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—
Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): I would ask parliamentarians and witnesses to take their places so that we can start.

This is the 28th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. In the first part of our meeting, it is our pleasure to hear from two organizations that represent the minority language communities.

Sylvia Martin-Laforge is Director General of the Quebec Community Groups Network; she is here with her President, Robert Donnelly, from the Quebec Region.

We also have Lise Routhier-Boudreau, President of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, Ms. Bossé, who is that organization's Director General, as well as Diane Côté, Director, Community and Government Liaison.

Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the committee, which is no doubt one of the last before the summer.

Without further ado, I would ask the members of the Federation to give their opening address, then parliamentarians will be able to ask you some relevant questions.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, first I want to thank you for inviting us to appear this morning, but especially for showing interest in this fundamental issue of government support for organizations and institutions serving the francophone and acadian communities of Canada.

The purpose of the presentation we have for you today is to provide a description of the situation based on the recommendations the committee made a year ago in its report entitled, "The Collaboration Accords between Canadian Heritage and the Community Organizations - An Evolving Partnership".

For the needs of this presentation, we have focused on three of the recommendations. First, there are the two concerning Canadian Heritage's commitment to delivering funding responses by the deadline and that funding be delivered within 30 days following the date of the funding response. Then there's the recommendation concerning a 50% increase in funding for the Cooperation with the Community Sector subcomponent. In concrete terms, this takes the

form of the collaboration accords, which used to be called the Canada-Community Agreements.

Let's start with the first two recommendations. In the past few days, we conducted a survey of our member organizations so that we could give you a recent, up-to-date and slightly more detailed picture of the situation for 2009-2010. Based on that survey, we can tell you that 75% of the provincial and territorial representative organizations have not yet received confirmation of the amount of their program funding for the current fiscal year. In addition, while 10 organizations received a letter at the end of April informing them of a 25% funding advance, pending confirmation of their funding, the fact remains that five organizations at this time have not yet received the first instalment of their contribution.

Now let's talk about impact. Six of the organizations that responded to our survey said they are using their lines of credit, reserves or investments to cover their operating expenses. Since April 1, interest charges incurred on those lines of credit have varied between \$180 and \$525 a month per organization, which in some cases represents the equivalent of a pay cheque for one employee.

Lastly, the most unfortunate consequence, in our view, is that two of our member organizations have had to lay off staff for lack of cash and confirmed commitments by the federal government. Two others are considering doing the same thing by the end of the summer.

In closing, I would note that the situation does not apply solely to program funding. All the organizations are still waiting for responses to project applications submitted under the Community Life component. Too often the approvals and first instalments for these projects are received in the fall, forcing recipient organizations to carry out in six months activities that they had designed for a full year.

So that's a brief, but very telling picture of the impact of processing, approval and funding payment delays on the organizations that serve the francophone and acadian communities. Our survey does not concern local organizations, but the situation that we have observed within the provincial, territorial and sectoral organizations suggests that the local situation can hardly be any more encouraging. I would even say it's worse.

Ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, when our organizations receive program funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage, they become agents responsible for offering services and activities to citizens.

•(0910)

You'll agree with me that having to lay off staff while waiting for funding responses, having to pay interest charges on lines of credit drawn on during waiting times, having to borrow from one's own employees, these are not necessarily conditions that are conducive to concrete results in terms of services, activities and community life.

Of course, the kind of delay we're dealing with also occurs in other programs and other departments, but here we're dealing with a systemic problem that has persisted for a number of years now. This problem was raised, in particular, in the Official Languages Support Programs audit report last December. That report recommended, among other things, that the OLSPB put appropriate mechanisms in place to improve delays in the application and approval process and continue promoting the use of multi-year agreements.

We completely support those recommendations. It is really urgent that measures be taken to eliminate the waiting times and delays at the administrative level, if we want our organizations to be able to operate and provide the services that are expected of them.

However, that's only half the solution. I now come to the recommendation that you made concerning increased funding for the Cooperation with the Community Sector subcomponent. We have received confirmation that there will not be an increase for the next five years. However, the last increase in that funding dates back to 2005, and it was a very modest addition of \$2.7 million a year, well below minimum needs that the communities estimated at that time at \$18 million.

So that means that, roughly speaking, the funding granted to the organizations of the francophone and acadian communities to address the constantly growing demand for services and activities in French have remained the same in the past five to 10 years. During that time, the cost of living has increased. The final report of the evaluation of the Official Languages Support Programs clearly summarizes the situation: it refers to a situation "in which organizations have limited funding to assume a mandate, which is itself continuing to expand. This dynamic inevitably leads to fatigue, if not exhaustion, within the network of OLMC associations."

People will tell us that the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality provides for investments of \$1.1 billion over five years. That's true, and the FCFA pointed out that that Roadmap would make it possible to continue the momentum of the Action Plan for Official Languages in a number of important development areas for the communities.

However, there are two very significant problems. First, while announcements were indeed made about the various initiatives under the Roadmap, in concrete terms, the funding amounts announced remain to be seen. Second, we have pointed out that support for organizations that create community life in French is absent from the Roadmap. The issue of financial activities and services in French therefore remains intact.

People will no doubt be told that we are in the midst of an economic crisis. I would remind you that the organizations serving the francophone and acadian communities employ hundreds of individuals, not to mention the social and economic impact that they

have in their communities. Investing to consolidate this network is, in a way, a contribution to Canada's economic recovery.

In conclusion, like all Canadians and the government, the community organizations are in favour of the sound use of public funds to produce results. However, the delays in funding approval and payment we are dealing with, as well as the lack of any increase in dedicated funding for the collaboration accords clearly constitute a barrier to those results.

Thank you very much. I am prepared to answer your questions.

•(0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Routhier-Boudreau.

[*English*]

We'll turn to the Quebec Community Groups Network.

Mr. Donnelly, I think you are going to speak on behalf of the group.

Mr. Robert Donnelly (President, Quebec Community Groups Network): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, on behalf of the QCGN, we'd like to thank the committee for receiving us again this year. As you will have already heard from Lise, some of the problems are still there. I'll talk a little about that, but also about some more general things.

The QCGN, which was recognized by the Department of Canadian Heritage as the official representative and interlocutor of English-speaking Quebec in the last collaboration accord, is a non-profit association that brings together more than 30 organizations from all parts of Quebec. Its purpose is to support and assist in the development and enhance the vitality of English-speaking minority communities. We have 32 member organizations across the province, from Gatineau to Gaspé, from townshippers to MCDC in Thetford in Quebec, and to the Lower North Shore and Baie Comeau, and the lower Lower North Shore and St. Augustine, Îles de la Madeleine, etc.

Lise was talking about the importance of timely funding for these member organizations. This is the third year, I think, that I've come to Ottawa. We spoke about it in the past and we're speaking about it again today. We all have examples of member organizations that are surviving the summer on the executive director's credit card. That's the reality.

We get 25% funding, but it's 25% of what? We don't know what the funding is for the year. You don't know how much you can start spending because you don't have your yearly budget. In these weeks where there's so much talk here in Ottawa of support, funding, and the amounts that are being invested, this is not new. This is a five-year plan. It's the same money year in and year out, yet every year it's such a problem getting timely funding. We know that people have been working on trying to fix this, but there's still a way to go.

As the QCGN prepares to launch its 15th anniversary celebrations in the fall in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, we look back on past successes and failures and on 40 years of official languages legislation. The crucial question we must pose is this: how successful has the Official Languages Act been in supporting the vitality of English-speaking Quebec? But that is only the first part of the question. As we all know, the devil is in the details. The more fundamental question is the following: how successful have the Government of Canada's official languages policy framework and program funding initiatives been in supporting English-speaking minority communities?

The QCGN is working hard to develop and implement policies that support and nurture our community's place in Quebec and Canadian society. Among our greatest challenges has been getting recognition of Quebec's English-speaking community as a minority both in Quebec and in Canada.

That is why we were pleased that the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Graham Fraser, underlined our "national standing" when he noted in his annual report in 2007-08 that Quebec's English-speaking community is one of the two official language minorities. The commissioner stressed that federal institutions and key stakeholders interested in official languages should acknowledge our community's contribution to national policy-making in Canada.

However, for the Official Languages Act to be effective in Quebec, our community's national standing must not only be recognized but acted upon. That means federal institutions must find innovative ways of supporting our community. While priorities apply nationally, the policies can be adapted in such a way as to implement them differently for us in Quebec.

In the 2005 mid-term report entitled "Update on the Implementation of the Action Plan for Official Languages", our community's formal assessment noted that the most successful and promising initiatives under the action plan in Quebec were the efforts to improve access to health and social services in English. However, our overarching assessment was that the action plan had generated very uneven results and that it underestimated the community capacity required to successfully support its application.

That should have been a wake-up call to proceed differently, but despite the best advice, an upgrade didn't occur in the second round of the action plan funding and is absent from the road map. We are concerned that it is just still not a priority. While the development of the health sector is clearly a success story for us in Quebec, there is still little or no funding for other key sectors.

● (0920)

If evaluation frameworks for a 2008-2014 road map do not address funding gaps, for example, in immigration and literacy, the results will once again be skewed against our community. The evaluation may determine such programs were implemented successfully, but they will nevertheless have failed in supporting English-speaking Quebec.

We have come to recognize that when a systemic flaw fails to recognize the needs of our community, only an evidence-based approach can resolve the issue. In that context we have proposed that the Government of Canada develop and implement overarching

evaluation methodology that would ensure all departments take the priorities of the English-speaking minority into account. If that is not done, the priorities of our community will continue to be ignored.

In the most recent collaboration accord, English-speaking Quebec was allocated almost \$16.9 million in funding. That is less than \$3.4 million a year, of which 80% is core funding. The core funding is that 25% cheque that goes to all our member organizations, but they still don't know that it's 25% of what. While the amount represented an 11% increase from the previous collaboration accord, it is just insufficient to support our network and to meet the needs of English-speaking Quebec.

What do we need, you might ask. I would suggest our network needs at least an 18% to 20% increase in funding to meet the most pressing needs of our community and to address funding gaps in a number of currently underfunded areas, including youth, seniors, status of women, arts, culture, and heritage. So, yes, there is success in the health sector, but what about the other sectors?

Over the past year, the QCGN has attempted to access strategic funding from the national as well as the regional envelopes of Canadian Heritage. That has met with systemic roadblocks. We believe initiatives of national strategic importance that the network has submitted in the area of youth have not been given the national priority they deserve. We work within a framework of PCH Heritage regional in Quebec and PCH Ottawa.

Without support of initiatives such as permanent funding for a provincial youth coordinator, the creation of a youth organization for English-speaking Quebec will be impossible. Quebec's English-speaking youth have no voice. When compared to every other province that has targeted ongoing core funding for official language minority youth organizations, this has been a disappointment for English-speaking youth in Quebec.

These are among our many priorities for the coming years. I'm sure the committee agrees that to be truly effective in supporting English-speaking Quebec's communities and institutions, a high level of commitment by the politicians is required. Without the support of each and every one of you, and your parties, there will be little or no change. For us in the English-speaking community of Quebec, there's a real appetite for change.

Merci. Thank you.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

We'll start with Monsieur D'Amours.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you all for being here.

[English]

Thank you very much for taking the time to be with us this morning.

[Translation]

I would like to ask you a few questions. You need only answer with a yes or a no, or with a figure. Is there a deadline for submitting your applications?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé (Director General, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): It's November 28.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You have until November 28; that's later. However, some organizations will file their applications before November 28. I heard about organizations that had filed them at the end of October, precisely so as not to be filing at the last minute and so the government would have the time to assess the files.

Furthermore, we know that this money is used to fund operations; these things recur. We can have three- or five-year, agreements—which we virtually don't see anymore— or two-year agreements, which seem more common right now. It's hard to understand where the problem is, why it takes so much time to send that money. I imagine you're waiting.

Let's say you file your application at the end of November; we're talking about five, six or seven months before knowing. They tell you or suggest that you find another solution to fund yourselves in the meantime. So you're going to request a line of credit. That's great: a line of credit! As you said, Ms. Routhier-Boudreau, that's money for operations. There are costs, there is interest, but, if they don't approve your plan, what happens? Who'll pay down the line of credit? Who'll pay down the credit card that someone has used if you don't know on April 1? When it works in one direction, it should work in the other as well.

Let's consider the example of tax returns. There's a deadline, and there are penalties that the citizen fails to file before the deadline. However, you're told that, if the government is late, that's okay. Get organized and find personal financing, outside funding. However, if your plan is ultimately rejected, you're in no man's land; you have no idea what's happening. In that case, who will repay the line of credit?

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: Indeed, that's a major problem. We have to take risks. We don't have a choice; the situation requires it.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You're volunteers.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: We're forced to do it. We have staff who are currently very tired. We're unable to retain our staff properly because there are risks associated with the fact that the funding is never guaranteed year over year. That has a lot of consequences.

The interest issue is also very important. The interest money could be invested elsewhere much more effectively. I think the fact that we have to use lines of credit is an enormous problem. We're not in favour of that practice, and we're trying to avoid it as much as possible. However, in concrete terms, that's the way we operate.

● (0930)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: It was mentioned that the fact that you've obtained your operational funding could be announced, but project funding isn't yet available. A lot of Canadian organizations are currently waiting. As you mentioned, the funding may not arrive until the fall.

Now it's late June. You can't receive money and implement your projects the next day. That's virtually impossible. It takes time.

Let's consider the example of the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada, which is waiting for project funding. If a number of months go by before it gets an answer, people will wind up panicking. You have to implement your projects, but at the same time you have to do your planning so you can get funding for next year.

Do you think you can operate efficiently when you're asked at the last minute to do 1,001 things, whereas everything could have been done well a long time ago, especially when we're talking about recurring agreements?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We talking about Canadian Heritage projects that haven't yet been approved. However, we know that there are other projects. For example, an application was filed with Industry Canada in February 2008 for an event that was to be held in March 2009, and we still haven't received a response.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You filed an application in February 2008 for March 2009, and you haven't received a response!

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We haven't yet received a response, but the event has taken place. When we talk about risk management—

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Was the organization able to manage that risk? That's impossible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

We'll now continue with Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Putting it another way, it's hard to go to war without ammunition. But that's exactly what you're doing. I remember accompanying Jeannine Séguin, president of the Fédération des francophones hors Québec at the time. She is someone who speaks out loud and strong, who makes appropriate demands. She was explaining to Serge Joyal, who was then Secretary of State for La Francophonie, that it first had to be understood that groups like Alliance Quebec—today the Quebec Community Groups Network—and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada represent the Canadian and Quebec social fabric.

Today, if we used the same language, if you were representatives of banks, of GM or oil companies, you would be telling us how you would manage the billions of dollars or the tax credits that are granted to you by the Canadian government.

However, it's quite the contrary; it's still the same debate. I remember interdepartmental debates that took place in the mid-1980s to ensure that money didn't come just from Canadian Heritage or from the Department of the Secretary of State, as it was called at the time. People wanted the Canadian government to help all the communities fighting against assimilation or for rights in Quebec and in all of Canada. At the time, I was president of the Fédération des francophones de Saskatoon, which was experiencing the same thing.

At the time, the Chrétien-Martin government cut our funding. They wanted to cut our budget by 52%. Ultimately, it was cut by 37%. We know how hard it is to retain staff in that kind of situation. People don't wait forever. You yourself said that employees are being asked to go on employment insurance. If they're on contract, they can't get it.

We read the report that was written on the collaboration accords. I'm one of those who proposed the subject to the committee, and my colleagues agreed to discuss it. We know the solutions. The problem is systemic. We know that. I want to thank Mr. Godin for suggesting that we conduct this emergency meeting.

For the government and Parliament to understand, what solutions are the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Quebec Community Groups Network proposing? You talked about multi-year agreements. What elements should be put in place so that we no longer have to meet on this subject, so that it works on its own?

• (0935)

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: I'm going to start, and Suzanne and Diane can continue, because they're the ones who handle the day-to-day management of files.

Multi-year agreements are definitely part of the solution. I'll give you the example of the Sommet des communautés francophones et acadiennes, which was held in June 2007 and was largely funded by the Conservative government. We conducted an extraordinary exercise, and that summit resulted in a community development plan for the next 10 years. That plan sets out very specific strategies for each of the areas that we want to improve. The committees want better handling of the issues, and there are strategies. The indicators make it possible to report on the funding in place. It seems to me multi-year agreements could vastly improve the situation. There are other solutions as well.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: This year, the situation has definitely been exacerbated by the fact that the Department of Canadian Heritage had to renew all its programs and have them approved by the Treasury Board. However, this is systemic, as we've said. So you have to look to multi-year agreements and see how many officer signatures are required before the contribution agreement winds up on our desk.

Depending on the funding amounts in question. Does it absolutely have to go through the minister's office? On the scale of the number of signatures, there are all kinds of options that could be looked at. The FCFA asked the OLSPB for a meeting to discuss the findings and recommendations contained in the summative assessment report on the Official Languages Support Programs. We'll be having that meeting tomorrow, where we will say that we are ready to work

together to examine procedures and to do our part. However, matters clearly have to move at other levels.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

We'll continue with Mr. Godin.

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

[English]

How many associations did you say you have in Quebec?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: We have 32.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Out of those 32, individually, do they make requests for government money to run their associations?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Yes, every year it's a whole new application. It's new program funding.

We have four organizations for the first time now with multi-year funding. Obviously that is a good part of the solution, but I would say it's not only multi-year funding that is—

Mr. Yvon Godin: When do they make their applications?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: It's the same as you heard before, in November.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Out of those 32, how many have received their money?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: What they received, as I said, is the 25% advance. We're given 25% based on the funding of the previous year, but for the current year you don't know if your funding is going up or down. You don't know what's—

• (0940)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Okay, let's start again. They apply in November. They don't get it by the end of June. They get 25%, but in a year there are 12 months, and in six months they are through. You have 25%, which is not enough. That I understand. Then they have to go to their line of credit—

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Yes, to their credit margin in June and July. That's what happens, yes.

We also didn't talk about the 20%, which is the project funding. Of the \$3.4 million, 80% is core funding and 20% is projects. So I guess we don't talk about the projects, because they say we're complaining enough. It's even worse. We have to take our project applications by December. They are one-year projects. They only do projects after core funding. We hear about projects being approved in June and July, and we get funding in September, but the project was supposed to run from April to April, for 12 months.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I don't know if you had it in Quebec, but remember, they used to take the money out to do the highways, but they got it in November. We are in Canada, and we have winter.

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Yes, well, they get credit margins.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I want to put the same question to Ms. Routhier-Boudreau. Is this the same situation, in which people apply in November...? Perhaps we're repeating ourselves, but it's worth the trouble to do it. Some people have to hear a song a number of times in order to learn the first couplet. The situation is the same for us: you apply in November and you get 25% in June, without knowing why, in fact.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: A number received a notice telling them that they would be getting 25%, but they haven't received that 25%. They were told, but that was a long time ago. We've been having problems in this regard for years now. What makes the matter more dramatic this year is that, as we have no room to manoeuvre because budgets have not been increased, obviously, we no longer have anything so we can address or temper the situation.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They're lucky you're the person responsible because, if it were me, I'd close up shop and tell them to take a look at the mess they'd gotten us into.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: It's not out of the question that it might come to that, perhaps sooner than we think.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Perhaps it takes a political crisis to wake up governments. And it used to be that way too. I'm very young, but I wasn't born yesterday. This has been going on for a long time. I remember that, from the start,

[English]

All your organizations have always had a problem.

[Translation]

That's nonsense. That's why I asked that you appear before the committee to make the government aware of this problem. It's all well and good to make promises and say we're respecting the communities, that we want to work with them. The purpose of Part VII of the Official Languages Act is to promote the minorities, both the anglophone minority in Quebec and the francophone minorities in the rest of the country. That's one of the reasons why I filed a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages. I don't know whether you're aware of that; I'll send you a copy. The Commissioner is examining the situation to see whether the act has been contravened. You can't keep everyone in suspense, like hostages, in that way. You're not working to fund the Government of Canada; you're working to provide a service to the community.

[English]

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge (Director General, Quebec Community Groups Network): May I add another situation? I don't know if it's comparable to that of the FCFA. In Quebec, because we are one province, while we are a national minority contributing to policy across Canada, there has been up until relatively recently, in the last year or so, little consideration for the fact that we play on the national scene, not just in the case of QCGN itself but also for a few of our other organizations who meet with national organizations with the francophones outside Quebec, for example, l'Association de la presse, or la FCCF.

We have small organizations in Quebec, like ELAN, English-Language Arts Network, that are required, requested, and important in order for Canada to play on the national scene. ELAN, English-

Language Arts Network, receives a very small pittance. I won't even embarrass ELAN by telling you what the amount is here today. For that, they have to figure out how they are going to develop policy and play, and talk to CRTC, CBC, and all of those. They don't even have \$100,000. It's way below \$100,000.

In Quebec there are other funds—strategic funds—at national headquarters. For Quebec, a number of us English-speaking organizations take a ping-pong approach to trying to get funding. The regional office gets the collaboration stuff, and they want us to play only on a very regional basis, not recognizing that a number of us have to play on the national stage.

I think that's another piece of a puzzle that is different from Quebec and that is a problem for funding.

• (0945)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Now we'll go to Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Good morning to all the witnesses. Welcome.

[English]

Welcome to our committee. For those of you who don't me, I'm a very new member of Parliament. I was elected only last October, and I too am disappointed to see how much time it takes for government to work, and that has a lot to do with opposition as well. I'm surprised at how much of this goes on to stop good work from being done for Canadians, so I sympathize with you.

I do have a few questions, though, because my understanding is that this delay, the time it takes to get projects and funding approved, has been ongoing for many years. I'd like to ask you on average how much time it takes, in your experience, to get your funding. In previous years, what has been the average time?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: The times that have been mentioned so far have been the same for the last three or four years. When I talk about project funding, remember I said you get your funding in September for a project that was supposed to start in April. You're six months into it, so you get creative. You change the project because you have to do half of what you said you were going to do or do it all in six months instead of a year.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: But that's only for the last three years. My understanding is, and I've been informed, that six months has been the average for many years, which is why the 25% was set out—and I see some nodding heads—to address some of that concern. It sounds as though this has been ongoing for ten or more years, and it's unfortunate that we haven't found a way of progressing more quickly. I do want to point out some of the challenges that I've learned about since I've been here.

Of course we don't have public servants who have delegation for approval. The funding for the projects has to go to the minister. So they go to the regions where they do what's called “due diligence”, and then of course they go through a number of other steps before the public servants then transfer them to the minister who has to approve them.

This has been a unique year. We had an election in October. Boy, oh boy, I'm still not fully aware of all of my responsibilities, and I'm seven months in. So it was unique simply because of the way we started, but also it's unique because of this need for Treasury Board to deal with the files that were coming to an end.

[Translation]

You talked about multi-year agreements. It's true that we have multi-year agreements. Isn't it?

An hon. member: Yes.

Ms. Shelly Glover: This year, there will be renewals; we'll have new multi-year agreements. So I hope that will help as well, since the department will have fewer cases to approve.

[English]

I think that's something to note, that this year is somewhat unique. Then, of course, in December we also had other problems that came into play.

So I did want to point some of those out, but also, some of the groups have not signed their contribution agreements. I think that plays a part as well. I would encourage those groups that have not yet signed to do that as quickly as possible. If we all work together to try to get that done, I think it would certainly help. But I did want to point out that we also have new money.

[Translation]

It was said earlier that it's been five years since more money was invested in Community Life. I acknowledge that, but we have committed \$260 million of new money under our Roadmap.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: That component doesn't include the community organizations. There's no money—not a cent. We were told directly that there was no money available for organizations such as ours under the Roadmap.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: So your organizations have filed absolutely no applications with respect to that \$260 million in new money?

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: We don't have access to that funding. Those funds are closed. We're trying to explore other ways of obtaining funding. That's the message we're sending the minister to see whether there are any other avenues to explore.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Do I have a little time left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I wanted to ask a question about another matter.

I'm going to give you the opportunity to tell us where you think we could make improvements in order to advance matters. This has been going on for years—in fact, more than 10 years. Do you have any suggestions? Where could we improve the process?

• (0950)

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I think we've already named a few options. I agree with you: advancing 25% of funding to offset funding approval and payment delays is an excellent option. However, that funding has to be paid. It's one thing to receive a letter in April informing you of that 25% advance, as we said in our presentation, but the money still hasn't been paid today. It's important.

We mentioned earlier that the multi-year agreements were very important. As for the contribution accords, yes, they have to be signed. I know of one case in particular in which the accord isn't signed. They still have to be received. That's what we were saying earlier. The contribution accords haven't been sent. The contribution amounts haven't been confirmed. We can't even plan.

Do you want to add something, Diane?

Ms. Diane Côté (Director, Community and Government Liaison, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): There's an enormous number of steps and processes that have to be followed at the Department of Canadian Heritage, at the regional and national levels. There are two or three stages at the national level alone before a project gets to the minister's office. From there, it has to follow the reverse path. In any case, there are an incredible number of stages for each project or programming.

There's also another factor that makes the matter more difficult. The Department of Canadian Heritage is a department that has about the largest number of contributions and grants in government. This year, all its programs, not just the Official Languages Program, were at the renewal stage. I also find that somewhat unacceptable. The department should be able to stagger its programs somewhat so it doesn't have to be done all at the same time.

The Chair: That's definitely a point to take note of, so that the expiry dates are not all the same because that causes a backlog. It should be arranged in sequence, staggered.

Ms. Diane Côté: Absolutely. There are other things that I wanted perhaps to mention—

The Chair: Do it quickly. I'm a bit short of time, but go ahead, you are the witnesses. We're here to listen to you.

Ms. Diane Côté: It's just another brief note. The deadline for some organizations, particularly at the national level, is in November. However, in the provinces, it's before that for most organizations. The deadline for some organizations is in September and October. That's the case of the organizations we're talking about.

The Chair: Perfect.

We're going to start our second round. We were able to do a good round; it was quite exhaustive.

Go ahead, Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, it's all well and good to try to blame others, but the opposition isn't the government. That may not be good for you, but I believe that people on the government side haven't understood that they are the government. They have formed the government since January 2006. If they want to talk about elections, I'm going to remind them that they're the ones who triggered the election in September 2008. So they should stop blaming the opposition and accept their responsibility.

It's all well and good to study the situation, but personally... I think that Ms. Bossé, from the FCFA, said that programs had to be accepted or approved again by the Treasury Board. Between you and me, that's not the organizations' problem; it's the government's responsibility to do things accordingly so that you aren't ultimately penalized. I think this is really a matter of common sense. If the government withholds approvals, takes the time it wants, and is forced to transfer matters left and right, ultimately you're the ones who aren't entitled to funding because they haven't done their homework. It's not your responsibility; it's not your fault. The government must accept its responsibility in that respect.

How much time has the entire matter of the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality taken? In principle, it should have been in place on the day the other plan expired. But they took their time, and today all we hear is that the Roadmap has been announced. However, we're looking for something concrete. Where does it stand? In what organization? In what region of the country? People are waiting to know when they'll get their funding.

Ms. Bossé and Ms. Côté mentioned earlier that applications to Canadian Heritage have to be submitted at the provincial level in September and October. This is now late June. That means that organizations and groups applied in September, but may not yet have received any money, or even an answer, in July. We're talking about a system that makes absolutely no sense. You aren't one of the new groups; they know who you are; they know what you want, what your objective is. You're trying to promote both official languages through your respective organizations, in your respective regions. However, the only thing we hear is that the money isn't there. It's deplorable to see these kinds of situations. It's up to the government to shoulder its responsibilities. This government has been in power for nearly four years. It's all well and good to say that some people are new, but the government itself is starting to get old. Four years later, they're still trying to blame the opposition for their own inaction and inability to do the necessary work to ensure that our organizations can be properly respected.

My remarks are probably more of a comment, because there comes a time when we get frustrated for you. We would much prefer not to have you appear before us, in the Standing Committee on Official Languages, to tell us what your problems are. If the government had taken action or was taking action, you wouldn't be here explaining to us what has to be done to save you. You would have your money. Your applications would have been approved, you would have received your money, your projects would be implemented, and the communities and groups would be benefiting from them. However, we're still struggling before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Why? Because the government isn't giving you the money you need. Why doesn't the government simply approve your application and hand over the money you need?

Mr. Chairman, how much time do I have left?

• (0955)

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: In view of what I consider a crisis for the organizations, we're going to submit a motion to the clerk, in both official languages, concerning today's subject. We're going to ask the committee to re-examine this matter. Let's summon the

people from the departments and the ministers responsible so that we can clarify the situation. Perhaps we have to put them under the lights once again, a second, a third time. Perhaps someone has to finally wake up. We're going to introduce this motion which, I'm sure, we'll be able to debate in a while, since it concerns today's subject. It will be in both official languages.

These kinds of situations have to stop. We have to find solutions for you. When the ministers reappear before us, they'll probably get fed up and make sure their departments work. They alone are responsible for the mistakes made. They have no one else to blame. They can't blame the opposition or the officials; they have only themselves to blame.

Mr. Chairman, we can debate this motion later.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Could I make a comment?

The Chair: You'll have a chance to do that.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): I nevertheless have a few questions to ask.

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours has used his speaking time. Every parliamentarian has the privilege of using it at his or her discretion.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: This is new for me.

The Chair: Ms. Guay, go ahead, please.

Ms. Monique Guay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to ask you a few simple questions. We see the problem is serious. The parliamentary session will be ending soon, likely this week. No doubt you know how things work here in summer: everything runs in slow motion.

What could we do to help you now, so that you don't see any of your organizations shutting down, going bankrupt or laying off employees? I see you are really in serious difficulty and that this has been going on for years. You no doubt often need qualified staff, but it must be hard to recruit them. These people don't want to get involved in an organization that offers no financial security or can't guarantee long-term employment.

Give us some ideas of what we can do, as parliamentarians, to press the government before the House adjourns for the summer in the next few days. That way, we could immediately take concrete action that might help you this summer. Then we could see you again in the fall so to give you some news.

I'm going to hand over to you.

• (1000)

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: The applications have been received and, from what we understand, have been analyzed. The cheques now have to be signed and mailed and the agreements sent. We don't know what office they're in now.

Ms. Monique Guay: You don't know at all?

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: No.

Ms. Monique Guay: But you file your applications with Canadian Heritage?

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: Yes.

Ms. Monique Guay: All right. We're going to look into the matter and see what desk they're lying around on.

Apart from that?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I'd like to point out that there are also Industry Canada, Health Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Human Resources—

Ms. Monique Guay: You file applications with all those departments?

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: Yes, in the context of various projects.

Ms. Monique Guay: All right.

If I understood correctly, you're saying you have filed a funding application and carried out the project, but haven't received the money.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: That didn't happen to us.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: It's Industry Canada that was involved. It was for the *La Nuit sur l'étang* concerts, an event that is held in Sudbury every year. It attracts a lot of people and represents a very significant economic and social contribution. The application was filed in February 2008, the event was held in March 2009, but these people still haven't received a response to the application.

Ms. Monique Guay: Since the event is over, Industry Canada may be less interested in granting the funding.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: That depends on the programs. For some of them, we're told we shouldn't make any financial commitments until the contribution agreement is on the table.

Ms. Monique Guay: So there was no agreement.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: No, there wasn't.

Ms. Monique Guay: However, you met the criteria for filing the application?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Yes.

Ms. Monique Guay: This is quite awful. This kind of thing really shouldn't happen. How long has this been going on?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: It's been going on for years.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: As I said earlier, the fact that the resources are minimal makes the situation increasingly dramatic. We don't have any leeway within our budgets.

Ms. Monique Guay: That's also why you're requesting a 50% increase in program funding.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: That's what was recommended by the committee.

Ms. Monique Guay: Indeed.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We're very pleased to have been invited this morning. When the political, administrative and community levels work together, they can produce results that benefit everyone. We can give you some examples in that regard. We have to sit down together and look for solutions. That's somewhat our message today. The fact remains that, for the moment, the contribution agreements have to be sent and the money granted.

Ms. Monique Guay: Are some of your members in debt? I heard that people used their own credit cards.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: That's correct.

Ms. Monique Guay: That makes no sense. Those people will never be reimbursed.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: We don't encourage those kinds of practices, but otherwise, they shut down. It's very difficult to shut down when you know that services will be vastly reduced.

Ms. Monique Guay: You can count on our support. I believe we have to do a big job before the end of the session. We have to bring enormous pressure to bear on the government for it to move and produce the cheques. Good Lord, we're going to go get them and take them to you! I can't wait to see the motion of our Liberal colleagues that we're going to study later.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, madam.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Beyond the practical aspect of the use of our lines of credit and credit cards, I believe in the notion of longer term strategic effects and results. You should not overlook the fact that, when we put forward a one-year project and are told that we can start activities every six months, we have to reorganize our project, and the long-term structural effects are no longer there.

I'm tossing out a challenge to the government. I'm asking it to consider the use of public funds in a strategic sense. Granting funding in a piecemeal manner, every six months, isn't strategic. In fact, you want the organizations to be more accountable to taxpayers than the government. We're sure we have to produce strategic results, and you're preventing us from doing it.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Martin-Laforge.

Thank you, Ms. Guay.

We'll now go to Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This morning, I would like to welcome our guests with a sense of urgency.

[*English*]

Mr. Donnelly from the Quebec Community Groups Network, I hope you'll forgive me, but I will continue this discussion in French, and principally with the president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. I hope you'll realize that if we manage to solve the problem for one, it will solve it for both.

[*Translation*]

I'd also like to point out to the committee that Ms. Routhier-Boudreau is a resident of Ottawa—Orléans. We have met on a number of occasions.

As far as I know, the issues we previously discussed were resolved to your satisfaction. Unfortunately, I don't remember discussing this one with you. If you had talked to me about it, I could have helped you. I very much appreciate the urgent efforts of the opposition members in wanting to support and help you.

This week, I got a call from the Festival franco-ontarien, which was facing a similar problem. In a few hours, they received the documents they needed. I think there's a way to improve the process.

The situation is probably the way it is because there have been abuses in other files in the past. Those abuses were committed not by the organizations that receive funding, but by the government. Today, the procedures are tougher. Everyone is ensuring stricter management of public funds. For a group such as yours,

[*English*]

and here I speak of both groups,

[*Translation*]

there is already an assumption of good faith. And since the assumption of good faith is there, I believe it's unacceptable to leave you hanging the way we are doing.

As for the \$165 million increase in the Roadmap, as far as I know, you aren't eligible to receive that money for administration or promotional purposes. However, you are eligible for it for projects, to provide services to the people you represent. Since I am one of those people, being a francophone living in a minority setting, I would be critical of you if you didn't file an application to obtain a portion of that funding.

Ms. Routhier-Boudreau, I would like to speak with you during the break. I very much appreciate the assistance of all the other members in solving this problem as soon as possible. The fact remains that you have one servant at this table, me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1010)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I'd like to thank you for being here.

There are definitely some problems. I would ask my counterpart Mr. D'Amours to be less partisan because, when we work together in this committee, we do a good job. We just did that in the context of a study on postsecondary education.

I would like us to study what is going on in the communities. We definitely support the vitality of your organizations in our communities. The services that you provide are very important. I know we are working closely with our minister and that the minister is pressing officials to expedite the review of your files.

[*English*]

What I'm saying is that it's not just under this government that there have been problems. When we did our study in 2006, we heard similar complaints that applied to a previous government. It's not a political thing. It's process and bureaucracy that are in the way, and we need to fix that. I would certainly be in favour of us looking at this in more detail so that we can continue to work with the department to correct what I see to be a significant problem.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Go ahead, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Robert Donnelly: I'll be quite brief.

First, a 25% advance that arrives in June isn't an advance. An advance is an amount that arrives on April 1.

Second, we talked a little about access to Roadmap funding. It's not that there isn't any money for the anglophone communities in Quebec, especially

[*English*]

in arts, culture, and heritage, for example, but Sylvia talked before about the process we're stuck in. We put in a national program for arts, culture, and heritage that's going to be of benefit for all the English communities and for Canada in terms of the arts domain. When we try to access road map funding or whatever, we're sent through a regional office in Montreal. That's not a problem for our confreres here, but it is for us in Quebec.

Sylvia was talking before about the trouble with working at the national level. We're in the process now. We worked six months on developing the arts, culture, and heritage. Yes, we can perhaps access road map funding for something like that because it's across Quebec—it's not just one little sector or one little organization—but when we have to work through the Montreal regional office that has its own ideas about our cross-Quebec project, we don't even know how far it goes from that level. It's like we're dealing with two departments of Canadian Heritage at the same time. It shouldn't be like that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

Monsieur Godin, *s'il vous plaît*.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: You have found an honourable servant who will solve all your problems and he is sitting at the table.

I thought that, in Ottawa, it was the Parliament of Canada. There are four political parties. Politics exists, and always will. When we don't want to do something, the excuse we give is that we don't want to make it a political issue. And yet we engage in politics every day. That was true before and it is today. It's like before and after. At the age of 20, I had hair on my head, and at 27, I didn't. What can you do about it? I'm still the same person.

I don't accept the idea that a government can say, as an excuse, that it's the fault of the public servants, who only work at the rate they're asked to work. I didn't accept that during the time of the Liberals, and I won't accept it under the Conservatives either. If things don't go quickly enough, perhaps it's because there aren't enough public servants. Perhaps there's only one official responsible for all the projects. What's the problem? You say you don't know where the file is. Someone has to take responsibility for that. The minister can't say that he isn't aware; it's been repeated to him for 10 or 15 years. It's the same problem.

Mr. Donnelly, you put it very clearly: a 25% advance six months later isn't an advance. I'm sure you've already told the department and the minister that makes no sense. Leadership has to come from the top. A member can't simply tell someone in his riding that, if he had known, he would have met with him and everything would have been solved. My God, spend the rest of the day with that member and solve all your problems. Promises are being made, but the money isn't going out. There are reasons for that. The longer the situation goes on, the better it is for them. That undermines the development of the communities.

If I was in your position, I would simply close up shop, but you're saying that's not the solution. It's true that it's not the solution, but when individuals who care about their community have to use their credit cards, what has to be done? It's the government that should care about the communities. Laws have been passed, and it's the government that's responsible for linguistic promotion of Canada's anglophone and francophone minorities.

I can't wait to see the motion the Liberals will be introducing. We have to find a solution. We must stop making this a political issue and ask the minister to find solutions. Why has this problem been around for 10 years? Instead of blaming the Conservatives, we have to wonder what the problem is. We should also ask the officials who is responsible for the problem. Is it them, the minister or the government? What do you think?

•(1015)

The Chair: There are two minutes left.

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau: For every dollar we receive from the government, we generate three, four or five. With what little we've received, we've moved mountains. We now have 25 community radio stations, French-language weeklies, French-language health networks and schools right across the country. The communities are making the most of the money they receive from the government.

The problem we currently have is major, and we've been talking about it for 10 years. I'm very pleased to hear you say today that everyone is concerned by the situation. If the problem persists, we'll be seeing office closures. We're dealing with a major case of fatigue, we are having trouble finding and retaining staff. We can't compete with other employers. The situation is serious, and yet our work is extremely important and is moving issues forward.

I believe that Mariette Carrier-Fraser, president of the AFO, spoke to you about this as well, Mr. Galipeau. It's really a priority for us. If we can address this problem, we'll be working even bigger miracles.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Has she previously spoken with Mr. Galipeau? I thought he had heard nothing about that.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: She didn't speak to me about it, and Mariette Carrier-Fraser hasn't spoken to me about it either.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right.

The Chair: Do you, the people from the Quebec Community Groups Network, want to add something, a final word? We're going to thank our witnesses before moving on to something else.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): First, I have a point of order.

The Chair: We're not going to adjourn; we're simply going to finish with the witnesses.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I just want to make sure we get the unanimous consent of all parties on this subject so that the motion I have drafted is studied on a priority basis.

The Chair: Before that, do you people from the Quebec Community Groups Network want to add something?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: I simply want to say that I completely agree with Lise on what she just explained. I've been coming here for three years, and we always talk about the same things, such as delays and the problems they cause. In fact, these are vulnerable organizations because budgets are fairly limited. That's the problem.

In addition—and this is the third time we've said this—for the anglophone communities in Quebec, there is a structural problem. We're somewhat caught in it: we do business with two offices related to Heritage in Quebec. And then there's our desire to work at the national level, and that's very important for us.

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

As the saying goes, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

You saw this morning how surprised I was to see that parliamentarians had more comments than questions. Moreover, we're going to debate a motion.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: That's because we all agree.

The Chair: So I would like to thank you for being here. You may still attend the committee's proceedings. We are now going to continue on the same subject. I believe Mr. Rodriguez would like to speak. Thank you.

We'll also have to adopt a report this morning.

Mr. Rodriguez.

•(1020)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We are on the subject, which makes the motion acceptable. To the best of my ability, in both official languages, this motion reads as follows:

That the Committee study, at the earliest opportunity, the impacts of the delays in providing funding to beneficiary organizations, following what was heard at the meeting of June 16, 2009.

[English]

That the committee study, at the earliest opportunity, the impacts of the delays in providing funding to beneficiary organizations as heard at the meeting of June 16, 2009.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

The motion is admissible since it concerns the subject.

Before hearing speeches, I will first reread it:

That the Committee study, at the earliest opportunity, the impacts of the delays in providing funding to beneficiary organizations, following what was heard at the meeting of June 16, 2009.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We have to stop criticizing each other or tossing the ball back and forth or blaming partisan politics, government officials or whoever. We want to solve the problem.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: That's not what you're doing?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm requesting a minimum level of politeness, Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Chairman, we want to get to the bottom of this matter and to debate the issue. Apart from debate, we want the problem to be solved here. That's what we want, and we won't solve it until we understand what is going on.

Is it because there aren't enough officials or is there an absence of political will? I don't know, and I'm not making a judgment today. I'm not saying why things are that way, but I want to know and I want us to solve this problem. That's the reason behind the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: The government is conducting a study on this subject because we also have concerns. So we want to help you as soon as possible. I assure you this is not a political response.

For my part, I believe in the Francophonie, in your investments and your efforts, and I frankly congratulate you.

However, with regard to the motion, I am concerned by the question of “the impacts” because that means that we'll be introducing witnesses who will tell us how this has affected them and so on.

[*English*]

There's a measure of urgency, and we don't really have time to invite all of these organizations back to say how it's impacting you. We know it's impacting you all. I think we can agree that it's impacting you negatively. We want to figure out how to fix it, so I think we should study the delays and how we can

[*Translation*]

improve those delays.

[*English*]

Every organization is going to come in and say they want it sooner, and I think we can agree on that. I don't think we have to bring 50 witnesses in and delay other very important studies we have to do to improve official languages in our country.

That is my concern. Then we'll have to talk about a date. We only have one meeting left, and it will be impossible to do anything by the one meeting. I agree with Monsieur Rodriguez in principle and in spirit, with slight amendments so it's not based on the organizations, because I truly believe, and we all agree, that they're all impacted negatively.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover.

We now go to Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Chairman, there have been some discussions. If you ask, you'll see that Mr. Rodriguez agrees to my seconding his motion.

The Chair: I don't think we need a seconder. I thank you for your offer, Mr. Galipeau. I'll take note of that.

Now we'll go to Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chairman, I'm in favour of the motion. I nevertheless want us to remember that Mr. Semianiw was to come and meet with us to talk about the transformation model. If I understood correctly, he can't be here next Thursday. So it's deferred to our next meeting, which could be held in June, July, August, September or October. I hope we can meet with him at the committee's next meeting when he is available. I want us to study that. That meeting is very important.

Do our Liberal Party colleagues agree to hold this meeting depending when Mr. Semianiw is available?

• (1025)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We would like to meet him.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That's what we expected. In that context, Mr. Chairman, there's no problem.

In addition, we're talking about a study—

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: —for the purpose of making changes as soon as possible.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, it's your turn.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I'm in favour of the motion. I know this is an emergency.

Furthermore, the government will have the opportunity to consult the committee blues and to see everything that is going on.

With respect to National Defence, we already had that subject on the agenda.

You don't conduct a study in one day. You have to do something serious. I don't want to play politics, but every time you make a comment, we believe it's political.

This isn't something that's been going on for two or three years; it's been going on a long time. What's missing in a good study? What are the officials going to tell us? Will they tell us why they can't respond on time? How can we adapt? We need answers. We have to be able to have a dialogue together to try to find solutions and make recommendations. That's why I'm supporting the motion. We mustn't conceal the fact, the House will probably be adjourning by the end of the week, unless the committee wants to sit in July. That's possible. I hope that, at the start of business, we'll begin by studying this subject and that we'll try to work with our communities to find a solution to this problem which has been around for years.

The Chair: The four political parties have expressed their support for the motion.

Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I had—

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: —a detail.

The Chair: Mr. Petit, go ahead, please.

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

The motion is very broad, and I support it. And we could even go as fast as possible at the first opportunity.

Mr. Godin seems to mean that someone has a problem, and that it's them or that it's us. Politically, that causes a problem. You have to look at the machine. How is it that it is having trouble handling the organizations' applications? Are there too many stages to go through before the decision is made? That's what we have to know.

If we want to give them an adequate response, we can't simply say they're responsible, or that we are. We have to know why the machine doesn't work. How is it that, when organizations file an application, there are perhaps 25 stages to go through and delays? That's what I want to know.

If that's Mr. Rodriguez' goal, if that's what we have to examine, we must make a recommendation to reduce the number of stages. We have to be able to make a recommendation. I don't agree that we should come up with a recommendation such as, "It's them or it's us." I want to be able to study the machine, to invite officials to testify, to ask them how they operate when they receive an application, where they then send it, who responds, how much time it takes between the two of them, why it isn't ready on time, why a decision can't be given in one month. Perhaps there's a problem in the machine. That's what we have to study. If there is one, we have to find a solution.

I agree with Mr. Rodriguez, but we have to proceed precisely and exhaustively in order to come to a solution. Consequently, the people who have testified this morning will be able to say that it's very possible they won't get it this year, but that, on the first occasion, there may perhaps be a meeting where we'll be able to find a solution. That's what I want. I believe Mr. Rodriguez wants that as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Mr. Rodriguez, go ahead, please.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: In conclusion, I would like to speak briefly about two points. First, I am entirely aware that we can't conduct a study in one meeting. So I know that it will be done in the fall. That said, if it's done in the fall, we'll have to make structural changes. There is a slight delay, but if, through the study, we could at least prevent that from happening in the coming years, that will already be an enormous step forward.

The second point I wanted to raise refers to what Mr. Petit and others have mentioned. This study and the motion are very broad because I wanted them to be broad. We're going to look everywhere. There will be no political finger-pointing. There may be political content, discussions that focus on political will, just as we may talk about the mechanisms that must be respected. You'll be able to help us on that point. We will ask officials to testify who will explain to us how things work internally.

When the application is received, to whom is it transferred? Does it stay on top of a pile or is it sent to someone else? We don't know anything about all that. It's broad because we have to get to the bottom of things in order to understand exactly what happens inside the government machine. It's not to point the finger at someone, but rather to change things so this doesn't happen again. That's the purpose of the motion.

• (1030)

The Chair: Ms. Glover, would you like to add something?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I'd like to get some clarification from Mr. Rodriguez. When he talks about summoning witnesses, is he still talking about witnesses like the FCFA? That will slow down what we want to do. We can invite 50 or 100 witnesses, but they'll all say that it takes too much time. We'll have to have officials from the region testify, and Treasury Board representatives. There will be an operation. We already have a lot of witnesses just talking about the people who operate the machine.

These witnesses really want to get their money. Inviting 50 or 100 witnesses who repeat the same thing—you presented your situation very well—will slow down the study, and people will suffer as a result. I'd like to do everything possible to avoid that.

So I would like to invite witnesses who can explain to us what you said, Mr. Rodriguez. How do they proceed? Where are the challenges? Where could challenges be eliminated?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover.

Allow me simply to recall that normally, when the committee decides to examine a subject, we first have to make the decision to do so, which seems to be the committee's wish. Then committee members provide a witness list. It is presented to committee members, we decide on the number of meetings we want to devote to the study, and we agree on a witness list. At this point, if committee members agree on the principle, we should adopt the motion.

Are committee members ready to vote on the motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: You want to introduce an amendment, Ms. Glover?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Yes. At the start, I asked that we delete the word "impacts" and focus on delays.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: This goes beyond impacts.

The Chair: Just a moment. I would like to clearly understand what Ms. Glover said. I'm going to reread the motion:

That the Committee study, at the earliest opportunity, the impacts of the delays in providing funding to beneficiary organizations, following what was heard at the meeting of June 16, 2009.

Ms. Glover, do you have an amendment to move?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: First, I think we've established that June 16 is impossible.

The Chair: That's today's meeting.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Pardon me.

The Chair: It is moved that, pursuant to what we've heard today, we will examine the impacts—

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I would like to delete the word "impacts" so that we focus on the delays themselves. Impact means that we have to invite 100 groups. We're going to vote on the amendment, and that will be in the minutes. You're going to slow everything down.

The Chair: So the amendment would read as follows: "That the Committee study, at the earliest opportunity, the delays..."

We're going to put the question on the amendment.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: We'll now put the question on the motion.

M. Pierre Lemieux: Can you read the motion once again?

The Chair: All right, I'm going to reread it, Mr. Lemieux.

[*English*]

That the committee study, at the earliest opportunity, the impacts of the delays in providing funding to beneficiary organizations, following what was heard at the meeting of June 16, 2009.

•(1035)

[*Translation*]

(Motion carried unanimously)

The Chair: That brings the first part of our meeting to an end. Thank you.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes. We've scheduled a second part to discuss the report.

Is it fine with you if we continue, Ms. Glover?

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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