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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (1350)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)):
Good afternoon everyone.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages is continuing its work as part of a special edition “Tour of the Canadian Far North”.

This afternoon, we are beginning the final stage of our mission to the Canadian Far North, which began in Whitehorse and continued here all morning with several witnesses. This final stage will be in two parts.

First of all, allow me to introduce our witnesses, to whom I would like to extend a very warm welcome.

With us today is Mr. Alain Bessette, Director of Éditions franco-ténoises/L'Aquilon and Société Radio Taïga, two important sources of information. Good afternoon, Mr. Bessette.

We also have Mr. Jean-François Pitre, Chairman of the Board of Directors, du Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. With him is the Executive Director, Ms. Sylvie Francoeur. Welcome, Mr. Pitre and Ms. Francoeur.

We also have Ms. Marie-Pierre Dupont, Director of the Garderie Plein Soleil daycare, a community organization. Welcome.

We also have Mr. Simon Lepage, Vice-President of the Association franco-culturelle de Hay River. With him is Mr. Justin Carey, the President. Welcome to you both.

Finally, we have Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime, from the Fédération franco-ténoise, who is joining us once again.

Without any further ado, I would like to invite Mr. Bessette to get the ball rolling with his opening statement.

Mr. Alain Bessette (Manager, Éditions franco-ténoises, Aquilon et la Société Radio Taïga): Good afternoon one and all. Thank you very much for inviting me to appear this afternoon.

My name is Alain Bessette, and I am the paid Executive Director of L'Aquilon newspaper and the volunteer Director of the Société Radio Taïga.

I would like to begin by giving you some brief background information about these two media.

L'Aquilon newspaper celebrated its 25th anniversary last week. It was published for the first time in February of 1986, as a monthly paper, but has been a weekly paper since 1993.

The newspaper is on a solid financial footing, even though, like any other company, it does suffer the adverse effects of Canada's economic cycles.

It is a non-profit organization. Éditions franco-ténoises/L'Aquilon is a company whose members are Francophone associations in the Northwest Territories.

The radio station CIVR 103.5 FM Radio Taïga began broadcasting in September of 2001 and will be celebrating its 10th anniversary next September. The station is still controlled by the Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife, but it will be on its own in a few months. A new non-profit organization has been set up to take over control of the Société Radio Taïga.

These two media are important to the community. According to a poll done in 2009 for L'Aquilon newspaper, 100% of subscribers believe the newspaper plays an important role within the Francophone community. That statistic is perfectly understandable if you consider that it was the Francophone community itself that took the initiative of creating these media. They are seen and perceived, not only as instruments that reflect the vitality of the Francophone communities, but also as partners within the broader Francophone constituency of the Northwest Territories.

Both media are associate members of the Fédération franco-ténoise and members of the Conseil de développement économique des T.N.-O., an organisation affiliated with the Coordinating Group on Economic Development and Employability.

The small size of the community and staff represent two challenges.

Unlike the situation in other provinces, where there is a larger concentration of Francophones, the two media, L'Aquilon and Radio Taïga, serve a small population, both in terms of numbers and density. L'Aquilon serves mainly some 1,200 Francophones in the Northwest Territories, whereas the Radio Taïga signal only covers the Yellowknife area and its 700 Francophone residents.

It should be mentioned, however, that both media also serve French speakers, for a population of more than 3,000. As a result, they act as very effective bridges between the Francophone minority community and Francophiles in the Territories.

In that respect, radio, through its extensive cultural and musical productions, is an incredible tool in terms of bringing the cultures closer together. The two media reflect their community through their content, but also in the fact that their staffs are small: the newspaper has two to three employees, while the radio has one or two employees.

They are both non-profit organizations. Now that does not mean that sales do not have an impact on their financial health. For the 25 years the newspaper has been around, it has been a tough battle to secure equity in terms of advertising, in those areas where official languages legislation make that an obligation for the various governments.

We have to take our hat off to the federal government for establishing guidelines that now mean it is very rare for an ad published in English in a majority language newspaper not to also be published in L'Aquilon. When that happens, it's often because there is a new employee at the office in question. One phone call is all it takes to rectify the situation.

We also resolved this with the territorial government through legal action against the government in 2001.

The situation is fairly similar for Radio Taïga when it comes to advertising by governments in French. The major problem for Radio Taïga has to do with the fact that radio is a medium that is not often used by governments for their marketing strategies.

The weakness of these two media has mainly to do with the problems involved in selling advertising to the private sector. There are two reasons for that. First of all, there are not many Francophones and, when business owners have to make a choice, we may not necessarily be the audience they are interested in. Second of all, our staffs are very small. As a result, we rarely have employees who are able to do everything, including looking after sales.

Past experience with respect to selling advertising showed that the salesperson's salary was higher than the revenues he or she was able to raise. There has been ongoing contact with business owners in the years since then. However, you have to have adequate financial resources to be in a position to absorb the losses associated with this kind of experience.

Even if the two media are non-profit organizations, that shortcoming directly affects their financial viability.

Another issue is the difficulty of accessing funding sources, in terms of priorities.

For years now, both media organizations have relied on grants to ensure their survival. Although it is sometimes possible to access various funding sources, that access remains extremely limited.

● (1355)

Let's take the example of Radio Taïga. There is no federal grant program to support the operations of community radio stations aimed at the Francophone minority. As a result, we turn to other sources of public funding, notably grants in support of community and cultural development projects. Unfortunately, the goals of such programs are rarely compatible with our needs. When they are, Francophones living in minority communities are rarely the target population.

We also face the serious problem of programs whose priorities are perfectly in line with the situation of Francophones elsewhere in the country, but not so well suited to that of a group which, not only is a very small minority, but also has a different day-to-day reality: long

distances between communities, an exorbitant cost of living, a high degree of labour mobility and difficulty recruiting locally.

One example I could give you occurred last fall. The Radio Taïga radio station has had a tough time financially for years, ever since it was first created. An analysis done in early 2010 drew the same conclusion as in past years: the radio station is not generating enough revenues. Because expenses have been cut to the bare minimum, there is only one possible solution, which is to raise the station's revenues.

The first step in the plan to raise revenues was to identify potential sources: revenues from grants and revenues from sales. While recognizing the importance of securing core funding for the station for the first time in its history, we decided to apply for grants for own-source revenue development projects, as well as a small project to celebrate the radio station's 10th anniversary. What is amazing is that the only development project that Canadian Heritage considered acceptable was the one to celebrate the station's 10th anniversary. The one aimed at organizing an advertising sales campaign, as well as the one to produce radio programming that could be exported and sold, were both rejected. Those two projects would have allowed us to take action to correct the organization's primary weakness, which is revenue generation.

In your opinion, what should be the priority be? To develop tools that enable us to sell and develop our product, or to continue to be a financially unstable organization which receives an occasional grant that has no real connection to its development needs?

Now I would like to talk about our expectations. We expect more understanding from funders when it comes to the reality in small regions. It is really important that federal government departments—not only Canadian Heritage—understand that the situation in the different regions of Canada is very diverse and that the main development thrust identified at the national level cannot be the basis for assessing every single project, without considering the reality in each of the individual regions. Not only is that reality different in every region, but even within a region, organizations are not all at the same stage of development.

That should also be considered when the government is aiming to support the development of Francophone communities and their institutions.

We would also like fewer value judgements regarding the strategies that are developed. It's unfortunate that we occasionally deal with officials who pass judgement on an internal development strategy relying only on a questionnaire, with lots of boxes to check, but often with too little opportunity to provide as many details as we would like with respect to the relevance of a project.

It is deeply offensive to be told that the objectives of a project are not valid, when they are the result of extensive thought regarding the gaps to be filled. It is also offensive for someone to conclude, after spending one hour assessing an application, that the hours spent analyzing the situation and developing a strategy to resolve it have no value.

Should the assessment process not provide someone with a chance to challenge a committee's decision, if you believe the committee is mistaken and that its decisions could jeopardize the survival of an organization?

As far as Radio Taïga is concerned, we would like to see a fund created to support community radio stations. For Radio Taïga, it is very important that Canadian Heritage create a special fund to support the everyday operations of radio stations, particularly small radio stations providing service in very limited markets. Those stations really live from hand-to-mouth without ever knowing whether they will be able to survive the next few months. That is the situation Radio Taïga finds itself in. And before volunteers find themselves in the difficult position of having to lock the door, we dearly hope that the federal government will make the needed adjustments when it comes to funding.

Once again, thank you very much for listening to my concerns.

• (1400)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bessette.

We will move on now to our witnesses from the Conseil de développement économique des T.N.-O.

Please proceed.

Mr. François Pitre (Chairman of the Board of Directors, Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest): Good afternoon. My name is Jean-François Pitre.

The CDETNO and the Garderie Plein Soleil, represented by Marie-Pierre Dupont, would like to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for the role played by the federal government in supporting the development of Francophones and the French language in minority communities.

Because we face that reality on a daily basis, we are aware of the challenges it presents and are well placed to talk about the vision and solutions that can be contemplated. We therefore very much appreciate this opportunity to talk about our expectations, our needs and our hopes as regards the participation of Francophones in the economic development of the Northwest Territories.

We are pleased to welcome you to the Northwest Territories and are grateful for the time you have taken to travel throughout the North in order to hear our concerns.

As part of the study the Standing Committee on Official Languages is currently conducting, the Conseil de développement économique des T.N.-O. would like to share its vision with the members. As requested by the committee, the CDETNO will attempt to answer the following questions.

What role does the federal government play in affirming and developing the Francophone communities of Northern Canada under Part VII of the Official Languages Act?

How is the Roadmap for Canada's linguistic duality 2008-2013 being implemented in Northern communities?

Is linguistic duality part of the political, socioeconomic and cultural development of the Northwest Territories?

Do the federal government and the Territories have cooperation mechanisms in place to foster dialogue and development in the Francophone communities?

What inequalities exist with respect to official languages laws and policies in the territories?

The Garderie Plein Soleil is joining with the CDETNO to present this brief to the committee, with a view to providing concrete examples of the challenges facing French-language minority communities.

To begin with, we would like to provide some background information. Founded in 2003, the CDETNO is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote, stimulate and support the economic development and employability of Francophones and Francophiles living in the Northwest Territories.

The CDETNO is part of the extensive family of similar groups under the Coordinating Group on Economic Development and Employability, a network that seeks to promote economic development and employability in Francophone minority communities outside Quebec all across the country.

The CDETNO offers a wide variety of services to business people, community organizations and individuals seeking employment. It brings together resources and enables targeted action aimed at enhancing the employability of Francophones and the overall economy of the NWT.

The focus of the CDETNO is community economic development. It seeks to consolidate the status of Francophones and stimulate their economy, in partnership and cooperation with the community. It is important to mention that more than 30% of our members are Francophile Anglophones seeking to take advantage of our quality services.

The CDETNO receives its core funding under a special program administered by the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, known as the Empowerment Fund. Money for this fund was guaranteed under the Roadmap for Canada's linguistic duality by the Harper government, and is in place until March 31, 2013.

To better understand the role of the CDETNO, it is important to start by considering the overall economic context, followed by the challenges facing the Francophone community.

Located between the territories of the Yukon and Nunavut, the Northwest Territories cover a total area of 1.3 million square kilometers, which is 18 and a half times larger than the province of New Brunswick. It has a population of 41,000, 50% of whom are Aboriginal.

There is a wide variety of mother tongues in the Northwest Territories, including 11 which are considered to be official languages in the Territories. According to the 2006 census, the Francophone community comprises 1,060 residents whose first spoken language is French, or 2.6% of the population. Furthermore, the number of people with a knowledge of both French and English has more than tripled since the 1950s. More than 3,720 people—9.1% of the population—now say they speak French in the Northwest Territories.

The population of the NWT is very young. The average age is 31. The Francophone community here reflects the situation across Canada to a much greater extent, the average age being 41. The Francophone population in the NWT is primarily adult. Among Francophones, families are small and there are few young people.

Consolidation of French language institutions in the education sector could help the French language community here to renew itself.

• (1405)

It is estimated that eight in ten Francophones living in the NWT were born outside of the territory. Almost all of them are originally from somewhere else in Canada, although immigrants do represent 9% of the Francophone population here. They come from Europe, Asia and Africa. The Francophones who originally settled here were from every region of the country, but especially Quebec and Acadia. The Francophone population is primarily concentrated in the urban area of Yellowknife, where there are 770 Francophone residents. The four other communities are Fort Smith, Inuvik, Hay River and Norman Wells, with a Francophone population of about 200. The other Francophones are scattered across small communities associated with the mining industry expansion, as well as around Inuvik.

Despite their small numbers, Francophones have managed to make their mark on the political, cultural and economic life of the NWT. The labour force participation rate has seen a gradual increase since 1984. With a rate of 73%, the NWT is now ranked first among the provinces and territories with its highest employment rate since 2007. In 2006, the labour force participation among French speakers was 84%. In 2007, it was 80%. Like what has occurred throughout the NWT, it can be assumed that the labour force participation rate of French speakers has also slipped somewhat since 2007. However, Francophones here continue to enjoy a higher labour force participation rate than the general population.

The economy here depends on expanded development of natural resources. At the same time, Francophones are not strongly represented in goods-producing industries, with the exception of the mining and oil sectors, which employ approximately 50 Francophones. The Francophone population is concentrated in other industry sectors, including construction, transportation and public services. As much as 40% of Francophones work in public administration, education, health care and social services.

Because Francophones here in the NWT work primarily in the services industry, they are often less vulnerable to resource-related price cycles. There are also approximately 80 Francophones here in the NWT who own their own business or are self-employed. Francophone contractors represent 10% of the French-speaking labour force. Many self-employed workers employ other individuals, thereby providing jobs to Francophones and other residents of the NWT. The average income of Francophones here is about \$55,000, which is \$11,000 higher than for the general population of the NWT.

The economy grew quickly between 1999 and 2007, in large part as a result of significant investments in the mining sector, and particularly diamond mining, as well as in oil and natural gas. The gross domestic product has risen by 57% since 1999, with a per

capita GDP of \$73,000, which is twice the national average of \$35,000, and approximately \$30,000 higher than in Alberta.

The economic crisis in 2008 did affect the NWT and Francophones who live there, but overall, it does not seem to have had a major impact compared to what other regions of the country have experienced. Data from the next census will provide a clearer picture of its effects.

I would now like to address some of the challenges. The shortage of both labour and resources is one of the main problems facing all employers in the NWT. Recruiting qualified people is a constant struggle for them. To that end, the CDETNO has developed a labour recruitment program and a number of one-time projects with the support of its partners.

The CDETNO works with more than 30 employers on an annual basis. However, this remains a persistent problem, as is labour retention. One of the best examples of the challenges we're facing involves the Garderie Plein Soleil, the largest employer of Francophones in the NWT. The daycare receives few offers of service for daycare teacher positions. It also has a high turnover rate, because employees move or receive job offers in schools, with the government or elsewhere. It is very difficult to compete with government salaries, and as a result, service offers are few and far between.

The ongoing problem of recruiting and retaining human resources has a significant impact on the organization's business operations. The daycare is always in survival mode, forcing it to continually restructure its staff. It is unable to focus on developing programs, because it is always busy trying to recruit employees.

• (1410)

There was a 57% turnover rate among daycare teachers in the last six months. Four teachers out of a total of seven quit their jobs at the daycare centre. Yet the daycare centre's situation is not unique, as the recruitment and retention issue affects every organization in the North.

One of the major challenges for the CDETNO continues to be mobilizing resources in order to carry out its mission. Indeed, employment services for BTS and business and employers services are not available in French on an ongoing basis in the NWT.

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr. Pitre.

Mr. François Pitre: All right.

These are our recommendations.

First of all, we are asking for your support to make the new federal CanNor agency aware of the need to develop a program to fund business services in French in the Northwest Territories, as well as the two other territories.

Secondly, we are calling on you to redouble your efforts to sensitize the Ministry of Education, Culture and Training in the NWT to the need for employability services in French, all across the Northwest Territories.

Thirdly, we are seeking your support with respect to the renewal of the Empowerment Fund administered by HRSDC, as well as the federal government's Roadmap, which will end on March 31, 2013.

Finally, we are seeking your support to reactivate the National Joint Committee mandated under the memorandum of understanding signed in March of 1998 by the Government of Canada and the Comité pour les Francophones en situation minoritaire. Furthermore, we encourage you to demand the ongoing participation of deputy ministers in the work of the committee, as it was originally constituted.

In closing, I would just like to say that Francophones here are making their mark culturally, economically and politically in the Northwest Territories. At the same time, consolidation of their current assets and the provision of permanent services which are essential for their development would clearly enhance their situation.

The few recommendations we have made are potential solutions intended to improve the standard of living of the Francophone communities, as well as community economic development all across the Northwest Territories.

Finally, the CDETNO and its partner in this presentation, the Garderie Plein Soleil, would once again like to extend their sincere thanks for this opportunity to talk about linguistic duality as a means of forging closer ties between the two solitudes.

• (1415)

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

We will conclude this first series of presentations with the representatives from Hay River.

Mr. Justin Carey (President, Association franco-culturelle de Hay River): Thank you.

Good afternoon. My name is Justin Carey, and I am the volunteer President of the Association franco-culturelle de Hay River. With me today is Simon Lepage, Vice-President and also a volunteer with the Association.

Ours is a non-profit organization that was established in 1987. It has been legally constituted since 1999. The Association's mission is to work towards the affirmation and development of the Francophone community in Hay River.

Hay River is one of the larger cities in the NWT with a population of 3,500, including approximately 150 Francophones, or rather, 150 residents who speak French.

I will turn it over to Mr. Lepage to continue our presentation.

Mr. Simon Lepage (Vice-President, Association franco-culturelle de Hay River): Thank you, Mr. Carey.

To begin with, thank you for inviting us and giving us this opportunity to address you today. It is reassuring to see the interest you are taking in Francophone minorities living in remote regions.

I address you today in my capacity as Vice-President of the Association, but also as a parent and member of the Hay River community. That being the case, I will try to cover as much ground as possible within a short period of time.

Historically, Francophones arrived in the Territories after the aboriginal people, obviously, but before Anglophones. Starting in 1770, there were Francophones following the fur trade route and engaging in commerce. In 1870, when the Territories were created,

Francophones had already been living there for 100 years and the French language had become a language of commerce.

That means that a large number of Francophones had taken up residence in the Territories, and were actually from there. At the present time, only 0.5% of Francophones living in the NWT are from here. They are what remains of those first Francophone pioneers. The names of Francophone places and families have been retained, but there is no longer any French. In fact, 2.5% of the population of the NWT is Francophone. That means that there are four Francophones from outside for every one who is actually from here.

Our linguistic situation has been studied. In a completely Francophone community, the language continuity index is ordinarily 100, meaning that the language is passed on at a rate of 100%. In the NWT, the index is 37%. In other words, over the long term, there is a serious threat to the vitality of the language if nothing is done. That 37% result does not guarantee its survival.

Furthermore, it has been observed that our population is more nomadic than the Anglophone population. We have a tendency to settle less often in the Territories, and the availability of services in French is not likely to encourage us to do so.

As a parent, I would like to raise my child in French, but I don't want him to speak poor French. I would like him to be able to speak both French and English with no accent. I want him to be able to speak to me in proper French. However, a parent wanting to do that would be better off going to live somewhere else at this point. That is why are asking that we be provided adequate services in French.

There are not many of us, but in percentage terms, our minority can be compared to other minorities in Canada. Indeed, the numbers do vary, ranging from 2.5% to 3.5% for the proportion of Francophones.

With respect to the turnover rate of the population, according to Statistics Canada, between 2001 and 2006, 8.5% of the Francophone population left the Territories, compared to 1.8% for Anglophones. That is an indication that Anglophones are more likely to stay here.

At the same time, there are just as many Anglophones coming from outside the Territories and they, too, may tend to go back where they came from. This is something that warrants study, as it raises questions. Why do Anglophones stay, even those from outside, whereas Francophones leave? The lack of services may be the cause.

Moreover, there are twice as many labour force participants in the Francophone population than there are in the Anglophone population. The unemployment rate among Francophones is half what it is for Anglophones. Our population is also better educated. If I'm not mistaken, the university graduation rate among Francophones is 10% higher. So, as a population, we are neither useless nor of no interest.

In terms of the services we are provided, in the education sector, for instance—and I'm still referring to the community of Hay River south of the lake—we have managed to secure a school. A great deal of effort was put into that project, and there was opposition; however, many of us got together and fought for it and were ultimately successful.

Now we are in need of a daycare centre. We have a French-language school but, after Grade 12, their spoken French is not as good, worse than my English. I will spare you the demonstration. Ah, ah!

● (1420)

Anglophone children born to rights holders who want to attend French-language school have no contact with French, as there is no daycare centre or no services are available. When they start school, they have to be francized. They carry that problem with them throughout the time they're in school, right up to Grade 12.

And the same applies to Francophone children. My child now speaks English. We speak French at home, but that is not enough. When he starts school and is surrounded by other young Francophones whose command of French is poor, and Anglophones who have no idea what he is talking about, he will stop speaking French, unless we move. That is why the language continuity index is not very high.

If I simply give up on French and we stay here, what services will be available to my son? There is absolutely nothing for young people. Outside of what is available through the school board, there is absolutely nothing—not even bilingual services. If services were bilingual, it would be all right. But we have neither unilingual French-language services nor bilingual services.

I would now like to address the turnover rate among Francophones. A Francophone who settles here ordinarily thinks about starting a family and, most of the time, will decide not to stay because he wants to continue to live his life in French. Francophones here are open to bilingualism. If they were not interested in speaking English, they would have stayed where they were. But at the same time they want to retain their French.

In terms of art and culture, it is pretty quiet here in our community of 3,500 Francophones. Our annual budget is less than \$60,000. We do what we can with it. When we are able to organize one or two shows or little events like sugaring off, our year is pretty well finished.

We need a larger budget in order to continue to be a vibrant community. This also affects our turnover rate which, in turn, influences economic development.

If we want there to be economic development, people have to consider staying longer. Someone who starts up a business doesn't stick with it for just three years; it's a long-term project.

I myself am in career transition. I am thinking that if I have to leave, there may not be much point in developing something in the Territories. On the other hand, if there were adequate services in French, we would stay and there would definitely be things happening.

Despite that, because we exist, some public services are offered, such as the school. The Association franco-culturelle de Hay River has created 14 jobs in our 3,500-strong community. That is not much, but we derive satisfaction where we can.

In terms of health care, 1.3% of health care personnel in the NWT is Francophone, which is not much. At the Hay River hospital, one

person has been hired on a part-time basis to support Francophone patients. At the same time, her tiny office is hidden in a corner and the public has not been made aware of this. It has happened that Francophones did not understand what the physician was saying—and I'm not sure the physician understood them either—and yet that service was neither offered to them or even mentioned. Nothing happened whatsoever.

We are not asking for the moon, but we would really like to be able to make ourselves understood, at least in that kind of situation. Aboriginal residents are entitled to interpreters, and we would also like to receive that service.

Consequently, we are recommending...

● (1425)

The Chair: You have approximately one minute left, Mr. Lepage.

Mr. Simon Lepage: We are recommending that there be more meaningful enforcement of the Official Languages Act so that we can receive more services. We would also like to see better funding for Francophone associations and organizations, as well as better access. Sometimes the nature of our communities does not jibe with the application forms. And yet what we are asking for is logical and makes sense; we can provide a rationale. We do what we can.

We would like to buy some land in order to have a source of revenue. That way, we would be less dependent on grants, which would be beneficial for the government, but we don't have the right to do that. We are completely dependent on grant money. So, we do what we can with the little we have.

We would like to see increased funding for French-language programs, or at the very least that such funding be made available. Other organizations, such as municipalities, do not have the money to develop projects in French. If there were a program, a budget or at least some incentives to encourage us, that would be a very good thing. For example, the NWT Arts Council, which is responsible for arts and culture in the Northwest Territories, only operates in English. It would be wonderful for us if part of its budget could be set aside for French.

In closing, I would just like to say that we are an active population, a population on the move. We are only asking for a few services, so that we can stay here and make more of a contribution to the community's development. And, in a context where there is increased interest in resources development in the North, we feel we should be a key community getting involved in that development.

We are some of the first pioneers to have settled in the Northwest Territories; we can be that again. We just need some help so that we can play our part.

The Chair: In your presentation, you talked about health care. This morning, we heard from a witness who is actively involved in that.

Mr. Tuyishime, would you like to make a few comments before we begin the question period?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime (Director, Réseau Territoires du Nord-Ouest Santé en français, Fédération Franco-Ténoise): After presentations like that, there is very little to add.

However, I do want to say that the Réseau Territoires du Nord-Ouest Santé en français identifies the need for health care and social services among Francophones. It helps to raise awareness of the importance of requesting services in French, particularly since it has been noted that active offer is not necessarily available in the NWT.

Furthermore, the Réseau plays a role in efforts to recruit, retain, mobilize and train Francophone health care professionals. It is very active in health promotion and disease prevention, as well as in developing the tools needed to promote access to information in French. We believe we are making a contribution to the Francophone community's vitality by fostering partnerships and cooperation with the various government agencies, health care institution managers, health and social services personnel, training institutions and the community. We are working closely with all of these partners to improve access to health care services.

I will spare you the figures, because I think you've already heard enough. The presentations prior to my own probably referred to the way the government provides services. So, I do not intend to go over that again.

However, I would like to make two recommendations. I think the focus must be on developing local skills and winning strategies. That means that we would like to see more community-based approaches to health care—in other words, for projects to start at the community level and move up, rather than being proposed from the top levels and trickling down to the bottom.

We are also seeking increased support for recruitment, training and retention of health care professionals. That remains a crucial issue in terms of the active offer of services in the NWT.

On that note, I would just like to say, by way of conclusion, that health care remains a burning issue and that it should not be left on ice.

Thank you.

• (1430)

The Chair: It shouldn't be left on ice.

Ms. Zarac will begin the first round.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My first questions deal with the school in Hay River and are addressed to Mr. Lepage.

How many students attend the school?

Mr. Simon Lepage: There are currently 123 students.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It covers primary and secondary levels? Is there also a kindergarten?

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes. It covers from kindergarten to Grade 12.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You say that there are no daycare centres to prepare the children.

Mr. Simon Lepage: No, exactly.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Is there an English-language school in Hay River?

Mr. Simon Lepage: There are actually three English-language schools for the three different levels.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: How many students attend those three schools?

Mr. Simon Lepage: That is a question I can't answer.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: How many, approximately?

Mr. Simon Lepage: Between 500 and 900 students.

On the other side of the river, there is also a school for the aboriginal reserve.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Is there a school for aboriginal languages?

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: There is one aboriginal school, three English-language schools and one French-language school.

Is French immersion available in the English-language schools?

Mr. Simon Lepage: No. Those schools were given an opportunity to offer French immersion, but they refused. That explains the existence of the French-language school. Faced with a refusal on the part of Anglophones to offer French immersion, Francophones decided they had to have their own school.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Mr. Pitre mentioned earlier that there is a labour shortage.

Are you having trouble recruiting teachers with the necessary skill set?

Mr. Simon Lepage: As far as recruitment is concerned, whether it is a teaching position or other kind of position, it is always difficult.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It's difficult to find qualified people.

Mr. Simon Lepage: When we find qualified people, we do everything we can to secure their services.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: And you try to retain them.

If I'm not mistaken, you have a budget of \$60,000 a year for the school.

Mr. Simon Lepage: No, that is the Association's annual budget. There can be some add-ons, but our core funding is \$60,000. If we're lucky, it may go as high as \$90,000.

Mr. Justin Carey: If we include in-kind donations.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: We visited l'École Émilie-Tremblay in Whitehorse. There, in addition to teaching the French language, they also teach English as a first language.

What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Simon Lepage: We want our children to be bilingual. We definitely want them to speak English.

My wife speaks English because she is English-speaking by origin. I want my son to also speak English without an accent. I would like him to speak both English and French without an accent. In any case, if he does have an accent, it will be my accent.

• (1435)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do you know whether French is taught in the English-language schools?

Mr. Simon Lepage: There are French courses, but the French courses they teach are similar to the English courses they teach in Gaspésie.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: In what year do they start teaching those courses? Is it in Grade 1?

Mr. Simon Lepage: No, I don't think so.

The Chair: Excuse me. I would just like to ask those who are not using the translation system not to leave their headsets next to the microphone when they're speaking, because they make a very high-pitched sound when that happens. We want to bring our interpreters back to Ottawa safe and sound.

That was just a technical reminder. Please keep your headsets away from the mike when you speak.

Thank you.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I was interested to hear that the unemployment rate is higher among Anglophones than among Francophones. From experience, we know that Francophones are very often more bilingual than Anglophones.

Do you think that is one of the reasons why the unemployment rate is lower among Francophones?

Mr. Simon Lepage: That could be one of the reasons. On the other hand, bilingualism in the Northwest Territories is not really valued. It is to a somewhat greater extent than it was in the territorial public service, because of the court rulings calling for more French. Obligations in that respect are clearly not being met. So, from that perspective, I don't think bilingualism is a factor.

On the other hand, there is a high turnover rate among Francophones. People come here to work, but if something happens, they leave again, whereas Anglophones are more stable. There is also the fact that in small northern communities where the unemployment rate is high, people speak English. But when we come here, it is not to be unemployed. That is why our rate is two times lower.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Given that there are 11 official languages in the Northwest Territories, do you feel that you are competing with the other official languages to receive services in your language?

Mr. Simon Lepage: No, not really.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I see that some people opposite are nodding.

Mr. Simon Lepage: It's possible. That is my perspective. It is not the absolute truth.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You do not have that impression.

I guess I will put the same question to Mr. Pitre or Ms. Francoeur.

Mr. François Pitre: I should point out that I have been here for 30 years. I have travelled from Iqaluit to Whitehorse. I am familiar with some 65 communities. I am pretty well acquainted with the reality all across Northern Canada. I set up the French-language school and secured funding for Hay River. I was a member of the school board for eight years and, for eight years, I have sat on the Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest.

First of all, Francophones who come here often have a job. Perhaps that explains our unemployment rate. People do not come

here for pleasure; rather, because there is work or because they want to be hired.

In terms of the feeling of having to compete, there is no doubt that if the territorial government gives something to Francophones, it absolutely must give the same thing to the Dene. There are five aboriginal languages. It is difficult to give something to one and not the other. In a way, it's always the same problem. For example, the schools were used to receive funding of \$4.3 million. I believe the territorial government was giving them \$600,000. The rest came from the federal government. It was somewhat the same situation as in Hay River. The dynamic is not always the same as elsewhere. It's not English and French; instead, it is English, the aboriginal languages, French, and so on.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do you have the sense that the funding arrangement is unfair?

Mr. François Pitre: It clearly is not fair from one end of the country to the other. There are 1 million Francophones outside Quebec. But the RDEE, or Coordinating Group on Economic Development and Employment, receives \$12 million a year. That is not a lot of money, and it doesn't allow you to do much.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: In terms of funding, you said that you received yours from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Mr. François Pitre: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: According to the figures we've been given, you receive the same amount of money as the two other territories.

Mr. Jean-François Pitre: The three territories receive \$300,000 a year.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: That's right, but you have a larger population.

Is my time up?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarac. You may have another opportunity later.

Mr. Godin, please. No, I'm sorry; you are up next, Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): I don't know why you always do that to me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: It was to be fair to Mr. Godin.

Ms. Monique Guay: Okay, that's fine. It will be his turn next.

Good afternoon to all our witnesses. I have several quick questions for you.

A French-language newspaper is important. In Whitehorse, they have *L'Aurore boréale*. Francophones there are having a lot of trouble keeping it afloat. One example they gave us was an ad that the federal government published in English and French in an English-language newspaper, but not in the French-language newspaper. Yet the newspaper needs these ads in order to survive.

How are things working at your end?

•(1440)

Mr. Alain Bessette: If that sort of thing were to occur, I would immediately contact the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. That sort of thing is not supposed to happen. The federal government's guidelines stipulate that, if an ad appears in English in a majority language newspaper, it must appear in French in a minority language newspaper. That is not right. Often a phone call—

Ms. Monique Guay: That also represents revenues for your newspaper. This is significant advertising.

Mr. Alain Bessette: At the present time, the newspaper generates approximately 80% of its revenues independently, through sales.

Ms. Monique Guay: Do you sell your newspaper or do you give it away?

Mr. Alain Bessette: It is distributed free of charge to Francophones in the NWT. If it is sent outside the Territories, however, there is a cost for postage.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Lepage, you say that you have no French-language daycare centres. Is that correct?

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes, it is.

Ms. Monique Guay: Are there many families that have French as a first language and speak French at home? In your case, your wife is English-speaking. But the children are able to learn French at home.

Mr. Simon Lepage: That isn't enough.

Ms. Monique Guay: No?

Mr. Simon Lepage: No, because we are surrounded by Anglophones.

Ms. Monique Guay: Yes, that's true. And friends in the neighbourhood?

Mr. Simon Lepage: They also attend the daycare centre. But that really isn't enough.

Ms. Monique Guay: If both parents work, they absolutely need daycare.

Mr. Simon Lepage: That's right. If we want our children to learn French at home, one of the two parents has to stay home.

Ms. Monique Guay: And you don't want to create a ghetto either.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Exactly. In the Territories, there are some interesting activities which are organized for children outside of the daycare setting. We don't want to deprive our children of these activities, so we participate, but everything obviously takes place in English. I speak French to my son at home, but on the outside, we don't use French. All the other Francophone children are in the same position.

Ms. Monique Guay: So, he speaks English when he is involved in outside activities. Otherwise it is very difficult to preserve his language.

Mr. Simon Lepage: It's extremely difficult. In my case, it's even more difficult because my wife is English-speaking and has a tendency to return to her mother tongue; however, families where both parents are Francophones also have to make a determined effort.

I even know of a family that has been living in the NWT for six or seven years and whose two children, who are now both teenagers, have difficulty speaking French.

Ms. Monique Guay: We saw your Language Commissioner for the Northwest Territories this morning, and she doesn't speak French. Do you have any contact with her and do you talk to her about the status of French?

Mr. Simon Lepage: I, personally, have never done that.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I met her more than once in Inuvik. We met with her in Inuvik and we also talked about our Francophone reality, particularly with respect to health care. She also talked to us about what First Nations people are facing.

Ms. Monique Guay: Yes, we also heard about what it's like for the aboriginal population, but you have your own reality, and I think an effort should be made in that regard.

A voice: Yes.

Ms. Monique Guay: Our Commissioner of Official Languages speaks both languages and has a perfect command of both languages, French and English.

Mr. Simon Lepage: That would certainly help.

Ms. Monique Guay: I imagine that when you hold meetings, you have to have an interpreter there in order to communicate with the Commissioner. That is somewhat surprising.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: The meetings take place in English.

Ms. Monique Guay: The meetings are in English, but if someone does not speak English, that is a problem.

And there is also a problem in the school setting. You only have one school, which covers both the primary and secondary levels. You say there are 100—

Mr. Simon Lepage: There are 123 students.

Ms. Monique Guay: Is there sufficient demand for there to be more?

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes, the demand is there. The daycare would help to increase the number of students that attend school which, in turn, would improve the quality of education. Furthermore, if the NWT government were meeting its obligations, we would have a better school. School board officials you will be hearing from this evening will address that with you. They are currently in court to see that their rights are respected, because it is clear that the government is racist and is stubbornly refusing—

•(1445)

Ms. Monique Guay: There is a French-language daycare centre in Whitehorse. In fact, there is a waiting list. The phone never stops ringing.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes, we have a study—

Ms. Monique Guay: The children keep going after that and attend the French school.

Now these people are in court.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes.

Our market study is ready. It was commissioned by the Francophone association, which is hoping to have a daycare. We are ready. The need is there. It has been documented. All that is lacking is the funding, because you don't get very far with only \$60,000.

Ms. Monique Guay: No, that is not enough.

I note that there are 19 members of the Legislative Assembly and that they are practically all aboriginal, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Simon Lepage: That's possible.

Ms. Monique Guay: Is there no one representing the Franco-phone community?

Mr. Simon Lepage: No.

Ms. Monique Guay: It would be a good idea for you to have at least one elected representative. Otherwise, you have no way of ensuring your representation, other than through constant challenges. You practically have to beg. It's really not very nice to be in that position.

Mr. Simon Lepage: No, that's true, and that is one of the reasons for the higher turnover among Francophones. If you want to stay, you have to fight.

Ms. Monique Guay: And you say that people don't do that.

Mr. Simon Lepage: That's right.

The reason I'm fighting is because, if we decide to stay, I want there to be something for my son. I could simply decide that we won't stay, that we're going to get out and that I'm not going to fight.

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

This time, we really are going to hear from Mr. Godin.

Ms. Monique Guay: The one and only.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Definitely the one, without an accent.

First of all, I would like to welcome you to our committee. It is really great to hear your comments and to see the differences in needs from one region to the next.

With respect to economic development and FedNor, if I'm not mistaken, you said that you would like to receive services in French. Is that because you are not currently receiving any?

Mr. François Pitre: Not consistently.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Please don't touch your mikes; someone is being paid to that. We don't want to take work away from anyone. It's all part of economic development.

Voices: Ah, ah!

Mr. François Pitre: Yes, it is CanNor, and that agency only came into being in August of 2009. That is why we are still having a lot of trouble securing equal services in French. At this point, we don't have any.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's fine to try to achieve equality, but you say that if a Francophone company—you said there are as many as 80 Francophone businesses here—wants to increase their staff and create jobs, they cannot receive services in French from FedNor. Did you never consider the idea of lodging a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages?

Mr. François Pitre: Our executive director has more involvement in that.

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur (Executive Director, Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest): The agency we come under here in the Northwest Territories is CanNor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: CanNor?

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: FedNor is in Ontario, I believe. Here, it's CanNor.

At this point, funding—

Mr. Yvon Godin: CanNor means “Canada North”?

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: It is the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is it federal?

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: Yes, CanNor is the equivalent of FedNor, but for the three territories.

As Jean-François was saying, this agency was created in 2009, but at the present time, it has no funding program for business services, even though they are considered to be permanent. They cannot simply be random or made available under an annual project; it has to be a permanent service, and CanNor has no program at this time to fund that kind of service. We are the ones doing that. HRSDC enables us to do that, because CanNor is not yet positioned to offer that type of program.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It was created in 2009. Do you mean that no thought was ever given to the fact that we live in a country with two official languages?

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: No, it's because of the program structure. There are services in French, yes, but it is the funding programs that pose a problem. The Agency has a vast array of programs, and yet there isn't one that funds permanent programs. It provides project funding. It doesn't have the right to fund programs or permanent or recurring activities and projects year after year. Nor can it provide core funding; so the government has to do what is needed to allow that to happen and approve the creation of a core funding program.

At our end, we engage in advocacy as well as doing a lot of lobbying, and we are slowly becoming a little more militant.

● (1450)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I just want to be sure I understand. CanNor is pretty well the equivalent of ACOA in my region.

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: Exactly.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But you are talking about permanent programs. When people turn to a co-op for money, it isn't money they will be receiving every year. It's an amount of money paid to a company that says it needs \$100,000, for example. Does it work the same way here?

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: Yes, that would be possible if it were a business, but in our case, as a non-profit organization seeking to provide services to entrepreneurs, it has to be a permanent service. We have to be able to guarantee service to these business people year after year and let them know that we will be there tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and the following year. They have to be thinking about expansion, the next steps, what to do internationally, and so on.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That wasn't my question. They are not all non-profit organizations. There are Francophone entrepreneurs. Do they receive services in French when they apply to CanNor?

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: No, when business people are looking to secure a loan or a program, there are no staff persons available who speak French. They would have to call on the services of an interpreter. What we are proposing is to be given the ability to provide that service, to do it on their behalf—which would be perfectly logical—but, for the time being, there is no funding program in place that would allow us to do that.

Mr. François Pitre: It's the same problem in the Territories. They don't have the resources to do that sort of thing in French. What we are proposing to both governments is that we do it for them.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are proposing to do the work, is that right? I understand.

Mr. François Pitre: More or less. We are proposing that they provide us with the funding to do that, because they are unable to do it at this time. They don't have the staff, they don't have the programs and they don't have the money.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, it's just because they don't want to.

Mr. François Pitre: That, too.

Mr. Yvon Godin: There are 33 million people in Canada; either they respect the official languages or they do not. There are laws in place.

Mr. François Pitre: It's blatant here.

Mr. Yvon Godin: A minister was saying that there were rules, but in actual fact, they aren't rules; they are laws. We are all wide awake, it is 3:00 p.m. and—

Mr. François Pitre: That's why we still have to—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am asking whether CanNor provides services in both official languages. The answer is no.

Mr. François Pitre: Not at this time, at least not in Yellowknife. Officials from CanNor say that it may be because they are offering services elsewhere, that they could send them somewhere else and bring them back. But in Yellowknife, the answer is no.

Mr. Yvon Godin: There is a difference when you're talking about a territorial responsibility. However, this is no longer a responsibility. We're talking about federal programs and you cannot access services in both languages.

Mr. Jean-François Pitre: We are not the only ones. That also applies to health care and other areas.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In terms of radio and newspapers, since you live in a region where French is a minority language, do you apply to Canadian Heritage for funding to partially subsidize your small French-language newspaper and radio station? I don't imagine you have much access to Radio-Canada here.

Mr. Alain Bessette: The newspaper has been around for 25 years, and we have always managed to position ourselves to receive a share of the budget under the Canadian Heritage program that funds initiatives related to linguistic duality. As regards the radio station, although it has been operating for nine years, it has never positioned itself. This year marked the first time we were able to secure core funding to operate the radio station for a year. That was the first year that projects were submitted on behalf of the radio station. But they

have not been very well received thus far. The radio station is starting to position itself.

It's important to understand that things are shared in the Northwest Territories. It is overseen by the two governments, territorial and federal, but there is a community response. The latter agrees that 10% of the money will be allocated to this organization or another organization, for example. In spite of that, the federal government reserves the right to reject the project.

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

We will move now to Mr. Gagnéux.

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

Good afternoon and welcome to you all.

Mr. Bessette, you just gave a partial answer to my question. I imagine that, as far as Canadian Heritage is concerned, it's relatively simple for the newspaper. There are programs in place, although there were changes in that area last year.

Is this beneficial to you? Personally, I have long been on the board of directors of a community newspaper.

Mr. Alain Bessette: There will be improvements, particularly as regards the program which will replace the Publication Assistance Program. At the same time, we will have to make certain adjustments from an administrative standpoint. The fact is that our newspaper is now provided free of charge to Francophones, but that is something that is not acceptable under this program. We will have to find some way of dealing with that.

• (1455)

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: How much did you receive for the radio station in your last fiscal year?

Mr. Alain Bessette: We are actually talking about the next fiscal year. This is completely new. The radio station was controlled by the Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife, but it will be transferred to an independent corporation beginning in April.

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: Was that the only obstacle to your securing funding?

Mr. Alain Bessette: It might have been a handicap. The new corporation that will be taking control of the radio station will give it a territorial mandate. In fact, we have plans to eventually go beyond the boundaries of Yellowknife in terms of our signal, in order to reach a larger audience.

In any case, this is the first year that I am able to secure funding for the radio station. That core funding is very important, but almost all the development projects through which we were expecting to establish a solid base for the radio station were rejected by Canadian Heritage. It's kind of a shame.

Mr. Bernard Gagnéux: The situation here is different, of course. The population of the North is about 40,000. You were saying earlier that the programs are not really in tune with your needs and that you do not get a very positive response from the different ministries.

Have you been experiencing these problems for a long time? Has it always been that way? The newspaper, for one, has been around for 25 years.

Mr. Alain Bessette: My comments had mainly to do with the radio station. As I explained earlier, I have been a driving force behind the newspaper for several years now. We were able to set up a proper operation. Now I am taking on a new mandate, which involves responsibility for the radio station. And I realize that there are some significant stumbling blocks. It is puzzling to be told by the department that the project does not jibe with its priorities.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you.

Mr. Lepage, you talked about racism when describing the territorial government's attitude towards Francophones. Perhaps you could give me additional details in that regard. As you know, that is a very strong term.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You don't seem to be concerned about the fact that you used it.

Mr. Simon Lepage: No. I'm not afraid of words. I'm no more afraid of that one than I am of another. In the court case where the school board was fighting the government, the school board was obliged to defend its rights. It was clear that there was a lack of good will. When the territorial government seeks funding from the federal government, it talks about the lack of space in French-language schools, but when the French-language schools say that they lack space and would like to have a gymnasium or other facilities, they are told that they have enough space. So, that shows a lack of good will.

How is it that every school in the Territories has its own gymnasium and adequate facilities other than the two French-language schools? That raises questions. If that isn't racism, then we need to know what it is.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Personally, I do not necessarily consider that to be racism. As you well know, there are 11 official languages here in the Northwest Territories. That clearly poses a significant challenge—if I can put it that way—for the government, in terms of ensuring that the needs of each of the official language communities are met.

You referred to the educational sector. This morning, we met with members of the Fédération franco-ténoise and we visited their facilities yesterday. It is quite clear that they are in very cramped quarters. They said they are interested in buying a building—either buying it or building it—in order to group French-language services in one place. There were more services being offered in their facilities, but because there was no more room, they moved.

Do you think it would be a good idea to bring all the services under one roof? That question is addressed to all the witnesses, both the person representing the daycare centre and the others. Would you like to have one building where all these services would be under one roof, including the high school? There could even be a gymnasium. Is it conceivable that there could be one building completely dedicated to Francophone programs and services in the Northwest Territories?

Mr. Simon Lepage: It is certainly conceivable. It has been done elsewhere, quite successfully in some places. But every case has to be examined separately. In our case, in Hay River, that is something we would have to look at. The community wants a community

centre, we want the school to expand and we also want a daycare centre. We have the same problem as the FFT: we want larger facilities. The question we are considering now is whether we want to centralize everything in the school or whether we want a separate building.

• (1500)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What is the distance between Hay River and Yellowknife?

Mr. Simon Lepage: The width of the lake, about 200 kilometres.

Mr. Justin Carey: But it takes five hours to go around the lake.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: It's shorter by boat, I guess.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Or by snowmobile in winter.

I'd like to hear from the person representing the daycare centre and Mr. Pitre on this same issue.

Mr. François Pitre: The community centre has been a subject of discussion in the Northwest Territories for 15 years now. And the question is still the same: who will take care of it? It's fine to build buildings, but if there is no money to maintain them, they just turn into white elephants. You build a beautiful new building and bring together all the different organizations under one roof. Then one of them decides to leave, it becomes difficult to operate and you end up having to close the building down. We are not in a position where we can develop a long-term vision. We are just interested in what is going to happen on March 31, or in three years' time, and our agreement with the government is for five years. These kinds of projects are carried out over a 20-year period. So we can't just decide to put up a building, particularly here, when it costs about—

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Based on my own experience—and I completed many different projects in my lifetime, both in the municipal and private sectors—as soon as you decide that you want to do something, you have to create winning conditions right from the outset, and do what is necessary for it to really become a collective issue. If you want to see the number of Francophones double over the next 25 years and ensure that they have services that jibe with Mr. Lepage's expectations, you have to come together as a group and develop a project collectively, to ensure that, 25 years from now, that plan will still be in place and be even more dynamic. It becomes a tool.

Mr. François Pitre: The last two times we tried to get that type of project underway, the governments refused to cooperate. That is what made the difference.

If government French-language services had worked together with the Francophone associations, it might have worked.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes, we have heard that before.

Mr. François Pitre: Since governments refused to come onboard, it wasn't possible.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Would you like to comment, Mr. Lepage? Please be quick.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes, I will. In terms of centralizing French-language services, in our case, our concern is that this could lead to the creation of a Francophone ghetto. We want services to be made available in different buildings so that it is clear that we are here and are part of the community. As for the community centre, we are currently trying to work with the Anglophone community to use part of their community centre. We really want to be part of the community, rather than ending up in a ghetto. We have no desire to be separate from the rest of the community.

Mr. Justin Carey: And at school, the students, the young people have to be able to speak French.

The Chair: So, you really need different and separate facilities.

That's excellent. That completes our first round.

[English]

We'll now start the second round.

Mr. Murphy.

[Translation]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here.

I am an Anglophone from Moncton, New Brunswick. In that province, we have long considered that a Francophone population, or bilingual population, is an important tool for promoting the local economy. It is an economic development tool among others.

I am wondering why a federal agency like CanNor is not providing minimal services in French. Moncton is where ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, has its head office. If it were not providing bilingual services for business owners and entrepreneurs, that would cause a real scandal.

I read in the notes prepared by the Library of Parliament that, here in the North, you have a higher percentage of Francophone immigrants than in the rest of the country. That may mean—and I'd like your feedback on this—that there are some Francophone entrepreneurs out there who would like to start a business here but don't do so because CanNor is unable to provide services and there is no federal agency to help them.

Am I right? It seems incredible. I think Mr. Godin already asked you this question. Is that the way it is?

Mr. François Pitre: There are no services in French offered at this time, either by the federal government or territorial government.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I have the paper from the Library of Parliament in front of me. It provides figures showing that, since 2009-2010, \$100,000 has been provided yearly by Canadian Heritage, under the Economic Development Initiative, to the Northern Economic Development Agency. Where is that money?

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: As a matter of fact, I wanted to talk about that initiative, but my time for answering was up. I wrote a little note to Mr. Godin, asking him to remind me to talk about it.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Please share the information with us!

Ms. Sylvie Francoeur: Absolutely. I will tear up my little note.

This is the only program offered by CanNor at this time in support of Francophone development in the North.

We are sitting here criticizing CanNor, but I think its officials actually show a lot of openness towards the Francophone community. They are making a tremendous effort to work with us. We received funding for projects through other programs. There is a lot of openness there.

I am currently working with a gentleman who is responsible for official languages, so that we can go one step further. In terms of their service offer, they do not provide services in English to Anglophones either. The problem is that they have to structure this new creature, which seems incredible. It took six months to settle the issue of the new president's signing power.

Dealing with the bureaucratic and administrative issues involved in creating this new infrastructure is taking an enormous amount of time. That is what we have been told. It took two years to build their offices in Iqaluit and now they have to hire staff. We have been told that they are still at the initial phase of developing the actual structure of the agency, now that they have dealt with the fundamentals and created the organization.

There has been some discussion about a more formal process under the new mediation program. I have forgotten the name of it. There has been discussion of the idea of submitting a project under that program, in order to support our actions and start to pick the pace. We have been patient up until now. We have cooperated closely with them, but beginning in the new year, part of my mandate will be to apply a little more pressure and move things forward a little more quickly.

•(1505)

Mr. Brian Murphy: I have two quick questions.

There is also an economic development and employability network at the federal level.

Is that network operating in your community? Is it effective?

Mr. François Pitre: Are you talking about the Coordinating Group on Economic Development and Employment Canada?

Mr. Brian Murphy: Yes.

Mr. Jean-François Pitre: That's us. The CDETNO is one of the 12 representatives on the Coordinating Group.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I see; thank you.

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

Please be quick. We will let you take a little bit more than the few seconds you have left.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Access to high speed Internet is an important communications tool for economic development. I know there is no such service in Hay River, based on what we've been told.

Mr. Simon Lepage: High speed is slow.

Mr. François Pitre: It's not very good.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Where is that service available?

Mr. François Pitre: The only high speed service is in Yellowknife, because they have cable there. Everywhere else, it is a satellite service and it's not very fast.

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

We will move now to Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay: Earlier you said that there are 80 Franco-phone businesses here. I would like to know what areas they are operating in.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Primarily in the services sector.

Ms. Monique Guay: And what kind of services are we talking about?

Mr. François Pitre: I used to do translation. A lot of people work in the restaurant and construction industries or provide services of that nature.

Ms. Monique Guay: I would like to know whether there are any private French-language schools.

Mr. François Pitre: No, we are not lucky enough to have one of those.

Ms. Monique Guay: I understand, and the reason I ask is not that I'm in favour of private schools. I ask the question simply because it has not been asked thus far.

So, there are two small schools.

Mr. François Pitre: Yes, there is l'École Allain St-Cyr and the Hay River school.

Ms. Monique Guay: As for CED Canada, I can't get over the fact that it isn't any more developed than that. Yet the program has been in place for a long time.

Mr. François Pitre: First of all, they didn't realize the distances that were involved. There are three time zones here. It is practically impossible to travel from Iqaluit to Whitehorse in the same day. These are things they forgot about when they set this up. Setting up an office in Iqaluit is all well and good—it's close to Ottawa—but there is nothing to buy, everything is taken, and there is no room to set anything up. Maybe it should have gone elsewhere in the meantime.

Ms. Monique Guay: Here as well, in Yellowknife, we were told—

Mr. François Pitre: Here they have offices, but over there, they didn't have any at all, because Nunavut became an independent territory in 1999.

Ms. Monique Guay: I find that extremely worrisome. As you know, we will be making a report when we return to Ottawa. We have learned a lot in a short span of time. I think we will be able to present a unanimous report. In any case, we will be discussing these issues. And we will also be talking to the federal government about this, because it makes no sense that you do not have access to these basic services. In my opinion, it's unacceptable.

As a Quebecker, I can tell you that even Anglophones in Quebec are treated better. They have their own institutions, their own schools and their own hospitals. They can live their lives in their own language without the slightest problem, whereas here, you have to fight tooth and nail, as the saying goes.

• (1510)

Mr. François Pitre: You really have to want to be a Francophone outside Quebec. I have two children. One lives in Montreal, and the

other, in Ottawa. They were born here and they went to the French-language school, but when they entered high school, I sent them to Pointe-au-Chêne.

Ms. Monique Guay: And there is no university either. So, they have to leave.

Mr. François Pitre: No, there is no university. We have a college, but it doesn't offer any programs in French.

Ms. Monique Guay: There is a college, but it doesn't offer university level courses. It's like a CEGEP, basically.

Mr. François Pitre: Not even. They would have to take distance courses provided by an accredited school. That's the problem.

Ms. Monique Guay: We were told that there are correspondence courses.

Mr. François Pitre: But there again, if you don't have a tutor, it's difficult.

Ms. Monique Guay: You need someone who can—

Mr. François Pitre: Distance education is not easy.

Ms. Monique Guay: Yes, I can certainly understand that and I don't think it's very effective either.

Mr. François Pitre: There is no tutor, so—

Ms. Monique Guay: I sincerely hope you will be able to secure a French-language daycare centre so that you can continue your different [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. François Pitre: There is one in Yellowknife; but not in Aklavik.

Ms. Monique Guay: And you don't have one either. So, you need to have one. The distances are so considerable and the territory is so huge that it simply isn't possible to concentrate everything in one place.

Mr. François Pitre: In Yellowknife, there is an immersion program.

Ms. Monique Guay: We came from Whitehorse last night. It's far.

Mr. François Pitre: It's 1,000 miles every time.

Ms. Monique Guay: I wish you the best of success and I hope things will work out. I would like to make a quick suggestion as a member of Parliament. I have been through six elections. I was elected for the first time 17 years ago. I suggest you do a little more promotion and that you try to have at least one Francophone member in the NWT legislature who will support your cause. You can campaign—

Mr. François Pitre: Every time there is an election, we have two or three candidates. We'll have to ensure that they get elected.

Ms. Monique Guay: I hope you will have some candidates, because otherwise, no one will be there to speak on your behalf in the legislature...

This morning, we saw the minister who is responsible for official languages. It's not easy. I know they have to respect the fact that there are 11 languages, but the federal government recognizes French as one of this country's two official languages. You really are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Mr. François Pitre: It is a consensus government; there are no parties. So it is as though there were 19 different small parties.

Ms. Monique Guay: Well, since there are no parties, perhaps you could get together and try to... You do vote, don't you?

Mr. François Pitre: Yes, but when there is no money, consensus doesn't work [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Ms. Monique Guay: I sincerely hope things work out for you.

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

We will now move over to the Conservative side. We will begin with Mr. Galipeau.

I believe you will be sharing your time, Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to try something I tried in Whitehorse.

First of all, thank you very much for being with us today to share your hopes and perhaps some of your fears. I am going to ask you a question with more of a sociological slant to it, to help us get a better understanding of who you are. So, I am going to point to a specific period in your life.

Where did you attend high school?

Mr. Tuyishime?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I studied medicine in Rwanda.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Carey?

Mr. Justin Carey: It was in Quebec, on the south shore opposite Montreal, in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I know that area.

Mr. Lepage?

Mr. Simon Lepage: In Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, Gaspésie.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Bessette?

Mr. Alain Bessette: At the Seminary in Sherbrooke.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Pitre?

Mr. François Pitre: At Bourget College, in Rigaud.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Oh! I know that area. I'm from St. Isidore de Prescott.

Mr. Jean-François Pitre: And I am from Plantagenet.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: We may even be related.

Mr. Jean-François Pitre: Possibly.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Ms. Francoeur?

Mr. Sylvie Francoeur: In Fort McMurray, Alberta.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Ms. Dupont?

Mrs. Marie-Pierre Dupont (Garderie Plein Soleil): In Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much.

Mr. Tuyishime, this morning, I was particularly interested in health care issues. I had to stop because I didn't have much time left. And I'm going to be cut off again, since I'm sharing my time with my friend, Mr. Gagné. I am generous with him, in fact. So, I would like you to take this opportunity to complete the testimony you began this morning.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I was saying that there are not enough health care professionals who are bilingual, and therefore able to provide services in French. I also note that we do not necessarily use existing resources to their full potential. For example, it is impossible to know who the health professionals are and where they are located. I think the first step should be to use available resources to the greatest extent possible, by identifying the areas where they are available and providing active services, which would allow people to know that someone is there and is able to serve them in French.

Furthermore, I think we should be thinking about ways of raising awareness within the community. According to a study that was done on this, Francophones who request services in French but do not receive them tend not to request them again. And, because services are only offered in English, they decide to just leave the NWT as quickly as possible. They prefer that to having to make another request for services in French. That is what has been observed.

We need to raise awareness among the French-speaking population, but that means making their request for services in French every single time. As we said, these are educated people who are bilingual to a certain extent. They think they are capable of receiving these services and understanding what is said. However, when they go in to talk about health matters, they may be nervous and upset and that can affect them. Under the circumstances, people may not necessarily understand everything they're told.

● (1515)

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

Mr. Gagné, I will turn it over to you.

The Chair: In actual fact, you haven't been all that generous with your time, Mr. Galipeau. There is only one minute left.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: Well, Mr. Bessette, there really is a lot of interesting information in your newspaper! I just learned that the NDP war room is already ready. Mr. Godin didn't tell us that. There is also an article in your paper about the Montreal Canadians where it says that they're running out of legs. And yet there is a picture of you with a Nordiques cap on your head. So you are in a conflict of interest when it comes to your hockey teams. Ah, ah!

Mr. Alain Bessette: I am from Laval University.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: I would like to come back to the idea of a common project that everyone would be part of. Earlier I talked about a place where everything would possibly be under one roof. I would like to hear your views on that.

Mr. Sylvie Francoeur: I think it would be an excellent idea. As far as we are concerned, there is a need. But Jean-François pointed out earlier that two projects were submitted to the federal government—

Mr. Bernard Gagné: In what year?

Mr. Sylvie Francoeur: The first was submitted in 1994, I believe, and the other one in 2001.

Mr. François Pitre: In one case, it was around the year 2000, and in the other—

Mr. Alain Bessette: The very first was submitted in 1994 or 1995.

Mr. François Pitre: The other one was submitted around the year 2000.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: But do you think that the overall situation, the community and services have evolved? No?

Mr. François Pitre: It's not only about the community. For a project to be successful, it is absolutely critical that everyone be involved. If we are talking about a single desk for Francophones, all the groups—the government, the community, the school, and so on—have to be able and willing to work together.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: Do you feel there is a desire to do that at the local level?

Mr. François Pitre: Possibly at the community level, but not on the government side.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: But it is the community as a whole that has to advocate and take up the cause—

Mr. François Pitre: Yes, but we need the support of the other party in order for it to work.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: I understand. But I do have the feeling that things have evolved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gagné. We will be able to monitor your progress by reading your weekly newspaper.

We move now to Mr. Godin, which will complete the second round.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. When organizations cooperate, they can make things work. They did that in Sault Ste. Marie and it was very successful. By bringing all the organizations together, they were able to centralize their activities in a single place, where people can receive services from the municipal, provincial or federal governments. The Centre communautaire de Saint-Boniface is another good example of that. Services are grouped together under one roof. People don't have to go all over town to try and receive services. They only have one place to go to.

Ms. Dupont, I would like to talk about the daycare centre. We wouldn't want to keep you here all afternoon and not even talk about it. Are you from Kapuskasing or Temiskaming?

• (1520)

Mrs. Marie-Pierre Dupont: Non, I'm from Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Your mike was off earlier when you said that. I just wanted to give you a chance to say where you're from.

I'd like you to tell us about how your daycare works and what kind of grant money you're receiving, if that is the case. We know that there is no French-language daycare centre in Hay River. What kind of difference does that make?

In your area, there is a French-language daycare. That means that, from a very young age, the children attend the daycare and then the French school, where the daycare is located. They stay in the same facility.

In Hay River, it's different. I would also like some feedback from our witnesses from Hay River on this. What difference does that make? If Francophones in Hay River are unable to put their children in a French-language daycare, they may have to have them cared for

by Anglophones. Then they will get out of the habit of speaking French. By the age of six, if they haven't been to a French-language kindergarten, they won't go to French school. I would like you to address both situations.

Mrs. Marie-Pierre Dupont: Demand for French-language daycare services is very high. There is a lot of intermarriage among families here; indeed, they form the majority. We are unable to meet the demand. Especially at this time of the year, the daycare is completely full.

At this point, the main problem is that the daycare cannot operate at full capacity because there is not enough staff. It would really be preferable to take fewer children. As you know, daycare centres and educational institutions are required to abide by a specific child-staff ratio. I would like all the spots to be filled, but I just don't have enough staff.

Of the seven people we had on staff in the last six months, four have left. Of those seven, two are early childhood educators. It's very difficult to provide adequate service.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So, rather than giving parents \$100 per child for every child under the age of six, they would have been better off investing in daycare centres.

Mrs. Marie-Pierre Dupont: Yes.

Ms. Monique Guay: The way we did in Quebec.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to put the same question to you.

Mr. Simon Lepage: As long as the money is actually invested in daycare centres, yes, of course.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's what I mean. I'm talking about daycare centres that provide proper programming, where children are properly educated and supervised, by qualified personnel.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Yes. Right now, I have no choice but to put my son into private daycare. The language used is English and we are not getting exactly the service we would like to have. We cannot tell the lady who works out of her own home to do this or that. We simply have to put up with the situation. So, I am working part-time and spending more time with my son at home. That's the way it is.

You asked what difference it makes whether there is a French-language daycare or not. Although my wife is English-speaking, she works at the French school as a teaching assistant. She looks after all the children with problems, such as speech disorders. She works closely with the teaching assistant in Yellowknife, where the issues are not the same.

The percentage of children from Francophone families is higher at the Yellowknife school—there is no doubt that has an impact—but the problems in terms of comprehension of French are far more acute in Hay River than they are in Yellowknife. You should hear the children speaking French; it's awful.

Mr. Yvon Godin: French is a language that you learn; English is something you pick up.

Mr. Simon Lepage: Ah, ah! That maybe the reason. They don't really learn French that well and I'm not sure they're picking it up either.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If they don't learn it between 0 and 5, they will... You are married to an Anglophone, and you are doing your best to ensure that your child learns French. But two Francophones settling here would have the same problem and would have to place their child in someone's home where they speak English. There would be a risk of assimilation. That child would not speak French.

Mr. Simon Lepage: There is no doubt the child's French would suffer. Even if the parents insist on everything being in French—other than at daycare or in school—whether it's television, music or anything else at home, the child will ultimately have problems in French, if only in terms of his ability to express himself.

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

Mr. Bélanger, would you like a turn?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): I asked for one minute.

The Chair: Yes, you said you wanted to correct something.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: As I was listening to Mr. Boutin, I had the impression there are 54 bilingual positions in the territorial public service, but that is not exactly the case. After the testimony, I had a chance to speak to Ms. de Jong, who works in human resources. The fact is that there may not even be 10 positions designated bilingual in the Territories. Mr. Boutin was referring to the fact that 54 employees received the bilingualism bonus. This lady will forward the information to us. I will pass it on to our analyst. I was saying that about 1% of positions may be designated bilingual, but in actual fact, it is more like 0.1%. I wanted to make that correction.

• (1525)

Mr. François Pitre: I guarantee you that if you get in touch with that ministry, they will not be able to answer you in French, other than to say “bonjour” and “merci”.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: These people were unable to tell me who is involved. They are researching this now and will forward us the information.

The Chair: That brings this part of our meeting to an end. We will suspend for a few minutes to allow the members to freshen up and our witnesses to take their places.

Thank you very much.

• (1525)

(Pause)

• (1535)

The Chair: We are going to resume.

I am very pleased to begin this second part of the meeting and welcome our witnesses. I should actually say that we are extremely anxious to hear from these witnesses, who work primarily in education and culture. We are in the second stage of our travel mission to the Canadian Far North. This is the last meeting of a tour that began Monday in Whitehorse and is ending here this afternoon.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the witnesses for agreeing to meet with us. Without any further ado, allow me to introduce the people representing the Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. I would like to welcome the Chair, Ms. Suzette Montreuil, and the Superintendent, Mr. Philippe Brûlot, whom we met last night at the home of the Association

franco-ténoise, as well as the Executive Director of the Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife, Ms. Marie Coderre.

Thank you all for coming this afternoon.

And, to represent youth in the Northwest Territories, we are happy to receive a young mother whose son had a birthday yesterday, Ms. Rachelle Francoeur. We're also aware that members of your staff are in the room today as well. and we extend a warm welcome to them.

Without any further ado, I would like to invite our witnesses from the Commission scolaire to make their presentation.

• (1540)

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil (Chair, Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest): Good afternoon.

Welcome to Yellowknife. I hope you have enjoyed your stay.

I would like to begin this presentation by pointing out that there were Francophones here as soon as exploration and development of Western and Northern Canada began. Whether we are talking about the coureurs des bois, the Métis who came from the Red River, the Oblate Fathers, the Grey Nuns or the merchants, Francophones from a variety of backgrounds played an important role.

For a very long time, Francophones had been working hard to preserve and promote French in an environment where they formed a very small minority. We suffer from a high rate of assimilation and, in the face of that threat, we recognize that French-language education plays a key role.

All across Canada, French-language school communities have had to make their case in the courts in order to resolve the issue of a lack of support for their constitutional rights with respect to education. The Northwest Territories are no exception in that regard.

There are four major reasons that underscore the need to promote the French language in Western and Northern Canada.

First of all, it is the central purpose of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, specifically, the development and preservation of minority language communities. In our case, it is French, of course. The second reason relates to the welfare of our children, and their ability to become fully bilingual and develop a Francophone cultural identity. Third is the role of French-language education, as a means of encouraging and protecting Canadians' interprovincial mobility, including that of French Canadians. The final reason is globalization and the linguistic expectations associated with it.

Two of these points warrant special attention. The first relates to the central purpose of section 23. The demands of the Commission scolaire francophone in its law suit against the government of the Northwest Territories, are based on the fact that our programs have no opportunity to develop because of a lack of infrastructure and resources.

In our pre-trial factum, our counsel, Mr. Lepage, points out that the case law has clearly affirmed the central purpose of section 23, which is the development and preservation of minority language communities. He states that the Supreme Court has laid out four principles that are fundamental to the achievement of that central purpose.

Section 23 addresses substantive equality in education for Francophone and Anglophone communities in Canada. It includes a positive obligation for governments to build the necessary educational facilities to achieve that substantive equality.

Section 23 creates a positive obligation for governments to act expeditiously to implement section 23. That section also gives rights holders and their representatives an exclusive right to manage their educational institutions. Finally, section 23 has a remedial component to it which is intended to right the wrongs of the past.

The development of Francophone educational communities in Yellowknife and Hay River has been hindered, because there is no substantive equality. Our schools do not have gymnasiums, nor do they have easy access to other gymnasiums. As a result, our students travel to different facilities, to wherever there is a willingness to let us access a gymnasium. The physical education portion of the day is cut back because of the time wasted, or students are told at the last minute that the gymnasium is not available.

The government argues that other schools in small rural aboriginal communities have the same problem, since they do not have a gymnasium, but they forget that those schools have almost exclusive access to the local gymnasium. So, the situation really is not the same.

Still on the theme of inadequate space, our schools do not have the specialized facilities that are needed to provide education of equal quality, particularly at the secondary level. We do not have fully equipped laboratories or special rooms for home economics, music or other subjects. We are also lacking sufficient office space for advisors and guidance counsellors. We can also give you other examples.

This lack of space results in insufficient classroom facilities, thereby forcing us to put students at two or three different levels together in the same classroom. That lack of space also complicates class organization, which becomes a real nightmare, since we really don't know where to put the students.

● (1545)

Infrastructure modifications require money, and the NWT government prefers not to fulfill its commitments under section 23 by conferring upon itself a right that it does not have. I refer to the right to manage admissions. This occurred when a ministerial directive was issued in July of 2008, under which the ministry now controls access to our programs and greatly restricts that access by limiting it to only those who meet the very narrow criteria listed in section 23, showing a complete disregard for the broad and remedial nature of the provision, and granting the minister the right to decide, based on no particular criteria, who will receive an exemption and who can be integrated into our programming.

This directive poses a very serious threat to the fundamental enforcement principles—as defined by the Supreme Court—with

respect to “exclusive management” and “remedial nature”. If we are forced to work on the basis of that restrictive definition of who is allowed to study in French, then people should not be surprised to see the French language completely disappear from Northern Canada.

It is our position that the government of the Northwest Territories shows complete disregard for its positive obligation to implement section 23, as the Francophone community is constantly having to go to court to protect its rights. We are currently witnessing the systematic erosion of our powers as a community, the weakening and disintegration of the Francophone population, which is surviving only with the greatest of difficulty, and the denigration of section 23, the thrust of which is not respected.

Let's move on now to the second point, which is the need to adapt to globalization and ongoing change in modern societies.

It is our submission that this adaptation cannot occur without the preservation of the French language and cultures that acknowledge each other's existence. We also believe that Canadian bilingualism is a key asset in a world where countries encourage their populations to become citizens of the world and speak several languages. We know that our French-language schools produce better examples of bilingual citizens.

Globalization and ongoing change translate into such phenomena of urbanization as immigration, pluralism and multi-ethnicity. How can Canada position itself to face the world of the future? We say it can do so by protecting the rights of Francophones and taking responsibility for their full development.

Bilingualism is, in effect, the best way to instill concepts such as pluralism and multi-ethnicity. Bilingualism also enables us to prepare them for societal changes that we experience on an ongoing basis in the major urban centres.

A child that already speaks two languages and has been exposed to two cultures will have an easier time coping with these changes and will be more open to the reality of immigration and the challenge facing aboriginal communities that seek to preserve their language. This will result in a future Canada that is more sure of itself, with fewer complexes and better prepared to meet the global competition. In the Northwest Territories, we will have young people who are prepared to call for measures that meet our needs at the national level, in both official languages.

Some people may respond by saying that the four above-mentioned phenomena are peculiar to the major centres, like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. They might also argue that this kind of adaptation to globalization is not needed in the context of the Northwest Territories, but that would be a grave mistake. And it would also encourage the development of a two-tier Canada: urban Canada, on the one hand, preparing for the world of the future, and rural Canada, on the other, which would remain on the sidelines of globalization. Such an error would be folly indeed in Northern Canada, which is actively seeking major industrial and mining projects, as well as the construction of a gas pipeline in the Mackenzie Valley.

Not respecting the rights of Francophones and the bilingualism principle is also extremely prejudicial to the students of today who will have to compete for jobs in the future. If we still believe in the importance of our two official languages, let's demonstrate that conviction by offering better support to French-language schools in Western and Northern Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Since we have just heard from the representative of the Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, I think we should move now to the Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife.

• (1550)

Mrs. Marie Coderre (Executive Director, Culture, Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife): I would just like to mention that I have cut back the part of my presentation that deals with historical background, since the Association franco-culturelle has the same roots as the Fédération franco-ténoise. I will address it somewhat, but to a lesser extent than originally planned.

The Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife is very pleased to be celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. From the organization's infancy, many different players have been successful in passionately promoting the French fact in a minority environment.

The tireless work of active members was certainly instrumental in consolidating our assets in terms of the development of French Canadian culture in Yellowknife. The first Francophone institution in the Northwest Territories came into being in 1978 under the name "Association culturelle franco-ténoise".

Francophone culture has been present in the Northwest Territories mainly since the 19th century. The First Nations' enduring perception of the Francophone community can be described as bitterness resulting from the repression of their mother tongue in the colleges and convents administered by the different religious orders, but also the recognition that we are a benevolent partner, rather than a rival or oppressor. The following is an example of that.

Aboriginal leaders pay tribute to the French Canadians for having fought, for some 240 years, against the policies of cultural genocide adopted by a Canadian government controlled by an Anglophone Orangeman mentality, and enthusiastically take inspiration from their courage and their success as they, in turn, demand that their culture be preserved.

It was thanks to the initiative of members of the Association culturelle franco-ténoise that a new association was established to serve the capital. The new association was incorporated on September 18, 1985 under the name "Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife".

In recent years, the Association has developed a number of important projects, including CIVR, Radio Taïga, the only French-language community radio station in the NWT. Since September of 2001, the Yellowknife community has been able to benefit from continuous programming in French, including at least 25 hours of local programming every week.

The mandate of the Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife is to develop cultural life in the City of Yellowknife. For many

people, culture is synonymous with art; for others, it involves social gatherings that are likely to create relationships and a sense of belonging because of similar societal references. However, the term "culture" is associated with several different categories of activity, such as the environment, history, the welfare of a society, the arts, and so on.

Over the years, the AFCY has succeeded in developing programming that meets the needs of Francophones and Francophiles living in Yellowknife. In order to attain the goals set by members of the AFCY, we need to establish multiple partnerships. The critical mass of Francophones and Francophiles is continuing to expand. It is therefore critical to ensure the necessary financial stability to cover expenses associated with fixed costs. Insecurity leads to poor distribution of tasks, something which causes burnout among both board members and employees.

Financial stability would allow us to strike a certain balance and enable our association to conduct research and diversify its funding sources. The AFCY is interested in focusing its attention on such areas as artistic dissemination, festivals, social and community activities, as well as youth-oriented programming.

In order to maintain the quality of the programming that is offered, AFCY employees are always seeking new volunteers who may be interested in supporting the Association. This organization would not be viable without the unconditional support of volunteers. Voluntarism is proving to be an excellent way of developing their skills in a variety of areas. Furthermore, our organization provides a meeting place for one and all, thus avoiding some people's sense of isolation. I also want to mention that our meeting place is a small "cabin". So, we have about three square feet to accommodate people.

It is important that the government understand that arts and culture act as a preventative tool, particularly from a social standpoint. Three years ago, the AFCY had about 40 members. Now its membership exceeds 250.

The ultimate goal is to see a tangible increase in the number of people who communicate in French, through various cultural projects. The year 2010 was synonymous with success thanks to the celebrations organized for the 25th anniversary. The festival that took place as part of that commemoration was an opportunity to demonstrate a visibility never seen before in the City of Yellowknife. That is a wonderful stepping stone for the development of large-scale projects in the near future. The "Miroir sur la francophonie nordique" festival was funded primarily through the support of the government. Without that contribution, we would never have found 15 sponsors, multiple partners in the City of Yellowknife, 25 volunteers, 10 or more local artists, caterers, and so on. That event had positive spinoffs at the economic, cultural, community and tourism levels. Now we enjoy excellent credibility and hope that this can continue.

• (1555)

Let's move on now to talk about the Association's issues. There is inadequate funding to ensure that the fixed costs of AFCY and Radio Taïga can be covered. The extra workload prevents us from carrying out medium-term planning. The work space is inadequate, too limited. There is a lack of funding to hire additional resources. Funders do not consider the fact that Yellowknife is located in a remote area. Personally, I think it is even more important under the circumstances to ensure cultural vitality. The funders' response time is unrealistic and excessive. Indeed, I want to point out that when we work in partnership or under contracts awarded by other non-profit organizations, we are all subject to the whims of our funders. At this point, there are approximately five contracts for which we are unable to be paid because the organizations in question are still waiting for their funding to come through. Under those kinds of conditions, it never ends.

I would now like to give you an idea of the daily work schedule for the director. In that capacity, I have to draft project proposals, provide the necessary follow-up, look after administration and accounting, organize fundraising, take care of communications and advertising, find funding and partners, write up all the formal documentation, respond to visitors, carry out long-term planning, organize events and activities and find volunteers. In other words, the director manages, plans and executes.

With respect to our accomplishments, I want to mention that these activities are self-financed or partially financed by the government. My salary is still not covered by our operating fund. So, it is really out of passion for what I do that I take on these responsibilities.

Here is a list of our accomplishments: the four activities organized as part of celebrating Canada, which are funded by Canadian Heritage, the *Miroir sur la francophonie nordique* festival and the radiothon. We had a magician give a show at the Northern Arts and Cultural Centre. That was a gift from the organization that enabled us to use the facility free of charge, and keep all the revenues that were generated. There was also the haunted house at the Maison bleue. That was done in cooperation with the Yellowknife Judo Association. We also had the Francophone Beer Festival, the silent auction, and the Epiphany event. We organized meetings, AGMs and special general meetings. We organized activities such as bringing the artist Gérald Laroche from Manitoba, the Youth Film Festival, the sugaring-off activities in the school, the igloo camp, weekly activities, the youth improvisation league, and so on. We are now part of the Coup de coeur francophone and Réseau des grands espaces network. I am still awaiting answers from my funders.

The Chair: Okay! Thank you.

Ms. Francoeur is now going to talk about the youth component.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur (Coordinator, Jeunesse Territoires du Nord-Ouest, Fédération Franco-Ténoise): First of all, it is important to define what Jeunesse Territoires du Nord-Ouest represents. This service has been in place for more than seven years and we are members of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne française or FJCF. Young people in the NWT can therefore take part in national activities developed by the FJCF or by members of the network, in addition to our activities.

Our mission is to enable young French-speaking residents of the NWT to get together to enjoy stimulating experiences while developing their full potential. Our vision is to instill in young people aged 12 to 25 a sense of belonging to their cultural community, thereby contributing to its vitality.

Because of its leadership role in the North, Jeunesse T.N.-O. is the only organization to have a committee composed of young people who, this year, come from both Yellowknife and Hay River. The committee's name is Comité Action Jeunesse or CAJ. It advises the Coordinator of Jeunesse T.N.-O on the direction to be taken with a view to organizing activities and events that reflect the reality and interests of young people in the Northwest Territories. The youth representative on the committee sits on the board of directors of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française.

Advocating a philosophy of "by and for youth", the youth service of the FFT seeks contexts which are likely to foster the development of a sense of leadership, empowerment, and participation on the part of young people, so that they are able to reach their full potential. Our actions are therefore planned in cooperation with youth in the North so that they are engaged in their community. For the NWT, 30 participants is the equivalent of 300 in Alberta.

Since the establishment of the youth service, a lot of changes have occurred that have made it possible to offer more activities to young Francophones in the Territories. Moving beyond services just for young people in Yellowknife, now it is possible for youth from across the NWT to be involved in our activities, thereby breaking the isolation created by vast distances. By becoming members of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, young people are now able to leave their immediate area to meet up with participants from all over the country.

It is at these get-togethers that our young people form a collective identity which allows them to form social relations and think about the issues that help them to build their personal identity. With respect to our accomplishments, here are a couple of key results from recent years.

Sexo Quiz, a quiz about sexual health, is a project that was carried out through our partnership with Réseau T.N.-O santé en français. The Franco-Nord camp de leadership, organized in partnership with the Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, Radio Taïga and l'Aquilon, was an opportunity for young people aged 15 to 25 to explore the art of journalism for an action-packed weekend in the City of Yellowknife. A cultural camp also took place this summer in Fort Smith with 18 Francophile participants. The Rassemblement Jeunesse nordique offers a chance to explore northern and aboriginal traditions. Thanks to Canadian Heritage, the wide variety of activities offered during the first three editions of the program has made this event very popular with our young people. The latest edition saw twice as many participants. Unfortunately, because of a lack of funding for recurring projects, Jeunesse T.N.-O. was not able to present its fourth edition of the event, even though it was in demand by young people in Northern and Western Canada.

The Forum Multimédia, which is also funded by Canadian Heritage, made it possible to hold an innovative interterritorial event that allowed young people to use new media and learn more about occupations which held a certain fascination for them. A DVD by Stop Motion was produced and presented at the Yellowknife Film Festival. That forum, which attracted 30 or more participants, was a great success and, once again, responding to general demand, Jeunesse T.N.-O. submitted a re-drafted application for the project to the interterritorial fund with a view to meeting the needs and interests of young people in the three territories.

The initiative known as *Yeux du Nord* allowed Jeunesse T.N.-O., through the Francofonds, to travel to communities in the three territories to introduce French-speaking youth to the technique of making films in 8 mm. A DVD entitled "On a perdu le Nord" came out of that project. It was also presented at the Yellowknife Film Festival and was showcased at the Northern Pavilion during the Olympic Games.

Our future projects focus even more on fulfilling the full potential of young people, their community involvement and support for French-language communities by Jeunesse T.N.-O. Jeunesse T.N.-O. is proud of the fact that it has been able to establish and maintain collaborative links with Francophone organizations in the North and the West. New relationships have been forged and that continues to be the case. The community education connection is also of critical importance in order to coordinate our actions and ensure that the Francophone community is a choice constituency for French-speaking young people in the NWT.

With that in mind, Jeunesse T.N.-O. launched a project for apprentice cooks, which is intended to teach young people how to cook and, at the same time, promote healthy eating habits and prevent obesity in Yellowknife and Hay River. For a two-year period that begins in September, the project will be a catalyst for the creation of a credit program in cooking that will be taught by the École Allain St-Cyr during development of the second phase.

• (1600)

The L.A.M.A. project, which could reach more than 400 youth in the three territories, refers to leadership, development, mobilization and action. For young people in the North, this is the project that will give real meaning to the term "leadership". The project will unfold in four phases and involves seven training sessions and five specific actions to be taken by young people in the community. It is aimed at citizen engagement among young people in their communities.

School staff already have a heavy burden, community players are overworked, budgets are limited and everyone is running out of steam. We must prepare the next generation of community workers. This project has resulted in incredible unity among the partners, who are 10 in number. They are now expressing their desire to take action to maximize the youth contribution. One teacher who recently talked to me about the importance of our extracurricular activities said that the young people tended to speak French in school the day after, rather than English, which sometimes happens.

Young people in the North who speak French need the support of Jeunesse T.N.-O. in order to have access to this kind of experience in French. Thus they can learn how to take their rightful place and discover their own personality. We rely on federal assistance to carry

out this project, which was submitted under the program *Les jeunes s'engagent*.

At Jeunesse T.N.-O., we are currently developing our Équipe TNO. However, because we have no sporting status, we are unable to benefit from the support of territorial sporting associations, which makes it difficult to secure sponsorships. We rely on volunteers, which makes our job particularly difficult, but, through Young Canada Works, we are able to hire a welcome resource.

A sporting clinic project for a two-year period which involves Sports-Québec, specifically includes training for coaches. It will be presented to the SAIC after this year's edition in Sudbury, with a view to creating better visibility for the Équipe TNO.

Jeunesse T.N.-O. is also partnering with the Association francoculture de Yellowknife and will be presenting the first Festi-Film jeunesse en français in one week's time in Yellowknife. A cultural camp for youth from Fort Smith, Yellowknife and Hay River is currently in preparation for the coming summer.

In closing, despite its long-term vision for minority youth, and the vitality of its coordinator and all the assistants who provide support through critical programs like Young Canada Works or Programme d'emploi jeunesse francophone, the support of a youth committee for whom the Francophone community means a lot, and partnerships with community players who believe in developing skills in young people, Jeunesse T.N.-O. is facing considerable challenges.

Our services do not have the benefit of recurring funding. That is why Jeunesse T.N.-O. is trying to diversify its revenue sources in order to remain a positive model for youth. The project funding formula makes it practically impossible to organize recurring events. Because of that, it is difficult to create traditions among young people and allow them to adopt a positive attitude towards the Francophone community. There are shortcomings in terms of the departments' obligation to put us on the funding track. Furthermore, the fact that a number of government players don't understand the northern reality means that we have to work even harder to have our projects accepted and funded.

The low level of interest in the Francophone community among young people, because of gaps in infrastructure and programming, results in a lack of participation on their part. They do not see the Francophone community as particularly attractive, so that preventing their assimilation by the majority becomes a significant challenge. Simply mentioning that our two French-language schools still do not have a gymnasium is enough to illustrate that fact.

Finally, the isolation of our communities as a result of their geographic location makes it difficult to bring people in, and yet that is an essential part of forming a youth identity. The very high costs of transportation means that there are fewer activities, fewer participants and therefore less visibility, despite the considerable efforts devoted to this by Jeunesse T.N.-O.

On behalf of young French-speaking residents of the NWT, I would like to thank you for your attention and I hope that you enjoy the rest of your stay here.

• (1605)

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

I see that Mr. Bilodeau, Chair of the Association des parents ayants droit de Yellowknife, has been able to join us. I am going to invite him to make a few comments.

Mr. Bilodeau, please.

Mr. Marc Bilodeau (President, Association des parents ayants droit de Yellowknife): Thank you.

Please forgive me for being late. The medication I took to keep me awake was a little too strong.

As Ms. Francoeur was saying earlier, we fought to secure a gymnasium and additions, both for the first and second option, which is now the subject of a lawsuit. We are awaiting the court ruling. We are there to help the parents of children who have the right to attend French-language school.

As I said earlier, we are pleased with what it is now occurring. We only hope that it will move in the right direction.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are going to begin immediately with Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you one and all. Welcome to the committee.

I have two or three questions of a general nature which are intended to complete the profile we are attempting to develop. Is there a community foundation for the Francophone community here in the Northwest Territories?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: The federation has a foundation for Francophones in the NWT.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It's the federation.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: But we are unable to take advantage of it. Richard Létourneau may be able to give you more information about that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It exists and you are slowly but surely building up capital.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Yes, it exists.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: We asked whether there was a foundation. She is thinking of the federation.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: No, the federation has such a foundation. Other organizations gravitate around the federation and have links to it.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes. I understood that.

Has it been in place for a long time?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Mr. Létourneau is in a better position to tell you that than I am.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Are there other groups, such as the scouts, guides, club Richelieu or other social clubs of that nature here in Yellowknife?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes, they exist, but they are all Anglophone.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So, we have seen everything that is available for the Francophone community.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: That is what is available at school and through the youth committees.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: My next question is addressed to the representatives of the school board. Section 23 gives you the right to manage your institutions.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you manage your institutions? By that I mean, your schools, buildings, and so on.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: The buildings do not belong to us. They belong to the government.

• (1610)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you hire your own staff?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes, but they are employed by the government of the Northwest Territories.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So, you have no budgets to pay their salaries.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Philippe, could you answer that question?

Mr. Philippe Brûlot (Superintendent, Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest): Yes. To pay the employees, we take money out of our general administration fund, which comes partly from the NWT government, to the tune of \$3.5 million, and partly from the federal government, to the tune of \$1.15 million.

I would like to add one thing. You asked a question about powers. One of the powers school boards and school board trustees are recognized as having is the power to develop policies. One of those policies is control over admissions.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I was coming to that.

Do you have taxing power?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So, you depend solely on transfers from the NWT government. Does the federal government send you money directly or does it go through the territorial government?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: It goes through the territorial government.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In that case, you are completely dependent on funding transfers. You have no taxing power.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: That's correct.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: We saw that you may secure the power to establish policies. That is before the courts.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Are there other policies, other than the one relating to admissions, that are at stake?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No other case is currently before the court. It is mainly the one dealing with the admissions policy.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Have you already claimed the power to set other policies?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: We have the right to establish all our other policies. I don't really understand the question.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Well, I am talking about policies with respect to hiring, firing, setting the curriculum, and so on.

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: Yes. As you know, the legislation is within territorial jurisdiction. As long as we abide by the process and procedures, we are free to do that. It has to be within the parameters of local legislation.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you agree with those parameters?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Employees are governed by the collective agreement, which does not only apply only to our school board.

Taking responsibility for all of that represents a lot of work for a school board of our size. That's why we prefer not to do it. We primarily want to have control over the right to admit students to our schools.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Can you tell me whether you have submitted an application? If so, I am not going to ask you what the result was.

Have you applied for assistance under the Court Challenges Program which was reinstated?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So, you did apply.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes, and we were successful.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I wasn't expecting as much.

With respect to educational television, do you have any agreements with educational television networks?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: We have just recently secured a system. Next year, we are planning to try and do something for our two high schools. The system existed previously, but it wasn't really used. It came about thanks to the health care system.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Are you expecting to enter into agreements with educational television networks from elsewhere—Ontario, for example, Quebec or even the Maritimes?

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: We are actually looking at that whole issue right now. There are obviously costs associated with that. When you have limited budgets, particularly because of a court case that is costing us a fortune, that limits our ability to provide opportunities such as the one you describe.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I would just like to add as well that schools throughout the Northwest Territories basically use the Alberta curriculum. So, that would be the first place we would look. There are specifications, such as a language study program which comes from us. Other than that, we really base ourselves on the Alberta curriculum. In Western Canada, the provinces are currently pooling their efforts to develop more similar curricula.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: When the Minister of Education, who is also responsible for official languages, meets with other ministers responsible for official languages or the Francophonie from across the country, are you consulted?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No. This summer there was a sort of—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The ministers had a meeting here.

• (1615)

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes. We were invited to the dinner, but we were not invited to—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: As for youth—

The Chair: You don't have much time left, Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Then I will simply say that I commend you and encourage you to keep up your work.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Could I just let Mr. Bélanger know that I am from Mattawa?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: We can talk later.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: She answered my question.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Guay.

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

I would like to know the exact meaning of the expression “rights holder parents”. Can you tell us exactly what that means? We have heard a lot about this, but no one has explained exactly what that represents.

Mr. Marc Bilodeau: It designates parents with children. It is to protect the children who are entitled to receive an education in French.

Ms. Monique Guay: So, these are children who have one French-speaking parent.

Mr. Marc Bilodeau: Exactly, or a grandparent.

Ms. Monique Guay: If the children have a French-speaking grandparent, they have the right to attend French school even if their parents are Anglophone. Is that correct?

Mr. Marc Bilodeau: No, not exactly.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Section 23 defines it in three ways. First of all, French has to be the language that you learned and still understand. After that, if the child attended a Francophone or French-language school—French as a first language—that child as well as his brothers and sisters are “rights holders”.

And what is the third way, Philippe?

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: I must have forgotten—

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: There are three specific categories. But it is important to understand that it does not imply that the parent speaks French.

Ms. Monique Guay: It's pretty complicated.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I would just like to raise one other point. We feel that, despite the complexity, this is really basic. In some communities, such as Hay River, where there was no French-language education for many years, the loss of French is significant. So, we are trying to correct that. We are seeking people with Francophone heritage.

Ms. Monique Guay: You told us a lot about young people. I saw you yesterday, I think.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: You saw my colleagues.

Ms. Monique Guay: That's right. It was your son's birthday.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Yes.

Ms. Monique Guay: Do you have a youth centre or similar facility where young people can get together? First of all, do you have access to space or a facility?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: We do, in fact. There is a youth centre, but it is managed by a Christian charitable association, if I'm not mistaken. The young people who go there are primarily Anglo-phone.

Ms. Monique Guay: And you don't have anything like that for Francophones?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: No. That doesn't prevent us from going there, nor does it mean that young people want to go there.

Ms. Monique Guay: How is it possible to bring them together when you organize activities—I'm thinking of the CDs you made—and want to make them aware?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: For example, there was a "white night" last weekend at l'École Allain St-Cyr. It was a chance for young people to get together. Otherwise, we obviously have to rent schools or other facilities. Although we have priority access to l'École Allain St-Cyr, the fact remains that, for certain events, we have to find other venues.

Ms. Monique Guay: Language is part of culture. You focused a great deal on culture earlier. As a Francophone, I know that if there was just language and no culture, it wouldn't work.

Do you receive any funding?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Your—

The Chair: Please be sure that your headsets are not close to an open microphone.

I circulated some DVDs, including the Sexo Quiz DVD that I would like to get back.

Ms. Monique Guay: Yes, we'd like to see it. Mr. Godin isn't interested.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: The Sexo Quiz is very funny. You're going to like it.

The Chair: Yes. I definitely want to listen to the new Sexo Quiz. It addresses topics of interest to me.

Ms. Monique Guay: It may interest our children.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: The five vignettes are on YouTube.

Ms. Monique Guay: They're on YouTube. That's good to know.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We'll have a look at them tonight.

Ms. Monique Guay: How can you work with young people if you have no facilities? In places where they have youth centres, young people can get together every night. In your case, that is probably impossible. I don't know whether you are able to invite youth to get together once a week, say, in a specific place?

• (1620)

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Right now, I am working with students at l'École Allain St-Cyr. The students and I have to go to William MacDonald School, however, because l'École Allain St-Cyr has no facilities and no gymnasium. I do this during my off-hours, once a week.

In addition, the youth committee gets together once a month. As I mentioned earlier, we receive project funding. So, there is not necessarily any specific time or place for us to get together.

Ms. Monique Guay: Are the parents able to provide some financial assistance so that you can organize extracurricular activities aimed at these young people?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Yes, the Parents Committee at l'École Allain St-Cyr sometimes provides money. However, that money is obviously divided up among several people. And it isn't always easy for the parents either. I think they are already asked to make major financial contribution as it is, because of all the activities their children are involved in. At some point—

Ms. Monique Guay: —they reach the saturation point.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Yes.

Ms. Monique Guay: In the cultural sector, you have a lot of activities. You listed some of them. Is that working well?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Yes, the participation rate is exceptional. And it's really interesting to see the wide diversity of activities that are available. We target various audiences for each activity. As far as I am concerned, it is very important that the association's programming not be addressed to only one target group. I have been in the job in Yellowknife for eight months now, and so far, things are working out very well in terms of activities. I'd say my colleague and I have worked miracles. We had no money. We are forever looking to work in partnership and we are constantly in survival mode. Our working capital is not guaranteed. I had to secure a contract for my colleague. She works for a tourist organization 80% of the time, and for the association the rest of the time. So, I am alone to look after everything until April 1, which is the end of the fiscal year. I would just like to mention, once again, that the association manages Radio Taïga, which survives through advertising sales.

What am I supposed to do if one year, sales are not as high as they were the previous year? I have to amortize the costs and run a deficit. Our cash assets are greatly reduced at this point. As I was explaining earlier, there is significant programming, but I don't want that to camouflage the real situation. I do this because I am passionate about it and I am always looking to the future. I want results in order to prepare the future. At this point, there are very positive spinoffs because of our partnerships. That is creating a solid base for our programming and for the future of the association.

At the same time, I'm running out of steam. It's too bad, because there is enormous potential. I also work with youth in Yellowknife. We have established partnerships, but we're always dependent on funders. Even with three contracts, as I explained earlier, I have no money right now. Yet I have \$20,000 worth of bills to pay.

So, that's the reality. But we keep going all the same. It's really people's response to the activities that stimulates me. I'm in survival mode. One week, I may sign a small contract, and the next, I am running all the time. I am unable to do any long-term planning whatsoever.

Ms. Monique Guay: I want to congratulate you and encourage you to keep up your work. The Standing Committee on Official Languages will be making a report that will be submitted in Ottawa, probably to the Minister... right, Mr. Chairman?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Could I add something? In terms of working capital—

The Chair: I'm sorry, I have already departed from the rule somewhat.

Mr. Godin, please.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Sorry.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Coming back to parents and grandparents, you said earlier that this does not apply to them. However, even if the parent does not speak French, it does apply.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Section 23 talks about parents who received instruction in French and whose mother tongue is French. However, they may have lost their language. As part of our admission policy, we wanted to consider French heritage. That would then apply to grandparents, even though section 23 does not mention them.

Another criterion was that a parent, a brother or a sister had studied in French and that French was their mother tongue.

•(1625)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Ms. Coderre, you applied for funding under several different programs. Are there certain federal programs where there is more of a delay before you receive the money or before being told that you're not eligible? Have there been cases where you have received a late response? Can you tell us more about that?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: This is my first year in the association. I am still learning about that sort of thing.

I have submitted a lot of applications, particularly to the Local Arts and Heritage Festivals program under Canadian Heritage, but I have not received an answer. I submitted the project on September 30. In terms of programming, I requested \$50,000 for the festival season. I will get an answer in April and the performance season is expected to begin in April.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Pardon me; you say you applied in the month of—

Mrs. Marie Coderre: On September 30.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In September, for programming that starts in April. And you are still waiting for an answer. Have they been in touch with you?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: I got in touch with them. I contacted them last week to find out what progress had been made.

Mr. Yvon Godin: And? What did they tell you?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: They simply said they couldn't make any promises and they hoped to be able to give me an answer by the end of March or early April. I am somewhat taken aback by that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The application you submitted in September was for an event which is planned for April, and they are waiting until April to tell you whether or not it will be accepted?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: That is correct.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What do you need? Have you suggested artists and that sort of thing?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: I'm sorry, but if I get an answer in April, I am going to have to delay my performance season.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Last week, officials representing that organization said there was no problem.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Really? That's great.

I should mention the quick response time with respect to the linguistic duality program. I applied in September and received an answer in November. That is the only program that responded quickly, and it was a positive response.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You applied in September, you received an answer in November, and everything worked out. That's great.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: It was the only case; we are still waiting for all the others.

Mr. Yvon Godin: For the other ones, you will do what I did. You will lose all your hair after pulling it out.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Yes, that's life!

We are organizing a youth film festival in partnership with the Montreal International Children's Film Festival. We received money from the SAIC, which still had some left over. We submitted the application in November. I called them this week to say that we are getting the project underway and would like to know whether it had been accepted or not. They told me it had been approved by the committee, that it was now on the Minister's desk, but that they could not confirm it 100%.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Who are you talking about?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: The SAIC.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The SAIC.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: I will probably be receiving a cheque on March 31. The event will already be over and I will have incurred certain expenses. I find that absolutely unbelievable.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I want to come back to April. We are now in the month of February. When you talked to them last week, did they say that they need more time, that they have to wait until April or that you don't meet the criteria? Did they give any reasons to justify this delay?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: No, they simply said there were very pleased to have received my application.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Well, that's just great!

Mrs. Marie Coderre: The main problem is medium-term planning. I'm not even thinking about the long-term; even planning in the medium term is impossible. For the time being, I don't even know whether I'm going to be able to re-hire my colleague on April 1. If all my projects are accepted at the same time, I'm going to have my back against the wall. That is my main concern.

As regards the federal applications, there is one other factor that I find rather amusing. We are asked to submit biennial applications. That's fine; I did that. However, for programming applications, they ask us to increase costs by 10% in the second year. However, the amount always stay the same. For the last five or six years, we have been receiving \$73,500. I don't understand why we should still be receiving \$73,500 in 2012-2013, if we increase our expenses by 10% and it's always 10%, then another 10%, and so on.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you very much.

Ms. Montreuil, I know that Mr. Bélanger already talked about court challenges. I want to go one step further.

In terms of money, what percentage have you received for this case through the Court Challenges Program? You said it is costing you a fortune. If you are receiving money under the Court Challenges Program, it should not be costing you a fortune. However, you did make the comment that this is costing you a lot of money even though you receive money under that program.

Can you tell me approximately what percentage of the money you received under the Court Challenges Program?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I would just like to clarify that there are two court cases. The first began through the APADY. At the beginning, there was money under the former Court Challenges Program.

• (1630)

Mr. Yvon Godin: You're talking about the old program.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: After that, approximately two years ago, the school board agreed to pay the rest of the costs associated with that court case. At the time, the Court Challenges Program no longer existed.

We submitted an application to the Language Rights Support Program, or LRSP, and received \$125,200. That even exceeded the maximum, because they recognized that, in terms of admission rights, it really was the new legislation that was in effect. That program is different. It is aimed more at negotiations, but because we were referring a new issue to the court, we did receive financial assistance.

As for the other case, it is specifically the school board fighting the government with respect with the school in Hay River.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand, but what percentage of the money did you receive from the program?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Ten per cent.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You only received 10%. So that's why it costing you a fortune.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In the previous case, under the former Court Challenges Program, what was the percentage? Do you know?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: It was managed by the APADY. I don't know the figure.

Do you know?

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: No. I couldn't say.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right. We will find that out.

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

We are going to complete the first round with Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank all of you for coming to meet with us today.

I would like to know how many students in the Northwest Territories are considered to be rights holders?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: It depends on your interpretation. Do you mean strictly based on the definition of rights holders under section 23?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Yes.

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: There's a lot of controversy around that because, based on a highly restrictive vision of things, the government says that the schools still have room to take in a lot more rights holders. For example, the government will say that in Hay River, there is only a handful. We're talking about only a few dozen, whereas the town is full of people who have been assimilated. It has been extensively colonized by the Métis.

So, we use a remedial and broad interpretation, as recognized under section 23.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Since we don't have an answer to that question, I will ask another one that would normally have been a sub-question to the first.

How many students are there in the French-language schools?

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: In our two schools, we currently have 197 students.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: How many students are there in total in all the schools? I'm trying to determine the proportion. We are talking about 197 students out of how many? Are there 5,000 students in the Northwest Territories?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I believe that is approximately the number I have heard, but you must understand that we don't have all those students.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: You were unable to answer my first question.

Can you tell me whether, in addition to those 197—I suppose they are all rights holders—there could be another 200 or 500 rights holders?

Mr. Bilodeau, you seem to know the answer to that question.

Mr. Marc Bilodeau: As we said, we have no figures on that.

However, because I know a lot of Francophones in a lot of different communities, I can tell you that parents do not send their children to l'École Allain St-Cyr for secondary school because there is no gymnasium. So, we don't have those Francophones with us. That's automatic.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: And you have no way of counting those rights holders?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I can tell you that for the court case involving l'École Allain St-Cyr in Yellowknife, the number we are using is 465. That is based on the principle of the target school population developed by the sociologist Angéline Martel. That's not the maximum number of children. It's about half, somewhere between the maximum and what we have. That is the figure we are looking for.

It's not 465 students. It's 265.

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: Yes.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: So, it's 265 for Yellowknife, and 220 for Hay River.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you, Mr. Montreuil.

Before I am cut off, I would like to address two issues that I believe you referred to.

Ms. Coderre, you talked about agreements signed with your funders. I presume you're talking about the federal government.

• (1635)

Mrs. Marie Coderre: We are talking about Canadian Heritage, the Arts Council, and the SAIC.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: There are two problems, from what I can tell. First of all, under the existing agreements, the money your funders have agreed to pay you arrives late. Is that a recurring problem?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Absolutely. For regular programming and the regular, set project...

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Do you know where things are getting held up?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: I have no idea. It's because of government bureaucracy.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Is it because the reports do not contain all the necessary information?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: No.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Or could it be because those reports got buried on someone's desk somewhere?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Not while I've been in charge.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: When I talk about someone's desk, I'm not talking about yours. I'm referring to your funders.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: I have no idea. I am not in their office, obviously. I have absolutely no idea how the process works.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: This is a question that has come up previously in this committee. It was last year or two years ago. We were told that the problem had been corrected. So, I don't like to be told that something has been corrected if it hasn't.

Thank you very much for giving us this information.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: It was a pleasure.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: The second issue relates to the projects you submit and for which you have not been promised any money. Perhaps the committee should recommend that there be a sunset measure introduced with respect to response time. I understood you to say that in some cases, you would prefer to be given a negative response than to be told "maybe".

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Clarity is always preferable.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Earlier, Ms. Montreuil gave us a delightful surprise when she said she was from Matawa. And you, Ms. Coderre, where are you from?

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: From Quebec City.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: So you attended high school in Quebec City.

And you, Mr. Bilodeau?

Mr. Marc Bilodeau: In the Saguenay.

Ms. Rachelle Francoeur: Fort-Coulonge.

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: I spent one year in France, three years in Quebec and two years in the United States.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: And where did you go to high school?

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: I did one year of high school in France, three years in Quebec and two years in the United States.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Where in France?

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: At the end, I was in Toulouse.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Gagné will be very pleased to use that time.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: You are far too generous.

Ms. Coderre, I am somewhat familiar with Canadian Heritage's programming. I know that applications are submitted on a semi-annual basis. In other words, one in the Fall, and one in the Spring. Since there is no such thing as a perfect world, there has to be a starting point and a cut-off date—in other words, for activities planned in April, the application has to be submitted in September, something that you are already doing. Of the applications you have submitted to the Canadian Heritage, how many have been rejected?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Thus far, none.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: I see. I am happy to hear that, because in Northern Canada, there certainly are not hundreds of you asking for money from Canadian Heritage. A very large number of applications are made to that department under all the different programs. I regularly see a listing for my riding indicating that the amounts allocated are less than what was requested. So, if you asked for \$50,000, don't be surprised to only receive \$35,000, \$40,000 or \$45,000.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Absolutely.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: The pool of money is the same, but the number of applications is growing exponentially.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: The problem is that this is national funding. So, there is a lot of competition. But people do not consider the fact that we live in a remote area. Having lived in Inuvik, Fort Smith and Yellowknife, where I currently reside, I can tell you that when there is zero cultural vitality, social problems immediately come to the fore.

Mr. Bernard Gagné: And if—

Mrs. Marie Coderre: It is really important to mention that. Our winter lasts ten months of the year. We're isolated. There are 110 different ethnic groups and they have to live together. If there is nothing out there, it's a real disaster.

Mr. Bernard Génèreux: I want you to understand that I fully agree with what you're saying.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: They really have to consider the fact that we live in a remote area. That's important.

Mr. Bernard Génèreux: Actually, if none of your applications have been refused—

Mrs. Marie Coderre: In fact, there is my regular program and the project on linguistic duality that was accepted. With respect to all the other programs, I am still waiting for an answer. The SAIC has almost said yes. I'm still waiting for an answer.

Mr. Bernard Génèreux: When they tell you it's on the Minister's desk, that means it has already been accepted.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: I understand, but still—

Mr. Bernard Génèreux: There is a distinction to be made there.

Is my time up?

The Chair: Yes, your time is up, Mr. Génèreux.

In fact, we have 10 to 15 minutes left until the end of the meeting. We could continue with a formal round or have one last five-minute round.

Mr. Murphy, please.

• (1640)

Mr. Brian Murphy: With respect to the census, I note in the document prepared by the Library of Parliament that the population here is more mobile than in the rest of Canada. That means there are a lot of people moving around.

Furthermore, we need accurate numbers to show how many have French as their mother tongue and how many have a knowledge of French, in order to support the programs the minority communities need.

Do you think, either collectively or individually, that a reliable census that provides a lot of details and answers to questions about the population you are serving, is important to have?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes, but even the long form census did not identify rights holders. The question only refers to whether they spoke French. That is not the same thing.

I want to point out that in Western and Northern Canada, the starting point cannot only be those who speak French. If we want the language to survive, we have to promote it and repair all the damage that has been done, take a broad view of things, use the census and go even further because, in terms of French in Western Canada, the questions were not enough.

Mr. Philippe Brûlot: I should also add that census data is not always accurate. Let me give you an example. The question is not whether you have studied French, but rather, whether you speak French. Someone who may have lived in Quebec for two years and has lost the use of his language will say that he does not speak French. Automatically we lose a rights holder. There are all kinds of

inaccuracies like that in the census data. We must exercise caution in that regard.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Ms. Montreuil, you told the committee that the French-language school board has no financial management powers, other than the power to pay its employees, and that it does not own its infrastructure. Does it own the land where the school is located?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Are the English-language school boards in the same position?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: The other two school boards in Yellowknife own both their land and their facilities. School boards outside of Yellowknife are pretty much in the same position as we are. They have no taxation powers and they do not own their facilities.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So, it applies to one school board but not another.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: There are several school boards in the Territories—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: How many are there?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I believe there are eight.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So, there are eight school boards and three schools.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No, in Yellowknife, there are three school boards—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I'm talking about Yellowknife.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: If you are only talking about Yellowknife, there are about 14 schools and 3 school boards, including one Catholic, one public and one Francophone.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Are they in the same position as your school board?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No, the other two school boards in Yellowknife do have taxation powers and also own their land and their facilities.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Have you asked the ministry why the same conditions do not apply to everyone?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: We decided to start with what is most crucial for us. If we are successful, we will see what should be done subsequently. However, first and foremost, we want the right to manage our schools and facilities on an equal footing with other boards.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do the ministry, the other school boards and yourselves consult one another?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: There are two fairly regular meetings that take place with all the school boards and ministry officials. I should also say that we have spent a great deal of time negotiating. We had not made just one request before going to court; we negotiated for years unsuccessfully. That's why we really had no choice.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: With respect to the case that is currently before the courts, have you lodged complaints with the Languages Commissioner?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I do not believe so.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: When I refer to the Language Commissioner, who do you think I'm referring to?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: There is one at the federal level and one at the NWT level.

• (1645)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: When I talk about the Languages Commissioner, who do you think I'm talking about first?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: I don't know his name.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: That's fine; that's it.

The Chair: And when you think of the chair of official languages, I guess you think of me, Ms. Zarac, do you not?

Ms. Guay, please.

Ms. Monique Guay: I will be brief.

Ms. Coderre, you have experienced some problems with your grant applications, but every organization from one end of the country to the other has had the same problems. Some heads of organizations have even used their personal credit cards to make reservations, in order to hold their activities.

This is something that is being corrected at the federal level. I hope that it will be corrected, because it's ridiculous and prevents organizations from carrying out their activities.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: There are repercussions to this. You lose your staff and professional burnout quickly affects the employees that remain. When you are at the point where you have to use your personal credit card, as you can well imagine, there is already quite a bit of accumulated stress.

There will be very positive results if you move forward on this.

Ms. Monique Guay: Some organizations in my own riding are in the same position. They work hard, they take on all the responsibility. They end up being exhausted. So, we have to find a solution, for you as well. Rest assured that we will be thinking of you in future.

I want to commend you for the great work you are doing.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: Thank you very much.

Ms. Monique Guay: I wish you the best of success with your French-language school board in the Northwest Territories. I know there is a hefty price to pay, but sometimes you do achieve results. I certainly hope that things work out for you.

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

Mr. G  n  reux, please.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Montreuil, I didn't really understand your answer to the question Mr. Godin asked you earlier. You were saying that it costs the association or the school board a fortune to defend itself against the government. You said that you received \$125,000 from somewhere.

Who pays the total legal bill for all of this? Is it paid directly by the parents?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No, the board realized that we were going to eventually end up in court, so it put some money aside. It comes out of the board's funds. We also negotiated with our legal counsel to spread the costs over several years to give us a chance to—

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: What is your estimate of the cost of the current court case?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Should I give it for both?

Mr. Philippe Br  lot: Yes, you can, but it's [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: We estimate the cost of the two court cases to be \$900,000.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Almost \$1 million. That is almost the cost of a gymnasium.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes, in my opinion, it's a crime. It's criminal.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Of course you have to establish rights for many long years after that.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Personally, I am not particularly fond of courts and that sort of thing. This morning, we met with representatives of the Association franco-t  noise. It would seem that the court process has historically been the favorite approach to win against the government.

Do you think it's normal to have to go through this kind of process to arrive at an agreement that respects our rights?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No, absolutely not. It's not just the question of money. We have also invested a great deal of staff time in this. Mr. Br  lot spent one year doing nothing but that. We would prefer to invest that time in educating our children. That's where it should be invested.

I really want the committee to understand that it's the whole community, not just the board. You were asking earlier whether we thought it would be a good idea for everything to be under one roof. We have gotten together I don't know how many times to talk about these things. The community would arrive at an agreement, and then we would wait. The community associations are giving up on this. They say they have to do something and explore other options. You can't blame them.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Has any money under Canada's Economic Action Plan been invested here in Yellowknife, in infrastructure of one kind or another—water systems, sewers, culture, education?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: It was basically Canadian Heritage that paid 80% of the cost of the initial construction of l'  cole Allain St-Cyr—it paid less for the first phase of expansion.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Do you know whether money might be available to build other gymnasiums, for example, or a community building? Do you have the impression that Canadian Heritage might support that kind of project?

• (1650)

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: As we see it, it's sort of like a game of ping-pong between the two governments. It seems clear that the NWT government is waiting for Canadian Heritage to pay the same percentage it has traditionally paid.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: And that is 80%, correct?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Canadian Heritage says that this does not fall within its purview and that now, that is a provincial—or in our case—territorial government responsibility. Personally, one way or the other, it makes no difference to me.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I understand.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: All of that is causing delays.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Coderre, to begin with, I would like to commend you for your passion. You are doing an outstanding job in terms of the activities you have organized since you came on board. You said that membership had gone from 40 to 250, which is really a very positive result. Are those members active as volunteers?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: It's always difficult, because Yellowknife is a micro-society. There are lots of organizations. People quickly end up being overworked when they get involved in a number of different causes. It's always difficult to ensure stability in terms of volunteers.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We experience the same thing in the South.

Mrs. Marie Coderre: In my opinion, it is an omnipresent reality. Since we have no employees, I'm all alone. Tomorrow, I have two sugaring off activities with the schools. After a long struggle, I was finally able to find two people to help me. It may not seem like much, but you have to get the necessary equipment there. I have to find people, and that is not necessarily easy to do.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: At the same time, this is an area with very significant natural resources—diamonds, oil, and so on. Are these companies partnering with your Francophone organizations?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: It is certainly my intention to go and see them. Last year's festival really gave me a lot of momentum. There was great feedback. We were in the *Spectacular Northwest Territories* magazine. Now it will be really easy to approach the City of Yellowknife and other partners, because they believe in us; we have a lot of credibility.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: When does that take place? And what is it called?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: The *Miroir sur la francophonie nordique* festival takes place on August 14 and 15.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: And what activities are planned?

Mrs. Marie Coderre: There are almost 10 artistic workshops presented by local artists. What we do is present a profile of Francophone communities in the North, with several countries. There was an African music group, Mediterranean grilled food, and a hot air balloon. The following day, we celebrated Acadia by again organizing artistic workshops with local singers, and so on. The hot air balloon was at the Parc Somba'Ke next to the city hall for two days.

I gave a presentation last week to officials at the City of Yellowknife. They greeted me with open arms because they took advantage of that event to promote their park. I see that there are now positive spinoffs and that it is easy to organize a Francophone event in Yellowknife. It has a lot of impact.

As regards the diamond mines, I was told that it was doubtful because these companies already give a lot to other Anglophone organizations. However, one day, it may be possible.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, I'm sure you will agree with me. Francophones in Yellowknife are a diamond for the community.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes, I totally agree with you.

The Chair: On that note, we move now to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Ms. Zarac talked about the Commissioner of Official Languages. I would like to continue along the same lines.

When you refer to the Act, you are talking about the federal Act and section 23, are you not?

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If I'm not mistaken, you did not ask the Commissioner of Official Languages to comment on your demand. You have brought your case to court, but you did not ask the Commissioner of Official Languages to comment on it.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: No, because education is within provincial or territorial jurisdiction.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with you. However, Part VII of the Official Languages Act and sections 41 and 43 state that the federal government has a responsibility to promote the two official languages. That being the case, perhaps the gymnasium would be paid for.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: That's a good idea.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am just giving you ideas that you should explore. You could even ask the Commissioner of Official Languages to present his views on this. These are your rights, and one has to hope that it wouldn't take two years for him to give you an answer. I'm sure he will read our "blues" and understand what I'm saying here.

Some people have lodged complaints. They said they had been waiting for two years to receive an answer to their request. We certainly hope that doesn't happen to you. I suggest that you go and see the Commissioner of Official Languages. He is an officer of Parliament who reports to Parliament. His role is to act as a watchdog with respect to official languages. You cannot preserve your language if you are not entitled to education and training. Part VII of the Official Languages Act and sections 41 and 43 do involve responsibilities, just as section 23 of the Charter does.

These are just some ideas.

• (1655)

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Thank you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: On that note, I would like to thank you for appearing before our committee. As a member of Parliament, it makes a difference—and my colleagues will probably agree—when you actually visit a region, see for yourself what the distances represent, learn about the communities, visit the facilities and see for yourself what is missing. We have an Official Languages Act that talks about equality for the two language groups. But equality cannot exist if there is not the same infrastructure or the same services.

I also want to congratulate you on the work you're doing. It's almost a mission. There is a reason why some people decide not to stay here. After a while, they are burnt out; they say to themselves that they don't need this and they go somewhere else. The population is constantly turning over. So, I want to commend those of you who have been living here for a number of years.

Whether the government is conservative, liberal or new democrat, it makes no difference. Every government has a responsibility towards its citizens, including the aboriginal people. First Nations people tell us that all they want is to preserve their language. As an Acadian, I understand what that means. It's a constant battle. We have been in Canada for more than 400 years now, but we're still fighting. Other people don't have to fight. Services are offered to them automatically. So, I commend you once again and want to extend my thanks.

Mrs. Suzette Montreuil: Thank you very much as well, Mr. Godin.

The Chair: Are we allowed to applaud?

Thank you, Mr. Godin. We are going to wrap up now. Mr. Bélanger, would you like to make a comment?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few brief comments to make. I understand the \$900,00 is almost enough money to pay for a gymnasium. However, there would have been no need to spend that money if the appropriate authorities had taken their responsibilities. I presume that the territorial government has probably spent more than \$900,000 in legal fees. That could have helped to pay for a gymnasium. Let's not forget that.

With respect to using the courts, it is unfortunate that people have to go to court in this country. I have experienced this myself, Mr. Gagné. That's why I wanted to comment on it. My mother went to court in Ontario to secure the right to manage our educational institutions. Had that not happened, we would never have had our own high schools or had an opportunity to manage them. I learned on the street that we have to assert our rights before the courts because governments, and it doesn't matter which ones—I agree with Mr. Godin—conservative, liberal or otherwise, do not respect the Constitution of this country. I commend you and encourage you to keep going, even though it has cost you a fortune. It's a price worth paying to defend your rights.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger. I don't think there could be a better way to end this meeting. I would just like to add my own grain of salt—

A voice: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Acting as Chair and having little opportunity to speak in committee helps to develop one quality, which is the ability to listen to others.

Today we very much had the sense that there is a great deal of effort, determination and abnegation on your part in the face of adversity and what might be compared to a Northern wind. For us, it is evidence of what we see in Ottawa, which is that the communities are the engine of development in the educational sector. These struggles have been led by the communities, and not by governments, who have been using the tools we discussed earlier. We also sense a certain fragility in these institutions, which have kept going through the struggles of some, out on the periphery of our country. Your work is even more heroic for that reason. Thank you.

That brings to an end this meeting and the work of the committee in the Far North. Thank you for your participation.

The meeting is adjourned.

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