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**Chair**

**Mr. Guy Lauzon**

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• (1300)

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)):** I am now going to call our meeting to order. First of all, I would like to welcome each and every one of you. As we said at the other meetings, this is the first time in 25 years that the Standing Committee on Official Languages has held a meeting in Moncton. This morning, we met people from Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. We are very pleased to be here.

As time is short, we will need to be very strict about it. We ask that you make a three-minute presentation. I know that you will say that's not much, but as I said this morning, the committee is very much aware of the problems, the Action Plan for Official Languages, etc. What we would rather do is open a dialogue between you and the MPs, who may ask you questions. I therefore ask you to stick to the three minutes allocated to you.

When you speak, please hold the microphone and speak directly into it. As there are not many of them, don't hesitate to move closer to the one you will be using.

During the question period, each MP from each of the political parties will have five minutes. We will attempt to have a few rounds of questions.

I wish to inform the committee members that we will be leaving at 2:30 p.m. to go to the University of Moncton's Medical Training Centre at the J.-Raymond-Frenette Building. We will be there from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

I would now ask the representatives of the Société santé et mieux-être du Nouveau-Brunswick to begin.

As they are not here, we will move on to the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick first.

Good afternoon, Mr. Maillet.

**Mr. Achille Maillet (First Vice-President, Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick):** Good afternoon to the members of Parliament on the committee. My name is Achille Maillet, the Vice-President of the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick would today like to concentrate on the issue of the federal government's policy for locating its services.

In recent years, the Acadian community in New Brunswick, and in the northern part of the province in particular, has noticed a shift and/

or the elimination of positions within several federal departments and agencies. Some of these decisions gave rise to complaints from the Commissioner of Official Languages and to legal action. We listed a number of examples in the brief that we provided earlier.

The repetitive nature of the decisions that seem to us to have weakened the scope of, and even violated, Canada's Official Languages Act, led us to take action in June to carry out a more systematic and rigorous assessment of the impact of these decisions and of the federal provincial policies on the location of government services.

Our view is that the geographical location of government services is directly related to three important parts of the Act, in particular Part IV, on access to services in both official languages.

There is a risk that eliminating front-line positions will directly reduce the delivery of services in French to minority Acadian and francophone communities, as is the case in New Brunswick. Furthermore, the concentration of positions in a smaller number of service centres and the distance between these service delivery centres and the Acadian and francophone communities may well have a direct impact on access to services. It should therefore come as no surprise to frequently see in reports from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages that government offices in regions where there is a strong anglophone majority are less able to serve francophone clients in their language.

Part V relates to language of work. The implementation of Part V of the Official Languages Act targets municipalities and regions in Canada where there is a significant minority language community or where a significant population is served in both official languages. New Brunswick is designated a "bilingual region" for the purposes of Part V, but many services provided in French in New Brunswick are from offices located outside the province, including Halifax. However, municipalities with large anglophone majorities are not targetted for language of work, even if they serve a large francophone minority, as is the case in the Atlantic region, where approximately 16% of the population have French as their mother tongue.

When services are located in municipalities with large anglophone majorities, it is more difficult to attract francophone employees. In addition, the workplace becomes a factor in assimilation. Locating federal offices in regions or municipalities with a heavy concentration of francophones or a majority of francophones, would contribute not only to strengthening the right of francophone public servants to work in French, but also contribute to the vitality of Acadian and francophone communities in New Brunswick and the Atlantic provinces.

Lastly, Part VII concerns community development. Locating government services in the regions is an important and highly effective measure for local and/or regional economic development, and for strengthening official language minority communities. New Brunswick is an excellent example of how the location of government services in the northern and eastern part of the province could have a significant impact on the region, and also on the whole of the province's Acadian and francophone community.

• (1305)

These communities are currently facing major economic challenges and suffering a marked population decline.

Let us now move on to the study begun by the Association francophone des municipalités on the government services location policy, on which we are currently working. We took steps to carry out a study on changing patterns of government employees in New Brunswick. Our office has already sent you a proposal on this matter. Discussions with various organizations, including the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, have shown that it would be appropriate to extend the study to the country as a whole. We are receptive to this proposal. The challenge at the moment is to put together a financial package in order to be able to complete the study.

Lastly, we would like today to ask your committee to acknowledge the importance of the policy on the location of government services in implementing Canada's Official Languages Act, particularly Parts IV, V and VII.

We would very much appreciate a recommendation or support from your committee, in order to obtain the financial resources required freed up for this study.

Thank you.

• (1310)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Maillet. I remind you that you have three minutes. I would like you to keep to that time limit, because the members will ask you questions afterwards.

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

**Mr. Daniel Thériault (Director General, Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick):** Good afternoon.

Mr. Yvon Godin is the MP for my riding. I would like to extend my greetings to him.

I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak. I wish to point out that some organizations may not be here because we only found out very late that we were to appear before this

committee. That is why I am going to speak from a brief that was submitted to Ms. Verner in May. This is intentional, however, because the core of what we wish to say is contained in it.

One-third of New Brunswick's population is francophone, but the legal context is rather special. New Brunswick is indeed officially bilingual, but there is more than one act on the equality of the two language communities. You will see and the end of my presentation why I mention this.

I am from the SANB, an organization that represents the Acadian community, and hence the francophone community in New Brunswick. In her presentation, the president was also addressing the minister as president of the Forum de concertation des organismes acadiens, which is a federation of 32 organizations, a few of which are here around the table today. That explains the community structure of Acadian society.

There are three points to be taken into consideration. We must always be watchful in order to maintain our position and to improve compliance with official languages legislation, both the New Brunswick act and Government of Canada act. Everyday life would definitely be easier if the federal government were to consistently apply the requirements of the Official Languages Act in the specific context of New Brunswick.

The Official Languages Act and the equality of the two language communities are enshrined in Canada's Constitution. The federal government needs to keep this legal framework in mind when it takes action in New Brunswick. It must also factor in the impacts on our community of any administrative changes, the relocation of jobs—I think that was well explained just now—and the planning of French-language services.

Strengthening the ability of communities to work together with the various levels of government and to play an active role in the development of public policies is also an issue. Staff resources and volunteers are the key to strengthening communities and their infrastructures. On the other hand, the depletion of volunteers and the difficulty in recruiting, retaining and developing human resources is harmful to engagement in the communities. Support for community engagement is a part of the Official Languages Act. I believe that the government should continue to work towards supporting our initiatives.

We wish primarily to draw your attention to the need for support from the federal government and the importance of realizing that administrative decisions can have an impact on the community, including the relocation of services. We complained about the Customs offices. There were three districts in New Brunswick, one of which was run from Edmundston. The only francophone Customs district in Eastern Quebec was merged with another district where the ability of employees to work in French or in both languages was reduced. That is one example.

One position was relocated from Tracadie to Amherst. That is another loss for the Acadian community in New Brunswick, as well as a probable loss in terms of the ability of government employees to provide bilingual support to the communities. At the same time, we lost public servants from the community.

As an example of an administrative decision, I would not want to forget the budget cuts, which have a major impact on our work in the communities. We think that it is a poor decision and that the government should change its mind, particularly but not only with respect to the Court Challenges Program.

With respect to the RCMP—and this will be my final comment—we appealed to the Supreme Court; our case is under review. The RCMP does not provide bilingual services everywhere in the province. That is a good example of why the federal government should adapt to the context. New Brunswick law requires that bilingual services be available to all of its citizens everywhere in New Brunswick. We think that the federal government regulations should take this into consideration in implementing the Official Languages Act.

● (1315)

Someone described New Brunswick as the zebra province: as you travel along the highway to Edmundston, you are entitled to services in French from the RCMP; if you are in Woodstock, it is not clear that this will be possible; in Sussex, there appears to be no need; in Moncton, there is a need; a little farther on, you don't know.

Why, in a bilingual province like New Brunswick, would the federal government not at the very least provide the minimum required under New Brunswick law?

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

I will return now to the Société santé et mieux-être du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Mr. Gionet, you have the floor.

**Mr. Norman Gionet (President, Société santé et mieux-être du Nouveau-Brunswick):** Good afternoon to you all.

I would like to begin by thanking all the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for having invited the Société santé et mieux-être en français du Nouveau-Brunswick to come and present a brief on the conditions under which our organization operates in New Brunswick.

In Acadia, we are always happy to receive important visitors, and we hope that our Acadian hospitality has met your expectations.

Our presentation will be brief, and will attempt to describe a number of French-language societal issues in New Brunswick, in addition to future prospects for the Réseau Santé en français.

Our society was founded just over three years ago. We are members of the Réseau Santé en français, which is our national counterpart. Our provincial organization has three action networks working in the field of wellness, service organization, and health training and research in French. More than 60 professionals in the province representing our partners in health are involved directly in our organization's activities. These partners include policy makers, training institutions and regional management institutions, professional associations and representatives of the Acadian and francophone community.

Our work consists of formulating and implementing strategies designed to improve access to primary health care services in French throughout the province.

We have just completed a provincial consultation entitled *Préparer le terrain*. This national initiative of the Société Santé en français was funded by Health Canada under the Primary Health Care Transition Fund. Its purpose was to develop a primary health care services plan that would provide health care system decision-makers with data to help them make well-informed decisions about the best ways of delivering primary health services to the francophone population in all regions of Canada. The project identified potential avenues for action in primary health care and services. Here are a few examples.

The communities of Fredericton, Miramichi and Saint John, which are mainly anglophone work together with the provincial government and the various regional health boards to identify and develop the optimal mode or modes of delivery to meet their specific needs and priorities.

Here is another example. Recognizing and making use of the skills available in the community health system lead to a wider range of services and to a more coordinated response to the needs of the Acadian and francophone population.

A strategy for gathering and managing information about the status of community health, which also covers all of the factors that influence health, has been developed by the provincial government in cooperation with Statistics Canada, the regional health board and the community.

We are now working to implement some of the actions identified in the course of the process. Needless to say, in Canada's only officially bilingual province, primary health issues vary considerably in terms of how they affect the Acadian and francophone population, depending on whether one is working in a region where the francophone population is predominantly francophone as opposed to a region where the population is predominantly anglophone.

This issue is what characterizes the work of our society. We all know that equitable access to health services in the language of your choice is a particular problem in a bilingual province like ours. Some regions have a very small Acadian population, but in principle, the Act guarantees access to all services in the language of your choice. One therefore needs to be highly innovative to find solutions.

We were innovative in the partnership model we used for our Société santé et mieux-être en français du Nouveau-Brunswick. We feel that a health planning process that involves the partners, including the community, allows for acceptable compromises. We further believe that planning a process like this can help avoid a number of situations like those that occurred recently in a number of Acadian and francophone regions.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate that our objective is to encourage conditions that will allow people receiving services from the health care system to be served at the appropriate time by the appropriate provider in the language of their choice.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

● (1320)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Gionet.

We now move on to the Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick. Ms. Josée Nadeau, the Director, has the floor.

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau (Director, Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick):** Good afternoon. Thank you very much for your invitation.

My name is Josée Nadeau and I am the Director of the Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick. I am speaking to you on behalf of my President, Ms. Denyse LeBouthillier.

The Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick, which has existed for 19 years now, has always lent its support to parents in education. Our mission is to encourage and strengthen the commitment and solidarity of francophone parents and the community in order to promote a school-community-family environment that is conducive to the development of children and their families.

Today, I will speak to you more specifically about early childhood, but we work in four areas: education, early childhood, culture and health.

We are also members of the Commission nationale des parents francophones and advocate the national vision of early childhood, so that francophone families in minority communities can have universal and affordable access to high-quality education services, in order to promote the overall development of early childhood within francophone institutional and community structures.

In order to achieve this vision, the AFPNB initially established the Réseau de la petite enfance francophone in 2004, and we now coordinate and manage this network. The network held its first symposium in March 2006 and, working together with the 180 or so people who attended the symposium, formulated several recommendations that were submitted to the government at the time. These recommendations included the establishment of early childhood centres that include integrated francophone services in every francophone region of the province. These services would be available in French to families from the moment a child is conceived.

As a francophone community, we need to make an effort to welcome families in order to prepare them and make them aware of their child's development, if we are to maximize our children's potential.

Research has shown that the most important interventions occur during early childhood. When we speak of early childhood here, we mean the period prior to birth until six years of age. For a long time, birth was considered the beginning. However, research into brain development has shown that before birth, the brain is already in full development. We now know that the brains of three-month old babies are already well enough organized to handle language.

We also recognize that coaching and enhancing the role of parents as the initial educators are essential to the optimization of child development.

Most people are aware of the importance of development when children are young. However, the issue is often to make it a priority and to start from the base. When the time comes to really make an investment in early childhood, there are often other priorities that bump it down the list of priorities. Intervention at the early childhood stage is all too often set aside. The most recent UNESCO report,

moreover, noted that early childhood was the poor relative in education.

The challenge for the AFPNB is to work to ensure that communities can develop a package of coordinated services which are currently scattered, and which families in the greatest need often are unable to avail themselves of. We therefore need child care centres, family resource centres and schools, not only to accommodate our children, but especially to accommodate parents.

The elimination of the Court Challenges Program will affect all parent federations in Canada. The program made it possible for us, through Supreme Court decisions, to control the management of our schools and to open several French schools. We hope that the government will reverse its decision, on behalf of all children who are entitled to an education in French. Investing in early childhood is investing in our families, our schools and our communities.

To conclude, I would like to thank you for your invitation. We are prepared to meet you individually for further discussion.

Thank you.

● (1325)

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

I now give the floor to the representative of the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick, Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier.

**Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier (President, Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick, As an Individual):** Mr. Chairman, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, good afternoon.

My name is Louis-Philippe Gauthier and I am the President of the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick.

The Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick represents approximately 1,000 members in or related to the francophone business community in our province. As a leader in this lively and dynamic community, the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick is very much interested in matters that reflect the vitality of official language minority communities. In addition to its role as a catalyst and promoter of the interests of the francophone business community in New Brunswick, the Conseil économique is also the organization delegated by the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick, which is usually called the New Brunswick RDÉE.

That said, you will therefore understand our deep concerns over the recent cuts and the disappearance of various government programs, which are necessary not only for the growth and development of minority official language communities, but also for the whole country.

We feel that decisions concerning these programs and initiatives should not be made on the basis of monetary calculations alone, but also factor in the outcomes and their effects on our communities. We believe that the savings made will never be able to offset the enormous social and economic costs that will result from these cuts to programs that have a major impact on the rights and the development of official language communities.

Today, I would like to draw your attention specifically to the elimination of the Court Challenges Program and the massive cuts to a number of literacy programs. I will then draw your attention to the renewal of the RDÉE financing agreement in order to ensure that it can continue. It is important to remember that the RDÉE plays a very important role in the economic development of minority official language communities.

To begin with, the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick is very worried about the elimination of the Court Challenges Program. Indeed, the Conseil économique is worried about the government's interpretation of the program, as it seems to perceive these cuts as a way of implying that citizens are getting more for their money.

Our question is how the minority official language communities are going to get more for their money when the Court Challenges Program disappears. Since its establishment in 1978, the program has ensured that the rights of many official language communities in Canada have been able to enforce their rights, and we are very worried about future positions that the government will take further to this decision.

Given that the committee has decided to make the vitality of official language minority communities the topic of discussion for this meeting, we believe that it is useful to point out to committee members that this vitality cannot be assured without the tools, programs and initiatives needed to promote the vitality and development of these communities, as well as respect for their fundamental rights.

Although it is more difficult to estimate the social and economic costs of eliminating the Court Challenges Program, the same cannot be said about what will happen as a result of the cuts to literacy. The Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français recently pointed out that these cuts would have a serious long-term impact on the development of francophone and Acadian communities in Canada:

The most recent International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey revealed that the average literacy rate among francophones was below that for anglophones in all regions of Canada. More than half the Canadian adult francophone population had serious trouble understanding what they were reading.

Illiteracy has a direct impact on our businesses and their development. The lower birth rate, together with the exodus and aging of our populations, have a direct impact on rural regions and on official language minority communities. These factors reduce access to qualified workers who have key skills, including reading, writing and understanding. It is therefore essential to maintain these literacy programs for the labour force for the good of our economy.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Four minutes have already gone past.

**Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier:** I will continue quickly, if I may.

These examples of major cuts to programs deemed essential for the vitality of minority official language communities are causing considerable concern to the Conseil économique about the future of the RDÉE.

The objective of Service Canada's Enabling Fund, under which the RDÉE is financed, is to fund the development and growth of

official language minority communities by capacity-building in human resources and community economic development.

To conclude, the vitality of minority official language communities requires programs that contribute to the growth and development of these communities. We are convinced that it is not too late for the government to change its mind, and to reverse its decision to cut and eliminate certain programs. We are equally convinced that we need to work even harder to protect these programs.

• (1330)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Gauthier.

We now give the floor to Mr. Lirette, of the Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada.

**Mr. Willie Lirette (President, Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada):** Mr. Chairman, asking Willie Lirette to give a three-minute summary is a bit of a stretch, but I will try to keep to the time I have been given.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** I have always believed in gymnastics, Mr. Lirette. You'll make it I'm sure.

**Mr. Willie Lirette:** The Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada is a non-profit organization that represents each of the provincial and territorial federations. We are the only national seniors organization to include all of the provinces and territories. We now have 303,000 members. We are thus the only francophone seniors organization in the country to be organized on this basis, and that includes anglophones.

To be sure, Bill S-3 would appear to provide the opportunity for more consultation of minorities, and seniors in particular. We are somewhat neglected at the Department of Human Resources and Social Development, and we are not always consulted. We suggested to the Hon. Ms. Finley that she strike a committee that would enable us to be consulted on official languages. The committee would consist of representatives from departments and our communities. We believe that this forum, or this committee, could be an opportunity for the federal government to ensure that it can effectively reach minority community francophone seniors and meet their needs.

The reason we would like to have this committee is that the department under which the New Horizons program operates has said that minority community francophone seniors very often do not receive their fair share of grants under the program. Thus, as a percentage of their demographic weight, francophone seniors receive much less than seniors from majority communities. A striking example of this is when it was decided to establish provincial committees to grant funds to organizations, very few francophones were appointed to these committees. Even in New Brunswick, we had to intervene to be represented on the committee. In Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Alberta, action had to be taken with the department to place francophones on the committees. There was even a committee requirement that francophone presentations had to be translated before sending them in. I believe that the question is now being debated at the department and that we can expect a favourable response, I hope, to this question.

The federation wants nothing more than to work with the department to ensure that such situations do not occur again and that francophones can receive equitable and fair treatment. That is only one example, but it shows just how important it is for the federal government to work together with our francophone communities.

The members of our federation would like to take this opportunity to underscore just how important it is to give greater consideration to our needs when the time comes to cut or eliminate certain programs. There is really no need to mention that the cuts being made will eliminate the structure for these programs. My impression is that the literacy program could perhaps continue, but that it would float along aimlessly. That, I believe, is where the cuts hurt.

In view of the little time available, we will only give the example of the literacy program. If seniors do not have access to appropriate programs in every area, how can they be expected to read prescriptions or even properly complete the forms they need to fill in to receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement? In this area, the government noted that over 200,000 Canadians were not receiving the supplement because they did not know they were entitled to it. Information about it had not reached seniors. And because seniors do not necessarily read well or perhaps have trouble reading, we made use of this program; we spoke about it a while ago. By making it impossible for them to complete such tasks, which are so familiar to us, are we not jeopardizing the independence and health of our francophone seniors in Canada? Francophone seniors in Canada need to be able to develop in their language, their culture and in the region in which they live. We believe strongly in this.

Lastly, on behalf of the members of the federation, I wish to thank you. I would add that I am accompanied by Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger, who is not only a member of our federation, but also the President of the Association acadienne et francophone des aînées et aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick.

•(1335)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you Mr. Lirette, you did well. You managed the gymnastics nicely.

We are now giving the floor to Mr. Richard Caissier of the Association of French Speaking Teachers of New Brunswick.

**Mr. Richard Caissier (Director General, Association of French Speaking Teachers of New Brunswick):** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I will begin by speaking about a paper that I submitted to the New Brunswick Minister and Department of Education, because it contains some things that could be useful to you.

The Association of French Speaking Teachers of New Brunswick is particularly concerned about issues that affect education, and also that affect the community in general. Programs for youth, seniors or any segment of our community have an impact, whether direct or indirect, on our community schools, particularly in minority communities.

We are especially concerned about the fact that there appears to have been a desire to cut programs which for us were closely tied to our youth education system, as well as by the effect this would have on parents or grandparents, and the direct impact this would have on the communities in which our schools are located.

Although these do not relate to all the programs, there are here in New Brunswick a number of federal programs that fall under the official languages programs. Grants made to the Department of Education, on a 50-50 basis of course, and that serve our schools and the education system in general under various initiatives or programs, all have a reasonably positive impact on our young people and on the system. These enable us to work on developing their pride in belonging to the francophonie and getting them interested in culture. As we know, schools are often rallying points for young people. They are in the majority as francophones at school, but outside of the school, they often become a minority or part of a basically anglophone community. These centres must therefore become centres for the promotion and dissemination of language and culture, a place where ties and their sense of belonging to a group can be strengthened so that they can continue into adulthood.

There are two main challenges surrounding the whole issue of francophone schools in minority communities. The first has to do with academic performance or student success as young people, and later, success as adults. The other dimension is the whole issue of language and culture, which necessarily become part of the school's mission. We need additional allies and resources in order to attempt to meet all these challenges. In a school that is located in a predominantly anglophone community, people don't need to organize French pride weeks or activities like this, which are often found in francophone schools in minority settings, simply because the culture is part of their everyday lives. For our young people in a minority community, the fact of being francophone is something experienced at school and in the family, but in the community, the francophone fact often disappears.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Caissier.

We will now move on to the question period. The first person to speak will be the MP for the official opposition, Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours. The MPs will have five minutes to speak. I will have to be very strict about this if we are to have enough time for two rounds of questions.

Mr. D'Amours.

•(1340)

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all of you for having travelled here to make your presentation before the Official Languages Committee.

I will get straight to the point. I listened to what each of you said. You spoke of different things: literacy, youth, court challenges, volunteerism, organizations and municipalities. All of these factors affect some of you, whereas for others, they are somewhat more important.

The goal is for the Action Plan for Official Languages to deliver the goods and also ensure that you can be recognized as organizations. We also want to acknowledge the people on behalf of whom you work. We have heard that the government wants to cut the fat, that illiterate adults are a lost cause, that francophone minorities are looking to the past. In speaking of these subjects and the cuts that have been made, I would like to know whether you believe that the current federal government has understood your needs. Do you feel it has understood your needs as official language minority communities, and the needs of the various organizations you represent?

**Mr. Willie Lirette:** I have just spent three days in Ottawa, because the Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada is a member of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

I must say that we are worried. The first waves of cuts hinted at what was coming. We of the francophone community—and Daniel can confirm this—are asking that Official Languages Support Programs be increased, something that has not happened in 10 years.

Last year, we received a small slice of 10%. That is not enough to deal with the problems. The status of the francophonie is not stable; it continues to progress, and each time we receive something, it increases. We informed people of this state of affairs.

It is worrisome for Canada's francophone communities. It is difficult to know exactly what is to be expected.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** I am not sure if anyone else has comments to make. Has the government understood your needs?

**Mr. Daniel Thériault:** I was going to say that for the moment, the cuts are affecting us indirectly, but that's not entirely true. Some organizations, like the federation, are directly affected by the cuts.

In fact, many organizations no longer have access to a number of programs that were previously helping them. We believe that this is a backward step with respect to the Action Plan for Official Languages.

We are beginning to get worried about what will happen to us. Our organization is working for the development of our communities. Support from the Canadian government is essential, and it is not charity. It is a duty, because it is in Canada's Constitution and in Canada's statutes. The federal government must support the Official Languages Committee. There are historical and national reasons for this, reasons that go back to the founding of the country. If our communities lack vitality, the future of Canada as a whole will be jeopardized. We are worried about what is going to happen to the Action Plan for Official Languages.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** What do you think about this, Ms. Nadeau?

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** I was also thinking about the cancellation of the agreement with the provinces for child care centres. Creating new child care spaces for our francophones would have been a great help to them.

We are not going to hide the fact that we were rather relying on that to pursue our action in terms of early childhood development. This may be a provincial jurisdiction, but the federal government

needs to help young families have more children. It needs sound family policies and it needs to create child care spaces.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** You have the floor Mr. André.

• (1345)

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Good afternoon.

I will continue by speaking about the Court Challenges Program. I am aware of the fact that New Brunswick had some striking victories thanks to the program, particularly in terms of the health care network. You fought a good fight in Acadia.

What impact will the elimination of this program have on the development of your community and of the francophonie in New Brunswick? I know that it is important.

According to you, why did the government cut this program? What was the overall idea behind it? What alternative would you suggest as a way of defending your community's rights?

**Mr. Daniel Thériault:** I thought that someone else wanted to answer. As I represent the Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick, and as that is rather the focus of our action, I will answer.

We did indeed have several victories. Thanks to the Court Challenges Program, we were able to intervene and get involved in a case that challenged a number of parts of the Official Languages Act. There is a new Official Languages Act that applies to municipalities, which was not the case before. Furthermore, the Canada Health Act contain no provisions about official languages. The current Act is now stronger from this standpoint. That was a victory then.

We were successful in maintaining the boundaries of the Acadie-Bathurst electoral district as a result of this program. We had an initial victory with respect to the RCMP, because the judges ruled in our favour. Unfortunately, the federal government challenged the victory. Then, there were reservations about the initial judgment and we are appealing this to the Supreme Court of Canada. We received a response from the Court Challenges Program on September 12 telling us that our project was being supported.

We could not have fought these battles without the program, or at least it would have been difficult. We are talking about many thousands of dollars. When there is a challenge, the thousands of dollars in legal fees build up and not many organizations can cover those sorts of expenses, and it is even more difficult for individuals. That is what this program has made possible. As for the schools, there were cases in Prince Edward Island where it made the difference between having a school and not having one. We used it to strengthen the political-legal framework in New Brunswick.

**Mr. Guy André:** Why do you feel this program was eliminated? Were there excesses? What reasons did the government give for eliminating a program like this one?

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** We don't know why it was done, because our community was not consulted. That was one of our greatest frustrations when the cuts were announced. We were never consulted to determine whether the fat was being cut or whether the program was useful to francophones. As I mentioned earlier, parents federations receive a great deal of assistance under the program. I would find it hard to believe that it would be possible for one or two parents, or francophone organizations, to be able to do battle in the Supreme Court to have a school in their community. Asking for that would be almost foolish.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** There are 45 seconds remaining.

**Mr. Richard Caissier:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I would add that one of the rare advantages of Canadian society has been that governments gave tools to the disadvantaged or to the weaker groups to allow them to challenge decisions that were disadvantageous to them. This enabled them to challenge the government's decisions. Perhaps the current government has eliminated these services or these tools because they are afraid of criticism or challenges from citizens and the most vulnerable among us.

• (1350)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Caissier.

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

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Thank you for your presentations.

This is the first time that the committee has travelled to meet you on your home territory. This took place while our party is in power; it's important.

I thank you for having shared with us your challenges and this information. This meeting also gives us an opportunity to provide you with some key information. Our government would like to support and promote the vitality of your minority language communities. I would like to give you a few examples. We have just announced a number of initiatives, including a billion-agreement between the provincial and federal government to promote official languages.

I noticed that there are many accomplishments within your education systems. You have 143 schools at each level, perhaps more today. It is a major accomplishment and I congratulate you on it.

Among other initiatives for communities, we announced a \$120 million-agreement to work directly with your communities to keep them vital, which represents an 11% increase.

As for literacy, although there have been cuts, we are going to spend \$82 million on literacy over the next two years. You therefore have our support, and we are going to spend that amount on these programs.

You represent several associations and organizations and you informed us today of a number of needs. How do you work together to set priorities? It is easy to have numerous challenges, but it is

really important to have priorities. In New Brunswick, what are the five priorities?

How are you going to work together to talk about all the challenges and set the priorities?

**Mr. Daniel Thériault:** Somewhat earlier, I spoke briefly about the Forum de concertation des organismes acadiens. This involves 32 francophone organizations that sat around the same table and established an overall development plan. They set their priorities sector-by-sector. The brief that we submitted to Ms. Verner in May sets out the priorities by sector and indicates the societal issues at stake. I would ask the committee to perhaps have it translated so that everyone can share it. That is how we set our priorities. We truly work towards developing our communities. We have succeeded in many areas, and we could talk about them if we had more time.

**Mr. Achille Maillet:** One of the priorities we discussed was precisely the question of cuts. I presume, Mr. Lemieux, that you are on the government's side. You are therefore perhaps in a position to answer the question, because as Ms. Nadeau was saying earlier, we were never consulted. These cuts directly affect the francophone and Acadian population in the Atlantic provinces; no doubt about it. We do not have the answers because we were not consulted. We would like to suggest some answers to you, such as going back on your decision, as Mr. Gauthier was suggesting, because it is really doing some damage.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I will answer you. There were no cuts for official languages. The funds are there. Furthermore, let us take the example of farm assistance programs. We cut \$5 million, but there is one little-known fact: there were administrative expenses of \$15 million to pay out \$11 million. Administrative costs are indeed very high. We did not reduce the programs directly, but cut back on \$5 million in administrative expenses. It is almost the same for the other cuts. There have been cuts, but the programs remain, the funds remain, and our government will support your communities and your needs as effectively as possible.

• (1355)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** There can be no answer to this question.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger (As an Individual):** I have been trying to speak several times.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** I can't let you speak unless I give you part of my time. I am going to give you an opportunity to speak. Normally, as I have said at previous meetings of the committee, I would be sitting elsewhere to ask my question, but I'm going to do so here.

I would like to correct Mr. Lemieux, who said that the Conservative government had come here to meet us. If it was the government, there would at least be a minister. It's the parliamentary committee, which includes representatives from all the political parties, that is here and that has a mandate from Parliament. It is not the government that is here, but the four political parties represented in Canada's Parliament.

There was discussion of cuts. Mr. Lemieux said that millions were injected, but what is the impact? That is the question I want to ask. For example, Bill S-3 was enacted, after being introduced by Jean-Robert Gauthier, the former senator. He made three attempts before Canada's Parliament enacted it. The Liberals were no better back in the day.

If the Court Challenges Program is eliminated, how far of a backward step will this be? There may be a lot of money. Mr. Lemieux spoke of \$15 million on administration and \$11 million for the communities or for the people. That's all very well, but without this program, would we still have the Montfort Hospital in Ottawa? Would there be a francophone school in Prince Edward Island? Would there be a francophone school in British Columbia? That is the question that needs to be asked and that is what we ought to be telling our government.

I would like to give Mr. Bélanger an opportunity to speak, because he has wanted to say something for some time.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger:** I do not know who is advising the government at the moment, but it has gone completely off the rails. First of all, it is not adhering to the fundamental principle of Bill S-3, which is to hold consultations. There are perhaps other ways of working, other ways of doing it, but we've been told about cuts, forecasts and things of which we are not aware, and about which we were not consulted. The purpose of this act is to really have consultations and to develop partnerships with the minority francophone communities in the country. Acting as they have goes completely against the basic principle underlying this act. I find this incomprehensible and unfortunate for the Acadian and francophone population and minorities in Canada. What is happening is senseless. We are really devastated by it. We are prepared to cooperate and to look into ways that we can work together, but we need to be consulted. You can't make budget cuts to Canada's francophone minorities on this scale without working with them. It demonstrates a deplorable level of awareness and a lack of information.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** This was Bill S-3.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger:** That is correct; yes.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Mr. Gauthier, did you want to talk about the cuts?

**Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier:** Mr. Lemieux said that the government was going to spend money. I would like to point out that we are not the people he ought to be telling about these things. It is up to you to communicate them effectively. In the same week, we saw cuts of over a billion dollars in programs that were essential to our communities, and paying down the \$13 billion-debt, if I am not mistaken. The spending should have been announced at the same time.

Of course, there is the issue of consultation. The communities were not consulted. This is the interpretation the government has given to current legislation. I would add my voice to the opinion of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada to the effect that this complies neither with the letter nor the spirit of the Official Languages Act.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** I would like to hear what you think. I would not deny the \$15 million-figure, but let's total up the value of volunteerism in Canada! What would happen to the

minority communities if the people who work in the associations and give their time to their community decided to pack up their bags, go home and stop doing things?

**Mr. Achille Maillet:** What can I add to that? You are absolutely right. Volunteerism is invaluable. When I think of my little community of Dieppe, I know that without our volunteers, Dieppe would not be what it is either now or in the future. The contribution of volunteers in Canada is priceless. How can you place a value on it? You have raised another very important point, Mr. Godin. Once again, it is incomprehensible, very unfortunate and pitiful to see what the Harper government has given us and is forcing us to swallow. It is senseless.

• (1400)

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

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to thank all the guests.

I think that the committee needs to be careful and avoid falling into the trap of becoming too political. On the other hand, I see that every time we have been invited, people talk about the cuts and tell us how devastating they have been for them. I believe that people are feeling them strongly right now because these cuts are very recent: they are only a month old. I can tell you that they have also been devastating for us. They target francophone organizations. I understand exactly what you are saying.

Yesterday, we were in Newfoundland, where only 0.4% of the population is francophone. This morning, we heard talk about Prince Edward Island, where the percentage is perhaps 2%. At home, it is 4%. Here, you represent 33% of the population, you have physical infrastructures and your province is officially bilingual. I tell myself that this is paradise and wonder how these people can have problems. If you come to our corner of the country, you will see what I mean.

Could you enlighten me a bit? Does the problem stem from the fact that francophones are in one corner of the country and anglophones in another? Are services for francophones deficient there or is there an anglophone majority?

There was discussion of moving. Earlier, Mr. Maillet spoke, I believe, about workplaces and other things. What is the big problem here? It seems to me that you have done everything that needed to be done.

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** One of the problems for us at the Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick is that things like specialized health services are not accessible in several regions. Families call me up because they are trying to find a francophone speech therapist and it's impossible to find one. The wait lists are for three years. There are still serious problems. If we are talking about the Acadian Peninsula and the northwestern and northeastern part of the province, the community is more anglo-francophone, if I may describe it in this way. In fact, the majority is now francophone. However, here the southeastern part of the province, in Kent county, in Saint John, in Fredericton and in Miramichi, there is still an enormous amount of work to be done in terms of services for francophones. For example, offices for federal services have been moved. Some of the offices that have been closed are also causing enormous harm to francophones, even though we make up 33% of the population.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Are you talking about the regions where you are in the majority?

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** Yes.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Okay.

**Mr. Richard Caissier:** I would like to return to the comments of the gentleman who wanted to reduce the administration work involved with the grants. In a minority community, there is nevertheless a difficult situation because we don't have the structures or the infrastructures needed to provide administrative services. We are working on developing services, such as forums to get the organizations working together. However, if they only have program funds, such administrative services will not be introduced, because the organizations do not have the administrative structure required to manage all these programs. Our communities are at a disadvantage from the administrative standpoint. We have infrastructures in place, but not enough to manage our volunteers, for example, or to organize and submit grant applications—

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** We will return to this, because I have only five minutes.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** That is correct.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Thank you.

I would like to return to Mr. Gauthier. We are familiar with the economic and employability development networks, or the RDÉE, which we have. The people of Prince Edward Island I believe told us this morning that they did not have enough funding for projects.

Does the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency fund your RDÉEs? In our province, for example—

**Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier:** RDÉE funding comes from the Service Canada Enabling Fund. In view of the cuts that have been made, we are wondering whether the funding will be renewed in 2008.

The direction taken by the New Brunswick RDÉE is to act as the intermediary and analyst for possible projects, in addition to being the coordinator, because we already have a number of infrastructures. The New Brunswick RDÉE definitely has an extremely positive impact on economic development and employability.

Is ACOA making a contribution? Yes. All of the federal, provincial and municipal authorities are working hand-in-hand with the RDÉEs.

We are worried about the renewal in 2008 of the Service Canada Enabling Fund. Needless to say, the RDÉE had some difficult moments a few years ago. Will it be renewed? Given that the francophone community was not consulted before the cuts were decided upon, will it be consulted when the time comes for renewal? I think we need to begin talking about this.

•(1405)

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

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC):** I want to thank you for having travelled here to come and share your concerns with us. I think that it is important for the government to know about the problems in order to be able to identify them. That is what we are here for.

I want you to know that our government, and Ms. Verner in particular, are working very hard. We firmly believe in official languages and the francophonie. Don't ever forget that.

I have spoken a great deal about cuts, but I am sure that each and every one of you has several accomplishments of which you are very proud. I would like to know which is the accomplishment of which you are most proud and how you managed to achieve it.

**Mr. Norman Gionet:** As I mentioned somewhat earlier, the roots of our Société santé et mieux-être en français du Nouveau-Brunswick go back to the Dion plan in 2003. We have only been in operation for three years. Before that, as a member of a university community with interests in the health field, we worked mainly in a silo. If I had concerns about certain health problems, I might have a great deal of difficulty gathering people around me. Our society has developed a model that resembles that of the World Health Organization. Every time we meet, there are the following five major partners: political decision-makers, health institutions, educational institutions, the community and health professionals.

Whenever we meet, the eight New Brunswick provincial boards, the community and the other partners that I previously mentioned are all around the table. I believe that was a success.

However, when we talk about how little money there is, Canada should perhaps look at what we have done. We and the other francophone organizations take this small amount of money and do a great deal of work. We are talking about \$250,000. In view of our results and our impact on the community, our achievement needs to be celebrated. The federal government should look at what we have done because we could serve as a model, even for the anglophones.

To conclude, I would like to mention another accomplishment: Our society is a part of 17 national networks. We met two or three times elsewhere in Canada and shared our problems with all of Canada's provinces and territories, with very little money.

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

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** Our greatest accomplishment is having been able to continue to operate with less and less money. As Mr. Gionet just said, we are continuing to be successful. Five years ago, our association had \$140,000 per year; we are currently receiving \$125,000 from Canadian Heritage. Our funds are not increasing, and our grants are getting smaller and smaller, but we are nevertheless managing to survive because we believe what we are doing and are determined to remain vital.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** If I have understood correctly, your greatest challenge is funding.

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** It is indeed one of the greatest challenges.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** It is one of the greatest challenges.

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

**Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger:** I heard Ms. Boucher's comments, but hope that the government will do something tangible. You spoke about the intention to support official languages, but we, the minority francophones of New Brunswick, are worried.

I will also have something to say to Mr. Simard, who seems to believe that everything is going well in New Brunswick. Yes, we have moved forward, we have made progress, but we needed resources to do it and we need even more now. Our population is evolving. Even though things are going well and even though there has been progress, there are still many things to be done in terms of health, cardiac laboratories, hospital employees or a francophone board. I know that provincial matters are not within your jurisdiction, but there is work to be done in our communities, and even our provincial governments must do something to move things forward. More resources are needed—not fewer resources—to continue to progress and play on a level playing field. But this requires that we be consulted. There are discussions about partnerships with organizations, but it is not enough to talk about these things; they need to be done. The government is not giving us any concrete signs about its interest in francophone issues; if it were to do so, it would give us hope. What we have been seeing is the very opposite. It makes no sense.

• (1410)

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

**Mr. Guy André:** As this is the second round of questions, I will attempt to move things along quickly, because several questions have been raised.

To begin with, I would like to address the issue of consultation. I know that there have been cuts and that the Court Challenges Program was shelved without any consultation. That is what you've told us this afternoon.

I believe that governments always have one fear. I worked in the community field for many years, and when the time came to announce cuts to the Department of Health and Social Services, we took action and were given a cheque. When cuts are involved, the impression is that government representatives hide and are afraid to meet us, which often gives the impression that they have been cutting in the wrong places.

When there is a budget deficit—which is not the case at the federal level, I feel—people can be consulted to determine where the cuts can be made. With respect to the francophone communities, how would you approach such consultations and a way of evaluating priorities, which has not yet been done? I think that you have said that you have infrastructures. I would still like to hear your comments on this subject.

Second, do you feel that you are receiving your share of the budget at the moment with respect to local and community economic development in the francophone communities of New Brunswick? Are there any projects you put forward that were affected by administrative delays, and that are at a standstill or not going anywhere?

Third, in health, there is often discussion of the level of education, and low incomes. I know that the francophone communities feel that they are losing vitality. If you consult certain statistics, it can often be seen that incomes are lower, etc. Is this reflected in the health problems of Acadians? Have ways been put forward to enable each individual to receive appropriate services in accordance with the reality of the communities?

**Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier:** You asked me whether I thought that the francophone community in New Brunswick was receiving its share of the economic development budget.

First of all, there is unfortunately too often the perception on the national level that the Atlantic regions are waiting for grants. I think that our business community is very dynamic; it knows where the resources are; it can do many things and it can go and find what it needs.

As for assurances that the ACOA will always be there to support private-sector projects or departments such as Industry Canada, etc., we certainly hope that the funds will be there. The thing is to ensure that the existing structures are maintained and properly funded. I would like to end my comments on that note.

**Mr. Norman Gionet:** If I could comment. As you know, there is definitely a correlation between socioeconomic level and health. The interesting thing is that our society consults and works with various partners to identify the problems involved in the health of our population. This is not done at the provincial or even national level, even though the data are beginning to come in. It is really essential to know the status of our community's health.

Society, together with its various partners, is trying to effect a shift towards wellness. So we may well go beyond health as such including, as you mentioned, the factors influencing health in terms of income, poverty, etc. Our society is thus becoming very sensitive to the issues that affect our population.

• (1415)

**Mr. Guy André:** Is there a significant gap between anglophones and francophones in New Brunswick?

**Mr. Norman Gionet:** Léandre Desjardins carried out a study of the population, but once again it is very difficult to collect data. It is not completely clear, but the fact remains that depending on where you live, there are certainly differences between rural and urban communities. We can only speculate about whether there is a francophone majority in a given region. That is highly likely where the problem lies, because we do not have the tools needed to identify the differences between francophones and anglophones.

**Mr. Guy André:** Okay.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** That's all. Thank you, Mr. André.

Now it's my turn. I would like to raise two subjects. The first concerns the health sector and hospitals. Ms. Nadeau mentioned earlier how difficult the situation was in the southern part of the province compared to the north. But it must not be forgotten that several hospitals were closed in the north.

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** Absolutely.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** We took the hit and are asking ourselves how far it will go. Hospitals were closed in Lamèque, Caraquet and Dalhousie, and several beds were closed in Saint-Quentin, etc. The hit was taken entirely on the francophone side.

I would like your opinion about this and I would like to know what the network can do. The Standing Committee on Official Languages could pass on your message about the cuts made by the federal government. Of course, we can't blame only the current government, because the 1994 government did its share as well.

The second subject I would like to raise is literacy. On this topic, I would like to hear what the Association of French Speaking Teachers of New Brunswick has to say about this. I don't know if anyone here can talk to us about literacy. It's not "fun"—I say "fun", because in New Brunswick we are bilingual—to learn that we are in a province where 64% of francophones are illiterate. That's nothing to be proud of.

Would you want the Standing Committee on Official Languages to put in its report what you have to say about cuts to literacy?

Let's begin by talking about health.

**Mr. Gilles Vienneau (Director General, Société santé et mieux-être du Nouveau-Brunswick):** First of all, it is clear that health is a very sensitive issue that gets people excited rather quickly. I have already heard you in Parliament, Mr. Godin, and it was—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** I never get excited.

**Mr. Gilles Vienneau:** No, you're not an excitable guy at all.

The Société santé et mieux-être du Nouveau-Brunswick would like the consultation process that is to be established at the regional and local level—and even if need be at the provincial level—to take distinctive features into consideration in taking financial decisions for a community, a majority and a minority. There are important decisions to be made. The model that we are trying to introduce aims precisely at giving the communities a degree of power—or at least influence from the consultation standpoint—to prevent any cuts.

In New Brunswick, the Act is clear. It provides for health services for all citizens, in the language of their choice, wherever they may be in the province, and that's what we want. The reality, on the other hand, is something else again. Unfortunately, when the time comes for policy decisions, they are made the same way for everyone. History has taught us that in a minority context, the minority often takes more of a hit than the majority. It is therefore a question of tools, empowerment and capacity building. That is what the organizations around the table do. That is what our work is.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you. I would like to hear a comment about literacy.

**Mrs. Josée Nadeau:** To be sure, if the francophone community had been consulted about the literacy cuts, it would have said no. As Mr. Godin said, 64% of the francophone community is illiterate. But what is more worrisome still is that of this percentage, 40% are 40 years of age and under. We are therefore speaking about parents, adults who work on an everyday basis. These are parents who cannot help their children do their homework or educate them as they ought to be educated.

The situation is indeed very worrisome. We are very concerned, and I find it unfortunate that the Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick is not here today, because it could have been very vocal. Unfortunately, this group will disappear because it has been deeply affected by the cuts. The group will disappear within a few months.

• (1420)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** My five minutes are up, and, as the others have done, I will yield the floor.

If there is unanimity on this matter among the members of the committee, I will give Mr. Petit five minutes to give him an opportunity to ask his questions.

**Some voices:** Okay.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Go ahead Mr. Petit.

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Thank you for coming. I will try to summarize your comments at this point. I am a member of Parliament; that will help you to understand what I am going to tell you.

First of all, I would draw your attention to the following: after taking each of your measures into consideration, I have noted that the Court Challenges Program was mentioned several times. If I have understood your message correctly, and as I must prepare a report, this would appear to be the key topic at the moment. Except that I am going to skip over it for the time being to ask you whether there is anything else. I did not travel 5,000 km to hear only about that.

I would like to know, as representatives of an active and powerful community like yours, whether there is something other than the Court Challenges Program. I have five pages [*Editor's note: technical difficulties*]. However, could you tell me, because we need to be proactive, what you are lacking, and not merely from the legal standpoint. I understand and have taken note of it. There is no need to go over it again.

Are there any key projects that you would like us to pass on to the Standing Committee on Official Languages and that could generate something?

**Mr. Achille Maillet:** When I return—

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** That is for anyone; it's an open question.

**Mr. Achille Maillet:** Thank you. I would like to return to the Court Challenges Program.

I referred earlier to services available in both official languages. There is access to French-language services on the one hand and on the other, there is the whole economic aspect. When offices are transferred to major centres where the majority is anglophone, our francophone officials need to work in an anglophone environment, and that, Mr. Petit, reduces their opportunities for working in the language of their choice.

Here is my final point, which you could take note of and pass on. In this corner of the country, we work hard to combat assimilation, and everything that I spoke about promotes an environment in which assimilation is predominant.

**Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier:** If I may speak, I will be brief.

You spoke about key projects. According to studies carried out by the previous government—I can no longer remember which department was involved—a 1 per cent-increase in literacy has a direct impact on the gross domestic product.

How are we in New Brunswick, given the realities of our francophone communities with respect to the labour force, going to be able to cope with needs for ultra-qualified workers in context of globalization, and given our high illiteracy rate? You mentioned a key project, one that would have a direct impact on Canada's economy and on Canada's positioning from a global standpoint.

**Mr. Daniel Thériault:** *[Editor's note: inaudible]*.

**Mr. Louis-Philippe Gauthier:** Illiteracy and the cuts related to it.

**Mr. Daniel Thériault:** Do I have the floor?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Yes.

**Mr. Daniel Thériault:** There is perhaps someone else... Jean-Luc?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Be brief to allow Mr. Bélanger to state his point of view. Okay, go ahead.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger:** I do not want to be unpleasant, but it seems to me that we have discussed several subjects and not only the legal issue. I do not know whether we are all at the same table or whether we agree.

In connection with social considerations and seniors, we pointed out earlier that we were concerned about the New Horizons Program, among other things. I do not wish to refer to the former government, but we requested from that government a francophone budgetary envelope for the New Horizons Program. We took some steps that were on their way to becoming a reality. We renewed our request and met some people at our AGM in St. Boniface and in Winnipeg in June to take this into consideration. Indeed, there are still many francophone minorities in Canada that are not receiving their proper share of the New Horizons Program.

Here again, literacy comes into the picture. When members of seniors clubs and people who are beyond a certain age want to complete registration forms, there are no resources to help them. If there were a budgetary envelope for francophones, the organizations here could help these people submit applications and follow up on them. It is not always easy for them to do so. The vocabulary used on forms is such that many elderly people, because of their poor literacy, cannot understand. Sometimes these people do not even take the trouble to apply for many government programs, thereby depriving themselves of benefits. Literacy is a truly important factor not only for seniors, but in every area that we have talked about around this table.

I want to note the absence of some key people from this committee. There was definitely a lack of communication, because other francophone organizations from New Brunswick could have been represented. I do not know what happened. My comment is not negative; simply a statement of fact. There are organizations in New Brunswick, such as the Forum de concertation des organismes acadiens and the AAFNB, who know all the francophone organizations working in New Brunswick in every field. You could contact them when you are going to meet as a parliamentary committee or otherwise, to keep them informed about what is going on, because they would like to be able to take part.

We want to cooperate with you, but in order to do so we need to be informed. We need to be consulted if we are to be able to communicate with you to move forward on various files.

● (1425)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin):** Thank you.

That adjourns our meeting this afternoon in New Brunswick. Earlier, we covered Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.

I have taken note of the constructive criticisms and assure you that our committee has not completed its work. Many associations were invited to come and meet us, including the SAANB. It is true that the invitations may have reached you at the last minute, but all I can say is that the work of Parliament has been proceeding at a furious pace for some time now. We are trying to do our best. This is the first time in 25 years the committee has travelled to meet in a region. Thus on a positive note, I can tell you that this will not be the last time. When we hold meetings in Ottawa, we invite groups to come and meet us and give presentations. We see groups that come to meet MPs. For example, a seniors' literacy group came to meet us in Ottawa last week. We want to continue our efforts in this direction.

A moment ago, Mr. Petit said that all he had understood was one thing: the comments about court challenges. I can tell you that there is more than one person at the table; I certainly heard other things. I am convinced that you raised other issues besides the court challenges. The francophonie affects minorities; it is a whole.

We are preparing a report that will be submitted to the government.

Thank you.

The committee must now go to the University of Moncton. We Thank you and good afternoon.  
need to pick up our suitcases and be ready by 2:45 p.m.

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