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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0900)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning, everybody.

Welcome to meeting 45 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are doing a study of the development of linguistic duality in northern Canada. We are very pleased to be in the Northwest Territories. It's actually the very first time for this committee to be in this part of the country.

All the members, including me as the chair, are very proud today to be with you, especially with the commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Ms. Sarah Jerome.

Thank you, Ms. Jerome, for being with us this morning. You told me about your backache this morning, so we appreciate your being with us.

We also welcome your legal adviser, Madam Shannon Gullberg.

Thank you for being with us, Ms. Gullberg.

Without any delay, I invite you to begin your opening statement. The members will then proceed with questions.

[Translation]

Madam Commissioner, the floor is yours.

[English]

Ms. Sarah Jerome (Commissioner, Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories): [*Witness speaks in the Gwich'in language*]

Good morning. I realize that I don't have a translator in the room so I will go ahead and translate for myself.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Welcome to the Northwest Territories. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you this morning.

I must apologize, as I am not feeling very well this morning. I have a pinched nerve, but I came anyway, thinking that today I would feel better, but it seems a little worse this morning.

I have my legal adviser, Shannon Gullberg, here with me this morning. Shannon was the previous languages commissioner prior to my appointment in May of 2009 and has worked throughout the territories with the 11 official languages. Shannon lived here in

Yellowknife and had direct contact with the francophone community, and also throughout the NWT, so I would prefer that Shannon do the presentation after I do my opening remarks. I just wanted to make you aware of that.

It has been quite a challenge working with nine official languages up here in the Northwest Territories. Having worked here all my life—I was born and raised here—and having been taken away to the residential school for 12 years, I kind of lost my language along the way, as have many others of our people who were taken away for about 12 years of their lives.

We have tried over the years to revitalize our language and to work to relearn our language. Some of our people have never been able to do that. I was very, very fortunate, as I had parents who took us back to the camp every summer for two months in an immersion situation, so we had no choice. My late mum spoke only the Gwich'in language. She did not speak English. Thank God for that: today I still have my language. But I cannot say that for the majority of our aboriginal language speakers up here.

Our languages have been on the decline over the years, so today we are working at doing everything we can to revitalize our language. It is being taught in the schools, but in order for the language to be taught it has to be taught in a natural environment, in an immersion situation, and possibly out on the land. It is being taught in the schools, so that's where we are right now.

With that, I would like to ask Shannon to proceed with the presentation.

Thank you.

• (0905)

Ms. Shannon Gullberg (Legal Advisor, Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories): We don't have anything formally written for you, but if the committee would like, maybe I would just make a few opening comments, perhaps reflecting or mimicking what Sarah has said.

Certainly with 11 official languages...and if you haven't been in the north before, just even getting to Yellowknife you can appreciate the vast geographical distances. You have a long way north to go yet before you actually get to the top of the Northwest Territories. The distances here are vast, and that is a huge issue. I don't believe it's insurmountable, but certainly it's a big issue.

So we have 11 official languages, huge geographical issues, and then, as Sarah indicated, we also have a history, if you will, that includes the legacy of residential schools. Not only was there no promotion of official languages, but it was frowned upon, to put it mildly, in terms of using some of the aboriginal languages. When you put all of that together, your starting point isn't good.

On a more positive note, there are a lot of good things going on. As Sarah indicated, there is a lot of language teaching in the schools. The former Minister of Education, Culture and Employment made a directive that there had to be second-language learning in all schools. The end result is that every child in the Northwest Territories in school is learning either French or an aboriginal language in addition to English. You can't avoid it. In a number of schools, and my children have had the benefit of this, not only has it been English and French; it's also been an aboriginal language as well, a Dogrib dialect. So when you put all of that together, it gives some hope that in fact good things will come out of that.

In the last 10 years, my experience has been that the government is far more cognizant of language issues. I think the Fédération franco-ténoise has played a large role in that by highlighting some of those issues and saying that we have to address these in some fashion.

To me, whether everyone agrees with the end result in some of the issues that come up isn't really the issue. The issue is that it highlights language, and people have to come up with some creative ways to move forward. I think it also gives hope that we will move forward in a positive direction.

Of course, money, I think, is always the bottom line. It's one of the big issues when it comes to government and coming up with those solutions. I think that's probably one of the bigger impediments right now.

We're glad to be here today. Welcome to the Northwest Territories and Yellowknife. I hope you enjoy what we refer to as northern hospitality.

• (0910)

[Translation]

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

We shall begin our first round immediately with Mr. Murphy.

[English]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here this morning.

It's indeed a pleasure—and I speak on behalf of my colleagues when I say this—to be here on behalf of the Parliament of Canada and to make the federal presence known. You have a wonderful, vibrant, beautiful community.

I am going to ask a few questions about official languages and your role as commissioner. In Ottawa we have Mr. Graham Fraser, appointed by the federal government, who of course gives progress reports to Parliament. But he is also—and I think he would agree—fairly vigilant, to the point of being almost critical of many of the steps the government is taking or not taking on any given day towards what he feels are the goals of official languages policy.

I must say that we've had a chance to read in advance the comments Minister Lafferty may make today, and I've heard your comments, and I understand the issue, which is that with so many official languages, there's an effort on all fronts. Would it be fair to say, however, that there isn't as precise a concentration on French as a second language, or French as a first language, an official language of Canada, when you have so many official languages to take care of?

I say that because the remarks from Minister Lafferty laud very much the efforts with respect to aboriginal languages, and I think you've obviously been making great strides there. But is there a danger that the *épanouissement* of the French language is being mixed in with that, and that it is not, from our point of view, being given as much due as it should?

I draw your attention also to the funds that have been transferred from the federal official languages program to the Northwest Territories. I guess the follow-up on that general question is the specific question of whether these moneys.... It may be ignorance on my part, but in the envelope of the development of federal official languages communities programs for the Government of Northwest Territories, for instance, the \$3.2 million and so on, are those funds directed solely towards French as an official language, French and English as official languages, or official languages as mandated by your commission and your territorial law?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I'll answer first. Sarah has asked me to give my comments on your questions.

In regard to the first question, I think it's a legitimate question: does French sort of get into the mix when there are 11 languages and get overlooked? There's a long way to go, in my opinion, in terms of improving French language services—a long way to go.

However, going back to the initial comment I made, I think that largely due to some really good push on the part of the Fédération, there have been great strides made in providing French language services. For example, there's the French language centre here on Franklin. I don't know if you will have a chance to see that while you're here, but they can provide basic information on government services. The government has worked far more diligently in the last five or six years to make sure that publications are in English and French. So those strides have been made largely due to pushing, and yes, I think there has been some resistance.

I'll just add that for the French immersion education that kids can partake in here, my personal experience is that it's second to none, if you want to look across the country. I can say that based on my own children and their experiences.

So does the government have to move forward and improve things? Absolutely. Are they making strides? Yes.

I think the frustration actually goes more the other way, where those whose first language is an aboriginal language would say that the francophones get all of this and that they're not getting their share of the pie to do the same sorts of things. For example, where is the centre for Gwich'in, where they could access the same sorts of services in a centralized office, and in the other languages as well?

Where those types of facilities have been made available, it has been due to communities—again—really pushing. For example, in Behchoko, they have actively taken the stories of their elders and catalogued them, but that has been a real community initiative as opposed to government really pushing on that.

In short, I guess it's a matter of moving forward, but I think the bigger issue would be that people would perceive it as almost the opposite of perhaps the way you're looking at it.

In terms of the budget issue, I haven't really had a chance to look at that in the last two years. I don't know if Sarah feels comfortable commenting on that without taking a look at it. Minister Lafferty is probably your better bet on that.

● (0915)

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Murphy.

We'll now proceed with Madame Guay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for being here today. We have just come from Whitehorse. We met with representatives from a very dynamic francophone community and discussed educating primary and secondary school students in French. The students are at school because they want to get their secondary school credentials.

I know that you face considerable challenges here. There are several aboriginal languages, and a number of communities that have to fight to keep their language alive. I imagine that children are often encouraged to learn English rather than use their aboriginal language, if it is not spoken at home.

Do you provide these folks with any services? Is there any follow up? Is there regular reporting to ensure that the approach is working? Is there funding to ensure that these folks can continue to live in their own language?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: As I said earlier, because we spent so much time away from our families during the residential schools era, people my age—49—some of our people, some of our former students, refused to speak their language, so therefore their children did not have that language spoken to them at home.

We do have a second language program in all the schools, and we have teachers, but in the early 1970s when we started teaching the language in the schools, we basically took people off the street who were fluent in the language, without any teaching background—people who did not know how to teach a language. I mean, we were the first teachers of the language, but when you get into a formal setting...our people did not know how to teach the language or did not know how to use resources.

We just put them in as fluent speakers, so there was no formal way of teaching our students the language in the school environment. Our elders and our leaders have said over the years that the natural environment is for our young students to be out on the land in their home environment, surrounded by their parents, their grandparents,

and their extended family speaking to them. This has not been the case.

A lot of our elders, at the time of our parents, lived out on the land, so therefore we did not have that opportunity to relearn the language. And we did not have a curriculum. We just put the teachers in the classroom and told them to teach the language. It was up to the teachers to develop the materials and to teach the language the best way they knew. This resulted in a lot of failure.

Today in the Beaufort-Delta we have a second language curriculum that has been translated into Gwich'in and the Inuvialuit languages, so the teachers are now being trained to use that curriculum to teach the languages. We are beginning to see some success.

● (0920)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Things are starting to improve then on that front.

Are there any schools or educational institutions for francophones in Yellowknife? Are there any services to help people learn French?

[*English*]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Sarah has asked me to answer that. I think I'll do it from my own personal experience, because I think that's the better story. I have three daughters, two who have finished school now and one who is still in high school. All of them took French immersion, which has been exceptional.

Just to tell you about the calibre of the programming here, which we as a family had always heard was good, we ended up going down to Alberta for six months because my husband had a job opportunity that took us out for a while. There, our kids were in a totally uni-track French immersion school in St. Albert for six months, for a term. The teachers there were shocked and actually not that happy that their speaking skills were so good, having come from a dual-track school. Now, I like to think my kids are bright, but it wasn't just that: it was the level of education they had received.

But one of the issues that happens in high school in remote communities—and I'll include Yellowknife in this—is that you need teachers at that high school level who are competent in teaching those matriculation types of courses—I don't know if this translates well into French—those university prep types of courses so that those kids feel comfortable continuing at that high school level in French and can get their bilingual diploma.

What happens is that it's sometimes difficult to get the teachers who are comfortable teaching those high school level courses to come here. You might have a Biology 20 teacher who is teaching in French and who says, "I'm francophone and I can teach the children some French, but it's really not my area of expertise, so I'm not really comfortable". The kids sense that. They get concerned about their education, so they make a conscious decision to do that subject in English, because they're thinking "What am I doing after high school?"

My personal experience is that if you want to keep kids learning and doing that—and this is for the kids who are francophone as well, who are making those conscious decisions and asking where they are going after school—you have to invest money. Particularly when you get to the high school level where the students are thinking about their future, I would suggest some incentives for well-trained teachers who are comfortable with and confident about teaching those matriculation types of subjects. I think that's where things kind of fall apart.

Other than that, I think the schools work diligently to try to provide a very comprehensive French immersion program. My personal experience is that I would put not just my kids but the other kids we know who've gone through that program up against kids from anywhere else in the country.

● (0925)

[*Translation*]

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

We shall continue with Mr. Godin.

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

I would like to start by welcoming you.

I would like you to clarify a couple of things. You are the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. There are nine aboriginal languages, English and French. Is that right?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: What are your responsibilities as Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories and how do they differ from those of the federal Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser? Do you work collaboratively, or is your sphere of responsibility limited to the Northwest Territories? I don't know if what I'm saying makes sense. After all, the Territories are to some extent federally regulated, aren't they? What are the federal Commissioner of Official Languages' responsibilities there, as opposed to yours?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: We had a territory language conference in Sudbury last fall. I went to that meeting. So we do work with them.

The other thing I should mention before I give this to Shannon is that my responsibility as the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories is to deal with concerns on language issues. If I walked into a government department—for instance, the Department of Health and Social Services—and services were not being provided in my language, then I would have to take that matter to the languages commissioner for the languages commissioner to deal with and investigate it.

I do not have the responsibility of revitalizing or enhancing the language or promoting the language. My only responsibility up here is to deal with concerns.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Whose responsibility is that? Is it the responsibility of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada?

[*English*]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: The act was amended going back four years now. One of the issues that the Legislative Assembly looked at was narrowing the role of the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories.

The idea was that the Languages Commissioner would deal with the issue of complaints. They would promote the office and they would promote procedures to file complaints and all of that sort of thing. The responsibility for promotion of official languages was put on a minister responsible for official languages, who it sounds like you'll be—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: The Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada was responsible for official languages in the Northwest Territories prior to the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories taking up his position. The Languages Commissioner did not replace the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada given that the federal Official Languages Act stipulates that French and English must have equal status.

[*English*]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I'm sorry, I'm not quite sure what the question is.

When it comes to any federal government department, certainly I think the responsibility for that would be with the federal Official Languages Commissioner. There have been joint meetings—both when I was the Languages Commissioner, and previous commissioners—with the federal commissioner.

If you know, and I'm sure you do know, a little bit of the history of the Northwest Territories, you'll know that it's not all cut and dry where those divisions are, and whose responsibility—

● (0930)

Mr. Yvon Godin: A puzzle that's not all dry.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Exactly.

So it's very important to try to work together, and—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand that, but take schools, for example. The territories are responsible for education. But before they had their legislation and all that, the federal government was responsible for it.

Has that been lost, the responsibility of the federal government to be involved, or do they still have some say in it?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I think from a funding perspective, the GNWT certainly looks to the federal government for—

Mr. Yvon Godin: People could look for it, but by law, does the federal government have responsibility?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I think there is still a strong responsibility on the federal government. The federation court case did certainly make it clear that the federal government can't just wash its hands of it and say—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I guess aboriginal people have the same as the francophone people, because they don't have much, or not as much as what the anglophones have. We should be treated all on the same level.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Right. And I think the court cases have clearly said that. In my opinion, it puts the onus back on the federal government to ensure that the funding is there to make that work. It can't simply be a GNWT responsibility. The Northwest Territories Official Languages Act exists because the federal government allows it to exist.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is it working?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: As we've already talked a little bit about this morning, there are issues. There certainly are issues. It's working, I would say, better than it did even 10 years ago, but there is room for improvement. The federal government—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Where is there room for improvement?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: A good example is with regard to the equality issue. If somebody walks into a government office, they can demand service in English and French. Someone like Sarah can make sure that service happens. But to do it right there, while that individual is standing in the office, if they're with a clerk who kind of looks dumbfounded and they don't know what to do...that person is not going to walk away satisfied. Ultimately those services could be provided in French, but what would be better than having to think too much about the next step would be, "Oh, you're speaking French. Here's how I'm going to provide services to you."

A lot of the time that happens, and there have been great strides to make sure people that know how to access those services. But we still hear those complaints: a francophone will go in, they'll speak French, they will demand service in French, and a clerk—using the example of a clerk—will be totally unsure how to address this need.

[*Translation*]

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

We will move on to Mr. Gagné.

Mr. Bernard Gagné (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies.

Ms. Jerome, you mentioned briefly earlier that there were nine official languages. Are there 9 or 11?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Gagné, I think you will address your question in French, so I would invite our witness...

Oh, you're okay...?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Gagné: Can you hear me? I see.

I'll repeat my question. Are there 9 or 11 official languages here in Yellowknife? It was my understanding that there were 11 official languages.

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Sorry: that was 9 aboriginal languages, but 11 with French and English.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Gagné: Ms. Jerome, you referred earlier to teaching in natural environments. What I think you meant by that is that the teaching does not only occur at school, but also at home, and even in the community. Have I properly understood what you said?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Gagné: You also referred to the notions of pride and identity in reference to each of the 11 official languages in the Northwest Territories. Can you elaborate on this and how it relates to language?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: I went to school when I was eight years old. I was taken away from my community and taken to a residential school where we spoke only English. Prior to going to school, I spoke my language fluently. It was my first language. I was proud. I was so proud, now that I think about it in retrospect. I was so proud of being a Gwich'in, of speaking my language and understanding it.

It gave me so much confidence in myself. Even before I went to the residential school, I had a dog team of my own. This must have been when I was about six or seven years old. I had a dog team of two. I pulled a tent and stove for my parents through the Richardson Mountains.

Then I went to school and I had to speak English. I had to read, write, and speak English all at the same time. Many times I saw a big red X on my paper. I was a failure. They took my pride and confidence away from me when they forced that English language upon me and punished me for speaking my language.

So when I talk about pride, today I talk about pride because I relearned my Gwich'in language from my grandmother, who was 106 years old when she passed away. I spent two or three years with her prior to her death, mainly because I wanted to regain my Gwich'in language, which I did.

Today I have that pride because I know where I came from, because my parents and grandparents entrusted that language to me. Today I have to carry that torch and re-teach my family. This is what pride means to me.

• (0935)

Mr. Bernard Gagné: That's very interesting.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for your testimony.

What's your sense of the youth in the Territories—do young people here feel a sense of pride like you do? And speaking of the youth of today, you mentioned earlier that young people had been to some degree assimilated in terms of their official language, whether it be French or one of the other nine aboriginal languages. How do you see the future?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Confusion, a lot of confusion, because our young people were not taught about the basic survival skills on the land. My husband and I do a lot of on-the-land programs with students from both schools in Inuvik, the primary-elementary, and also the junior high and senior high. We've observed that a lot of these students do not know how to survive on the land. Some of these students have said to us, "We've never ever had a box of matches in our hands". And matches are the most basic survival instrument you'll have if you're lost out on the land.

Therefore, from my observations, a lot of our young people today are not proud to be who they are because they're still confused. We are working in that area today through the healing, through Health Canada, to deal with the residential schools and how it affected us and how we've kind of put that onto our children and our grandchildren. We're trying to cut that now.... For me, I'm trying to deal with it so that my grandchildren are not affected, so that they will be proud of who they are, and so they will relearn their language through my efforts as their grandmother, their *shitsuu*.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have a little less than a minute, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I think that it's important to have tools to get specific things done. Yesterday, we visited the Maison bleue. I don't know what its official name is, but it goes by the name, "*la petite maison bleue*". It caters to the francophone community here in Yellowknife. It didn't take long for us to realize that the building is somewhat overcrowded.

Do you think that there should be better equipped infrastructure here in Yellowknife that caters to the broader francophone community and offers a number of other services to do with secondary education and francophone culture? Do you think that that kind of infrastructure might be a useful tool to help develop the community?

• (0940)

[English]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I think you've hit the nail on the head. It always boils down to resources. I think that's the bottom line. I don't think it's a lack of willingness on the part of the government to promote cultural events and to promote language growth. I don't think that's the issue. It's always the money. If there were a bottomless pot of money, I think that some of the things we've talked about this morning would magically happen.

Certainly, having more resources means having more ability to have more offerings to promote the language. There are some good things going on. The francophones have developed a *collège*, where people who don't know any French can take anything, including a

course on advanced skills in writing for business in French. That's amazing. My understanding is that those courses are well attended.

The more of those things that can happen and be promoted, I think the better. Certainly, groups like the cultural association are invited to the schools for various activities, both on the aboriginal days and then when there are francophone cultural days. Again, the more money they have, the more they can provide and promote. I don't mean that in a crass way. That's simply the reality of the situation.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Généreux.

We will begin our second round with Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Madam Jerome and Madam Gullberg, I'd like to get a sense of the relative importance, I guess, the relative use, of the 11 languages in terms of the number of people—the percentage of the population—who use them. Does that exist?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: That certainly does exist in statistics. If that's something you're interested in, the office could certainly provide you with that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Offhand, would you know?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Well, if you look at French, it would be about 10% of the population in the territories that feels functionally bilingual. Of course, people have different ideas about what that means, but they would feel functionally bilingual. You look at a language such as Gwich'in and it would be a very small percentage, and—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay. So where would that put French? Would it put it third or second?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Oh, I would say second.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The first would be English?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: English, yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Which aboriginal language would be used most?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Probably Tlicho, I would say.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That would come third...?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Yes, I would say that's probably third.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay.

Madam Gullberg, you were the commissioner prior to Madam Jerome.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Correct.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: How long were you the commissioner?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: For four years.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: From what year to what year?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: From 2004 to 2009.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In 2008?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Yes, 2008—that's better.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay. They were tumultuous years.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Would the commissioners, either Madam Jerome or yourself, table an annual report?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Correct.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you also follow up on complaints?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Correct.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Can you also table a report about a particular complaint?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: You could. You certainly could file a special report. I did that because the one area, when I did a bit of an historical overview of files, not just the files I dealt with.... Because I really didn't receive that many complaints.

But if you were to look historically at the kinds of comments you'd hear if you were doing a presentation, health care was huge—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: —so I did a special report on health care.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And those are all accessible through the government website?

• (0945)

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: They are.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

What's the budget of the commissioner's office?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: It's about \$240,000.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And the staff?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Well, there's me, as the languages commissioner, and there's my legal adviser, Shannon, who is part-time. I also have an admin assistant in Inuvik, who is part-time, and another admin assistant here in Yellowknife when and as needed.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: There's an area that intrigues me a bit, and I want to see if I can understand it. Is there a category of public service employees or positions that are deemed bilingual?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Yes, there are certain positions where you would have to be bilingual. There's a competency test if you wanted—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In that case, which of the languages are we talking about?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: It would depend. For example, if you were looking for a job at Stanton Territorial Hospital, there are interpreters or translators there. You would have to—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Here's what I'm trying to understand. Are there bilingual positions that are English and French, or English and an aboriginal language, or are there trilingual positions?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I don't know if there are any trilingual positions, but there are certainly bilingual positions. There's also a bilingual bonus that—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: English and French?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: English and French, for staff—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Would you know if this is something the commissioner has had to look at in terms of determining or helping to determine or reviewing the number of bilingual positions that are in the territorial public service?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Sorry, can you say that again?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: There are, I'm told, 4,700 public servants in the Northwest Territories. Would you have stats on how many of those are deemed to be bilingual positions?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: That could be obtained.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You don't have it, though?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I don't have that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And the commissioner, Madam Jerome...? No?

Okay. I'm getting signals here that my time's up, so....

[Translation]

The Chair: Indeed, Mr. Bélanger. Thank you.

The floor is yours, Ms. Guay.

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

My question has to do with health care.

Is everything okay, Ms. Jerome?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: We saw that this was a major challenge in Whitehorse and that there were a lot of problems as far as health care is concerned, especially in specialized fields, due to highly technical terminology. Even in your own language, you sometimes have trouble understanding doctors when they explain treatments. I can imagine that it's a problem when the explanation is in a language that you do not master. What's more, in the Northwest Territories, you've got the additional challenge of nine aboriginal languages.

Are there any services available for these folks to ensure that they get the proper treatment they need in their own language, understand what their problem is, what drugs they need or what treatments they require?

[English]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Maybe first in response to that, if you look on the website for the report I did on health care, I think that will help you understand to some extent what some of the issues are.

There are official positions that are translators—for example, at Stanton Territorial Hospital—and those people can be accessed through other health care facilities. Sarah has that report here if you want a copy of it. They could also be accessed through other hospitals and clinics. There are also some nurses and physicians who are bilingual francophones and can be accessed, but one of the recommendations in this report is that.... It's only by word of mouth that someone might hear of a doctor who is bilingual only by word of mouth and that's who you may choose to go to see. So there are ways of making that general knowledge more prominent and more available to the public.

The other thing, too, is that just with the way health care and technology are going, I think there are fewer and fewer reasons, regardless of where you are in Canada, why you can't access services through Telehealth so you can deal with a francophone nurse or a francophone doctor and comfortably understand what's going on. One of the concerns and complaints used to be that someone would be critically ill and some family member would be trying to do the translation or interpretation for them. Family members don't have the technical skill, but also they're very probably not in the best emotional state to be dealing with that anyway. That was one of the issues.

• (0950)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: And what about for aboriginals folks?

[English]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I'm sorry—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: And for aboriginals?

[English]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: That's for the francophone community as well, where someone would be there.... I mean, they could try to access somebody, but if it's late at night they might have difficulty, so a family member steps in. That's not the answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: Yesterday, at the legislative assembly, we were told that health and education were the two biggest portfolios. Unless I'm mistaken, you still have your work cut out for you in both those areas.

[English]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I agree, and if you want a copy of this report, it gives some idea of it.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: Yes, if you could pass that on to our clerk it would be most appreciated.

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

I have taken note of the proposal to obtain your report on health care here in the Northwest Territories.

We shall now turn to Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Galipeau.

[English]

Mrs. Jerome, we had a chance to speak a little bit earlier. I'm very interested in your village. It's quite a distance from here. You told me that there are about 800 residents in your village.

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What is the predominant language spoken?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: English.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: English? What percentage would that be?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: I would say that maybe 80% to 85% speak English.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Is there any French spoken?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: In our community? No.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: So the other 15% or so would be your native—

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You have a school system there, with probably one school from grade...?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes, to Grade 12.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Is French taught in that school?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: No.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: But the aboriginal languages, some of them—

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: One of the other things you mentioned was that.... First of all, congratulations on having three bilingual children. That's amazing. Can you tell me...? You and your husband don't speak French?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: My husband is fluent. He went to Laval.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Okay. That explains it. Because I have a theory that if you don't have the support in the home, it sometimes makes the education quite difficult.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: If I can add to that, my husband would speak to the kids in French for a certain time, but overall, I really do give credit to the school.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: So my theory still holds true.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I was afraid you were going to debunk it.

Can you tell me how many complaints you've had in an average year, say, as commissioner?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Probably we could both answer that.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Yes, particularly about the minority language, which I guess in this case would be French.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I think if we both answer that, you'll get a good sense of it.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Very quickly, because I have to give some time to my friend.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Okay: few complaints in any given year.

At the time I came in—Mr. Bélanger referred to it as tumultuous—I was the stopgap while they figured out what to do with the legislation. The Fédération had launched its lawsuit at that time, so really, I think complaints stopped, because that was the bigger issue: what are the rights? That really helped solidify some of the things the government needed to do, so we weren't getting complaints, and that was part of it.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Was it the same for you, Mrs. Jerome? There weren't too many complaints?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: There were not very many. Right now, I'm dealing with two French complaints, and none for the aboriginal languages.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): I thank you very much for coming here to educate us, especially those of us on this side. I haven't been to the Northwest Territories since 1977. It's the first time I've come to your capital city. As you might well imagine, we're all interested in the issues of official languages, but as they pertain to how you deal with them, we're still virgins on this side.

But we're interested.

Unlike the people on the other side, we don't think the people of Canada made a mistake in the last election, so we're the government.

I'm interested to know how it works with nine official languages, plus English and French. When a citizen of the Northwest Territories deals with his or her government in any department—let's say social services—does this mean that inside that department, and in all departments, there is a capacity to communicate with the citizen in any of those eleven languages? Does that capacity exist?

• (0955)

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I'm going to say no, it doesn't. The ability to access that interpretation or translation service exists, yes, so there are interpreters and translators available.

In an ideal world, where you're coming from, I think, is where should really be: "Oh, here's who we come to talk to when this issue comes up". There's someone departmentally who becomes familiar with the work of that department and what's going on and who gets a better feel for it.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I'm a resident in—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Galipeau. Your time has unfortunately run out.

[English]

We'll now move to Mr. Godin prior to concluding.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: My question is directed at Ms. Jerome.

[English]

You said that in your community, where you live, there are how many people? It was 800 or so, and 85% speak English.

Ms. Sarah Jerome: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Through the regulations or the law of official languages in the Northwest Territories, I saw that you have a big

budget of \$240,000. That's not big. You're talking money.... You're saying that you're not getting any complaints from the aboriginal people, but do they know what it all means—their rights, the law—and what they have the right to have? Is there any promotion of it in every community so that they understand what is there for them and what should be there for them? Is there education of the population on what, by law, they are supposed to get?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: On promotion, because I speak the language—it's my first language—I promote it. I walk it; I talk it. At the office in Inuvik, right now, I teach Gwich'in language lessons to people who are interested. I have two little grandchildren at home who I speak my language to, because I feel that maybe the only way we can bring this language back is to teach it to our preschoolers in our head-start programs.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's in your village. But there are more villages in the Northwest Territories. How do you promote it in the other villages?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: I usually contract an individual from here in Yellowknife to deal with all the aboriginal language speakers who are interpreters and translators. I get them to do little blurbs on the radio in their languages. There are possibly four different blurbs this year. One has to do with Aboriginal Languages Month, which is March, and it tells people to continue to speak their language and to promote their language. There's another one for a greeting at Easter time. Aboriginal Languages Day is in June, and there's one again at Christmas.

Those are some of the things I do. I try to promote it through our interpreters and translators.

• (1000)

Mr. Yvon Godin: If you do have 11 official languages, there has to be not only teaching but also services that come with them too, right? We're talking about the hospitals, for example. Are there 11 translators there?

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: Yes, at Stanton there are. There are still issues with accessing them 24 hours a day, but they can do that.

I just want to add—

Mr. Yvon Godin: But when you're sick, sometimes you cannot wait 24 hours.

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: No, but they are on call. The hospitals can access the translators in the 11 official languages. It's not a perfect system, but it's not bad. Again, if you look at the report, you'll see that it talks about some of the issues with that.

I just think Sarah is downplaying a little bit or maybe isn't quite understanding the nature of the question. Sarah will also do things such as going to council meetings and doing a brief presentation on the office, what it means, and what to do if you have complaints. I would do the same. We would try to get the invitations to make those little presentations so that people would know what is going on...the radio posts, the website, and things like that.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Thank you. I have just one question.

Madam Commissioner, do you attend a national forum with other official languages commissioners throughout the country? Is there a national forum that you attend?

Ms. Sarah Jerome: I did go to the meeting in Sudbury last fall. That's the only one I can think of right now.

There are regional councils. There are five regional councils here in the Northwest Territories for the different groups of aboriginal people. I try to make it my business to attend. At that time, I usually talk about the laws of the official languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Zarac.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Yes, please. Since I wasn't given the opportunity to ask any questions, I do in fact have a question for Ms. Jerome.

Aside from the meeting that you referred to with Commissioner Graham Fraser in Sudbury, what relationship do you have with the federal Commissioner of Official Languages?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Jerome: It's through e-mail.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: What kind of relationship do the two of you have? Have you only exchanged two e-mails? So you don't really work together? There is no collaborative working relationship between you and the Commissioner of Official Languages?

[English]

Ms. Shannon Gullberg: I think that trying to get this group together, as Mr. Fraser did, was a really good start in that direction, because I think that more cohesive approach had been lacking.

That being said, when I was languages commissioner, he did come up here. The former federal commissioner came up as well. So there has been some connection, but I think that needs to be pulled closer.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

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

[English]

We will now conclude the first part of our session.

I would really like to thank you for coming to our committee this morning.

We heard in Whitehorse that "there is no language without culture". Through your testimony, Ms. Jerome, you remind us today that language is also a way of living. Thank you for promoting this linguistic diversity and therefore richness in the Northwest Territories. Thank you for showing that side of this.

[Translation]

We'll resume in five minutes.

• (1000)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1010)

The Chair: We will resume immediately as we have a full agenda.

We now have before us representatives from the Fédération franco-ténoise, the FFT. Thank you for being here this morning. We are delighted to see you again. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your hospitality yesterday at the maison franco-ténoise.

Without further ado, I will introduce the witnesses. We have with us this morning Mr. Létourneau, president of the FFT, accompanied by the Executive Director, Mr. Léopold Provencher.

Welcome, Mr. Provencher.

We also have the coordinator of Jeunesse des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, Ms. Rachelle Francoeur.

Welcome.

The immigration coordinator at the FFT is Mr. Émos Dumas.

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Dumas.

And finally, allow me to introduce, Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime, director, Réseau Territoires du Nord-Ouest Santé en français.

This is an extremely important hour for the committee. So, without further ado, I invite you to begin your presentation.

Mr. Richard Létourneau (President, Fédération Franco-Ténoise): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin by welcoming everyone, in particular the members whom I did not have the opportunity to meet yesterday, Messrs. Lauzon and Galipeau. I think that I had an opportunity meet the other members yesterday.

I shall begin without further delay. A copy of the brief, of which I shall read you an abridged version today, will be submitted to the committee.

According to the 2006 census, over 3,720 residents of the Northwest Territories are currently able to speak French, which is 9.1% of the total population; 2.6% the population of the People of the North have French as their first official language out of a total of approximately 41,055 residents; 8 out of every 10 Franco People of the North were born outside the Northwest Territories; a little over 9% of French speaking People of the North were born abroad. Yellowknife has a population comprising over 110 nationalities from all corners of the globe.

There is still work to be done when it comes to the federal government's role in affirming and promoting francophone communities in the north under Part VII of the Official Languages Act. Allow me to elaborate.

Our community infrastructures, as you perhaps noticed yesterday, are the poorest in Canada. We still lack a physical space where the dynamic forces of community development can gather in one place. These resources are currently scattered throughout the capital, by sheer necessity.

Regretfully, the federal government missed an opportunity to largely resolve our infrastructure problem by failing to purchase the post office in 2009.

A declared surplus space managed by Public Works and Government Services Canada was sold to a third party for \$100,000 less than what was offered by our federation. Five federal departments and organizations were involved in the part VII process prior to us losing the bid. We sought redress in the matter and the file is still before the Commissioner of Official Languages.

On February 15, 2008, we conducted a small in house inquiry into Part VII and the federal institutions. We wrote a letter to every federal NWT official for a total of 22 letters to members of the federal Council. Our intention was to secure a face to face meeting in order to exchange information on the programs and services offered by each institution. Moreover, our application was explicitly based on part VII of the act and called on the responsible authorities to establish what amounted in many cases to initial contact. The objective was to get a better understanding of their policies and programs. The response spoke volumes: 25% of the officials scheduled appointments and met with us; 25% opted instead for a group meeting with us and their counterparts thereby giving stakeholders an opportunity to get to know each other better and submit documentation. There was no response from the remaining 50%.

As far as the implementation of the 2008–2013 Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality is concerned, we are very proud to note Justice Canada's encouragement of our youth; Canadian Heritage's support for the establishment of our Collège des T.N.-O., the first ever francophone post secondary institution in Canada's North; ongoing backing by Health Canada; the development of a start up project to support francophone immigration in the Northwest Territories; Canadian Heritage's financial contribution to our community organizations' minimal operational expenses; the support of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and Canadian Heritage for a research project on the revitalization of the three Canadian Territories in conjunction with the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities in Moncton; the clear expression of support from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for closer cooperation between the three territories' economic and community development collaborative bodies.

The standards governing the management of federal policies and programs are nevertheless generally applied to the letter. For example, certain projects targeting youth require the participation of at least 400 young people. If our federal institutions do not relax the rule regarding the number of participants, and take into account our northern experience and the ways in which we are different, we will not qualify for funding. Although our population is comparable percentage wise to that of the other Canadian provinces, we may end up marginalized if certain program application rules are not adjusted.

Part VII of the Official Languages Act is nevertheless clear about the obligation of result. The right to fair and equitable treatment is perhaps different because different needs justify different treatment. The CALDECH decision clarified this issue. Here are our demands. We want all forms of communication and services to be adapted to our northern experience. The constraints that we face in many areas accentuate the impact of any budget cuts, administrative delays, or lack of awareness about how we live and the major issues that affect us.

It is worth recalling the federal government's undertaking in 1984 when the NWT government adopted its official languages act, which was based on the federal act. The Canadian government committed at the time to covering the cost of services to the francophone community. The court demonstrated that negotiations with the federal government had, for many years, been financially disadvantageous to these communities due to a policy of confident delegation, in spite of the obvious lack of a plan to implement the Official Languages Act. Part VII sets out an obligation of result and ensures that positive measures are taken in order to effect change.

I will now discuss the federal territorial consultation mechanisms to promote dialogue concerning the development of the francophone community.

According to the territorial budget, the territorial government is financially incapable of supporting our community in the same way that the Albertan and Manitoban governments support their communities. The Northwest Territories needs more support from Ottawa. The public is chronically misinformed in the NWT. In fact, the Legislative Assembly and the government claim that there are 11 official languages for which services are provided, however that is clearly not the case. Aboriginal communities do not have access to language related services as we are led to believe. Furthermore, these communities have neither the same demands nor constitutional rights. We respect their approach, but it is clear that they put other objectives first.

● (1015)

The government is in favour of Canadian Heritage, the President of the Treasury Board and Justice Canada encouraging federal institutions to cooperate with provincial governments in order to guarantee the implementation of part VII. However, in our opinion, the language provisions in the agreements lack teeth. This was particularly evident to us when we missed out on the purchase of the Yellowknife post office. There is a lack of consistency among federal departments and no clear Treasury Board policy on the matter.

We put a request in writing to the departments of Canadian Heritage, Justice Canada, Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Public Works and Government Services, and the Treasury Board calling on them to intervene. The correspondence dates back to March 2009. We referred to their obligations under part VII, the community's dire and urgent infrastructure needs. In spite of this, we missed out on the opportunity to purchase the post office premises after offering \$1.2 million at stage two of the bargaining process, the list price. The building was ultimately sold for \$1.1 million. And yet, it met the majority of our community's needs and was situated at a strategic and central location in the community. We lodged a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages and have waited two years for a response.

In closing, we would like the federal government to consider a different operating model that takes into consideration the northern experience. The consultation and cooperation committee was created by the government and the Fédération franco-ténoise to establish, promote, evaluate and adopt a plan to implement the Official Languages Act of the Northwest Territories and guarantee the provision of information and services in French. As a member of this committee, we are proposing an innovative and economical solution that promises to be effective.

Rather than adopting a cookie-cutter approach to the federal model of bilingual and unilingual positions, which was clearly not as successful as expected, we favour the establishment of service teams. We are proposing a French language one stop shop for the community in which the federal government could set the tone and consolidate a number of federal services within a bilingual service centre, supported by the community. Territorial, and even some municipal services, could be incorporated. The centre would be loosely based upon the Manitoban model, only improved and tailored to the northern experience. The federal model of designated bilingual positions was not very effective at meeting the objective of guaranteeing services of equal quality, and was costly, thus the need to adapt it. The model is even less suitable for northern Canada largely because of the region's high employee turnover. We may end up training bilingual employees only to lose them one by one. We would constantly have to start from scratch and, in the meantime, would fail to provide quality services.

If the government were to create a sufficient number of positions as part of a bilingual team, there would be a greater likelihood of consistently providing quality services. This would not preclude the strategic allocation of a number of bilingual positions in departments and agencies. Our community has expressed an interest in prioritizing services, and responding smartly and flexibly to support the gradual and systematic introduction of services. The expert panel reviews the development of this concept, its underlying principles, the rules governing its implementation, and the legal grounds that underpin it. The panel is comprised of high level outside experts, but is not currently sitting due to a lack of funding.

• (1020)

The Chair: You have one minute remaining, Mr. Létourneau.

Mr. Richard Létourneau: That is all the time I need.

These efforts will have a major impact on the francophone community and will help it gain recognition and status. The model is

original, creative, less costly, more suitable for Canada's north and far more likely to succeed. For it to work, we need to continue to work alongside experts, such as Dyane Adam, the former Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Michel Bastarache, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, and our executive director, who attended the court case from 2003 to 2010. These three individuals support our federation's representatives. A budget of approximately \$100,000 per annum for the next two years is required to guarantee the implementation of a rigorous, well thought out and intelligible plan to meet the needs of our northern community.

We would like to thank you for your interest and look forward to answering your questions. Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Zarac will begin the first round of questioning.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Létourneau and concerns the federal government's contributions and transfer payments for official languages. Given that there are 11 official languages in the Northwest Territories, do you know whether these envelopes are earmarked for Canada's official languages, French and English, or whether they are divided between the Territories' 11 official languages?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: It was my understanding that for several years the funds allocated by the federal government were for services in French, but that a portion of these funds was returned to Ottawa every year. I believe that this was the explanation we were given throughout the court case. I don't know whether Léo-Paul can give you a more clear-cut answer.

• (1025)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Were the funds returned to Ottawa because they were not spent?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher (Executive Director, Fédération Franco-Ténoise): Yes, when the Programme de développement culturel et communautaire was in place. Approximately \$1.6 million was paid out over a ten-year period through this program. The federation and its services received \$145,000 per annum in funding. This was shared between 10 to 12 organizations. As far as the remaining funds are concerned, I think that it is up to the territorial government to respond. I believe that there are bilingual services officials at the departments who allocated these funds, perhaps for translation purposes, but I'm not sure of the details.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Are you saying that the funds are returned to the federal government because they aren't spent? Couldn't the funds be allocated to activities or programs?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: You'd be right in saying that we did not send back a cent of the \$145,000. However the NWT court case that went before the Supreme Court revealed that out of the \$1.6 million, \$5 million that wasn't spent—and I'm referring here to the territorial government—was returned to the federal government over the lifespan of the program.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

We visited your premises yesterday and immediately noticed that you are short on space, especially in light of all the activities and services you provide. I find it passing strange that your offer was refused and that a lesser offer was accepted.

Was the complaint filed with Commissioner Jerome or Commissioner Fraser?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: It was submitted to Commissioner Graham Fraser just shy of two years ago. It will be two years from now in one month.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You didn't go through the local commissioner?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: This was a matter for the federal government to decide. The building belonged to the federal government.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: And you have received no response whatsoever in the past two years?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: We spoke on several occasions to a number of analysts. We submitted all the information required to back up our complaint, but there has been no comprehensive review or findings. We were only contacted a few times over the course of the process.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: When was your last meeting with the commissioner or the analysts?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: Unfortunately, I can't answer that question because I was absent for 10 months. I have only been back for a short time.

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Francophone representatives from the three territories came to Ottawa and met with the official languages coordinators for each department. Mr. Graham Fraser was in attendance. At that time, we gave a short speech in which we drew the commissioner's attention to this matter. He claimed that the issue had been dealt with, but made no further comment.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Which means that the process is not complete.

We're inclined to draw comparisons with the Yukon because we just visited Whitehorse. If you look here at the linguistic continuity index, the situation is quite worrisome. In the Northwest Territories in 2001, there were 1,000 people whose mother tongue was French, whereas in 2006 there were only 995. The linguistic continuity index is dropping sharply in the NWT. It went from 0.598 to 0.462.

Do you think that that is cause for concern? Do you get the sense that assimilation is upon us? How do you interpret these figures?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: This issue was researched during the court case. We were told that the assimilation rate in the Northwest Territories was 64%. This calculation was based on a period of roughly 20 to 25 years.

The Chair: You have one minute remaining, Ms. Zarac.

• (1030)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

And yet, you provide services to fight assimilation. I understand that you cover every area where change is possible. What are your recommendations to the committee?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Our recommendations deal with our two top priorities. To begin with, we need help getting a community

space. I think that is the top priority. We determined that it was a priority about 10 years ago. In fact, when I came to the Northwest Territories about nine years ago, it was already a hotly debated issue. We have been working on it ever since. There have been a number of governments, red and blue, and yet this issue has gone unresolved. We would really like the matter to be addressed, and we would appreciate some support.

The other issue concerns our negotiations with the territorial government to obtain funding for our Official Languages Act implementation committee and to move ahead with our other endeavours. We have two experts who share their expertise with us, Mr. Bastarache and Ms. Dyane Adam. Not only do they provide assistance to our section of the committee, they help our territorial government partners who benefit not only from their expertise, but also from a less expensive and more centralized model for the provision of services that are better suited to remote regions such as Yellowknife.

The Chair: That is excellent.

Thank you very much, Ms. Zarac.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours. It is actually Ms. Guay's turn.

Ms. Monique Guay: A point of order has been raised.

The Chair: My apologies, you're right.

Mr. Yvon Godin: When I raise a point of order, it means it's my turn.

We have listened to one presentation. I thought that the other groups would also make presentations. Does the federation speak for everyone? Could please clarify this?

The Chair: I consider that a request for information. Initially, the various speakers on health, culture and immigration had their own separate timeslots. The plan was that each group would appear one after the other, however it was discussed and it was decided that all the witnesses would appear the same time.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Usually, when witnesses appear at the same time, they make their presentations one after another and members ask questions of whomever they want.

The Chair: Have the representatives prepared speeches?

We would have needed a two-hour time slot, Mr. Godin, if you look at the time—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I simply wish to point out that it is regrettable. We ask people to prepare remarks. That requires a great deal of effort. Now they are here and they aren't getting to make their presentations.

The Chair: I understand.

I suggest we continue with the current format. We can consider other options during the break. There are witnesses this afternoon. More witnesses can be added, that's another option. We can discuss this during the break.

On that note, I think we'll proceed. We do have these folks here should members wish to ask them questions. We'll leave things the way they are and revisit the issue.

Thank you.

Ms. Guay, the floor is yours.

Ms. Monique Guay: I have a suggestion to make, Mr. Chair. If they all have texts, they can submit them to the clerk for translation. That way we can include them in our report and ensure that each group is properly represented.

I'm concerned about your centre, Mr. Létourneau. I visited it yesterday. It was very small. You weren't able to purchase the other building. What exactly happened? Was it simply a question of money, of a \$100,000 shortfall, or was there a lack of will?

You can speak frankly; this is a committee.

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: I have kept a close eye on this issue. Our offer was for \$100,000 more and not \$100,000 less.

As the president of the federation pointed out in his introduction, there was no consistency between the various federal services. Since we were only small buyers, there were a number of conditions attached to our offer. One of those conditions was to obtain funding prior to purchase. We took steps to ensure that we could make an offer. Our initial offer was for \$600,000, the second for \$1.2 million. The selling price was \$1.2 million, which is what we put on the table.

We didn't have an opportunity to discuss the new conditions. There was a telephone conversation in which we were told that the transaction was complete, that it was over.

Ms. Monique Guay: Who bought the premises?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: It was a group with an aboriginal name, a company comprising a number of major proprietors.

• (1035)

Ms. Monique Guay: I see. So it had nothing to do with the services you provide.

I'm aware that you engage in a lot of prevention targeting our youth. We met to discuss this issue yesterday. Are your services really in great demand? Do you get the sense that the federation is sometimes running on fumes?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: You'll have an opportunity to hear from the three employees in question. Their remarks will be far briefer since they will be giving an account of their respective areas of responsibility.

Ms. Monique Guay: Perhaps you can briefly comment on this matter. I'd be interested in your point of view. You can have my remaining time. Go ahead.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime (Director, Réseau Territoires du Nord-Ouest Santé en français, Fédération Franco-Ténoise): I would like to begin by talking about health. You have heard what the commissioner had to say about problems with health care and social services.

In the speech that I prepared, I focused on the fact that the government has no policy when it comes to the delivery of health care and social services in French. As a result, the services available are purely haphazard. There are services available at hospitals and health care institutions, but they are also mere happenstance. What's more, the services provided are interpretation and telephone services. We recently lost our Health Line, which was also available in other

languages. This service was cut, which led to a further reduction in services.

The Réseau Territoires du Nord-Ouest Santé en français works in a partnership. The Health and Social Services Authority of Yellowknife, a body comprising many francophone clients partnered with us in launching a project entitled Enhancing French Language Services Within HSSA. This project is intended to help increase the number of health care services available in French. So there is some headway being made.

What is striking however is the huge problem with the recruitment, mobilization, training and retention of health care professionals and other employees. Not only is the community remote, it also has specific needs. That is why we are looking for some degree of consistency in our health care funding.

The Chair: Ms. Guay, the floor is yours.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Dumas, Ms. Francoeur, whoever wishes to respond, please go ahead.

Mr. Émos Dumas (Coordinator, Immigration et Franco 50, Fédération Franco-Ténoise): Good morning.

The Centre d'accueil francophone Immigration des Territoires du Nord-Ouest provides a referral service for newcomers informing them of community resources and services available in French, health care, and youth services. A broad array of activities is on offer and everyone has access to services in French. Folks are informed about services available in French.

We try to foster loyalty at a community level among newcomers to the Northwest Territories in an attempt to ensure the survival of the French language. We are aware that the population is transient in the Northwest Territories: folks stay for a while and then sometimes leave. If francophones decide not to stay—a great majority of the francophones come from other provinces and sometimes from abroad—we may end up losing our community. We really want to strengthen community ties and provide as many services in French as possible so that residents can live in French in the Northwest Territories. The centre's mandate is to foster loyalty among francophones.

The same is true of seniors. We try to provide as many activities in French as possible and create French-language groups. I don't want this to be perceived as the ghettoization of our small francophone community. We want to work together to ensure its survival. The challenge is to guarantee the survival of a francophone culture in an anglophone environment.

• (1040)

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur (Coordinator, Jeunesse Territoires du Nord-Ouest, Fédération Franco-Ténoise): Jeunesse Territoires du Nord-Ouest mission is to give young members of the Northwest Territories' francophone community an opportunity to assemble and enjoy stimulating experiences while reaching their full potential.

There is no ongoing funding of the service. The ad hoc funding of projects makes it virtually impossible to plan regular events. This makes it difficult to encourage traditions among youth and help them to cultivate a positive attitude toward the francophone community.

They lack interest in the francophone community due to the gaps in infrastructure and programs. This has implications when it comes to youth participation levels, which sometimes makes it very difficult to meet the quotas set for us. Community isolation and geographical remoteness make getting together, something that is essential to building one's identity, difficult. Transportation costs are especially high. Consequently, there are fewer activities, fewer participants, and a little less visibility despite the fact that Jeunesse Territoires du Nord-Ouest goes to a great deal of effort to build partnerships and provide young people with activities.

We are also a member of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française. We participate at the national level. However, a major challenge for us is youth participation and this is due to a lack of funding for ongoing projects.

Ms. Monique Guay: Thank you so much. You have given us a better sense of the services you offer.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Guay.

We would like to give you more time to speak. I'd like to thank committee members and the witnesses for being flexible. What you have to say is more important than the rules. The committee is eager to hear from you.

We shall continue with Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Like Ms. Guay, I would really like to give you an opportunity to elaborate, if you so desire. We are here to listen to you and not for you to listen to us. We want to hear what you have to say.

You can use my speaking time as you see fit.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I would indeed like to add something.

We primarily offer interpretation services. Interpretation in its current form is not an acceptable model for francophones. We've observed that it is more likely that folks will not use a service if they have to go through an interpreter either because they don't feel very comfortable with interpreters or because there is a communication breakdown. Some folks who consider themselves bilingual make a choice one way or another and end up not understanding a message about health, for example. This can adversely affect the quality of the service and even jeopardize personal safety, not to mention of course —

Mr. Yvon Godin: For example, when you see a doctor, you think that what is said is confidential. The same is true when it comes to dealing with a nurse or other health care professional. The consultation is between two individuals.

With all due respect to our interpreters, whom we adore, when a third person gets involved, the patient feels intimidated. It is no longer confidential because someone outside the health care setting becomes involved.

Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Absolutely.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We were told in Whitehorse that some interpreters, those who are not interpreters by trade or are not

familiar with the health care field, do not accurately interpret the message.

Have you encountered this problem in Yellowknife?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I cannot comment on that because I haven't necessarily had to use those services. However, a number of studies show that relying on interpretation services can be problematic, especially in a medical context. Sometimes people without medical backgrounds are called upon to interpret.

● (1045)

Mr. Yvon Godin: You apply to the federal government for support or funding to run projects targeting youth or other groups from the health care profession. Is getting the money on time a problem?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: I must say that the funding for the Société Santé en français is well structured and solid. The money has been flowing for a number of years and even though I've been away for the past 10 months, I think I can safely say that it is a well-oiled machine. The Société does a good job and provides a lot of support in terms of health care services in French. Every provincial and territorial team plays a role, and that includes us.

When a service evolves however and demand among users goes up, the community becomes aware of other needs outside the scope of the original service. One time projects are the rule of thumb there too. The process involves presenting a project, waiting for the outcome of the review, and then getting results. Obviously, every project involves red tape, and in many cases, there are delays getting answers. That forces the community to produce results quickly so as to make good use of Canadians' money, or in some instances, to seek extensions.

There are some good examples of projects for which officials have extended the deadline till June because the project was approved in February and the financial year finishes on March 31. We know that this is more complicated in the federal system, but this kind of solution has been used from time to time. It is the smartest way of going about things when the system creaks along too slowly to rapidly meet demand.

Some review procedures are lengthy, as are some reports or project renewals, and even—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Provencher, you were not there for the past 10 months, but you were, Mr. Létourneau. I'm sure you can tell us whether there were projects that should have come online earlier. Extending the deadline is all well and good, but if the project was for July, will it be pushed back to February? It doesn't take a year to review a project.

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Obviously, as president, I'm not the one who manages the daily inflow of cash. However, everyone knows full well that over the past three or four years, there have been problems with Canadian Heritage and that grants have been awarded very late in the fiscal year. That has caused problems for much of the financial year. For example, at the FFT, we continually had to use credit to pay employees because we did not have enough cash to—

Mr. Yvon Godin: When was the last time you had to pay for something on credit?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Do you want to answer? We have a line of credit—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm sorry, but we're not here to sugar coat things; we want answers. Over the course of the last year, have you had to use a line of credit?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: To my knowledge, the FFT has lived off credit for six months of the year for the past five years while waiting for the project funding to trickle in.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Did you rely on credit in 2010?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: In 2010, yes we did.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Giving an answer shouldn't be difficult. We want answers.

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Obviously, there are fees associated with lines of credit, and that makes things tough for community organizations like ours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is the money you draw on credit typically used to fund the association's regular operations, including existing programs, for example?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, we have time for a brief response and you can revisit the issue in the second round, if you wish.

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Do you want to answer that question?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: In response to your question, Mr. Godin, I would say that every year we regularly resort to credit. It's a question of cash flow management. Obviously it is not necessarily a budgetary issue. It is a common cash management problem. It obviously incurs an additional cost, as you'd imagine, but it is a regular practice.

In some cases, for example when there is a change in staff or a report is a month or two late, we have to meet our responsibilities. These things happen. However, as a general rule, even when we scrupulously manage our projects and submit reports on time, we sometimes have to wait quite a while before the funds are dispensed.

• (1050)

The Chair: Thank you. We can come back to that.

Mr. Galipeau, the floor is yours.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses who have come before us today.

I would like to focus my attention today on health care issues. Mr. Tuyishime—my apologies if I am mispronouncing your name—supposing I fall ill during my stay, so much so that I forget that I'm bilingual and I can only speak my mother tongue. If I turn up at the hospital emergency department, will I be served in French?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: That depends on where you are.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I'm talking about here, in Yellowknife.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: In Yellowknife...

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Yes, here.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Yes, you will be.

In Yellowknife, in the daytime, there is always someone to greet you and contact an interpreter.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: The emergency doctor?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: No.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: The nurses?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Some, yes. It depends. It's the luck of the draw.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Is there a service protocol for both official languages at the general hospital in Yellowknife?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: There is a sign indicating that you can request services in French in the reception area, and you will receive them. Sometimes, the signs are in English.

When you arrive at the hospital, and you ask to be served in French, typically the receptionist won't be the one to do so. You'll wait until someone is called and that person will come and see you in the emergency department. It is at that point that an interpreter will assist you.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I'll give you my business card during the break. Thirty years ago I developed a similar protocol for health care in the two official languages. It didn't work in Canada's national capital 30 years ago. I'll give you my business card and you can write to me, and I'll send it to you.

It's a starting point. You have to start somewhere.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Indeed.

I'm going to tell you a personal story. I had a heart attack and had to go to emergency. I was looked after by a French speaking nurse, but it was a pure fluke. I don't know how it happened. The doctor, who came from the United States, was also a francophile. I found this out because I wasn't able to speak a word of English. He told me that I could speak in French and that he would understand me. I was really surprised. And yet, it was just a stroke of good luck.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much, Mr. Tuyishime.

Are health care issues something the Fédération franco-ténoise is concerned about? What steps have been taken over the past five years, let's say, to improve the services?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: That is currently one of the topics for discussion between our consultation and cooperation committee and the government of the Northwest Territories. The government has to develop an Official Languages Act implementation plan. It does so with the expert assistance of Mr. Bastarache and Ms. Dyane Adam.

Discussions are underway to implement a plan, for health care among other things, because it is one of the most important items on the agenda. Obviously, I don't want to get into too much detail right now about discussions that are taking place with the NWT government, however I can tell you that this is certainly a key issue that we're fighting tooth and nail over. The status quo is unacceptable to us.

It is really important to have a tailored approach to ensure that bilingual services are available both in clinics and elsewhere. We want to be able to get services in French without relying on chance. We want to know that at a particular time on a particular day, will be able to get a particular type of service. For example, on a specific day a specialist would be available, with the nurse on hand at all times, or perhaps specialist services on a monthly basis, when the specialists come to Yellowknife. There are actually a lot of medical specialists here in the Northwest Territories. They come from Alberta and other provinces on rotation. The NWT government representatives might be able to say more about this.

•(1055)

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I have a couple of questions regarding education. I don't know if somebody will be able to answer my questions. How many students in the Northwest Territories education system go to school in French?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Are you just referring to the francophone school board or are you also talking about immersion students?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I'd like to start by knowing how many students there are in the Northwest Territories, so that I can get a sense of proportions.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: I couldn't tell you how many students there are because there are—

Mr. Royal Galipeau: How many students go to school in French?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: I think that the director of the francophone school board would be in a better position to give you that figure.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I guess that there is only a school in Yellowknife—

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: No, there is one in Hay River, and there are also immersion schools in the four main communities.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: There are French language immersion schools, but are there also French language schools?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Yes, there are. There are French language schools, schools with immersion programs and so called core French programs.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: There is a French language school here in Yellowknife, isn't there?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Yes, there is.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: How many students attend that school?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: About 125.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Galipeau.

Unless I'm mistaken, representatives from the school board will be appearing before us at 3:30 p.m., so you'll be able to delve further into these issues this afternoon.

We'll start our second round with Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Mr. Létourneau, in your speech, you mentioned that you met with representatives from every department that has jurisdiction in the Northwest Territories concerning their obligations under part VII of the act. You mentioned that 25% responded right away and met with

you, that 25% made some form of contact with you, and that the other 50% brushed you off.

Can you tell us which departments did what? Did you identify them in your remarks? I'd like to know. Can you get this information to us?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: I'll double check. I can't say that this issue has occupied my full attention over recent months. I remember that Justice Canada and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration were on the list. Unfortunately, I have no clear recollection as to the others, and I don't wish to mislead you.

Let's see, 25% of 22 equates to about five departments. So there were three others, in addition to another department that attended a group meeting.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I see. So you can provide us with a list with those that showed up and those that didn't respond. I'd like to see that document. If you forward it to the clerk, everyone will get a copy.

What's more, you said in your presentation that you respected the process, but that you noticed that priority was being given to other objectives. I assume that you are referring to the territorial government here. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: I'm sorry, I spoke very quickly because the brief was quite long.

In fact, I was referring to aboriginal communities represented by aboriginal leaders who are standing up for aboriginal languages. Their political goals do not necessarily correspond with ours. Given that very few people speak some of these languages, the NWT government does not focus on service delivery in those languages. The focus is often more on trying to implement curricula, as the commissioner mentioned.

•(1100)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So the objective is to save the language rather than to offer services in the language in question

Mr. Richard Létourneau: I would say that it is more a matter of the survival of the language than the delivery of services in that language.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: As far as part VII of the act is concerned, you said something that made me raise an eyebrow, I must admit. You talked about an obligation of result.

I played a role in introducing amendments to the act in 2005, and we did not refer to an obligation of result, but instead to an obligation to act. There is a subtle difference. I do not think that Parliament would otherwise have agreed to amend the act. What we created is an obligation to act, with the hope that the outcomes would be positive. I want to make sure that we understand each other on that point.

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: When it comes to the concept of an obligation to act, when you are a responsible government, any action you take or activities you engage in must make good use of any money allocated for the purpose in question. So it is certainly an underlying factor. There are real and positive measures that must be taken to achieve results.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: There is indeed an obligation to take positive measures.

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: Yes, there is.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You might say that it is a subtle difference, but it is very important. In fact, you cannot force results; you can ensure that actions and positive measures are taken.

I want to come back to the crux of the issue. You stated that \$145,000 is allocated to the Fédération franco-ténoise out of the funds the Northwest Territories receives annually.

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: This \$145,000 envelope is funnelled through the cultural and community development program. It is bundled in with the \$1.6 million managed by the territorial government for the purpose of francophone projects.

Obviously, it is not the only money that—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, I understand that. So the federation receives \$145,000 of the \$1.6 million envelope.

When you sued the territorial government, it was revealed that \$5 million of the remaining amount was returned over a specific period.

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: Your question is a little technical. I think that it has to do with the duration of the agreement. The Official Languages Act was passed in 1984 and implemented three or four years later. As soon as it was implemented, the government established a cultural and community development plan, and in the ensuing period, \$5 million was handed back.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you know whether the funds were completely used up under the current agreement?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: We don't have access to that kind of information. The territorial government reports to the federal government regarding the management of the funds.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So there is no published breakdown of the figures?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

We shall continue with Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay: In other words, you have no direct access to the federal government.

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: When it comes to managing the agreement, the federal government works hand in hand with the territorial government as part of a government to government collaborative approach, as they like to put it. We did not take part in the discussions regarding the renewal of the agreement that occurred over recent months.

We have already said that, from our point of view, there should have been a steep increase in funding, however we do not have a seat at the bargaining table and cannot discuss and argue our points of view.

Ms. Monique Guay: So you weren't consulted either.

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: We were consulted once and we put forward a figure. That was a few years back. At that time, we had far more in-depth knowledge of the results, the provision of communications and services in French. We wouldn't submit the same figure today. At the time, we argued that the \$145,000 should be

increased to a minimum of \$975,000, and we backed this up. Today, however, we would give you a different figure.

Ms. Monique Guay: An even higher figure

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: We now know what needs to be done to improve communications and provide adequate services, document translation, bilingual positions, and training. For example, interpreters must familiarize themselves with the health care sector and medical jargon. Often, they are not familiar with the more technical terms they should be using. I've had contact with a number of interpreters who fill in at Stanton Hospital, and they aren't necessarily trained in lexicology. Our health care project includes a training module that deals with medical terminology.

● (1105)

Ms. Monique Guay: Even in your own language, medical terminology is not always clear. You really need an expert to explain what certain words mean.

Ms. Francoeur, you spoke about young people and the trouble they have getting involved in activities, partly as a result of how few of them there are. We visited Émilie Tremblay School, where one high school class had only six students. There were not even enough of them to make up a basketball team. They were upset they weren't able to play any team sports. Do you experience the same issues here?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: There are more than six students, I think, because there are already two francophone schools. The number of students does not necessarily have a bearing on the participation rate. We also cater to immersion students. It is often distance that gets in the way of large numbers of people gathering together in one place.

Our youth activities obviously usually take place in Yellowknife. As a result, many communities go without these very beneficial services that help languages survive.

Ms. Monique Guay: When you conduct activities, is there an organization responsible for fundraising in the regions to bring young people together?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Oftentimes, fundraising is on a project-by-project basis. An attempt is made to diversify both partnerships and funding sources. For example, applications are filed with the city and so on, but it is not always easy since the money has to be shared around and there are a lot of people with their hands out.

In our future projects we are definitely going to try and foster youth engagement in the community through training and concrete action. Between now and then however, we are going to continue to take up the challenge of finding new blood to conduct fundraising in other communities and of identifying activities created for and by our youth.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Dumas, I have a question for you

I'm from Quebec. Let's say I decide to come and live here for professional or other reasons. Of course I'm going to try and see whether I can live in my language, whether I can get health care in my mother tongue and if I'm prepared to take a risk when it comes to my children's health and education. Do you automatically share all this information with people or do they have to come to you to get it?

Mr. Émos Dumas: Folks do in fact come to me to get this information. They are told about the advantages of the Canadian north, but also about the drawbacks, so that they can make an informed choice. We don't simply bring people here in order to swell the numbers in our francophone community. We know that some people will come here and realize after two weeks that it is not what they were looking for, and won't stay. We want to foster loyalty in the community, so you have to paint an accurate picture.

Ms. Monique Guay: So services need to be improved in their language, in French. Otherwise there certainly won't be any increase in the population. If children cannot live, enjoy themselves, study properly and get health care in their own language—which is extremely important—it will be extremely difficult for immigrants to come and settle here.

How many immigrants are there per year?

Mr. Émos Dumas: I don't know about immigrants from other countries because I don't have the statistics on that from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. In any event, last year, between 20 and 23 people used our service. Many of them stayed, but since we conduct follow-ups about every six months, it is a little bit difficult to know at that point whether these people have stayed or gone.

We therefore need to keep better track of statistics. Our service is young; it's only two years old. We want to set up committees throughout the territories so that we can really promote the Northwest Territories and all the communities.

We're just a service point. We simply refer folks to other services in areas such as health care, youth, and the francophone school board. Ours is truly a referral service.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Guay and Mr. Dumas.

Mr. Généreux, the floor is yours.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses here today.

Mr. Létourneau, our research analyst from the Library of Parliament presented us with a very substantial account of what has been achieved in the past 15 to 20 years in the NWT francophone community. When I read this document, I realized that you have often relied on the courts to have your rights upheld. Has this approach, which has been adopted over the years as a way of defending your rights, had an impact on the relationship that you have with the Northwest Territories government? That is my first question.

• (1110)

Mr. Richard Létourneau: That certainly has an impact. Now that the trial and legal dispute phase is over, we are trying to restore these relations, but it is not easy. It was a long and arduous battle. Our association fought in court for 10 years. A number of battles were waged by parents' associations to have schools built and expanded. There were many court cases. This sometimes resulted in acrimonious relationships.

What is different here, in the Northwest Territories, when compared to a province such as Ontario or Alberta, is that if you decide to fight the government, you won't be up against faceless administration. In Ontario, for example, you will never meet the

minister or deputy minister. Here, in Yellowknife, however, you need to be mindful of the fact that the deputy minister might be your neighbour, and that you might be seated next to the minister at a restaurant or the cinema, that the prime minister's children might be in the same hockey team as your children. You realize that when you face off, it can get personal. All of that makes these fights even tougher.

This is a heavy burden for volunteers to shoulder. Indeed, one doesn't always feel like fighting one's neighbours. Not only do we want to be part of a francophone community, we also want our NWT community to be strong. We are members of a broader northern community.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do you get the sense that the Fédération franco-ténoise has become quite representative of your community over time? I assume that it has. One needs to remember that francophones were among the founding peoples. Now, we have to look to the future, 20, 30, 40 or even 50 years from now. Your association opened its doors about 25 years ago, didn't it?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Thirty-two years ago.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Are you taking steps to grow the association? Relationships can sometimes be strained, that much I understand. You are part of a small community and you sometimes rub shoulders with people you may come to blows with in order to achieve results. Having said that, I guess the association's ambition is not only to ensure the greatest number of services for the francophone community, but also to swell the ranks of this community. Are the financial and human resources currently at your disposal sufficient to guarantee the growth of the association and, obviously, of its members?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Obviously we always want more. We are never satisfied with what we have, and enough is never enough. Our role, as a federation, is to ask for, and demand, more.

I think that we are living in an era of renewal and expansion of language rights. The francophone presence was important in the early history of the Northwest Territories. Then, after the Métis uprising, a number of rights were abolished. For the past 32 years, we have been living in an era of renewal. I believe that bilingualism has a future in Canada and we want to continue to fight for it. We intend to plough ahead.

• (1115)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Your answer was interesting. I told the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories earlier that if progress is to be made, you need to have the right tools. It quickly became obvious yesterday that the premises you occupy is tiny and doesn't suit your needs. You're aware that there are various federal programs in partnership with the territories that offer possibilities. The post office is a thing of the past. We now have to look to the future. Have you considered other ways of linking services? Last night you said that—and despite the beers I drank I was still clear headed enough to understand you—some services could be linked.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, unfortunately, your time has run out. Thank you for your comments and input.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like the witness to have an opportunity to respond.

The Chair: If there are any further responses or comments to be made, or documents to submit, they can all be submitted to our analyst.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think that Mr. Généreux is right. Yesterday, you spoke at length about the petite maison bleue. We visited it and saw that people are packed in like sardines. There is no space to accommodate visitors. What plans do you have now? The post office is no longer an option, but there are still construction companies and other buildings. Do you have any plans?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: Having a space, a community center, a hub, where we can bring together all the francophone community organizations under one roof, is clearly a priority. It is crucial in order to create synergy and to share resources and save money. What's more, there's also the issue of continuity and making sure francophones stay put in the Northwest Territories. And the way to do this is through education.

We fought to obtain primary and secondary schools. The school board is fighting to get gymnasiums in schools. We established a college and we want to have the necessary funding to sustain it and to really... as Ms. Guay said: if a francophone comes and settles in the Northwest Territories, we have to be able to say to her that her child or children will be able to study in French from child care through to high school, and even on to college.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We're going to meet with the francophone school board this afternoon and ask these questions.

I don't want to come down too hard on the government—even if its members believe that that's what I do—but if you are forced to use your line of credit... You say that people come here, stay for some time and leave. Do you sometimes have to lay people off, and get rid of people who work in the community?

Mr. Richard Létourneau: We have had to lay people off in the past, but that is not the major problem. The problem is that there is a lot of transience. That forces us to renew our resources every year. People don't work for long or stay long in the Northwest Territories. As a result, it is difficult to implement a sustainable organizational culture.

Mr. Yvon Godin: As far as immigration is concerned—you welcome people, you describe the services that you offer—do you engage in a dialogue with the federal government and Citizenship and Immigration Canada to ensure that the immigrants are francophones? Are there any discussions? Are there any programs in place that produce results?

Mr. Émos Dumas: There was the Destination Canada program to recruit French and Belgian immigrants.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You said, "there was." Does it still exist?

Mr. Émos Dumas: There was—

Mr. Yvon Godin: There was, the used to be, there no longer is.

Mr. Émos Dumas: There will be a meeting next year with France, Belgium—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Hold on a second, this is 2011. When you say next year, does that mean in 2012? Is nothing happening in 2011?

Mr. Émos Dumas: There will be one in November. And there was one in November 2010.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is what I wanted to know. It is ongoing. I thought that it had been suspended.

Mr. Émos Dumas: There are also initiatives in other countries, for example in Lebanon. There are programs, job fairs, so that local employers can seek out the expertise they need under the Provincial Nominee Program. For our part, we insist on francophones. We want to have a pool of francophones.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are there agreements stipulating that immigrants must stay for a certain period in a particular region? Do immigrants who settle in Yellowknife or in the Territories have to spend a specific number of years here before they leave, if that is what they decide to do? Can they just spend six months here and then leave?

Mr. Émos Dumas: There is the issue of permanent residency. When an employer sponsors an immigrant there is usually a one year mandatory commitment to the employer. The employee can only work for that employer that year. After he has got permanent residency, he can go and live anywhere in Canada.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's all.

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

With the consent of committee members, Mr. Murphy would like to ask our guests a question.

Go right ahead, Mr. Murphy.

● (1120)

Mr. Brian Murphy: As far as access to the justice system is concerned, are there enough lawyers who speak French, who can argue before the court in French here? Are there enough judges? Are there bilingual prosecutors? Is there adequate access to the justice system, not only for the general population, but specifically for francophones? Has the elimination of the Court Challenges Program of Canada prevented you from taking fighting government?

Mr. Léo-Paul Provencher: The government is taking steps to make services available. Based on the experiences we've had here in the court system, both in the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal, judges have been capable of hearing cases. Judges have come from elsewhere. There are agreements in this regard with Alberta, and the western provinces. I think that Justice Canada has taken steps to ensure that legal professionals, judges and lawyers provide services.

However, on a day-to-day basis, if people wish to go to court over some form of infringement or another, there are few local francophone judges and lawyers. Nevertheless, an attempt is being made to meet the demand.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you à Mr. Murphy.

That concludes that the second part of the meeting. I would really like to thank you for coming to meet with us this morning. We would like to spend more time with you, but it was a good start.

We will suspend for a couple of minutes and resume at around 11:30am.

• (1120) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1135)

The Chair: I would like to call this meeting back to order. This is the third segment of this meeting, but by no means the least important, as we now have the privilege of welcoming government representatives from the Northwest Territories including the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and Minister responsible for Official Languages, and his team.

Mr. Lafferty, I would like to offer you a warm welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. It is the first time that the committee has been here since the creation of the Northwest Territories and the coming into force of the Official Languages Act. It is in some ways an historic moment that we are sharing here today.

Without further ado, I would call on you to make your opening remarks. Committee members will then have an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with you.

[*English*]

We were informed that you would begin in your native language. Please feel free. It's an official language. We know that you have many here.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty (Minister, Education, Culture and Employment and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Government of the Northwest Territories): *Mahsi*, Mr. Chair.

[*Witness speaks in the Tlicho language*]

First of all, Mr. Chair, I'd like to welcome you and thank you for coming to the Northwest Territories. I believe this is your first official visit. I'm sure it won't be the last. I'm hoping that you guys will come back again.

I'll just introduce the party I have with me here.

I'm Jackson Lafferty, the minister responsible for official languages, education, culture, and employment, the Minister of Justice, and also a member of the Legislative Assembly for Monfwi riding, a Tlicho riding in the four communities I represent in the Northwest Territories.

I have with me Deputy Minister Dan Daniels, Department of Education, Culture and Employment; Mr. Benoît Boutin, senior adviser with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment; Lorne Gushue, official languages consultant with the Department of Health and Social Services; Sonya Saunders, director, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment; and Laura Gareau, director, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs. That's all within the GNWT.

Members, yesterday during your visit, it was very unfortunate that I couldn't address you in the House. We got in between the timing of our sessions, but I did mention to the premier that you guys were in town and the purpose of why you're here. They were very enthusiastic and excited—even our Speaker. The Speaker was ready to address you guys, but as I said, it was all in the timing.

But it's all good now. I believe you had the opportunity to tour the Legislative Assembly. It's part of our uniqueness here in the

Northwest Territories, and I guess that throughout Canada it can be admired. We're proud of it.

You had an opportunity to witness and to see us in action as a consensus government. We are one of the two consensus style of governments in Canada, rather than the more familiar system of party politics that we share all over the country. The consensus style of government is more in keeping with the way aboriginal peoples have traditionally made decisions within the form of a circle. Within this system, all members of the Legislative Assembly are elected as independents in their own constituencies, so it is important that we all work together in a cooperative and respectful manner in the House and proceedings to make sure that we make progress on issues and matters that are of importance, even if we have different views.

Mr. Chair, we are talking about languages. Language is an important piece of what I guess we can call history, but it's our identity: it is who we are and how we understand and interact with each and every one of us around this table here as well.

The Northwest Territories is unique in Canada because we have 11 official languages that are recognized by our Legislative Assembly and by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

In 1984 the Government of the Northwest Territories enacted the Official Languages Act. The establishment of the act was initially driven by French language rights, but formed the basis for an entrenchment and subsequent expansion of aboriginal language rights within the legislative framework of the Northwest Territories.

The enactment of this act, which gave legal recognition to English, French, and aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories, has resulted in considerable efforts being devoted to consolidating and implementing the official languages policy in the Northwest Territories.

• (1140)

The act provides a legislative framework for the establishment of the equality of status between French and English and for the advancement of equality of status of official aboriginal languages within government. As well, Mr. Chair, the act also has provisions for the appointment of the official languages commissioner and the tabling of the annual report. As you've mentioned, the official languages commissioner was before you.

The act also makes a special provision for the mandatory review of the administration and implementation of the act, the effectiveness of its provisions, and the achievement of the objectives stated in its preamble. It may also include any recommendations for changes to the act. Since 1984, a number of attempts to revitalize aboriginal languages and provide meaningful French language services in the face of a steady language shift toward English have been made.

Since the enactment of the act, Canada and the NWT negotiated several funding agreements under the Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement for French and Aboriginal Languages in the Northwest Territories. For the last 10 years, the agreements have been signed with minimal or no success in obtaining additional funding.

To summarize all the activities related to official languages since 1984 would take days, weeks, and even months or years; however, for the benefit of your committee, I would like to touch on some of the main issues arising from French and aboriginal languages.

Last year, the GNWT and the Fédération franco-ténoise created a consultation and cooperation committee. The mandate of the committee is to facilitate consultation on the GNWT's drafting, implementation, administration, and promotion of a strategic plan for the provision of French language communications and services under the Official Languages Act.

The committee is carrying out its work in two main phases: the initial drafting phase, and the implementation, administration, and promotion phase. So far, there have been two meetings, and the next meeting is scheduled for April.

The strategic plan will contain provisions on the active offer, in French, of methods to assess the oral and written capacity of employees occupying bilingual positions and the evaluation of the competency of French interpreters in health services. You've heard about some of this from previous speakers.

The previous year was also a significant year for the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie, which we're very proud to have hosted. The Conference on the Canadian Francophonie is a key stakeholder in intergovernmental actions aimed at strengthening the Canadian social fabric through the advancement of the Canadian francophonie. The conference's commitment can be seen in the active participation of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments in this important forum.

Last June, for the first time, the NWT hosted the ministers annual meeting, which gave an opportunity to the ministers responsible for the Canadian francophonie to increase their understanding of the cohabitation of the francophonie and aboriginal languages in Canada and their knowledge of the reality of the Nordic francophonie experience in the Northwest Territories.

Since hosting this event, I am now the chair of the conference until the next meeting in June 2011 in Moncton-Dieppe, New Brunswick.

On November 23, 2010, I met with the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Honourable James Moore, to discuss the plight of aboriginal languages, which are in dire need of assistance. Over the years, our partnership with the Government of Canada, through the Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement for French and Aboriginal Languages, has allowed for many activities to be undertaken. Clearly, there is more work to be done, and I stressed the importance of our working together to revitalize aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories.

The revitalization of aboriginal languages will be successful only if aboriginal people make it a priority and if governments are able to respond with support. To that end, I, along with Kevin Menicoche, chair of our Standing Committee on Government Operations, held a three-day aboriginal language symposium from March 30 to April 1, 2010. Over 200 northerners from each of the official language communities attended the symposium and discussed critical challenges and priorities for revitalizing aboriginal languages.

●(1145)

The information generated from the symposium formed part of a strategy entitled "Northwest Territories Aboriginal Languages Plan: A Shared Responsibility". The plan was tabled in the legislative assembly in our October 2010 session and it is the plan that I also shared with Minister Moore.

The development of the plan was a collaborative approach and effort involving many people across the Northwest Territories. It's not just our department that is going to implement it; it will take the whole community of the Northwest Territories. It not only reflects the priorities of the people of the Northwest Territories, but also recognizes that languages strengthen our society and underpin our cultural perspective.

The plan outlines the strategies to strengthen people's understanding of aboriginal languages, encourages them to use their languages, and establishes practical approaches to delivering government services in those languages. Sometimes it can be a challenge with nine aboriginal languages, but we are making ends meet.

This year, Mr. Chair, will be an active year. We are developing a full implementation plan for the aboriginal languages strategy. Once it's completed, we will start implementation in partnership with the French community, with their strategic plan for French services.

With its great diversity of people and places, the NWT is an exciting place to live. The Northwest Territories has undergone changes in the past and will continue to experience change in the future as well. However, one thing remains constant, and that is the need for us to have a strong sense of our identity. That sense of identity is found in our culture and heritage, including our language.

Many factors impact language loss, including media, technology, the aging population, the loss of our elders, and the impact of our residential school era. The residential school impacts on language and culture were mentioned by the Prime Minister in June 2008 during his very moving and important national apology. These thoughts were echoed by the truth and reconciliation commissioners, Mr. Willie Littlechild and Ms. Marie Wilson, at the Northwest Territories aboriginal languages symposium held in April of last year in Yellowknife.

Mr. Chair, in my travels through our communities across the Northwest Territories, I have had the privilege, opportunity, and pleasure of discussing aboriginal languages with so many people. It is clearly an issue on peoples' minds and is of great importance to them. Our leaders and elders have said, "If we lose our language, we lose our identity and lessen who we are as a people".

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, I would like to invite all of you for another visit to the Northwest Territories. Although this visit has been a short one, it has been a worthwhile visit. Another visit could be an excellent opportunity to visit our French schools and to discuss language issues with our aboriginal languages communities.

Mahsi, Mr. Chair.

●(1150)

The Chair: Thanks a lot, Minister.

We'll now begin our first round with Monsieur Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Minister and ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Minister, I had the good fortune of being minister of official languages for a couple of years. That was with two official languages, so my hat is off to you as the minister responsible when you have 11 of them. I thought it was a complex issue with two, so I can only try to imagine what it might be like with 11.

I hope you'll understand my apology, in a sense, which is that as a member of the official languages committee of the House of Commons I have to focus on two official languages: English and French. That is not to belittle or to impart less importance to the aboriginal languages, but in our case it would be perhaps two other committees that would have to focus on them: the heritage committee of the House of Commons and perhaps the aboriginal affairs committee of the House of Commons.

I will be focusing on English and French, and particularly French, as it is the minority community language. My first questions, therefore, will go to the policy that was included in our briefing material. That dates back to 1997 and is related to the Official Languages Act of the Northwest Territories. My understanding of this... It's obvious that it's from 1997 and that it designates areas where different languages would be applied. There are four areas where French is one of the languages: Iqaluit, Fort Smith, Hay River, and Yellowknife. How does your government apply that policy? That would be my first question.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Chair, *mahsi*.

In regard to those areas that have been highlighted, obviously we want to expand into other communities as well. On the policy itself, we work closely with the communities. As has been indicated by previous speakers, this is a close, tight-knit community, and we all know each other and call ourselves cousins.

We have a clear communication dialogue and we ask what's important for the Northwest Territories, what the positive impacts would be, and also what the benefits would be in a community or in a school or in a program that has been delivered. We try to reach out to those communities. Having the implementation that's before us, in working with the committee, as I highlighted earlier, we want to strengthen the working relations we have. There may be hiccups along the way. As with any discussion or any program we encounter, there are challenges, but we must look beyond that and say, okay, there are always solutions to a challenge. More challenges create more opportunities for us to work together.

But we closely monitor this area, Mr. Chair, and we want to expand further. An area you spoke to—specifically the French programming, the francophone community, and the language itself—has been very successful to date. We want to expand on that. We've talked about the aboriginal languages. I know you are referring specifically to French, but I'd like to throw the aboriginal perspective in there. We're losing our language as well. We want to follow a path as well. How have they been so very successful? What can we use? Instead of reinventing the wheel, let's work together.

I've talked to several of our colleagues in the French language system about how we can work together to start developing and implementing a strategy, so there is that continuously working relationship coming....

● (1155)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm told that the Public Service has 4,700 positions in the Northwest Territories. Is that accurate, roughly?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Chair, it could be a little bit more, but it's around that number.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Could I know how many of these positions are designated bilingual where one of the two languages is French?

Monsieur Boutin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Boutin (Senior Advisor (French Languages Services), Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of the Northwest Territories): Good morning.

The Department of Human resources undertook the major task in September of getting a better sense of the exact number.

We have the bilingual bonus. It is based on the same principle as the federal government's. Last year, 54 people were entitled to the bilingual bonus, for English and French.

The Department of Human Resources is working with a computer system in order to get a better sense of where these people are located.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Have the 54 positions being filled?

Mr. Benoît Boutin: Yes, they have.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you know where they currently are and in which department?

Mr. Benoît Boutin: Yes, we do.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Is there a bilingual position at the Office of the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories?

Mr. Benoît Boutin: You would have to ask the Languages Commissioner.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: He said that you knew. So I'm asking you the question.

Mr. Benoît Boutin: As far as I know, there isn't.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you. What percentage do these 54 positions equate to? Is it roughly 1% of positions? What percentage of the population is francophone in the Northwest Territories?

Mr. Benoît Boutin: Approximately 2.4%.

[*English*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Minister, we've also heard this morning about the agreement that exists between your government and the federal government in terms of French services and the financial assistance you get. Of that \$1.6 million annually for cultural and general services, \$145,000 goes to the Fédération franco-ténoise and the rest is used by your government, but we were told that over the course of that agreement some \$5 million was not used and was returned.

Would you confirm that and explain to me how that happened?

Mr. Daniels?

Mr. Dan Daniels (Deputy Minister, Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of the Northwest Territories): Thank you.

The reference to the \$5 million is historical. In recent years, we haven't been lapsing the money for French language services. The reference that was made to the \$5 million covers a number of years prior to our more recent experience.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bélanger, your time is up.

We will continue with Ms. Guay.

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

I'd ask those of you who do not speak French to put on your headsets. Thank you.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. We met you yesterday at the Legislative Assembly. We had a group of witnesses appear before us this morning, including the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. I know that you have 11 languages to manage, and that's a lot. Obviously, as my colleague said, this is the Standing Committee on Official Languages of Canada, so our focus is on French and English.

There seems to be a lot of transience among francophones. They settle here, but leave because they cannot get services in their language, especially in the area of health and education, both extremely important fields. When a francophone family decides to come and settle here, that family must be entitled to basic services.

I would like to hear what you have to say about this. How are budgets managed to ensure that francophones have genuine access to specific services, especially in the areas of health and education. How is the budget that you receive from the federal government divvied up among the various aboriginal nations and francophones in the Northwest Territories?

• (1200)

[English]

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: *Mahsi* for that question.

That's an area in which we've always tried to work closely with health and social services. That's one department that we work with. Of the \$1.7 million that's contributed annually from the federal government, most of the money obviously, as you've stated, goes to the languages, to the school boards we work with, to have them delivered in the schools and communities. A majority of the funding is expended in that venue.

But I think there is another important piece here. Right now, I work closely with Sandy Lee, the Minister of Health and Social Services. They are responsible for Stanton, the hospital here. We've heard concerns about the language barrier, not only for aboriginal languages but also for the French area. We have to improve in those areas. We've identified that. As you've stated, we have 11 official languages, and we have to account for all of it, because we're responsible, as the Northwest Territories, to attend to their needs. We

understand and are fully aware that the French and English languages are from a national perspective. I have to respect that as well.

We have to do what we can with the funding that's allocated to our department. There's some funding to other departments as well, so we have to collaborate, but our money is mostly expended in the school boards and the communities to deliver those services.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: We were told it was very difficult when it comes to health care, and that patients have to go through interpreters who translate what the doctor says, which is often highly technical. And this does not even take into account confidentiality issues. Will there be any attempt to provide access to francophone physicians and nurses who are able to provide services in French?

[English]

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Definitely: that's always been our goal. Again, the previous speakers as well are reaching out to outside of Canada to try to have some immigrants with a French background come to the Northwest Territories in order to use them as interpreters or translators in our communities. So we'll definitely continue to work with the Department of Health and Social Services, which is also fully aware.

We also work with the official languages commissioner and her office as well. She also has approached us to say that that we must provide aboriginal languages as much as we can, and of course the other two languages as well. English is obviously the prime language here, but definitely, with regard to French and the nine aboriginal languages, we have to continue to improve but also strengthen what we have to date.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: There are also gaps in the area of education, Minister, which affect young francophones. Earlier, we spoke with another group of witnesses about extracurricular activities that give young francophones an opportunity to get together and build a francophone community. The goal is not only for youth to be able to maintain their language, it is also about culture—just like you have your culture and language as aboriginals. Can something be done in this regard to boost these numbers?

[English]

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: As I've stated before, this is a small community compared to other larger jurisdictions where I've heard that they don't even have the opportunity to meet with their ministers or deputies. I'm clearly aware of that as well. We have a very tight-knit community and we do share facilities as well. As I stated, it's a small community that we have to deal with and we have to work with what we have.

I do appreciate where those students are coming from. I see Yellowknife and the surrounding communities as a family. It's very challenging, sometimes, when individuals or sports teams have to come from a community, because there's the high cost of travel. From Hay River, where we have a French school, travelling to Yellowknife, if the winter road is not in, is very difficult. But we have to try to meet the needs of those students. I have to work with the and municipal community affairs department and other departments to meet those needs. Definitely, that will be one of our goals: to contact communities, to say there are facilities here, and to ask how we can we integrate this.

We talk about culture and we talk about language. It's important for us. I speak my language fluently. I speak it in the House as well. We have to continue that tradition. The French community may be small, but they're part of the family. We need to expand on that. I see them as part of the community as well.

• (1205)

[Translation]

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

The floor is yours, Mr. Godin.

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

Thank you, Minister, for having accepted the invitation to appear before us today. I have a message from my colleague, Dennis Bevington, who sends his best regards. He told me about the way you govern, which is certainly different from ours. We got a real sense of that yesterday. It makes for a change. I don't know how you'd get the 308 members of parliament in Ottawa to agree like that sitting around a table. I don't think that anyone else will be listening to CPAC when the Oprah show ends.

You mentioned that the Government of the Northwest Territories agreed to the official languages legislation in 1984, is that correct?

[English]

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Correct.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: What about prior to 1984? Was it the federal level or ...

Mr. Benoît Boutin: Prior to 1984, there was no official languages legislation in the Northwest Territories. There was a translation bureau, but its main focus was on services and policy. There was no official languages Act in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I see, but you still had to abide by the federal Act. The Northwest Territories were part of the rest of the country.

Mr. Benoît Boutin: The Northwest Territories are independent.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Didn't the Official Languages Act apply to the Northwest Territories?

Mr. Benoît Boutin: The Official Languages Act of Canada applies to federal institutions and the Official Languages Act of the Northwest Territories applies to territorial institutions. However, prior to 1984, there was no territorial legislation.

Mr. Yvon Godin: There was no territorial legislation.

I'm trying to get a sense of the history, but I may be mistaken. Who regulated the schools back then?

Mr. Benoît Boutin: The Department of Education of the Northwest Territories was created in 1969. Prior to 1969, education came under federal jurisdiction.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I see, that's what I was getting at. So, prior to 1969, schools in the Northwest Territories were federally regulated. There was an official languages Act. The federal government had jurisdiction. In 1969, the Territories became independent and passed their own laws on education. From that point on, the Official Languages Act disappeared for some time and the Territories had no such legislation until 1984. The federal government no longer has any jurisdiction over education in the Northwest Territories. There was a gap from 1969 to 1984, then?

Mr. Benoît Boutin: That's right, there was no legislation.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But you said that there was federal legislation.

Mr. Benoît Boutin: That's right, but it applied to federal institutions.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But prior to 1969, schools were federally regulated.

Mr. Benoît Boutin: Education and official languages are two completely separate issues.

Education is one thing. The federal legislation was passed in 1969.

• (1210)

Mr. Yvon Godin: What I'm trying to say is that at that time there was federal legislation regulating schools. The federal government was also responsible for promoting official languages, and to do this, you need schools. I'm not saying that it complied with the legislation, but it did have an obligation. Having legislation is one thing and abiding by it is another. So schools were subject to federal legislation at that time.

Mr. Benoît Boutin: We're going to need a historian.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We'll bring one in.

There is the Official Languages Act, and the territories run the schools.

[English]

For the last 10 years the agreement has been signed, with minimal or no success in obtaining additional funding. I mean, the money is not coming in as you would like to see, right?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: *Mahsi*, Mr. Chair.

Obviously we are receiving funds to operate and provide services in our 11 official languages: nine aboriginal languages, French, and English. Of course, we'd like to see more. That's our dream, and that's our hope. That's what I've been pushing for. We appreciate the funding we are currently receiving. But we have to serve 33 communities. Some are very remote communities and some are fly-in communities.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand that. It's nice to have dreams, but we have laws, too, and the government, under part VII of the law, sections 41 and 43, is responsible for the promotion. And with promotion comes money.

For example, the French school doesn't have a gym. There are certain things they don't have. Has your government made a request to the government saying that you want the same quality of school for the French as you have for the English? Has that been asked for and refused?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Chair, that particular question has been addressed to the heritage minister. We work closely with the office. The request has been made. We are still working with the federal government.

When it comes to infrastructure in the Northwest Territories, we have to involve the federal government. Also, the territorial government receives funding. We have our own infrastructure funds as well, but we need to have a partnership in place too.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand that. You need to have a partnership, but you need the money too.

The government, in part VII of the Official Languages Act, has a responsibility to transfer money. That's not a dream. I hope the federal government isn't saying, "Have a good dream, and continue dreaming". Because in reality, it has a responsibility to give you the opportunity to have those schools. Outside of that, the community is not being treated as equal to the other communities. Do you agree?

[Translation]

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

[English]

If you want to comment....

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Chair, this is an area that has been a challenge for us. But I can say today that we continue to work with the federal government. I'm certainly hoping that they'll be our true partner as we move forward. That's the plan we've had in the past, and we'll continue to strengthen it with the federal government.

Mahsi.

[Translation]

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

We'll now hand the floor over to Mr. Lauzon, and since the Minister had committed to being here until 12:15am, this will wrap things up.

Mr. Lauzon, the floor is yours.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you very much, Minister, for being here.

Thank you to our other guests.

I have some questions here and there, and limited time, so I'm going to push right on.

Minister, you mentioned a strategic plan. You already have a couple of meetings started. I understand that there's another meeting in April. When do you see the plan being in place and ready to put into action? Is that soon or...?

Mr. Dan Daniels: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

We are working on the development of a strategic planning framework. We have a collaboration and cooperation committee that we've established, with membership from the Fédération franco-ténoise. There are three deputy ministers from the Government of the Northwest Territories who sit on that committee: me, the deputy minister from health and social services, and the deputy minister from human resources.

We've had a couple of meetings. We have one coming up in April for which we've presented a framework of a plan to the committee. We have some further discussions to undertake. We're hoping that with the April meeting we will have the framework pretty much finalized. I want to clarify that it's a framework. From there, once we have the framework in place, there will be a need to develop more specific plans on a department-by-department basis.

• (1215)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Would you say within 12 months that would be realistic?

Mr. Dan Daniels: That would be a realistic target, I would think.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: We won't hold you to that.

It's very interesting. One of the principles of the strategic plan is that you will have an active offer in French when a person comes for service. Is that when a person comes for service to a territorial government official? Where is there going to be an active offer in both official languages? At your territorial government offices?

Mr. Dan Daniels: Yes, the strategic plan we're working on is aimed at government services, so we will be focusing on government offices to make those active offers available.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: That's quite a challenge, by the way, because we just had our commissioner do a review of some of our major federal departments, and 100% active service is quite a challenge.

Anyhow, just as an aside here, Ms. Gareau, I believe you're in municipal affairs?

Ms. Laura Gareau (Director, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Government of the Northwest Territories): Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Can you tell me, when somebody comes to the municipal offices—a francophone—do they get an offer of service in French? Or can they...?

Ms. Laura Gareau: My understanding is no, they don't. In the Northwest Territories we have legislation to establish municipal governments. We consider them separate third orders of government, so they—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: So right now it's not a requirement.

Ms. Laura Gareau: That's correct.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Okay.

There are a couple of other things I want to ask about industry, tourism, and investment. I represent a community that has a significant minority French population. We border Quebec. Very recently, our tourism department did not have anything in the second official language, believe it or not, to attract tourists from Quebec, which is right next door. So with some promotion, our tourism information now is bilingual.

Quebec would be a great source for tourism, probably, and to get financial investment. Do you have a way to go out and reach into, say, the Province of Quebec or other francophones...?

Ms. Sonya Saunders (Director, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, Government of the Northwest Territories): Yes. Actually, we work quite closely with the organization CDETNO in particular. That's the Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. They're going to be speaking with you this afternoon. We work with them closely on tourism and also on attracting people to live and invest in the Northwest Territories.

In terms of tourism, we work quite closely with them on translating materials and that kind of thing. Last year when we had Canada's Northern House in Vancouver during the Olympics, we had a representative from CDETNO at the house. We also always had someone who could provide services in French at the house.

We have a tourism marketing advisory committee, which is a territorial committee, and we have representatives of CDETNO on that committee providing advice on how to attract tourism from Quebec, but also from Europe.

A lot of our tourism marketing is actually done through Northwest Territories Tourism, which is our designated marketing organization, but the TMAC group I just referenced is a joint group between the government and a number of industry organizations, including CDETNO.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you.

I'll just keep moving around here like a shotgun.

Mr. Gushue, you're involved with health care. I guess it's a valiant start that you have interpreters. If a francophone goes for health care services, there are interpreters, but we heard in Whitehorse that having interpreters isn't the ideal situation, because sometimes things get lost in the translation, especially when it comes to technical health care terms.

Has there been some thought given to the idea that if a francophone went to the emergency room it would be nice if they could at least explain their problem or their medical condition in French? Is that possible? Is it realistic to think that might be able to happen?

• (1220)

Mr. Lorne Gushue (Official Languages Consultant, Department of Health and Social Services, Government of the Northwest Territories): Thank you.

In the health and social services system right now at the various health authorities in the regions and at the department, there are a number of people currently employed who are receiving the bilingual bonus to provide service in the aboriginal languages and French. We do currently have, in addition to the interpreters, people who can provide service—nurses, specialists, doctors, etc.—who are bilingual, so it is currently happening. Part of the strategic plan, obviously, is to continue to recruit collaboratively with the Department of Health and Social Services more people who have that linguistic capacity.

There are a number of problems. It's no mystery that throughout the entire country, recruitment of health and social services professionals is an ongoing challenge. Recruitment of bilingual professionals is particularly challenging here.

There are also a number of people currently employed within the system who do have a linguistic capacity and who for various reasons are reluctant to self-identify as bilingual and therefore are unwilling to receive the bilingual bonus. I wouldn't care to speculate as to why.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: One of the challenges that seem to be apparent is retention of francophones. You have a transient population. Has anybody ever looked at how you keep people here, especially if they're francophones?

Mr. Lorne Gushue: There was a previous comment about people leaving so quickly. A lot of the francophones—and there are other people who have greater expertise in this than I do—who come here are on term employment with the Department of National Defence or the RCMP, or they are coming to work in the resource industry for a short time, so it's expected that they will leave after a very short period of time. Obviously we'd like people to stay and raise their children and contribute to the community, so it's always a balance.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

It's now time to conclude this great meeting.

I would like once again, Minister, to thank you for coming to our committee for this premiere. Thanks again also for welcoming us at the Legislative Assembly yesterday. The comments of your assistant, Mr. Boutin, were very instrumental in giving us a better understanding of your challenges.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: He's a good man.

The Chair: Yes, he sure is, and he speaks French.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: He's been here for 21 years.

The Chair: Yes, he has, for 21 years.

If we lose our language, we lose our identity and lessen who we are as a people, so thank you for promoting this. We can feel your attachment, especially to the native language.

Even though it's not the direct mandate of this committee, I think by promoting this linguistic duality here in the Northwest Territories, you make this country a better place.

Before we conclude, I have one favour to ask, and that is whether it is possible to have our picture taken with you once we sum up this meeting. Thank you.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Thank you.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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