as I was saying earlier. The situation is quite alarming. We think that if we can succeed on the west coast, we could definitely set up other French-speaking locations in the rest of the province, and the west coast would become our model.

• (1120)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much.

I would like to come back to Mr. Lemieux's question in order to understand the structure better. If I understand correctly, there are two budget envelopes. Do you have a Canada-community envelope here?

A voice: Yes.

Hon. Raymond Simard: The same principle applies throughout the country. In other words—I do not remember the amount anymore—the FCFA negotiated \$18 million a year for administering groups such as the one headed by Ms. Poirier. Next, I believe there are officials from Heritage Canada on a committee with representatives from the community organizations and these people decide how the funds will be distributed in each province.

In the case of the action plan, however, the funds are distributed to the various departments.

You were talking about education, Mr. Lemieux. Unless I am mistaken, it was decided, in cooperation with the provinces, that funding from the action plan will be given to the provinces. In other words, you raise a good point, because the funding disappears somewhat in the provincial envelope for education. It is true that there are a great many different federal funds. I just wanted to make that clarification, because I find it quite important.

Things work quite well in my province because we have excellent cooperation with the province. Our province is open; our Minister of Finance is a francophone; our premier is open to the French-speaking community.

First of all, I would like to know whether that is your experience as well.

My second question is about economic development. I am very familiar with the RDÉEs. They are a huge success in my province. When I look at the figures, I see that the population is very mobile. Does that cause you problems? I believe that 50 per cent of the people contacted in 1996 and 2001 had moved. That must create incredible instability. Does this percentage refer to just the francophone community or to the population as a whole?

Mrs. Cyralda Poirier: We have an excellent relationship with the provincial government. In my opinion, we have never seen such openness toward the French-speaking community.

The advantage of being a small province is that you have access to the ministers. I refer particularly to the ministers who are of interest to us. For example, I do not go to see the Minister of Agriculture. However, I know that Mr. Ottenheimer, the Minister of Governmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs is incredibly open. He helps us and supports us in every way he can.

The same is true of the Minister of Health. We had a meeting with him in June. Our president was there, of course, as well as the Executive Officer of the Société Santé en français. They were amazed at his openness. In our opinion, this relationship is never called in the question, and we are trying to take advantage of this open attitude as much as possible. This attitude is not unique to this government; traditionally, this is always been the case.

Hon. Raymond Simard: In terms of economic affairs?

Mrs. Josée Dalton: The statistics on the mobility of population are correct. I will have more data on that because we are currently doing community profiles for each of our francophone regions. Earlier you mentioned 50%. I have heard that it is higher in some regions but I believe the whole population was included.

You are aware that Ontario or Fort McMurray are very attractive to Newfoundlanders — anglophones especially — and that Fort McMurray has almost become a second Newfoundland. There is certainly some staff turnover in our organizations, depending on the region. In some regions this is more stable. It always depends on the local industry. For example, in Labrador, the population appears to be more stable, more homogenous. The main attraction is the mining industry in the IOC mines. When that industry is operating, staff turnover is more or less stable. Whenever there is a downturn or a slight recession, as there was a few years ago, then people tend to move. We have tried, along with the RDÉE, to find other ways of diversifying that economy and creating other measures of employability.

There are other areas, such as this one in St. John's, where we are discovering — and people may not realize this — a second, and even a third generation of francophones. There are hundreds of them like there are elsewhere, whoever this generation is made up mostly of professionals. These are more mobile individuals, who come for a year or two and who are attracted to St. John's because of the island. They come for the maritime experience. We are trying to find ways of keeping our people in these communities.

The director referred earlier to retention problems. There are recruitment problems. Qualified people have to be found to work in our communities. The ball is in our court; we need to do whatever is necessary to increase retention within our francophone communities.

• (1125)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Petit, you have the floor.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning Ms. Poirier.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I am sorry, Mr. Petit. This might be one of the questions you wanted to ask.

At this point I would like to welcome Ms. Marie-Claude Thibodeau, director general of the Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. There was a death in the family and she has only just arrived.

Before you put your question, perhaps we could ask her to give us three minutes. Your time will then begin. You might want to ask her questions.

Ms. Thibodeau, allow me to take this opportunity to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mrs. Marie-Claude Thibodeau (Director General, Fédération des parents francophones de TNL): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Forgive me for being late. I am truly sorry. There was not only one death but two, in a plane accident.

Thank you for having me and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you. I have only been working for the Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador for six months. The most important area we have been working very hard on is early childhood. Last year, we had the privilege of opening the first francophone daycare here, in St. John's. We now like to open more, whether home daycares or daycare centres.

As Ms. Josée Dalton stated earlier we have problems retaining staff and finding staff who speak French. It is extremely difficult. We need to establish partnerships with other provinces that have resources. The problem is keeping these people. These are big challenges. My feeling is that we need considerable support from the provincial government, from Heritage Canada, and from the school boards. It is truly fantastic to see the effort the whole community is making to give our children access to francophone and anglophone cultures.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Ms. Thibodeau.

Mr. Petit, you have the floor.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Ms. Poirier, Ms. Dalton, Mr. Watt and Ms. Thibodeau.

I read a document given to us by our research staff and entitled "Francophone community profile of Newfoundland and Labrador". My first question is: how does the francophone population compare to the anglophone population, or vice-versa, in my province?

This document states that many French-speaking people work in the service industry. Almost 45% of the population works in the service industry. According to the same document, your average salary is 50% higher than the province's average salary. Therefore, according to this document, you represent a francophone community that is rather successful in terms of employment, income, etc.

I believe Ms. Poirier referred to the question that I would like to ask you. Perhaps you have also referred to this. I am interested in immigration in minority situations. I am aware that there have been agreements.

Could someone tell us which agreements currently exist and what kind of immigrants you are recruiting? Are they coming from the province of Quebec, or from Saint-Pierre et Miquelon? I am not sure whether it is Ms. Poirier or Ms. Dalton who referred to this earlier.

• (1130)

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: I will begin and then perhaps Josée can expand on my answer.

If you are wondering what kind of relationship exists between francophones and anglophones in a province or a city, just take a taxi. The taxi driver will tell you exactly what he thinks and will happily take charge of the conversation. Here, when taxi drivers hear you speak French, they all tell you that they have a bilingual child, niece, grandson, brother, sister or sister-in-law, and they are very proud of the fact. There is openness and there is a very good relationship. In the 22 years that I lived in Newfoundland, I have maybe met — and you will always meet one — one or two anti-francophone individuals. When that happens, you move on. What this shows is that there is a very good relationship.

In terms of immigration, we do not currently have a reception system for immigrants in our communities. That said, this does not necessarily mean that we do not welcome them or that there are not any; we simply have not got into that stage yet. I am sorry, this was something I wanted to look into but I was rather tired yesterday. If I understand Citizenship and Immigration Canada's legislation, a certain number of immigrants are allocated for each province. I believe that 300 immigrants have been allocated to Newfoundland. We have five sets of statistics that show that over the past few years, immigrants have not come to our province, even within the anglophone communities. And yet, going by what people say, we are very welcoming. The problem lies not so much in how we welcome people, but rather in the fact that we do not necessarily have as much to offer as the other provinces. For example, immigrants who come from African countries and who speak French will go to Quebec and will find their community. In the same way, the Chinese go to Vancouver because they can find their community there. We still have a very homogenous population. We do not yet have that support — and I do not mean from a racial point of view — we do not yet have that mix that people can identify with. As I stated earlier, we will be focusing on this through our projects: the exploratory mission and the host project that will begin next April.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Fine. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): There are 30 seconds left. Would you like to add something, Ms. Dalton?

Mr. Daniel Petit: I am sorry, Ms. Dalton.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: You referred earlier to the FCFA document that talks about education levels, francophone populations, etc. I simply want to clarify that. We are finishing up a community profile on the Port-au-Port Peninsula. We are applying the old saying "Know thyself." We are currently doing a detailed study of each of the three francophone regions in order to determine what the needs are. At this point we have found that the francophone population from the Port-au-Port Peninsula has a lower level of education and income on average than the anglophones there. I wanted to clarify that. It is not quite the same situation as in St. John's, but still.

We also wanted to determine community needs. As Cyrilda mentioned, we are not yet at the point of developing an immigration strategy. For my part, I would like to see us identified the needs in our communities. In Labrador, for example, although we do need lawyers and doctors, what we really need are blue-collar workers. We need working people to go there. We will need skilled workers, engineers and people with more technical specialties to work in management at the mines. That is the policy that will apply. Last year, we took part in consultation with the provincial government,

which wants to develop an immigration strategy. We will continue to cooperate with them to try to attract people that are suitable to each region. As I said, we need more blue-collar workers in some areas and more white-collar workers in others. This is always done in consultation with the province.

• (1135)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. André, it is your turn.

Mr. Guy André: My question is for all of you. I do not know who will be able to provide an answer.

Our federal services — from Canada Post and other institutions — are they really available in both languages, in keeping with official languages? Can you talk a little bit about that?

I have seen some reactions, so I will let you answer.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: In some areas, in some departments, such as Canadian Heritage and Service Canada, we are lucky to have two French speaking program officers, not just bilingual but franco-phone, working here in the province. There is also the RCMP, Citizenship and Immigration. I am trying to go over the list. I think that they are twelve. In some cases, I would say that the situation is very good, but that is not the case at Canada Post, where it was terrible last year, and it is even worst at the immigration service. There was one incident that created quite an outcry. I believe that it was three or four years ago, and it involved a member of the community who wanted to be served in French when she went to renew her passport. She went to the office, spoke in French and was answered in English. They understood perfectly well what she had said in French, but it seems that they were not able to answer her in French because the supervisor refused. If she allows the service to be given in French, that will create a demand, and they did not want to get into that.

Do you see the kind of challenges that we face? It was the same type of situation when the customs service at the airport was run by the federal government.

When all of you go back to the St. John's airport, test the service for yourself. You will see the little sign that indicates that service is available in English and French. Speak in French. Some of them will certainly understand, but they will always answer in English. That is one example. I want to turn the floor over to Cyrilda, Steven or Marie-Claude. They may have other examples for you. But as I said earlier, we always need to be vigilant and seek our rights.

Mr. Steven Watt: In some instances, although a given federal entity is supposed to provide service in French, in light of the small French-language population base... The thresholds are often set at 5% or 20% of the population, percentages that we could never reach in Newfoundland and Labrador. In other words, there are nationwide official languages programs that could never be run in Newfoundland and Labrador. Nevertheless, I would like to draw your attention to a success story. It concerns a pilot project that Service Canada launched in the Stephenville-Port-au-Port region. Although there are francophone communities in the region, they are not sufficient in number to meet the five or 20% threshold. By converting to an traveling service, they were able to be classified in a region with a higher percentage of French-speaking persons.

The Stephenville office now has a staff member who works two or three days a week in the GrandTerre and Cap St. George region, which is around an hour's drive from Stephenville. This is the sort of flexibility I was talking about earlier; it allows us to run programs in special circumstances, such as those found in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Guy André: Did you want to add something, Ms. Poirier?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: No, but I would like Josée to talk to you about ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: I did not really want to get into this.

Mr. Guy André: As far as I'm aware, ACOA provides services in both official languages.

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: I brought it up because it is a fairly unusual situation. I especially want Josée to tell the committee what ACOA staff said.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: ACOA takes advantage of the fact that we do not have the critical mass to meet the 5% threshold. There is only one French-speaking ACOA officer in our province. The officer in question is a bilingual English-speaking person. When I went to meet with officials at the Moncton headquarters to seek an explanation on certain matters I was advised — very politely — that while they respected us and recognized the contribution made by the French-speaking community, they were perfectly at liberty to conduct both written and oral communications with us in English. They basically said that it was because we were in their good books that they deigned to communicate with us and provide us with services in French.

Furthermore, the federation was recently sent a survey by ACOA's president, Monique Colette, with whom the RDÉE has met on several occasions. The survey, evaluating the quality of services offered by ACOA, was done in English. It is somewhat ironic that a service quality survey would be sent out to us in English. I got in touch with those in charge, who sent me out a French version, but the return date had been and gone before it got to me. I filled it out nonetheless. In my opinion, some departments — and as was the case here, some agencies — depart from their official language responsibilities. That is why we always have to be on our guard. Although I do not want to return to the militancy of yesteryears, we have to remain vigilant.

• (1140)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I think that we will have time...

Mr. Guy André: Did you file a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages? Did it get you anywhere?

Mrs. Josée Dalton: Exactly.

Mr. Guy André: Did you file a complaint?

Mrs. Josée Dalton: I was contemplating exploring the process further when the cuts were announced.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You should address a copy of your complaint both to the Commissioner of Official Languages and to our committee. In general, the committee likes to receive a copy of complaints filed with the Commissioner of Official Languages. It allows members to find out about any problems and follow up on how they are handled.

Ms. Thibodeau, in your capacity as director of the Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve-et-du Labrador, you spoke about early childhood and childcare. I would like to know what you think about the government's decision to give money to individual families rather than investing it in childcare spaces. I know the government will defend its actions by saying that it will also invest in daycare centres. Either way, the decision has certainly caused an uproar across the country.

I do not know how appropriate my question is. In the three brief minutes I granted you earlier, you told us that you were working hard to set up daycare centres and stressed the importance of having qualified staff. I would, nonetheless, like to hear your view on this decision.

Mrs. Marie-Claude Thibodeau: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Your question is both important and very relevant. The daycare centre to which I referred is the first French-language daycare centre in Newfoundland. All the work that has been done will serve us well in the future. We are not without hope. Obviously, the cuts introduced by the current government have hurt us. We have taken a step back, but perhaps it will allow us to be more successful in the future.

Let me tell you how I understand it: It was an election promise, and Mr. Harper is known as somebody who keeps his promises. I cannot be angry at somebody for keeping his word, although obviously the decision has been damaging for parents and our federation. We hope, however, that the government will re-evaluate the situation and, in the future, will introduce measures to support education, French-language communities, and families — all with a view to helping children.

In fact, the aim of our federation is not simply to help families, but, first and foremost, to help children. We have a duty to them, from the moment they are born, and even before, to convince parents of the merits of having French-language schools and daycare centres. At the end of the day, given that we are living in an English-speaking province, their children will certainly become bilingual.

Although the government has made a decision, I do not believe that it is set in stone. I hope that things will get underway soon, as we intend to prove how important it is to focus on children.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): As has been said before, if Canada's French-language minority wishes to preserve the francophonie, especially in provinces such as Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, Alberta, or even cities like Vancouver, children have to be exposed to French from as young an age as possible. If parents are unable to send their children to French-language daycare centres and have to instead send them to English-language daycare centres while they are at work, they will face an uphill struggle.

It is like the situation in New Brunswick, which was resolved by separating the schools. When English-speaking and French-speaking children are together in the playground at break time, English inevitably dominates. This meant that children were going home after school speaking English rather than French.

You said that you had experienced setbacks with the daycare centres. Could you go into a little more details about this? Promises are fine and well, but we cannot escape reality.

•(1145)

Mrs. Marie-Claude Thibodeau: You are absolutely right.

It is still very early to assess the damage. An impact study has not as yet been carried out, although I think it would be an excellent idea. Now that you mention it, I can see that it would be really useful to get some statistics on the impact it has had. It would be a good way of convincing the government of the merits of what parents are seeking.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): If the committee is in agreement, we could go around the table and give everybody, each party, two minutes, since it is already 11:50 a.m. Then we could make our announcements and the meeting would be adjourned at noon.

I will begin with Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair. I have 20 questions that I would still like to ask, but I will try to limit myself.

Mr. Watt, you mentioned a centre in Stephenville. Is this a bilingual service centre where several government levels provide services in French, a one-stop shop?

Mr. Steven Watt: Yes, it is a single window.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is it a pilot project at the moment?

Mr. Steven Watt: Yes. The travelling aspect of the service is a pilot project.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Are there any plans to set it up elsewhere in the province?

Mr. Steven Watt: There are fewer needs in the other two francophone regions, because they are urban centres. So we simply need a bilingual employee, a bilingual position within the existing office. The problem arises from the fact that Stephenville is a one-hour drive from the communities where most francophones live. So there is a travelling service which leaves the Stephenville office two or three days per week and sets up in the Sainte-Anne school and community centre.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you.

As far as immigration is concerned, Ms. Poirier, you mentioned earlier that your target market was perhaps Eastern Europe. That interested me because in Manitoba we are focussing on French-speaking Africa, that is just about our only target market and it is working very well. But we have a University College in Saint-Boniface which acts somewhat as a magnet for these people.

Do you have a francophone university here or something that could attract people, or not really?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: No, we do not have a francophone university or college here; we do not have this type of institution and that is, to some extent, a shortcoming.

Hon. Raymond Simard: So where do young people go once they have completed grade 12, if they wish to study in French? To Moncton?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: Acadie.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Where is Acadie College located?

Mrs. Cyrilda Poirier: There is no Acadie College.

Mrs. Josée Dalton: They go to Moncton University, Sainte-Anne University, in Nova Scotia, and to MUN, the Memorial University of Newfoundland, of course.

Hon. Raymond Simard: So that would be quite a challenge for economic development as well, I would imagine, Ms. Dalton, because you have youth programs, knowledge-based economy programs. You train these young people and then you loose them after grade 12. Is that accurate?

Mrs. Josée Dalton: We do have some mechanisms to deal with this shortcoming. For example, we have continuing education, ongoing education. There are many distance learning courses that are becoming more and more accessible. Unfortunately, we do not have any francophone post-secondary institutions here, in the province. We are, however, relying a great deal on the new Centre scolaire et communautaire des Grands-Vents, in St. John's, to try to set up an ongoing training program. This represents a dual challenge for us. We run a risk when we send young people away in order to study, we risk losing them and then we have to try and get them back later on. I would say that there have been some success stories. Some people have left and then come back, but this is a challenge for us, one that we need to consider. We have to find some way to encourage them to come back once they have been educated.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: On the issue of daycare centres, our plan calls for a second phase. We would like to create 125,000 places all across Canada. Minister Finley is currently working on this initiative and she would like to work with interested parties, with the associations directly, not with the provinces. She has just established a committee, and if you would like to submit your ideas, you may contact Minister Finley's office, because she is in the process of preparing a plan.

Secondly, as regards the \$1,200 given to families for every child under the age of 6, could you tell me whether or not you are able to work directly with the parents, to get their financial support in order to establish francophone daycare centres? Six months ago, parents did not have this \$1,200, but now they do. It is important to have a francophone daycare centre.

Are you able to work directly with the parents by telling them that, now that they have a little bit more money, they may give some thought to investing some of it in a daycare centre. In that manner, you would have the support of the parents.

•(1150)

Mrs. Marie-Claude Thibodeau: Indeed, despite my lack of experience — as you know, I am not yet an expert in this matter —, I would say that it is very difficult to obtain money that has been given by the government for daycare centres, children or baby sitting services, by telling parents that, since they are receiving this money, they should perhaps hand it back so that their child can be placed in a francophone daycare centre. I do not think that this link occurs automatically. We would need to do a great deal of work to make people aware of this or to promote this idea in order to attract children to a francophone setting.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, exactly.

Mrs. Marie-Claude Thibodeau: You know that in Newfoundland most couples are exogamous. At the outset, we have a lot of work to do on that issue. I do believe in Ms. Finley; this is what is giving me hope.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Indeed, I had an opportunity to talk with Minister Finley last Friday about this committee. We spoke about your visit.

Mrs. Marie-Claude Thibodeau: We will be present. Thank you, that is a gift.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: All right, that is great.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Since Mr. André is not here, I will continue in the same subject.

As far as daycare centres are concerned, how are you going to operate? For example, 30 parents have each received \$1,200, and you were going to do some marketing to try to get them to make recommendations as to how to spend their budget and money. Is that your responsibility, first of all?

Secondly, I do not agree with Ms. Finley and the others. Are you not afraid that five conscientious individuals will say to themselves that, since they have been given \$1,200 for childcare, that they should use it for this purpose whereas the others will not do this, the result being that only five individuals will have to pay for the others?

Mrs. Marie-Claude Thibodeau: My dearest wish is that the \$1,200 will be put into the children. However, the best way to do this is to give this money to organizations that look after children.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Ms. Thibodeau. You answered my question. This is not an issue of common law, it is just common sense.

Since the meeting is now coming to an end, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I would like to thank you sincerely. This meeting marked the start of our tour, which has begun here in the eastern part of the country. It has been very interesting, and I am sure that my colleagues share my opinion.

I would like to thank our translators, who ensure that the proceedings are bilingual and give people the opportunity to hear exchanges in the language of their choice.

I would like to thank our technicians who are travelling with us and who ensure that the meetings run well.

I would like to make a few announcements to committee members. You will have to check out of your rooms at 1:00 p.m. At 1:15, you need to be in the hotel lobby.

• (1155)

Mr. Samy Agha: With their luggage.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, with your luggage, because it appears that our clerk does not want to go and pick up our suitcases!

Lunch will be served in the room next door, and we would like to invite you. There will only be sandwiches, coffee and some drinks. Nevertheless, it would be most interesting to have you join us for lunch. We would therefore be able to continue our discussions informally. We would be very pleased to have your company.

The meeting is adjourned.

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