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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning everyone. While the committee members take their seats, we will begin our meeting.

First, I want to welcome representatives of francophone communities from across the country. There are two from the Prairies, two from the Maritimes and one from Nunavut.

Before we begin, we have a motion prepared and moved by Mr. Lemieux on our agenda.

Good morning, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Before the motion is presented, I would like to advise committee members that we have received confirmation from two witnesses. Radio-Canada has confirmed it will attend the May 27 meeting. We will talk about the CBC. We will have the coast guard on May 29.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you very much. You have the motion in front of you. On May 26, 2008, we will be visited by a Finnish delegation headed by the Honourable Pär Stenbäck, former minister for the Swedish-Finnish Cultural Fund. The purpose of the delegation's visit is to learn about Canadian official languages legislation, at both the federal and provincial level, and about the education systems for the official language minority communities.

Mr. Chair, I would like to move that we, as a committee, take part in a lunch here on the Hill. There have also been some discussions with the official languages commissioner. He too is interested in attending this luncheon. The motion seeks to ask the clerk of our committee to make the necessary arrangements for a lunch with the Honourable Pär Stenbäck.

The Chair: Excellent. Is the committee ready for the question?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: With no further delay, we will now turn to our witnesses. I had the opportunity to take part in the inauguration of the Festival du Voyageur along with Mr. Boucher, just a few weeks ago. This morning, as I indicated, we have five witnesses. There is a lot of material. I invite the witnesses to get to the heart of the matter, so that we can allow our parliamentarians to learn more about your presentations through exchanges.

With no further delay, I give Mr. Boucher the floor.

Mr. Daniel Boucher (President and Executive Director, Société franco-manitobaine): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for having taken the time to meet with us here today.

I'll be quite brief, as the chair has asked, so that we can move on to questions. I think that we could talk about the various issues a little later.

You asked a few questions, when you invited us here. I think that, generally speaking, the communities had a good experience with the Canada-community agreements, nevertheless, various quite serious problems remain with regard to the way those agreements are managed, particularly with regard to some of your questions.

I have held this position since the first agreement was signed, in 1994; I saw the evolution. I was around even before the agreements, so I remember how things worked previously. I can tell you that there has been progress, but, at the same time, not enough of it, for example with regard to funding. I know that this issue is often raised, money really does make the world go round. I think that there are very significant challenges with regard to funding of the agreements. Our communities need funding that is not forthcoming in order to fulfil demands and implement initiatives.

I think that organizations feel a little bit like the air is being squeezed out of them. Currently, due to a lack of funding, we don't have the capacity to innovate, to expand or keep our staff. We know that this is a very significant issue. As you know, we feel that we're doing important work for Canada and for our communities. We are present in each of our communities, which is very important for our provinces and territories. To this end, we need financial support.

I would go even a little further and say that, in our communities, we represent the heart of the francophonie, but we also welcome a new and different francophonie. For example, in our region, we are seeing more and more francophone immigrants. We need resources to take in these immigrants. We are getting some from the Canadian government, but mainly from the province of Manitoba, in our case.

We also need money for people who are learning French in Manitoba. For example, there are 105,000 people who speak both official languages. We must be able to present our culture to these people, to provide them with services and programs, among other things. All these things are very important and are related to the funding our organizations receive.

With regard to accountability, red tape remains and has been around for years and years, and centuries and centuries. Frankly, there are no more excuses for it. It is now May 1 and we still haven't heard about our funding, which started on April 1, and we don't expect to hear about it for some time. We feel that this situation, which has existed for quite some time, is not normal.

With regard to all the reports that we have to write, once again, they take resources and expertise. We want to do professional work. We believe in being accountable and all that it entails. In our opinion, it's extremely important to be accountable, but we need resources to do so.

As far as managing our priorities, I think it is important that there be more coordination with regard to all the agreements in our communities. We are talking here about the Canada-community agreement, but we also have other agreements, such as the Canada-province agreements. We need to be much more strategic with regard to our agreements. We need to keep the bigger picture in mind. The community must be able to have the bigger picture, both to be effective and to ensure long-term planning. So, in our opinion, managing priorities means taking into consideration all these factors and ensuring that we have a real place at the table. We don't just want to be consulted, we want to be part of the decision-making process in relation to all these agreements, be it in the area of education, the Canada-province agreements or the Canada-community agreements. So we feel that managing priorities is extremely important.

Finally, we recommend to the committee that the next agreements be truly negotiated with each of the provinces and territories so that those agreements meet the needs of each jurisdiction instead of having a one-size-fits-all or a cookie-cutter approach.

• (0910)

In our opinion, it's extremely important to have agreements that truly meet our needs on the ground. However, this will require additional investments in some regions for all kinds of reasons: be it that there are more needs, that those needs are greater, etc. I think that we have to address that issue in that context.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I want to thank you and I will now give the floor to my colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boucher.

We will now move over to New Brunswick, a place where people are getting their feet wet. Let's hope that they dry off rather quickly. Let's welcome Ms. Simard, President, Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick and Mr. Godin. I invite you to make your presentation.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard (President, Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick): Mr. Chairman, members, first of all, I want to thank you for your invitation. Before elaborating on the matters of concern to us, allow me to recall some of the history of the organization I represent.

The Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick, which was founded in 1973, is a provincial organization dedicated to the defence and promotion of the collective rights and interests of the Acadian community of New Brunswick. It acts as the official political mouthpiece of New Brunswick's Acadian community.

The Acadian community's community sector consists of 33 provincial organizations represented within the Forum de concertation des organismes acadiens and is divided into five spheres of action: the arts, culture and communication; the economy; education; the socio-community sector; and the socio-political sector.

Of course, many regional and local organizations that are not members of the Forum also work for the development and vitality of the Acadian community and may receive funding under the Collaboration Accord.

For the years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, we have \$1,952,000 under the Collaboration Accord annually to support our programs, whereas demand is in the order of \$2,900,000. As regards support for innovation, we have \$488,000 a year. For 2008-2009, demand equals approximately \$900,000 for the first round of projects, and we expect nearly the same amount for the second round. The situation was the same last year.

It is easy to understand from these figures that, since the groups do not have the bare minimum in which to operate, they're cutting back their initiatives and the services they offer to their members. In general, this situation is slowing the overall sustainable development of our community.

Due to a lack of financial, technical and human resources, most groups are already unable to engage in development or to deliver the required services to the community and to their members. Without enough skilled and well-paid professional resources, the organizations cannot design, plan, deliver and evaluate the services they provide. The first services that have already been cut are the regular updating of websites, information-sharing and the creation of tools to develop community skills.

The chronic underfunding of support for action undermines the energy of volunteers and employees, who in many cases must work over-time without pay simply to find basic funding and to organize funding activities. As a result of the lack of marketing and communication professionals, expected results are not being achieved. In addition, the private sector is highly sought after in funding campaigns organized by institutions. Companies, of which there are a limited number, also have limits on the resources they can use to provide financial assistance to the groups that request it.

It goes without saying that this underfunding of support for action dangerously undermines sectoral and intersectoral consultation efforts and forces groups to scale back their work efforts. This situation prevents them from taking effective action to achieve the results contemplated by the two signatories of the Collaboration Accord.

To achieve, in spite of everything, the results contemplated by their members and the community, groups rely to a high degree on funding for innovation. This is how major activities have seen the light of day.

The organizations are thus caught in a vicious circle and are faced daily with unresolvable dilemmas. Heritage Canada cannot forget that these organizations were created to meet the needs expressed by the public or that they offer a host of services that no government could deliver based on current funding levels or without the contributions of the many volunteers working for them.

All of this obviously has a very negative impact on the stability and efficiency of the organizations, which face significant staff and volunteer turnover. A number of initiatives requiring long-term work in order to achieve results will never be completed. Many ideas and tools developed for structural projects will stop and be lost as a result of a lack of resources.

This situation also prevents new initiatives from being created and developed. Since budgets have already been exhausted, for both action and innovation, many groups do not file applications, knowing there is no money to fund them. When funding is granted for support for action to an organization that has not yet received any or for a new project, the funding granted to other organizations is reduced because the budget remains the same.

In our constantly changing minority community, that seriously undermines the ability of the local community and populations to take charge of their full development.

• (0915)

This situation was moreover the reason for a request to increase funding for the Acadian community sector under the Canada-community agreement, made to the former minister of Canadian Heritage, Ms. Beverly Oda, and to the present minister, Ms. Josée Verner. I hope that you will be able to support us in this effort.

The figures on this matter speak for themselves. Since the first agreement between the Government of Canada and the Acadian community of New Brunswick, in 1994, the Acadian community, which represents 25% of the minority francophone population, has received only 10% of budgeted funding earmarked for the agreements with the various provinces and territories. On a per capita basis, New Brunswick stands in second-last place among the provinces and territories, with \$10 per francophone. Only Ontario, with \$9 per francophone, receives less funding. This situation must change. I invite you to consult the table in the appendix at the end of this document.

I would add, on this funding issue, that the word “indexing” has never been part of the language used in dealing with the funding of the organizations of the Acadian community sector in New Brunswick. It is therefore strongly recommended that multi-year funding be extended for the term of the agreements. With respect to accountability, the Acadian community sector has long had to provide extensive justification of the way in which it allocates its revenue to the various expenditure items, which is normal. However, we find the governments' requirements of the community sector excessive to say the least. The groups' administrators must often file two or three reports on how they use each grant received, regardless of the amount in question. Furthermore, each funding agency has its own evaluation forms and, more often than not, requires detailed performance indicators. In addition to that is the fact that, every time there is a staff change at a funding organization, accountability factors are subject to new interpretations to which the organizations must adjust.

In the context of the renewal of the Canada-community agreements, it would therefore be appropriate to review the frequency of reports that must be filed and to prepare a standard list of performance indicators as well as a standard form in which they must be presented.

With regard to the management of agreements, in the early 1990s, before the Canada-community agreements were put in place, the Acadian community had already observed that the funding granted to it by the Office of the Secretary of State—which has become Canadian Heritage—under the official languages program was inadequate to meet its development needs. A number of sectoral organizations were also established at that time, as a result of which the number of grant applications increased for both basic and project funding. It was also at that time that major reductions were made to the program as part of the budget cuts ordered by the federal government.

• (0920)

The Chair: I just wanted to point out that you only have about two minutes left, Ms. Simard.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: To support its commitments to the implementation of the Official Languages Act, the federal government made financial resources available to the minority communities to support community development and vitality-enhancing efforts.

Following two rounds of Canada-community agreements, new institutions were established and institutional networks strengthened. In March 2003, the Government of Canada adopted the Action Plan for Official Languages, which in fact renewed the Canadian government's commitment to linguistic duality.

Lastly, as noted above, the Acadian community of New Brunswick has been financially supported since August 2005 by a Canadian Heritage contribution agreement designed to support its development and vitality. The organizations benefiting from past agreements have been in a better position to plan their action strategies and to ensure the implementation and funding of community development activities.

The amounts that we have obtained have been managed in a sound and transparent manner, even though the last collaboration accord funded only 45% of financial needs.

New Brunswick's Acadian and francophone community must absolutely open up to francophone immigration and to cultural diversity in order to offset the declining birth rate and exodus of its population to regions of the country that are experiencing a sustained economic growth. However, the programs at Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which are aimed at settlement agencies, are hard for community groups to access. And yet success in the area of immigrant integration relies on greater awareness on the part of the host community and the reinforcement of francophone intake structures.

In the current state of affairs, even though many organizations are aware of the importance of these issues, none can assume, on a full-time basis, the complex responsibilities stemming from the desire of the two levels of government to increase francophone immigration in the minority communities.

All the organizations agree that it is fundamentally important for them to know how long they must wait for a decision after filing an application for financial assistance. Too often organizations must manage with interim funding and all the stress and anxiety associated with waiting times. A few examples of this are given in the text.

In addition, as a result of these lines of credit and additional interest charges, a large portion of the organization's grant revenues are used to finance the banking system, out of public funds. Other federal agencies, such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, have established operating rules concerning the time periods during which Canadian taxpayers must wait for a response. The organizations should be entitled to the same treatment.

In closing, we repeat that it will be necessary to increase the budget for the next collaboration accords in order to enable us to consolidate what we have already established, to achieve equity with the other provinces and territories and to counter inflation.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Simard.

Let's turn immediately to Canada's far north and Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux (Assistant General Director, Association des francophones du Nunavut): Good morning.

My testimony will be more subjective than objective, in that it will be based on my own personal experience.

In 1994, I negotiated the first agreement for the Northwest Territories, where I lived for 10 years. It was a pilot project that Canadian Heritage had instituted, at the time, without Treasury Board's knowledge—as we learned later—and which lasted until 2001. The federation is the umbrella organization comprising all the francophone community groups in the N.W.T., and it managed the agreement. In fact, the project was self-managed. The federation received the cheque and was responsible for all expenditures and for allocating funds based on the needs of the community and of each group. It worked very well.

In 2001, Canadian Heritage changed its approach to results-based management, and all of a sudden, we went from being partners to clients and got caught up in an unbelievable administrative muddle. For example, proposals had to be signed by the chair of the board in blue ink, the chair's signature had to be authenticated by a witness and a copy of the board of directors' resolution had to mandate the chair to sign the proposal. Things have gotten a little better since then.

The worst thing about this change in approach was, undoubtedly, the way the agreements' objectives had to match those of the Government of Canada. The government supports its francophone communities on the proviso that they share the government's objectives. And that leads to a whole lot of problems. For example, communities have to adapt their overall development plan and make it fall in line with the government's interests, which does not always mean that the communities are getting their real needs met.

Perhaps we could emulate Quebec. In Quebec, there are 48,000 not-for-profit organizations including 8,000 community action organizations. Of these 8,000 organizations, 5,000 get financial support from the Quebec government totalling about \$670 million annually, and it is divided into three forms of funding: service agreements, projects, and overall mission support.

The great thing about the overall mission support is that it makes up 60% of the \$670 million. And those funds are allocated to 4,000 autonomous community action groups. They are autonomous

because they are not in a dependent relationship with the government. The groups are not funded on the basis of what they do, but on the basis of who they are.

In Nunavut, we claim that the francophone communities are Canada. Clearly, the Canadian government manages their growth. It is said that there is a lot of vitality in our francophone communities, but their vitality waxes and wanes with the injection of funding, or lack thereof. If funding should dry up all of a sudden, our schools, our associations, our newspapers, and so on and so forth, would close.

Right now, we have the sense that we are just getting by. And that's not a very good impression to have. Francophone groups are still coming to terms with the overwhelming red tape, a bureaucracy which, in my opinion, is overzealous. These groups still have to tweak their overall development plans to fit the government's interests. Every year, pages and pages of reports have to be blacked out. As someone said this morning, that puts a strain on our precious human resources that are there to respond to real needs, so this is being done at the expense of these communities' development and vitality, and that of Canada, because in our opinion, their needs are one and the same.

In conclusion, I would be pleased to elaborate during the question and answer period.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux, for your succinct presentation.

We will now hear from another representative of the Prairies, Mr. Denis Perreux, Director General of the Association communautaire des francophones de l'Alberta.

Mr. Denis Perreux (Director General, Association communautaire des francophones de l'Alberta): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members, for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

I have been director general for a couple of weeks, but I have been a manager of the Canada-community agreements in Alberta for four years. Before that, I was a public servant for four years at the Department of Canadian Heritage. So I have had the opportunity of seeing the management of these agreements from both perspectives.

Our association interprets the origin of these agreements by going back to the Supreme Court of Canada *Mercure* ruling and the subsequent abolishing of the language rights of Franco-Saskatchewanians and Franco-Albertans in 1988. At that time, the federal government attempted to meet these communities' needs by way of an agreement between the federal government and the communities, since their respective provincial government had no statutory obligations in this regard. And this is what led to the first agreement in Saskatchewan in 1989 and in Alberta in 1992.

Today, in Alberta, there is about \$3 million in total funding. However, we annually receive funding applications from community organizations to the tune of \$5 million. About 80% of this funding is spent on the day-to-day operations of these community groups, and 20% is dedicated to projects and innovation. The envelope funds about 40 community associations, the majority of which are regionally based, with the other half being either provincially or sector-based. About a third goes to the arts and culture.

In the early days, the Canada-community agreements constituted a real partnership between Canadian Heritage, as the federal coordinator for official languages, and the ACFA, as the mouthpiece and lead association for the overall development of the francophone community in Alberta. Concretely speaking, that means travelling throughout the entire province, looking for consensus, identifying the communities' needs and priorities, overseeing the decision-making process which precedes funding allocation, and being part of intergovernmental, interdepartmental collaborative efforts.

For us, in Alberta, the community organizations funded through these agreements are crucial in ensuring that the provisions under sections 41 and 42 of the Official Languages Act are met. I am speaking specifically about community development and vitality and promoting equality between French and English. The agreement really was the catalyst for several projects, including the most important in recent years, such as the first ever bilingual health care centre in Alberta, which will open its doors in a couple of weeks, the early childhood centre network, the performing arts network, community centres and about 25 service centres for francophones throughout Alberta.

This agreement led to a kind of symbiosis between the federal government and the community. Without the community, the federal government's ability to act is severely hampered, and without the funding under the agreement, the community is disempowered. And our ability to act is also hampered. So there really is room for a true partnership.

When it comes time to address official language issues at the Olympic Games, we call on these communities to be a springboard for action. When it comes time to ensure that section 23 education rights are implemented, once again, it is the communities we call upon. In our province, early childhood services, reception, settlement and employment services are all vitally important. And ultimately, the communities are the ones to develop these services.

I had intended to talk about four principles, but I limited myself to two, at the chair's request. I want to talk specifically about communities being responsible for their own development and for intergovernmental cooperation.

When a community is responsible for its own development, which is what we often also call governance for and by the community, that really is an example of the natural progression between priorities, resources, and the capacity to act. It is at that point that taking responsibility really counts. Why is it so important? Well, to begin with, it is practical.

When programs and services are imposed on minority communities like ours, it becomes much harder to entrench services which will be used across the entire area concerned. When communities

establish their own service priorities and—for us, this includes early childhood, reception and settlement services—they end up using these services. The reason why there has been a veritable explosion in the number of people using these services in our region is that the services addressed real needs and priorities.

• (0930)

The other reason it is so important for communities to take responsibility for themselves, is out of respect. At the ACFA, we are putting together a comprehensive development plan including 9 action items across 14 regions in the province. In 2003, 38 advisory meetings were held and there are 15 to 20 meetings that take place annually to determine communities' needs and priorities.

There is a committee which looks at all that, makes funding allocation decisions and which forwards this information on to the department. So, we do the job we have to do. Now in the past, under the former system of agreements, the next step was to reach joint decisions with the department. So what actually came out of our committee meetings was a series of recommendations for the department on funding issues.

Currently, under section 157 of our accord, it is left up to Canadian Heritage to focus on that. So, this is a far cry from the communities being responsible for their own development, and I think that this frustration is at the heart of the communities' current dissatisfaction. The amount of funding is also very important, and I don't want to minimize that. But our main source of frustration is not having our communities' top priorities adequately funded.

At the grassroots level, we try to overcome this obstacle by way of good working relations, but as you can imagine, with the massive turnover of staff, things are very short-term, and so we can't really depend on this for the long term.

The second point I wanted to raise with you was intergovernmental and interdepartmental cooperation. There are clauses in these agreements encouraging us to work with the official languages federal coordinator, Canadian Heritage, with the province, and also with the other federal government departments.

The reason I'm raising this is that in Alberta, we don't have any legislation or policy concerning services provided in French. In fact, the current legislation states that Alberta's official working language is English. So in light of that, any progress made in Alberta is really based on what we could call an Alberta-made solutions model and on common sense. When there is a call for a service and it just so happens that it fits the government's priorities, then we're able to work together and implement it. But while we wait for these services to come on line, we rely on the Canada-community agreements to fill the gaps, whether that be in terms of reception and settlement services, early childhood services, or any other area. In fact, even education was dealt with in that way for a century. When the provincial government declared French-language education illegal, the ACFA and religious communities made sure that French-language education was available. And that is more or less the model that we still have in our communities. We meet unmet needs by relying on this grant and we would encourage intergovernmental cooperation so that we can have long-term funding at our disposal.

Let me give you an example, and this is really the crux of the matter, in some respects. At one point in time, the federal government negotiated early childhood agreements with the provinces. Under these agreements, there was a clause which simply referred to—and it was very modest, only a couple of lines—ensuring that Alberta's minority official language communities' needs were taken into consideration. That little clause was worth its weight in gold. For us, it meant that we could go and knock on provincial governments' doors and work with them to set up services. The great thing about the system thereafter was that when the agreement was amended, the province continued to play its role.

• (0935)

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Denis Perreault: The province has continued to fund these services. So there is not only the issue of federal funding, we also need access points. These measures are essential.

In closing, I have four suggestions to make to improve the current system.

First, more money is needed in the current envelope, and, as was mentioned earlier, we need gradual, incremental funding, not only a lump sum over five years, because there are emerging needs and growth is very difficult to manage.

Second, management by a third party, such as a community foundation, is, in my opinion, a winning formula that ensures that we are accountable to taxpayers while giving us decision-making powers over the allocation of funding. I will be pleased to answer questions on this topic if there are any.

Lastly, there is the issue of provisions concerning official languages in the entire federal-provincial agreement. I cannot emphasize this enough: it is important to open the door to communities so that they can work with the provinces. It works for us, even in Alberta, where sometimes, federal-provincial cooperation can lead to tension. Those are my closing remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perreault.

We will now turn the floor over to Ms. Thorne, who is Director General of the Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin or the Société acadienne de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard.

• (0940)

Ms. Lizanne Thorne (Director General, Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin (Société acadienne de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard)): Thank you for having us here today and allowing us to present our viewpoints.

I will begin by explaining the situation in Prince Edward Island. The Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin was founded in 1919. Its main mandate is to preserve the French Acadian culture and language in our province through education. In 1950, with the merger of small schools, Prince Edward Island lost all of its French schools, except in the Évangéline region. This had a negative impact on the preservation of the French language. We are said to have lost some 35,000 francophones, because they were assimilated into the English-language education system.

For us, the agreements are an essential tool. I will speak to you about our concerns, but I do not want to go over the same points that my colleagues have raised.

Is funding adequate for us? We have a fixed budget envelope over five years. However, in five years, many things can occur to change the situation. In Prince Edward Island, in 1999, there were only two French schools, whereas in 2003, there were six. This change occurred very rapidly, but the budget envelope has not increased. We must thus provide services to four more schools and four more communities with the same amount of funding.

Prince Edward Island is experiencing extraordinary growth in terms of official language knowledge. With a bilingualism rate of 12.7%, our province currently ranks third in Canada, after Quebec and New Brunswick. Between 2001 and 2006, the bilingualism rate increased by 0.76%, whereas the national trend declined.

This means that requests for services are increasing and needs are becoming more pressing. The number of French schools is climbing while the number of English schools is dropping. Despite this, we have the same budget, which prevents us from properly meeting the needs of our community.

Our employees and volunteers are becoming exhausted trying to meet these growing needs. We are passionate, resolute and dedicated. The study that has just been conducted shows that on average, our employees in the community network receive one-third of the salary that is paid in the public service or in the private sector for the same skills and the same work. In addition, they work an average of 15 hours more per week, unpaid, to offer quality services and continue to do their work. Our volunteers sit on an average of three committees or more, and do an average of three times more volunteer work than our English-speaking counterparts.

In terms of accountability, since the programming envelope under these agreements continues to be inadequate, we are increasingly forced to deal with several departments and granting agencies, which is not necessarily a bad thing. However, as my colleagues have said, departments and granting agencies have very different and complex requirements.

As concerns our priorities, once again, the program funding provides leverage and ensures a certain stability for employees who oversee the diversification of our funding. However, every time we submit an application to a department, we must adapt our results and our priorities to the framework of the targeted funding.

• (0945)

The cooperation agreements have allowed the community of Prince Edward Island to maintain an ongoing dialogue with Canadian Heritage. We would have liked to negotiate an agreement that included the Canadian government, and not only Canadian Heritage. All the departments have an obligation, and it would be a way for us to simplify the approach and set things straight for all sectors and all departments. A joint trilateral plan would also help cut down on red tape. The Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin is currently devising a comprehensive community development plan that includes both the provincial and federal governments.

As my colleagues have said, the disadvantages of the accord are as follows. Instead of giving responsibility to the community, it strips it of certain powers. The funding evaluation and recommendations committee appears to me to be more of an advisory committee. It is no longer a decision-making committee like it was before. We are lucky, because there is a director at Canadian Heritage who clearly understands the needs of our community. However, the staff can change any time and influence the way things work.

I, too, would recommend the establishment of a mechanism that includes more than one department. The next phase of the action plan and the subsequent collaboration accords must include the provincial and territorial governments as well as the other federal government departments. They must take part in the process as full-fledged partners rather than simply holding summary consultations.

The federal government's actions in the area of official languages must be felt on the ground. The fact remains, however, that certain areas of intervention that have a direct impact on the vitality and lot of our communities come under provincial jurisdiction. We recommend a trilateral collaboration model. For the past six months, we have been working with both levels of government in order to develop this type of collaboration model, which should result in joint planning and empowerment. This mechanism will allow for the provision of a plethora of institutional and community services so that citizens can live their everyday lives in French.

Under this model, governments would assume their obligations towards the Acadian and francophone community in all sectors. Furthermore, the community would have the partners it needs to ensure its full-fledged development and vitality.

In closing, governments must recognize and showcase, in a tangible fashion, the work done by community development organizations on the ground. To do this work, communities need stable, adequate and foreseeable funding in order to meet the growing needs of the regions effectively.

Thank you.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for this overview of the issues relating to Canada-community agreements throughout the country.

Without further ado, we will now go to our members of Parliament, who are very eager to ask you questions.

We will begin with Mr. Pablo Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being here today. It's a pleasure to welcome you and to discuss matters with you. You spearhead the development of French in francophone communities throughout the country. I congratulate you on your courage, determination and the work you do.

I would like to ask a general question and hear a very brief answer from each of you.

In each of your provinces or territories, is the community doing better or worse than it was a few years ago?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I can begin...

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: I would like the question to be more specific.

What do you mean by "doing worse"? What are your criteria?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Is the community doing better in terms of structures, operation, access to education, services and daycare? Is the situation better or worse than it was a few years ago? It's a general question.

● (0950)

Mr. Daniel Boucher: In general, thanks to the work of the community, it is doing better, yes. If we had the support we needed from governments, it would be doing much, much better, but it is not doing too badly.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: We in New Brunswick are privileged as concerns development, but that is because we work very diligently in that regard. However, we are seeing rising assimilation rates. The rate was 7% in 2002, I think, and it is now 12%. It's going up. As concerns daycare centres—given that you asked that question—there are very few in francophone communities, and as for rural communities, they don't even exist. And yet we are a rural province.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: In Nunavut, I would say yes, not because of the Department of Canadian Heritage, but because of the Department of Indian Affairs, which finally realized that its actual name was "Indian and Northern Affairs", and has thus started, over the past few years, to carry out its mandate in this area like WED or ACOA. Things are going better because of that, there is more money in the community, also because of the trial that was brought and won by the Fédération franco-ténoise against the Canadian government and the Northwest Territories government. For these two reasons, yes, the community is doing better.

Mr. Denis Perreux: Things are going well for us too. There are a few indicators. Obviously, the dynamics are different because we not only have a strong community, but a growing community thanks to interprovincial and international migration to Alberta. We are starting to see the injection of funding into the community, and French multinationals who are moving to Alberta. There is a great deal of capital investment on the part of francophones.

Mr. Chair, even as concerns the government, we are not satisfied with the current legislative framework, but there is a certain degree of will and recognition. Because there are a lot of people, it is unavoidable, we need services in French.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We'll come back to that quickly later on, during the second round. I have specific questions for you.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: In Prince Edward Island, it is definitely better than before the agreements, but our fear is that we have now created a need and a demand. We're seeing extraordinary growth in the early childhood sector, among students of elementary school age, but on the other hand, we are losing out because we are unable to offer the services people need to live in French. We are afraid that we will continue to suffer losses if we are unable to increase the level of services people need to live their everyday lives in French.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Perreux mentioned earlier a provision that takes the needs of minority communities into consideration with regard to early childhood education. That seems to me essential, because assimilation starts at that age. If parents cannot send their children to school in French at a young age, then they start out on the wrong foot, with assimilation beginning very early.

Does this provision exist in Alberta?

Mr. Denis Perreux: I don't know if the agreement still exists, but it is not the same formula as it was at the beginning. We felt that it was essential to have this provision in place at the outset, because it helped us approach the department. Once that was done, we had our foot in the door, literally, and we were then able to develop a solid plan. From then on, we made a number of gains.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Is there any provision in your province or in another province or territory? No?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Do you mean concerning early childhood?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Concerning early childhood specifically. I'm asking the question because in my opinion, it's absolutely essential. Such a provision should exist everywhere. I also suggested, a year or two ago, that this provision be part of any agreement between the federal government and the provinces. I think that it should be systematically included to oblige the provinces to take this reality into account every time an agreement is negotiated with the federal government. I presume that you agree with that as well.

Mr. Perreux.

Mr. Denis Perreux: I apologize for interrupting, but I would go a step further because there are sometimes massive investments being made. For example, I'm thinking of the Royal Alberta Museum, to which the federal government contributed a significant amount. If there is no obligation to at least knock at the community's door to see what could be implemented there, then it's a problem... Obviously, for us, it is extremely important to educate the public about history and heritage, and therefore, this affects financing agreements as well.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I have one minute left. I am going to ask a brief question. First, has the implementation of Bill S-3 and the fact that the government is now responsible before the courts changed anything in your community? And second, in your opinion, does the government consider you as partners and does it treat you with respect?

• (0955)

Mr. Denis Perreux: In my opinion, Bill S-3 made little difference. There is a great deal of inertia, especially among public servants. As long as there is no clear direction coming from above...

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: And yet Bill S-3 was adopted two years ago.

Ms. Thorne.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: It made a difference for us. We witnessed a change in culture among our public servants. They now consult us more often to find out what is meant by positive measures or if they can do more. For example, we are currently negotiating with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Unfortunately, we are a kind of

training ground for this department. We train people so that they can work for that department. We reached an agreement with the department to have a senior official seconded to help us draw up a human resources renewal plan.

We are seeing more open-mindedness among public servants; they want to know how they can help us out. Unfortunately this does not exist in other provinces. It is not necessarily by providing funding but rather by negotiating different training agreements, secondments and so forth that community development can be fostered.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Gravel.

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of you. You have come out in force and I don't really know to whom I should direct my questions.

My concern is for elderly people. I understand that there is a lack of funding and that francophone communities are small. In your communities, do elderly francophones who live in homes or are ill have access to health care in their language?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: In some parts of Manitoba, some facilities are designated bilingual or francophone, especially those that provide services to seniors, like seniors' homes. We negotiated that aspect with the province several years ago, and it is going rather well, but we have other needs. Obviously, the aging population is growing and we will have to plan for those needs.

We created the largest francophone seniors' home in Winnipeg, called the Centre Taché and the Foyer Valade. It's really rather impressive for a city like Winnipeg. However, we need far more beds.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Is it the same thing—

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: In New Brunswick, specialized health care services mainly developed in the southern, or more anglophone part of the province. So francophones must always travel to obtain services. Aside from being sick, they also feel financial stress from this.

We often get asked for support in obtaining a francophone seniors' home in a mostly anglophone region. Sometimes, they move francophones three hours away from their families, which is really inhuman, in my opinion.

Pursuant to the Official Languages Act, they must offer French-language services to all francophones who request them, but we know that is not always possible. For instance, I know someone in Saint-Jean who knew he was going to have an operation. He had to reserve French-language services on the given date, but you cannot always plan these things: there are emergencies.

When Bill S-3 was passed, the federal government slipped up, which I find unfortunate. I have yet to get over it and I don't know if I ever will. It's as though the right hand has no idea what the left hand is doing.

When this bill was passed, we won a case before the Federal Court to obtain RCMP services in French in all of New Brunswick. Then, the federal government decided to appeal that ruling. It should never have happened. However, we did prevail before the Supreme Court. That is even stronger.

●(1000)

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): There was, back then, the Court Challenges Program.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: At the same time, Bill S-3 was voted on. It was on a Tuesday or a Wednesday. The following Monday, the federal government decided to streamline border services, customs. The only francophone district in the Atlantic provinces was merged and it became an anglophone district.

S-3 may be working, but some people are not talking. When it comes to respecting the partners, I sometimes get the impression it is mandatory compliance. I won't elaborate any further on that, so that you may make up your own mind on the issue. Moreover, I would not want to take up Mr. Gravel's time.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That was a very good question.

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: Mr. Gravel, I'd like to reassure you right away regarding the concern you expressed. Seniors cannot live in Nunavut if they are not working: the cost of living is too high. So that is not a problem we have.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: That's interesting because Mr. Georges Lalonde, from Quebec City, who works with seniors, told me when I met with him that there was a problem in Nunavut surrounding seniors' pensions, given the very high cost of living there. He told me that over 200 seniors were living in Nunavut and that the situation was a real problem.

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: The Inuit receive a great deal of financial support from the Government of Nunavut, but white people cannot stay there. A one-bedroom apartment costs between \$1,800 and \$2,000 per month.

Mr. Denis Perreux: When it comes to living conditions for seniors, homes were built all over the place. They're essentially apartment buildings. For instance, recently we managed to create the Centre de santé Saint-Thomas, a place where there is ordinary housing, in other words apartments designed for independent living. Then there are centres that offer a little more support. I don't know what that is called in French, but in English it is referred to as assisted living. There are also homes for people suffering from dementia or who have significant palliative care needs. People who are prepared to move to Edmonton can access those services. But, at the end of the day that is the only way to obtain these types of services in French.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: In PEI the situation depends on the area where people are located. People can receive French-language services mainly in community homes. It is quite sad because over 25% of francophones are over 65. So we are working very hard with the provincial government to improve services in the homes.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: It would seem that Saint Thomas Aquinas is quite popular in the region. Ms. Thorne, your organization was founded in 1919. Was it originally sponsored by the Catholic Church?

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: No, but the goal was nonetheless to train young men, and mainly to see to it that there were francophone priests. They would be sent to Quebec, on a scholarship, to study. At the time, religion was an integral part of the movement.

The Chair: We will now move to Mr. Yvon Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses. We have met them on several occasions. After a while we start recognizing people. Without wanting to discriminate against anyone, I would like to welcome the people from New Brunswick, from back home.

Earlier on we were discussing improvements made in the provinces. We were trying to determine whether there had been an improvement or a deterioration in the situation. Based on your answers it would seem that things are going better. In my opinion, some communities are doing better, but they know these cases were won before the courts. If today there are schools in PEI, it is because of a fight before the courts and not thanks to governments. We should not be fooled about that.

Since when have things been changing? Mr. Rodriguez tried to say that it was since 2006, but in actual fact, it has been since people first started to fight and win their cases, like the fight for schools in PEI, and recently, the RCMP issue in New Brunswick. I was listening to Mr. Dion state that if he were to be elected he would double funding for the Court Challenges Program. Well, I have a fear that he may doubly breach legislation and that we may need twice as much funding to win before the courts.

You say that there has been some change, that negotiations or official language programs now fall under the Minister for Canadian Heritage, but really, that they should fall under the Government of Canada so that this responsibility might be borne by all departments. It is very difficult to meet with the minister. In fact, this committee can't even seem to do so. Under these conditions, I can just imagine how communities feel. I would like to hear your opinion on the changes that have taken place with respect to negotiations and agreements with the government.

●(1005)

Mr. Denis Perreux: If I understand correctly, you are talking about the fact that there is a minister who is directly responsible for official languages. Our approach to produce results on the ground is very often to take action on a daily basis, with departments that are on site. This is where we see our work bearing fruit.

Politically speaking, I cannot say if this change has made things better or worse in terms of structure. On the ground, to my mind, the problem is that coordination of official languages falls within the jurisdiction of Canadian Heritage, pursuant to the Official Languages Act. The department does not fully carry out its role on the ground. When it comes time to deploy efforts in major areas, the coordination role is not handled well. In my opinion, things have been this way for some time now. The department simply lacks the necessary rigour.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: I will give you an example of this. As far as we are concerned, the interdepartmental position has been vacant for two years. Furthermore, we've had experiences with other departments which, through the IPOLC or other programs at Canadian Heritage, could have provided greater support to francophone and Acadian communities. We are told that it is too complicated to deal with Canadian Heritage and that they prefer to simply give us money. This leads one to believe that there is something amiss as regards interdepartmental coordination; the department is willing to give double the amount of money rather than heading to Canadian Heritage to negotiate financing for communities.

Mr. Yvon Godin: An action plan is going to be unveiled, even though this is not happening quickly. Mr. Lord's recommendation is to increase the budget to \$1 billion. The last action plan provided for \$810 million over five years. Mr. Lord's recommendation, which I believe identical to recommendation no. 32 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, would include assistance to the arts and culture sector. In this case, the amount of \$1 billion, as compared to \$810 million, does not constitute an increase in the action plan's envelope.

I would like your opinion on the following. Do you believe that more than \$1 billion should be invested in the action plan? Would the amount of \$1 billion be satisfactory for the communities, since arts and culture would be part and parcel of the action plan? Well, that is what we presume.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: Firstly, we have no idea as to how this \$1 billion will be distributed. Will a large portion remain within government administration to increase government services? We do not know where this \$1 billion will go. When priorities are added, community agreements are only enhanced by a bare minimum. When we increased our number of regions by four and added two provincial groups, there was no increase. There were cutbacks because the needs became greater. I assume that the same would occur with the action plan. The cost of living has greatly increased since the first agreement came into effect. To my mind, the increase will be insufficient if we continue to add priorities that are not focused directly in the areas of intervention.

• (1010)

Mr. Yvon Godin: As we await the announcement regarding the action plan, are communities affected by this delay?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: To my mind, there is a significant distinction to be made between the action plan and the agreements. The action plan is not the same as the Canada-community agreements. That is where the problem lies. We must continue operating, in any case. The action plan is of course a significant asset to our communities, but there has been no increase in our financing that would allow us to sustain the action plan. That is where the problem lies.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you mean the previous program?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I now give the floor to Mr. Daniel Petit.

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

Thank you for being here today.

I want to raise a more specific issue. I've heard each and every one of your comments. Naturally, your time has been extremely limited, since there are many of you. We had the opportunity to hear from two other witnesses about two weeks ago: one came from the Yukon, and the other from the Northwest Territories I believe, though I am not certain. Those witnesses made a great impression on me because they were making their demands with an extremely positive attitude. God knows that their community is even smaller than some of the communities that are being represented today at this table.

I am new and I'm not too familiar with how things work within the federal government. I imagine that you will reiterate the demands that you are making here today in your respective provinces. There are several levels of government. I imagine that you also have to request funding from your large municipalities. We must certainly not be the only door that you knock on in order to explain the lay of the land.

I'm going to quote Mr. Corbeil from Statistics Canada, who raised something quite particular as he was talking about demographics. Indeed, what we are trying to ultimately do is manage demographics. When you were asked a question on senior citizens, the question was really about demographics. When we talk about youngsters and early childhood, again, we are talking about demographics. Mr. Corbeil said the following:

For francophones living outside Quebec, interprovincial migration is the main factor that directly influences changes within linguistic groups. Between 1996 and 2001, if you will recall, the number of francophones living outside Quebec increased by 10,000; this increase is mostly attributable to the migration of francophones beyond Quebec. Essentially, the majority of these francophones headed to Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia.

I have some questions concerning Alberta, because people from the Yukon told us that... Your province has an economic impact. In fact, it is an economic engine. Oil reserves have been discovered off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Next year, that province will no longer depend on the federal government and equalization payments, and will become like you. There's going to be an east-west attraction, but the attraction affects certain groups, because French-speaking groups need to earn a living. Not everyone wants to receive social assistance. People need to work. In your province of Alberta, there's a very specific characteristic. I would like to know... As we speak, a number of francophones are moving to Alberta, and I will give you an example...

How much time do I have remaining, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: It's running out.

The Chair: You have used up three minutes, you have four minutes remaining, Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: The Edmonton School Board has invested significant sums of money for francophones. The Saint-Jean Faculty is affiliated with the University of Edmonton. This has not happened in other provinces, or to a far lesser degree. There are many immigrants that have moved to your province, even to Fort McMurray.

How do you absorb these immigrants? I understand that you receive money, but do the provincial and municipal authorities provide you with assistance? I know that the universities, professors and companies have contributed greatly to making sure that the francophonie remains alive... How are you responding to this new economic dynamic, at a time when people from our province are leaving to move to your province?

•(1015)

Mr. Denis Perreux: I would like to clarify something with respect to the French-language school board in Edmonton. At present, we are absorbing newcomers through services. Take our student body, for example. The number of students in schools has tripled over the past 10 years. In fact, it went up by 20% in a single year, between the end of June and the beginning of September in the following year. So you can imagine that if this had happened to a regular school board, the system would have been totally overwhelmed. The system was somewhat overwhelmed, but we were able to recover.

Think about the University of Alberta. These are all areas that are growing very quickly. In the province, we have five employment centres and five reception centres. We are in the process of increasing the number of ACFA regional centres. For many years we had 9 or 10, but now we have 14, along with 6 other points of service we are opening through other means. It is through services that we are developing. The traditional model for groups like ours is to achieve development through community development, cultural development and identity development. In Alberta, we are developing through the provision of services. It is therefore a roundabout way of reaching francophones.

The University of Alberta's Saint-Jean Campus is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The university's name has been translated—it is called both *Université de l'Alberta* and University of Alberta. That is a small gesture. So it is really through the provision of services that francophone culture is maintained in existence these days. We therefore have to work with the province in particular, but the second stage is achieved by working through municipalities. We are making sustained efforts with the province, and even the Premier of Alberta has stated he would be open to a policy on French-language services for the Government of Alberta as a whole. We are working very hard in that area.

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

The Chair: We will now begin our second round with Mr. Denis Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Good morning, everyone, and thank you for being here today.

I will try to be a little more specific, since you did put forward a number of options. It's all very well to say that services are needed, but I believe that everything starts with how resources are managed, and how resources are provided.

Mr. Boucher, you talked about managing priorities. Ms. Simard talked about some review of how funding is spent. I would like to know how you receive your funding.

I understand that we must not set one region against another. So you do of course need a basic amount, but even if we don't talk about

indexation we do need an additional calculation to ensure that resources are indeed sufficient to meet the needs of a given French-speaking community within the broader French-speaking community. That is just an idea I am putting forward. Earlier, you talked about improving and increasing funding, and I would like to hear more on that, Ms. Simard.

What would happen if we were to establish a kind of representation index, which would exist alongside the existing system, but take nothing away from the other regions—since we know you need a certain amount to provide basic services at least. For example, Prince Edward Island has the coast guard, and we are very eager to hear them; they will probably be hearing some choice words. There are services like those for which we have signed framework agreements with New Brunswick governing foreign students. We have signed an agreement on immigration. I would like us to put our minds together and see how the government should be providing more funding. Mr. Lord has done his public relations exercise, and has come up with a figure of \$1 billion. However, that figure doesn't mean anything.

So when we talk about calculations, what would you say to a representation index, in addition to the basic amount provided by a province? How would you feel about that? How would the French-language minority community and to some extent the English-language minority communities in Quebec, feel about that?

Mr. Boucher.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: It might take an equalization formula that is less complicated than yours. I think that, instead of coming up with figures that mean nothing, we should conduct more sophisticated analyses. Needs in individual communities differ. The places are different, and so are the needs.

We recognize that some provinces are underfunded. So we have to start by raising the bar. We should all have the minimum amount needed to meet the needs of our communities. At the same time, we need to go further in some areas, and we have to examine that issue. For example, immigration is an important area for us. We will be asking the federal government for funding, depending on our needs. We will not be asking for an amount that covers only half the work. Within two years, we will be welcoming 700 francophone immigrants per year. At present, we receive half of all refugees going to Manitoba. They are francophones. So we need a different funding formula, and a different approach. In our view, that is just common sense.

•(1020)

Hon. Denis Coderre: So you do agree there should be an equalization formula.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Yes, but it has to pass the common-sense test.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Since this approach would be advantageous to us, I believe it is very useful, and fairer. It would make it possible for us to catch our breath, and get back in control. The national average is \$22 per person. Volunteer contributions in New Brunswick amount to \$50 per person, and we receive \$10 per person from Canadian Heritage. In New Brunswick, the number of people who are francophones by birth is equivalent to the entire francophone population of seven provinces and territories, provided we exclude Ontario. So we do carry some weight.

Hon. Denis Coderre: It would therefore require a measure of fairness.

Mr. Lamoureux, are you angry?

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: We are not in favour of per capita calculations. We are the smallest of the French-Canadian communities. We comprise some 700 to 800 people distributed over two million square kilometres. In Nunavut, the average is one person per 70 square kilometres. So we are not in favour of per capita calculations. We would prefer to see symmetry, as Daniel was saying. There are many other ways of looking at the issue than on the basis of per capita distribution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: They might perhaps be able to answer very briefly, since I have no other questions. It will be very quick.

The Chair: Please be brief.

Mr. Denis Perreault: The network we are all a part of is now considering the issue. However, measures to reduce assimilation go beyond traditional economic and demographic factors. There are aspects tied to the vitality of communities. Sometimes, measures turn out to be useless, and sometimes, they work better in some places than in others. In some places, avoiding major problems is enough. I think we have to look at somewhat more flexible sociological factors in order to come up with a fair formula.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: In our view, it is just as important to have a basic per capita amount, as well as complementary funding for institutions in each of the provinces. In some provinces, there are many more francophones than in others, but there are more services as well. There are few francophones in my province, but we lack many services. We have to devote a great deal of effort and energy to increasing the basic services provided by governments and municipalities.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

I saw that a number of people were having their own discussions while our witnesses were speaking. Please go outside the room for your private conversations, because the background noise is disruptive.

We will now continue with Mr. Denis Lebel, a member on the government side.

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here today.

As a member newly elected in September in a riding that is almost 99% francophone, Lac-Saint-Jean, I'm very happy to be hearing your comments.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Unfortunately, it's only for two years.

Mr. Denis Lebel: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: It's only a two-year term.

Mr. Denis Lebel: Mr. Coderre, you have been a member of the government for 13 years. I am listening to our witnesses talk about what you have achieved in those 13 years—an agreement signed in 1994. All I am hearing dates back to the time when you were minister, Mr. Coderre. I hope to be a member of Parliament for more than two years so that I can remedy this. It will not take me 13 years.

Mr. Daniel Petit: It will not take 14 years.

Mr. Denis Lebel: Ladies and gentlemen, I am very happy to see you here this morning. The crucial thing here is official languages, and we have to look to the future. Demographic changes in Canada are undoubtedly creating new needs. I have a question on that, but before I put it to you I would like to make a comment.

Earlier, Mr. Lamoureux talked about a link between the government and the funding paid. In Quebec, I was vice-president of the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean Health and Social Services Agency. I am therefore well aware that funding is allocated to health before it moves on to the association network in a given region. That is part of the regional strategic planning process. All departments are accountable to every region. I don't want people to think that associations in Quebec receive funding without being accountable for it. That is not how things work. That is not how things work at the federal level either, and that is how it should be. Accountability is not an issue for you, nor is it for us. We are here to be properly accountable.

Given the geography of the provinces, specialized health care often has to be sought elsewhere. That is not just because of language. In Lac-Saint-Jean, we have our children treated at the Sainte-Justine Children's Hospital in Montreal, which is 500 km away from where I live but I have no choice but to take them there. In your province, New Brunswick, there are also language-related and geographical realities that need to be taken into account. That said, demographic movements undoubtedly lead to a need for new services. I don't think that this is a public relations issue.

The present government takes official languages very seriously. We want to move forward. That billion dollars will be defined—but now what it expresses is a willingness to recognize needs engendered by such factors as new arrivals and an aging population. Earlier, we heard that needs were increasing. Are new organizations or associations knocking at your door? Are new organizations being created? Are existing organizations closing? What impact are these new arrivals having in your area? I understand that the organizations all want more funding.

●(1025)

Mr. Denis Perreux: You cannot increase the number of associations to meet needs created by new arrivals. The limiting factor is the agreement, which is for a fixed amount. If we are to give money to one organization, we have to cut it from somewhere else. We have to make do with what we have. We have often said that funding should be gradually increased. At present, we are bit like a financial nursery. We work with the province and municipalities to create service agencies, that are then funded by the province. Nowadays, we are relying much more on that than on the agreement. We are getting good results. We have to recognize that all this takes a lot of work. That is the approach we are using to meet our needs.

Mr. Bruno Godin (Executive Director, Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick): In New Brunswick, new services are being requested. New Brunswick is often used as an example because it is the only officially bilingual province in Canada. That comes with a responsibility; people expect to receive services in French.

The number of organizations has increased over the past few years. As my colleagues pointed out, there is no indexation. The funding envelope is set for five years. There are new organizations offering new services and they have to use the same funding envelope as the others. In order to provide enough funding and new services, money has to be taken away from others. Society is evolving. We're robbing Peter to pay Paul. Are we coming out the better for it? I'm not so sure.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: The Société franco-manitobaine is a reception service agency for newcomers. In three years our staff has gone from one to six. The needs are enormous. We welcome approximately 400 francophone immigrants per year. Our goal is to be able to accommodate 700 and to continue to increase that number. All organizations need to be involved in order to make this project a success. It's becoming more and more difficult as the needs increase. Many refugees have very specific needs related to trauma and very significant social problems. We have to find a way to serve them. We have to see how we can meet these needs in the short and long term. We still don't have the means to do so. Our funding mainly comes from the province of Manitoba and from a CIC contribution for specific projects.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lebel.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Jean-Yves Roy.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be putting my question to Ms. Simard. I was surprised when you said that the assimilation rate for francophones in New Brunswick has considerably increased. Yet it continues to be the second biggest francophone community in the country. I thought you had access to services and perhaps even more so than other communities outside New Brunswick. At one point we heard that the strength of francophone communities, what allowed them to remain strong, was their access to services. Everything we have heard over the past few weeks and before that consistently confirms that access to services is what allows a francophone community to remain strong and to continue to make progress.

Have you done any studies with a view to understanding why the assimilation rate of francophones has increased in New Brunswick? Are there any reasons for this? You at least have access to services in French.

●(1030)

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: We have heard several explanations from demographers and specialists. First, earlier, Mr. Petit spoke about migration. In New Brunswick, there is very significant migration from the north to the south, from rural areas to urban areas, where there is an anglophone majority. In Fredericton there is one community school centre. In the parking lot you can hear little children speaking English in the school playground. They don't have easy access to francophone environments outside their classrooms. They therefore become easily assimilated.

Another explanation we have been given relates to culture. Young people become assimilated through American culture, through music, television, and so on. There therefore has to be more of a focus on developing Acadian pride and identity.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: What solutions has your association come up with in order to counter this phenomenon? Do you have the means? Have you suggested or tried solutions in order to counteract this assimilation?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Several initiatives are currently being undertaken. For example, one of them is called "Accrocs de la chanson". We try to motivate young people with musical talent to write and perform songs in French, to discover that it is cool to speak, express oneself and live in French. That requires resources. As I already pointed out, even though we have the institutions and the laws, at some point you need something else to sustain things. What gives an institution its vitality is the community. If the community cannot innovate or continue the projects that it began in order to make this its ways of life, then it is limited; it can't just happen once every 10 years. We have ideas but we do not have the means to implement them permanently.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: My next question is for Mr. Lamoureux. Earlier, Mr. Lebel asked you about your statement regarding subsidized community organizations in Quebec. I would say to Mr. Lebel that I also worked for five years in an agency. I was responsible for volunteer organizations. At the time, we developed the model you are speaking about. Of course there is accountability. However, according to our model, there would be a financial base that would acknowledge the value of the organization, the fact that it exists and that it fulfils a duty in this area. That is what you told us. You did not say that were the system to change, there would no longer be any accountability.

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: You're absolutely right. I did not at all refer to accountability but rather to the three types of financial support: service agreements—in the health sector there are several of these, approximately 56%—projects, that do not account for a very high percentage; and support for the overall mission, which takes up 60% of the subsidies. There's minimal accountability. This generally amounts to financial statements and a report which looks more or less like this: we were to do this, we did this, period. We don't really get involved in endless paperwork.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roy.

We will now end our second round with Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I don't think that what Mr. Petit was trying to say earlier was that equalization payments for programs meant that the people receiving the money were all welfare recipients. I was somewhat affected by that remark. I don't think that's what Mr. Petit was trying to say.

Ms. Simard, in your conclusion on page 8, it states: "That is a striking example—to which we could have added the developments in the *santé en français* issue and the constant fight to maintain duality in education [...]".

It also states: "Such as: exhausted bank reserves; delays in project implementations; temporary closing of the organizations; decline in services offered; personnel layoffs".

I'd like you to talk to us about these problems that are so important. You are not getting money from the Canada-community agreements on time, and you have to fight with the bank in order to keep your staff. You talk about a decline in the services offered. That is why I wanted you to come before this committee. We would hope that things are better than they used to be, but that is not enough. In your brief you state that things are going well but that you do not have the money that you need in order to discharge your responsibilities. Furthermore, this is affecting the development of these communities. I would like to hear your comments on this.

• (1035)

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: My executive director would like to respond.

Mr. Bruno Godin: I will try to be brief, but it is something that I could easily spend an entire week discussing.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Are you related to this gentleman?

Mr. Bruno Godin: No, not at all.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But we share a common ancestor, a man named Pierre. He arrived in Montreal some time around—

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: However, he is his member of Parliament.

Mr. Bruno Godin: Yes, that is true. We both come from the same riding.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It may be difficult to admit, but it is a fact.

Mr. Chairman, I hope you won't deduct this from my time, okay?

Mr. Bruno Godin: There are a number of problems. As we stated earlier, the fiscal year began on April 1st. With a little luck, we will know by July how much we will be receiving. Last year, we were told in August. That means that we are already four or five months into the fiscal year. We are given an advance representing a meager 25% of the previous year's funding on April 1st, so that we can continue to operate. We make do with very little. Often, we lay people off for the summer while waiting to see what will happen. The current year's funding is provided to us in August. That is five months after the year has begun. We often receive funding in February for individual projects. The money arrives in February for a project that was supposed to begin the previous September, and which must end by March 31st. We let everybody go because we have no money to pay them, then suddenly the funding arrives. We

scramble to find our employees, and many are no longer available because they have found other employment.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This did not start two years ago, did it?

Mr. Bruno Godin: No, it is a recurring problem. I am not mentioning it because I want to play politics.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I don't want to either, but with all the boasting in the media about the Canada-community agreements, the fact remains that you are not receiving the money in time, and that affects your operations. Am I right?

Mr. Bruno Godin: Yes. I totally agree with you, but the cooperation agreements are touted as extremely important. We can't deny that. It's the process that needs some fine tuning, however. The program will end on March 31st, 2009, but we know that the agreement won't be signed for another year or 18 months.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Does Manitoba have the same problem?

A voice: Absolutely.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I believe that it is also the case for Nunavut, Alberta and Prince Edward Island. We must make sure to mention that in the report, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: The situation is even worse for us because only five organizations are eligible for program funding. We receive our 25% allotment. Some 10 organizations operate on a project basis. If they don't receive a response by September, October or November, then they have already lost half a year.

Mr. Bruno Godin: One of our problems is that we cannot undertake long-term or even annual planning, since the funding is only available five or six months into the fiscal year. It is almost impossible. Moreover, we must constantly be accountable. If a grant arrives in February—

Mr. Yvon Godin: It seems to me, Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: Mr. Godin—

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Would you like to stay after the meeting has ended?

The Chair: We wanted to set some time aside to allow members to ask questions. We will now begin the third and final round. Each member will have five minutes.

[English]

We will proceed with Mr. Brent St. Denis.

[Translation]

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Lib.): Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I represent a large riding in northern Ontario. ACFO is a good representative of the francophones in my region. I imagine that the same would apply to other provincial organizations, in other words, each provincial organization represents a number of small local associations. The local associations must prepare the applications for the renewal of agreements, etc. Because of staff shortages, I imagine that it is no easy task to renew agreements, make applications, while at the same time doing whatever it takes to support the community. There is a lot of red tape for small local organizations to deal with.

I would like to hear your comments on the number of people that you need in order to satisfy all of the government's requirements.

• (1040)

Mr. Bruno Godin: There again, that is something that I could spend an entire week talking about.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: It is not easy. At home, there is a bad word and it is "Schedule B". That is the schedule in the agreements where we have to fill out our reports. It requires qualified resources. Finding the people and paying them adequately is a problem. It is becoming increasingly difficult because we are always competing with the others, as you know. The smaller organizations come to us for help in this area.

That is a challenge for us, because we have to manage several projects. All of that is not taken into account when changes are made to the system. It has become very cumbersome for us. We prefer direct community development work over filling out government reports, although we do understand why reporting to the government is important. We would like to discuss the best way of proceeding with the government, because furthermore we are involved in activities where the impact is not always easy to measure. It will be measured later. We are being asked to measure the immediate impact of something that we have not yet succeeded in doing. There again, it involves gymnastics. We must think about all of that in order to come up with ways of reporting. It is very complex and it has become very cumbersome. I think that there could be much simpler ways of proceeding, but we need the same person listening to us from start to finish.

Mr. Bruno Godin: Accountability is important and organizations are aware of that. Money received must be accounted for. We have no problem with that. However, it often changes with the people. If an official changes position, we start over from scratch. Then there is a different interpretation of the rules, the reports, and so on. If it were standardized, there would be a form to fill out and it would be set. If the official were to change, it would not be a problem because the form would remain the same.

Given the circumstances, we must also put in several applications to various departments. When we devote 25% of our time to applications and filling out reports, we are unable to do anything else during that 25% of the time. If an organization has 50 people, it is a minor issue, as five of them will look after the work. But when there are two or three people in an organization and they must devote 25% of their time to filling out those documents, many things in the field are not done.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. St. Denis. I would also like to thank our witnesses for these clarifications.

We will move on.

Mr. Gravel, it is your turn.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Even here people butcher the language. I went outside for a cigarette and there is an orange sign at the entrance that says, in English and French: "Piétons, utiliser l'autre trottoir", "utiliser" is in the infinitive form and "trottoir" as an "e". I think that should be denounced.

The current government says it is in favour of promoting minority communities in the provinces. However, you have all said that your

budgetary envelopes were neither indexed nor increased. How can we talk about growth, operations, and enhanced vitality of the communities if that never increases? Moreover, members' salaries have just gone up. So if your budgetary envelopes are not increased, how can you talk about growth? It is just for show. The government doesn't really want to promote minority communities.

• (1045)

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: No, we like to say that we are managing the decline in growth. As I was saying, there are many initiatives that never see the light of day. What worries us the most is that we are talking about accountability. We have responsibilities to the government, but we also have responsibilities to the community.

We signed an agreement. We agreed on joint outcomes. At present, in New Brunswick we can't achieve that. We signed a contract, a partnership, but someone is not living up to his end of the contract. That is why we will never be able to achieve the results we agreed on.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Earlier on, someone said that you had gone from being a partner to a client.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: And from there to social assistance.

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: We are more like associates now.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: That would mean that the relationship is no longer the same. In fact, it is a paternalistic approach, or a maternalistic one because the minister is a woman.

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: Precisely.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: What is your relationship with Quebec? Does Quebec, with its majority francophone community, influence the minority language communities in the other provinces?

Mr. Daniel Lamoureux: In Nunavut, all the francophones are from Quebec, I think. All the taxi-drivers come from Montreal. But people do not stay very long. They are there on average for between two and four years at the most, but there are exceptions, since some people have been there for 20 years. But most go back to Quebec. So it is a little bit like the James Bay region. People come to Nunavut to make money, \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000 a week, and then they go home. There is definitely an influence in terms of culture and even identity. We are all Montreal Canadians fans.

Mr. Denis Perreux: In Alberta, there are good relations with the Government of Quebec. I must say that the policy on the Canadian francophonie, in particular the promotion of the Canadian francophonie in Quebec, has been very well received. From our point of view, the best thing that can be done in Quebec for our communities is promotion and the opportunity to raise awareness. However, we couldn't do that by sending ACFA brochures. There has to be an extensive and sustained effort. So it is really great that Quebec has added the aspect of visibility and promotion of the Canadian francophonie to its existing policy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gravel.

We will now go to Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your presentations. I have a question about funding. There are many programs; the Canada-community agreements have been mentioned, for example. If I remember correctly, Ms. Simard said that her association represents some 30 organizations in her province. As you know, in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, there are many francophones and francophone organizations. Some of those organizations get money from a variety of places in the federal government.

For example, in the area of arts and culture, some groups receive federal money from Canadian Heritage. In the area of official languages, a lot of money is provided through the National Arts Program to an organization that distributes the funding to various organizations in various ridings. Under the Canada-community agreements, money is distributed to organizations.

How do you keep on top of what is happening in the 33 organizations in your province and the various sources of funding? You have said that there is a lack of funding. I understand what you are saying about this specific agreement, but the other organizations may be receiving money from various other sources. How do you keep abreast of what is happening with the various federal government programs and how they are supporting the organizations in your province?

• (1050)

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: I was really hoping that someone would ask me that question. I have a research study here that we have just completed in collaboration with the 33 organizations that receive money. Canadian Heritage has always told us that it provided all of our funding. That is not true. Canadian Heritage contributes 20.7% of the organizations' funding. Of that percentage, only 12.8% is earmarked for development. The other 8% goes to administering the agreement. Sixty-four per cent of the funding the organizations receive comes from outside the federal government. The federal government's total contribution is 36% including that from Canadian Heritage. The money from Canadian Heritage is extremely important because it is used to leverage other funding. However, the funding we obtain from sources other than Canadian Heritage is eight times what it gives us as income.

If we look at contributions in kind, that is, what 95% of the organizations receive in the form of goods, services, loaned use of space, etc., they amount to \$12 million a year, whereas Canadian Heritage provides New Brunswick with \$2.4 million a year. With the contributions in kind and the funding altogether, there is a leverage effect of 12 times what we receive. If I take into account total contributions, Canadian Heritage provides 8.3% of the funding, with contributions in kind amounting to 59.8%.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Thank you, Ms. Simard. If that study is public, I would invite you to send it to the committee clerk. We can have it translated so it is available in both languages.

Mr. Daniel Petit: I would like to have the complete study that we have just talked about for committee members.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Could we send it to you in a few weeks, if you give us your contact information? There are a few corrections to make. This is a draft version.

The Chair: That would be fine. We will give you the contact information for our clerk. The study will certainly be helpful to us, if we can have it for the drafting of our report and recommendations.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Thank you.

The Chair: The last word this morning will go to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is all well and fine to talk about programs and money, but as Mr. Godin said it so well, we could talk about it for weeks. Everyone has the same problem. You work hard to prepare programs and present them, but you don't get the money until January or February and things have to be finished up by the end of March.

Is that not a handicap for the community?

Mr. Bruno Godin: It certainly interferes with planning, organization of the work, the distribution of tasks, etc. It is like a household that starts operating on January 1st but doesn't get its first cheque until April 1st.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I want to understand this. You get approval in January—

Mr. Bruno Godin: All funding applications have to be in by December 15th. The fiscal year begins April 1st. At that time, we get 25% of the previous year's amount so that we can operate for the first few months. It depends on the province, but the core funding for the current year usually arrives in July and often in August. This year, it was February when I received the project funding for the current year, which ends March 31st. I believe that my colleagues are in the same situation. The funding for a project that was supposed to start in September came only in February of this year. But the project has to be finished by March 31st.

• (1055)

Mr. Yvon Godin: That must prevent the communities from achieving the results expected of them. That is what I am getting at. You need to receive the funding at the outset.

Alberta is getting a lot of people from our region. I know that because when I take the plane, three quarters of the people from our region are going to Alberta. They are often francophones from the Acadian Peninsula.

Do you expect to receive more money from the government to be able to provide services for those people? We are calling for more immigrants to come, but many francophones are losing jobs that are available in Alberta.

Mr. Denis Perreux: That is a very good question. Right now, there is a reception centre in Edmonton that receives funding only to provide services for immigrants. Most people who have finished their three years of funding in Quebec then come to Alberta.

Mr. Yvon Godin: There is a reception centre that deals only with immigrants, but there is no such centre to help Canadians who do not speak the language of Alberta. Alberta is recognized as an anglophone province.

Mr. Denis Perreux: This is only done through the budget. Reception services are qualified as "services". We do what we can for newcomers. Even if immigrants have spent three years in Quebec before coming to Alberta, there is no more funding. So, our reception centre survives—

Mr. Yvon Godin: What is your recommendation on this?

Mr. Denis Perreux: First, the province has to recognize these services. Despite the language barrier, the settlement needs still remain.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is the result of the workers moving from one province to another. We are getting workers from China, but there are people in Canada who speak both official languages. What is your recommendation?

Mr. Denis Perreux: I don't want to confuse the phenomenon of migration and that of immigration, however I would say with regard to federal transfers to the provinces for settlement, it would be interesting to see interprovincial migration recognized. Cooperation with the province is the way to go in my opinion. We must also ensure that the budget of the Canada-communities agreement exists. In any case, the communities are the ones that have to create those services.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The work would be done by both the federal government and the province, in order to recognize the transfer of individuals.

Mr. Denis Perreux: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

I also want to thank the witnesses for having contributed to our deliberations. Our analyst has taken numerous notes, during your

speeches, which will be useful when we write our report. I also want to thank the parliamentarians.

I would quickly like to speak to the steering committee members or their representative, after the meeting.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré is leaving us today, it is his last meeting. His wife is about to give birth in the next few hours. He will only be coming back in the fall.

I simply wanted to thank him for all his work.

Some honourable members: Hear! Hear! Bravo!

The Chair: Ms. Simard.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Will we be able to obtain your report?

The Chair: Of course.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Will you send it to us?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: It will cost \$20.

Some honourable members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Marie-Pierre Simard: Put it on your expense account.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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