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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, April 1, 2014**

**Chair**

**The Honourable Michael Chong**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Tuesday, April 1, 2014

• (0900)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)):** Welcome to the 17th hearing of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, this Tuesday, April 1, 2014.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are continuing our study of the economic situation of Canada's minority linguistic communities.

Today we welcome two groups. First, L'Art du développement, represented by Ms. Côté, whom I welcome to the committee. Afterwards, via videoconference, we will welcome witnesses who are in Haileybury, Ontario, and who represent the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce: Ms. Rivard, Mr. Griffith, as well as two other witnesses.

Welcome to you all.

We will begin with Ms. Côté.

**Ms. Ethel Côté (President and Chief Executive Officer, L'Art du développement):** Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, thank you.

This is the first time I have taken part in a committee hearing, and I hope you will like what I have to say. As an entrepreneur, I thank you sincerely for giving me the opportunity to speak to you about a topic I am passionate about, which is the economy of minority francophone communities.

As far back as my twenties, I worked for various francophone community organizations, in different sectors of activity, and I saw that there were economic challenges in that community environment. We really had to find ways of funding our organizations. Afterwards, during more than 15 years, I created and managed two private businesses. The first one, Mécén'art, dealt with events, and this one, L'Art du développement, is concerned with community economic development.

I think I can say that today I have a good knowledge of the phases businesses go through in their development, both private and community ones, in light of my professional experience and the lessons I have learned, but also because of the training and support I offer on a daily basis, every week — and have for years now — to entrepreneurs in several Canadian regions. I train and support young people, women, immigrants, or groups of people who choose to create their own business together and to generate wealth in their community.

What are we talking about when we refer to the francophone economy? I don't know if you are familiar with the Pan-Canadian

Forum on Economic Development in the Canadian Francophonie, which took place in 2012. I was part of its steering committee. This forum was the first event where it was recognized that there was a plural economy among linguistic minorities, as in the broader society, as a matter of fact. This diverse economy takes into account the fact that there are private, social and public economies. However, we noted when we organized the forum that there really was a great deal of strength in the economy of francophone minority communities.

We noted that there are 430,000 francophone businesses in Canada, which represents 18% of all Canadian businesses, and that 70,000 of them are located outside of Quebec, and that they create employment everywhere, in both rural and urban areas.

In addition, 22% of these jobs are occupied by francophones in all sectors of the economy. One thing is interesting when we talk to economists. It is important to do so if we want to be recognized as an economy that plays a role, and has an influence on the broader economy and creates spinoffs in the society in which we live. Economists also consider impacts on the GDP and in that regard, we have managed to collect some figures. The economists were surprised by the scope of the economic activities generated by the Canadian francophonie, as it represents \$230.5 billion, which is to say 19% of the Canadian GDP. That is quite striking. Each dollar of the GDP that comes from the francophone economic space contributes to generating 52¢ more for the Canadian GDP, while providing tax income of \$23.4 billion to the various levels of government. This economy which is generated by francophones in minority communities but also by francophones period, is considerable. It is important to me, it is important for entrepreneurs, that is to say the men and women who create all kinds of businesses, but it is also important for all levels of government.

Obviously, in the context of that forum, we could not gather all of the data to document all sectors of activity. That is part of the first challenge we are facing. This is probably true of you as well. There is a blatant lack of data on the francophone economic space in the provinces and territories, as well as nationally. In order to be able to discover all of the facets of the economic sectors, a dialogue is necessary. There is a crying need for it.

The majority of figures we managed to collect touch on the more traditional economy, the more conventional economy as we know it, that is to say private business. We could say today that despite all of that wealth, the minority francophone economy is even richer.

There are many of us who support entrepreneurial development in French in minority milieus, particularly the Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario, the Coopérative de développement régional au Nouveau-Brunswick, the RDEE, which you probably know, and the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, a social enterprise I am associated with. There is also Passerelle-I.D.É., that focuses on entrepreneurship and works with young immigrant men and women, the Fonds d'emprunt économique communautaire, which offers support while providing access to credit, as well as many other organizations. Those organizations offer support, training, guidance and advice.

All of these entities and these people who are involved in the development of entrepreneurship do so in order to propose strategies, to learn from their experience, to document what works well and determine what would be needed for things to work even better. They get involved to create more businesses in our communities, and hence greater wealth, and to support inclusive entrepreneurial growth. Inclusiveness is important. As I was saying earlier, we are talking about both private and community businesses that are developed and managed by women, men, young people, immigrants, and this is going on in both rural and urban areas. All of these people create products and local services and support the local economy.

● (0905)

Despite all the effort that has been expended and some significant economic steps forward, we can see that many members of minority official language communities are marginalized by the market, by the economy, and sometimes by conventional business approaches. People organize in order to meet those challenges. The economy is not homogeneous; it takes many forms. That is why we have to understand all aspects of our economy.

Everyone is familiar with the private sector, made up of businesses, from the smallest operations, through small businesses as such, to multinationals. Everyone is familiar with the public sector, made up of the various levels of government, and of which you are a part. But there is another sector called the social economy. This is an economy of togetherness. This is the category in which we find collectives and co-operatives in all areas of activity. We also find all the community organizations that have chosen to provide services and sell products on the market in order to generate income and create wealth.

All those businesses fill niches that the market, the private sector, did not respond to. They also stimulate innovation in our communities at the same time as they improve the delivery of social, economic and social services to our communities.

For example, when no health services exist in a village, the people there will get together and establish a health co-operative. If they need daycare services, they will start a daycare as a social undertaking. If they want funeral services nearby so that they do not have to drive three hours in order to find them, they will start a business that will provide them. By coming together to provide the services for themselves, they create jobs and generate wealth inside their communities.

Basically, these community businesses promote economic growth in their own environment and help to revitalize it. Projects of that kind often improve the standard of living in my community and in

those where I have worked. They come to grips with the weak points in our communities and with the need to revitalize them.

Even more impressive is the place that collective business occupies in our national economy. Currently, co-operatives, mutuals and not-for-profit organizations represent between 8% and 10% of the GDP. We came up with that figure a few years ago using data we had gathered from here and there. It is an indicator that positions this type of economy as one to be taken seriously.

Let us mention the survival rate of those businesses. The fact that three, four, five or six people have worked together to make their business a reality in their community ensures that the business meets a real need, has a real market. They also ensure that connections are made in their communities, one of which is a connection of use. But there is more. All kinds of skills are called on to contribute to the business project. About 66% or 67% of the businesses are still active five years after they were started. By way of comparison, the figure for the private sector is about 30%.

This form of entrepreneurship, which often operates at a disadvantage, without access to all the development resources available in various forms, has still a huge amount of impact in the community.

I know that people from the co-operative movement have already talked to you about co-operatives, so I will not do so. They will have talked to you about Alphonse Desjardins, the first credit union, agri-food co-operatives and all the rest. You know that it represents more than 18 million members, thousands of jobs, millions of dollars in dividends and billions of dollars in assets. At any given time, these are often the businesses that will decide to reinvest in a community because that is one of their principles. They will support other forms of entrepreneurship in that community.

Let me give you some examples. Take the Groupe Convex, in the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, in eastern Ontario. Who will hire people with disabilities? Not many businesses want to deal with the hassle of hiring, training and supervising them. The Groupe Convex decided to step up to the plate. A group of social workers found out what a social business is all about. Today, the Groupe Convex is celebrating 10 years in operation. It has set up nine social businesses and created 120 jobs. It is a presence in every village in eastern Ontario. The co-operative succeeded in using funds intended for people with disabilities and invested them in companies that hire the people with disabilities and that meet community needs. They operate printing, woodworking and recycling services for the towns and villages of eastern Ontario.

Take the co-operative grocery in Moonbeam. The village grocery was about to close. People mobilized. In a few weeks, they had gathered \$300,000, bought the grocery and kept it open. When it did not belong to them, they would get together and go elsewhere. Now, it is their own business.

● (0910)

Francophone communities are becoming entrepreneurs; they are doing things; they are mobilizing capital. They are starting renewable energy companies. They are creating strategies so that small businesses can be passed on. Did you know that 65% of small businesses in rural Canada have no one to pass the business on to?

It is important to be very specific about all forms of entrepreneurship and to recognize that they each play a specific role. They each contribute to the economy, they each create wealth and provide our communities with jobs, services and quality products. Public strategies and policies must be established to assist them, as must specific approaches.

In the document I submitted, I have 41 recommendations. I will not read them all. The recommendations are not pie in the sky; they are firmly rooted in practicality. They deal specifically with strengthening skills, with diversifying financing, and with developing markets, networks, strategic planning, research and documentation. The stories of our minority situations must be told. Some recommendations offer suggestions for the joint implementation of public policy in order to create a supportive environment. They also deal with the socio-economic integration of immigrants and with youth participation in the economy.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Côté.

We now move to Ms. Rivard and Mr. Griffith, from the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce.

[English]

**Mr. Darcy Griffith (President, Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce):** Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee.

My name is Darcy Griffith, and I am the president of the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce. With me today are Joline Rivard, a director with the Chamber of Commerce; James Franks, the economic development and funding coordinator with the community growth and planning department of the City of Temiskaming Shores; and Lois Weston-Bernstein, the business manager, with the chamber of commerce as well.

The Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit organization composed of businesses, professionals, residents, and community groups working together to ensure a healthy economic and socio-economic base to benefit the entire community. We serve the area from Earleton to Latchford, and from Temiskaming Shores to Elk Lake, including Cobalt, Coleman, and the south Temiskaming area.

We currently have a base of 385 member businesses, which represent almost half of the eligible businesses and organizations in our catchment area. Our member businesses range from national organizations employing people across Canada, to local manufacturing and service businesses with scores of employees, to single person entrepreneurs. That is a true snapshot of business in the south Temiskaming area.

The majority of our operating funds come from membership dues, although we also receive limited municipal funding to operate an inbound tourism information centre, and some federal and provincial funding to hire summer staff to assist in local tourism initiatives. The largest urban centre in the area is the City of Temiskaming Shores, which was created by the amalgamation of New Liskeard, Haileybury, and Dymond, in 2004. It serves as the regional hub for business services, shopping, entertainment, and dining.

Indeed, the availability, variety, and number of businesses in the Temiskaming Shores area and the neighbouring communities far exceeds what we would expect for the population of the area alone, and is only possible given the size of the catchment area from which patrons come. This catchment area extends into the province of Quebec, and due to the invisible nature of the interprovincial border, allows shoppers from both sides to drive to the neighbouring province to find the goods and services they need. The Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce has members not only from Ontario but also from the communities located in Quebec as well.

As for the use of language in the area, the most recent federal census indicates that while the primary language spoken in south Temiskaming is English, a large proportion of residents, approximately 30%, learned French as their first language. Coupled with the fact that the City of Temiskaming Shores is less than 25 kilometres from the Quebec border, it is easy to see how doing business in both official languages is a daily occurrence for our member businesses.

● (0915)

**Ms. Joline Rivard (Director, Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce):** We are fortunate to have local educational institutions working to help create more bilingual residents, with some primary schools and high schools offering French immersion streams to help children who learn English as their first language also learn the French language before they graduate. We also have schools in the public and Catholic system, providing primary and secondary education in French, allowing francophones to maintain their language.

At the post-secondary level we have two local colleges: Northern College and Collège Boréal. These two colleges, one providing training primarily in English and the other primarily in French, allow the opportunity for secondary school graduates to attend an institution that provides training in their preferred language choice, limited of course by the program offerings of each institution.

It is also possible to take French as a second language courses as part of the Collège Boréal continuing education curriculum to help adults improve their French language skills and become more bilingual. The number of local residents and member businesses who speak French has also impacted the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce and how we offer services to our members. For example, many of our publications are available in both English and French, and our events such as our annual dinner and business awards are now presented in both the English and French languages.

Our area businesses are well aware of the bilingual reality of our communities, and the majority strive to provide services in both official languages. In some cases this is accomplished by the owner having the ability to speak French, either as their first language or by having learned it later in life, while in other cases they must hire the expertise as part of their staffing plan.

Speaking with business owners, however, shows that the perception exists that it is often difficult to hire a person with the right technical skill set for a position who is also fluently bilingual. In these cases, a choice must be made about the right candidate for the job, which is never easy.

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** The economic situation in south Temiskaming has been consistent and improving over the last several years, and we are fortunate to have an abundance of opportunities for businesses in a variety of sectors, including agriculture, mining, forestry, green energy, government services, manufacturing, retail, dining, entertainment, health care, and construction. This variety of opportunities has allowed the local economy to grow and the number of businesses to increase as each of the sectors has improved. In this case, diversification of sectors has been an advantage to our communities.

Historically, one of the biggest challenges facing businesses in the south Temiskaming area is the disconnect between the desire of local businesses to hire qualified applicants who have experience and a proven track record in their field, and the reality that most of the young adults must leave the area to pursue their post-secondary field of study and gain the experience needed to be qualified and get hired to a local position.

Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to make this presentation to you today, and we are ready to take your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Rivard and Mr. Griffith.

We will have about an hour and 10 minutes of questions and commentary from members of the committee.

[Translation]

We will start with Mr. Nicholls.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP):** My question goes to Ms. Côté.

You mentioned the social economy and the co-operatives. You said that projects of that kind make a major contribution to the communities. When a crucial need exists, co-operatives are there to respond to it.

My question is about funding for co-operatives. In 2012, the Conservative government cancelled the co-operative development initiative. In your opinion, what was the main effect this had on the co-operative sector in Canada as a whole, more specifically on official language minority communities? I am thinking specifically about the francophone communities in western Canada, but you can answer in general.

• (0920)

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** I am very familiar with the cooperative development initiative, the CDI, as someone who has submitted projects. We obtained funding to do feasibility studies, prepare business plans or provide support. As well, co-operatives that had obtained CDI funding used to meet annually at a forum where best practices and knowledge were shared. I led and facilitated those meetings. The initiative meant that, instead of development taking five or six years, it might only take a few months with no need for additional funding because people would support each other. The money from the CDI was essential.

In my brief, I even suggested reinstating a similar program. What counted most was not the huge sums of money, but rather the fact that money arrived at exactly the right time for projects to be developed. People have to do the work, they have to identify the need in the communities they want to address, they must organize,

they must create a structure. They must also invest in their projects. Sometimes, the lack of one little skill or an unfamiliarity with one little practice can result in a project being abandoned after it has started. The CDI provided a little start-up capital to get a project going. It also allowed people who were starting and managing their projects to acquire the necessary skills that they could then apply.

The CDI was really an important program. I can tell you that less development is taking place today because there is less capital to help businesses get going.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** So you are recommending re-establishing that program.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Of the 41 recommendations, five deal with financing and investment. Very interesting things are happening. However, we do mention the possibility of establishing a similar program. The program did not involve huge sums of money. It cost a few thousand dollars and it was a strategic investment on the part of the federal government. The thousands of dollars invested in each of the projects were multiplied three or four times by the communities, as a result of their own investments and their time. That created jobs.

Do you know how much money the state saves when someone stops getting social assistance? Those small grants helped people to set up their own businesses.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Is it your opinion that, if funding from the co-operative development initiative were increased, we would see more growth in those businesses?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Around Canada, and even around the world, these kinds of businesses established by communities and for communities create many more jobs than just one. Sometimes, it is three, five, 10 or 20 jobs. In the Groupe Convex's case, it is 120 jobs. In the case of La maison verte, in Hearst, it is about 40. Various kinds of financing and investments must be available to companies like that.

They must also learn to become real businesses. As a result, a few thousand dollars may be necessary for start-up and support in the preliminary stages of establishing a business. Sometimes, you need a little money to get a business going, and sometimes you can get a loan or a grant. Basically, a number of practices come together.

If a similar program were re-established, providing an added value, there will be a range of financing for investment. People could take out what they needed, whether they needed \$3,000 prior to start-up, or \$5,000 for an opening or \$150,000 or \$1 million for a bigger project like refurbishing La Nouvelle Scène in downtown Ottawa, an organization that has created 150 jobs in four arts companies.

I would also invite you to look at what is happening in Manitoba, in Nova Scotia and in Quebec. A number of options are being created there.

It is a good program, but if it could be diversified, it would be stronger. Each dollar invested in a community yields at least four dollars, if not more.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Very good.

What impact did the reduction in staff and in funding at Industry Canada's Cooperative Secretariat have on the co-operative sector in Canada? What effect will it have on official language minority communities?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** That is a tragedy too. Little research has been done to gather information on co-operative practices and the spirit of collective enterprise. However, the secretariat was listing the number of businesses, their areas of activity and the value of their economic impact on the communities. It also made available the history of some co-operatives so that other communities could take inspiration from them. It promoted the co-operative program both with the federal government and with the other partners and it spoke about it as an economic endeavour for which investment is required, given the impact on the communities.

The secretariat was gathering information, establishing links and monitoring projects. It worked with the machinery of government on public policy. The best public policy has been designed collectively, that is, not only by politicians and bureaucrats, but by working in collaboration with people in the trenches. The secretariat was playing that coordinating role.

It was part of Industry Canada for a very short time. We do not know if we will find the same dynamic, the same connections and the same kindred spirits. Being part of Industry Canada is not a bad thing, I must say. As I was saying earlier, collective businesses make up a real economy. It was as if Industry Canada, the department with the principal economic *raison d'être* in Canada, recognized them as being real businesses and dealt with them accordingly.

It remains to be seen if we will find our place, if we will have the same programs that come with other kinds of entrepreneurship to support co-operatives. Even after being in existence for 150 years, co-operatives remain business structures that governments fail to understand. The secretariat was a box inside government that knew us and that knew all the ups and downs of the movement, and all of its strength.

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Your turn, Mr. Gourde.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for joining us.

My first question goes to the representatives from the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce. I will likely have the same question for Ms. Côté.

In your view, what are the leadership characteristics that you see in the businesses in your region and the chemistry you see there that makes some come together well and others have more difficulty?

[English]

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** Perhaps I'll take the question.

I believe that the leadership capabilities of the person are both ingrained—you're born with them—and you learn them and are trained in them. I think some businesses succeed and some

businesses struggle based on how well they service the needs of the individual people who come in.

In the case of our community, because we have a high degree of people who in some cases speak French as their only language, or who speak it as their first language, one of the challenges that business owners face is that you have to service the needs of this minority language community. We have anecdotal stories of business owners who do not have francophone members of our community coming into their businesses simply because they feel they cannot get service in their language. They will choose other businesses where they feel they can.

Why any business succeeds or fails is I think an incredibly complex question and has to do with the resources and the experience of the owner, and the niche market and how well they get the word out about what their services are. But part of it really is the ability to meet the needs of those customers as they walk in the door or make that initial contact. People like to do business in the language of their choice. It's something that business owners here recognize, but it's something that we do struggle with in trying to hire the expertise in French language skills.

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** As a leader myself, I bought a 17-year-old business. Three of the previous owners were bilingual. They pretty much sustained their business for 16 years by just doing what the previous owner did. I come in and I blow it out of the water. I triple it in size and I bring in more business, but I can't afford to promote myself, so I could potentially be a failure because I've grown so quickly and can't keep up anymore. I'm not quite ready to hire because I don't have the time to train these people. I don't have the time to go looking and to do interviews.

As an example of what you're asking about, I think I'm a prime example. It's frustrating to know that I have to do a 40-page essay on why I should get a graduate to come and spend time with me so I can mould them and mentor them, because I think I would be a great mentor. But perhaps I could have five other businesses with me so that we can share this person in our community and they'll grow even better. Anyway, that's just my idea.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you.

What would you say, Ms. Côté?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** I have worked with a lot of groups. I have been able to see some characteristics in some entrepreneurial projects and not in others.

First, the leaders who start the businesses, whether private or collective, must have a clear vision. They look forward in time, they see where they want to be in 5 years and in 10 years. When they start a business, they do not play things by ear.

They also have a direct connection to the market. There really does have to be an actual need. If someone wants to set up a print shop in the village where there are two already, it is not going to fly. To prevent that from happening, people like that do their homework and check whether there is a genuine market.

They verify that their market exists with a feasibility study and a business plan. If they are less methodical, if they are not able to enlist help in preparing those documents, or even if they turn that task completely over to a consultant yet are not able to understand the documents the consultant provides, they will never manage to run their businesses. They have to be able to recognize their personal strengths and weaknesses and they have to have the necessary training or find the necessary support.

An entrepreneur is also someone on the move. You can be an entrepreneur in the public service, but, in a community, you take risks. If you have invested your own money, they are often calculated risks.

You must also be able to invest time and energy, and to be patient. You cannot expect a business to get off the ground immediately just because you have worked on a good idea, grasped a good business opportunity, and written a business plan. It takes time.

There is also strategy and timing. The most committed businesses I have worked with take considered decisions. Do we continue to move forward? Do we change the game plan?

There are 25 characteristics of an entrepreneur. I have found them in the winners, those who, individually or collectively, have been successful in business.

• (0930)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Ms. St-Denis, it's your turn.

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Listening to you, Ms. Côté, we have the impression that all is well in the best of worlds. Everything is perfect. We are investing, we are succeeding and everything is going well.

A few years ago, in Sault Ste. Marie, in Northern Ontario, relations between francophones and anglophones were very tense. You will recall that the anglophones trampled on the Quebecois flag.

Do you think these violent tensions left traces in terms of the two communities' active participation within economic development agencies? In other words, what does the relationship between French-speakers and English-speakers look like? You say that everything is going well, people are investing a lot, but how is it really going?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** In the real world?

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Yes.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** I mentioned the entrepreneurial features. That doesn't mean that it's easy; it takes hard work to get there.

What happened in Sault Ste. Marie left scars, but a lot of wounds have healed since then. When these events happened, I was personally involved in the francophone community, especially in the community component. I went to Sault Ste. Marie to do planning, but also to Dubreuilville for people who wanted to start collective enterprises, co-operatives, among others, with young people. There was also the community centre that wanted to launch a partnership enterprise and become financially independent. It was clear that we were going to have to wait for the dust to settle.

These people who set up entrepreneurial projects in the francophone community had to establish partnerships and develop ties with anglophones and francophones. They had to rebuild their network of contacts. What I was able to see during follow-up on those projects was that francophones didn't create networks of contacts only with francophones, but also with mostly anglophone businesses, including the CFDA for that region, which relied on a bilingual team member. So there was a support link. Moreover, the person from the RDEE, a francophone economic organization, worked with the anglophone partners.

So spaces were created to develop various ties. I can tell you that more and more francophone businesses are being set up now, compared to 15 years ago. They were always there, but we are now starting to see them in the community. It seems that people are encouraging these businesses if they find that the product is good.

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** When you say that there are bilingual businesses, does that mean that interactions between francophones and anglophones are still done in English, in the end, or is it that communication may take place in French in cases where some anglophones speak French?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** There are a lot of anglophones who have become francophiles because they love the language. They will find opportunities to shop in French, speak in French and relax in French. In any event, we are part of a reality. It's a fight every day in minority situations.

I always told my children that they had to ask people for things in French, that they had to shop in French. I always told them as well that they should not be rude if the person responded in English, because that was how we were going to work together. We still tell our children that they must speak to people in French first, be it in a boutique, a shop, a major chain store or a supermarket because you never know if the person in front of you is a francophone or a francophile. It is also an opportunity to speak French, regardless of the context. It's not easy.

• (0935)

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Do schools and universities help develop economic development networks?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Partnerships are being established. For example, there are universities that helped us do applied research. If we are doing a project in one region, they will get their students to contribute. For example, the universities can apply for research funding that we do not have access to. The professor will supervise his students and work with the community. The universities can then do neutral analyses independent from ours that will give us a clear picture of where we stand. The universities are giving us access to research that we would not be able to afford otherwise, not even with the small CDI grant or other funds. It's complementary.



What is interesting about community colleges is that they can make a more technical contribution, often closer to a trade and often also closer to the type of business someone wants to start.

I've seen young people who have started a business in Internet programming. It was interesting to see the college, which teaches that subject, help these young people who wanted to start a business.

So there are indeed matches being made. We used to work much more separately, but now we are adopting a rather horizontal approach, which helps build as many ties as possible. This is especially the case in minority linguistic communities, but it goes beyond simply language. It is a way of reinvesting in our projects and making them successful.

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** My next question is for Mr. Griffith or Ms. Rivard.

You said that there are a lot of interactions with respect to trade exchanges. The people of Quebec go to New Liskeard a lot. I know this because I used to live there. I don't know whether the opposite is true, but I know that a lot of people in Abitibi and Timiskaming in Quebec shop in New Liskeard.

Does your organization have special business relationships with Quebec?

[English]

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** We don't have a special relationship. We do work cooperatively on tourism initiatives. We just finished a Temiskaming lake tour that incorporated the communities surrounding Lake Temiskaming, including those from both the Quebec and the Ontario sides of the border. So we do have a history of involvement, including Quebec businesses when we're looking at Ontario growth plans, and of course Quebec businesses seeking out information from Ontario as they choose to grow.

Our chamber of commerce does include members from Quebec, so there are businesses in Quebec that find value in being a member of our chamber of commerce. Likewise, we have businesses here that advertise on radio stations and in print media on the Quebec side of the provincial border to try to share what they offer to the Québécois community.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Are you able to estimate how many francophone businesses there are in your community?

[English]

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** To estimate how many...?

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** I wouldn't think there would be any businesses located in Ontario that spoke only French. I think there would be many businesses whose owners spoke French as their first language and who had learned English as their second language and would be more comfortable communicating in French, but will also make attempts to speak English to those who come to their business.

Given the reality that almost every schoolchild in Ontario has taken some French, almost every Ontarian knows a small amount of French. The challenge seems to be this concern that they're going to try to use it and look foolish or embarrass themselves. They just don't have the confidence to try to speak French. One of the things that we think might be beneficial would be an awareness campaign,

a try-your-best campaign. If you speak any degree of the other official language just try your best, and likewise an acceptance of the respect of the attempt, that if someone is trying to speak French and

[Translation]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** I would like to ask you another question.

Do the municipalities and the province provide funding to francophone organizations? In other words, what kind of support do provincial and municipal organizations provide to business people in the francophone community?

● (0940)

[English]

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** I don't know what's out there and when I start looking and start asking, I find the bigger businesses know what's available. They won't share it with me, because they want to keep that to themselves.

A francophone in a downtown that's mainly English—it's a misconception there are francophone businesses, it's known as an anglophone downtown—would rather shop and deal with businesses on the outskirts. Our Quebec highway leads to a set of lights and if you turn right, you're going to go to the big Walmarts, the Canadian Tires, the mall, where the chances of bumping into someone who is bilingual and who can help you are greater than if you come to our downtown, where one person in each store might or might not speak English.

I'm part of that group, the BIA, and I find that the efforts that these business owners do to be able to help their francophone.... I've offered to be a call-a-friend. If you have someone who speaks French, who can't communicate, call me, I'll help you. They've even found some apps so that the person coming to their business can speak to the app and it translates it for them. Our community is trying really hard.

Our new generation is going to French immersion, and I hear it from these kids as a coach. I've coached a team that was 75% anglophone kids and I was able to speak to them in French all summer long while coaching them, because they're in French immersion. I told their parents I was amazed at how well these kids, who are eight and 10 years old, are picking up French, because they have the occasion to play and live in French.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Madam Bateman.

[Translation]

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for the ideas they are sharing with us and the work they do.

I would like to divide my questions between you, but to start, I would like to clarify something Ms. Côté said.

In my notes, I see that you work as a business development practitioner for the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, an organization that works with francophone communities, but with anglophone communities, as well. However, you have spoken only about the communities you serve, in other words, francophone communities.

Could you take a moment to talk about other communities?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Thank you very much for your question.

It is true that I am an associate of the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, which is a partnership enterprise. We do not seek funding.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** I would like to know what percentage of your work is spent on anglophone businesses.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** I would say that most of my time is spent on francophone businesses. I also work on projects where the individuals, francophones or anglophones, want to create a bilingual business in a bilingual community.

At the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, which is a collective enterprise, we have five practitioners, three of whom work full time. There is me, a francophone, and two anglophones who work a great deal on files involving Canada's north and west. However, we sometimes work together on certain projects.

For example, we worked together on a project to develop the development wheel, a common tool to support entrepreneurial development. We wanted to offer it in English and French at the same time. So we worked together on developing it and provided the community with training. We are really working to break the isolation that separates francophones and anglophones in the communities they share.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Yes, and both are very important.

[English]

Darcy and Joline, what's the percentage split? Obviously you're open for business in both languages, but where does the community split? Is it like your numbers, about one-third francophone and two-thirds anglophone? Is that a reasonable split in terms of the service you provide?

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** Yes. I would think that a limited number of people would speak French only. Most would have a degree of ability to communicate in English. I would think that there would be more people who speak English who are challenged to speak in French.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** I'm one of those; I'm definitely one of those.

• (0945)

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** So I would think that we do have those people who are anglophone only, but a fewer number would be francophone only.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Rivard, I am very impressed with the work you do with young people. Congratulations. It's good work.

My next question is for both organizations.

Since you have some experience in this area, I would like to ask you what conditions you think should be established to encourage economic development and growth in Canada. I am thinking specifically of the tax burden and the regulatory burden.

[English]

Maybe we'll start this time with Darcy and Joline.

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** I would say that certainly the need for regulations exists, although the more time required to comply with those regulations, the less time there is to actually contact customers and have the ability to market or make sales. The difficulty is finding that medium middle ground between how much regulation is a proper amount and how much just becomes an undue hardship on businesses.

With regard to taxation, again, I think we benefit from living in a fantastic country with wonderful services. I think taxation is a reality and something we need to do. But at what point does it put undue hardship on a business and take money away from the ability to grow? Every dollar spent on taxation is a dollar that can't be spent hiring another employee.

So it's finding that middle ground between the two, where there's a reasonable amount of taxation but still money to put back into the growth of a business.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Joline, as a young woman who has set up a business and has tripled the size of her organization, are you glad that we've reduced the tax rates? Is it helpful that we're reducing the red tape, or...? What is your view, Joline?

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** I'm fairly new at this. I can't say I'm aware of all of those tax breaks. If there are tax breaks, I haven't felt them yet. But I offer an area—

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** [Inaudible—Editor]...a member of Parliament.

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** Sorry?

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Well, I was just thinking, as a young businesswoman it's pretty important that you are aware of those tax breaks, so make sure you find out.

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** I realize that. I know. But by tripling, I've had no time. I'm a single mother. I have to do what I have to do.

But I do participate in my chamber of commerce. I do participate in the BIA. I try to be aware of those things first. Yes, I should be aware—I totally agree—but I'm telling you I'm oblivious, and there's no shame in that.

The other thing is that—

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Trust me, then, you're better off now than you were about eight years ago.

Perhaps we can have Ethel's point of view on that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** About a decade ago, I was one of the people arguing for less bureaucracy. I felt there should be regulation, as long as it wasn't abusive. I also felt there should be tax deductions and tax incentives, which are not offered across Canada. If, as a business, I want to invest in my community, in projects where I live or in other businesses, it seems to me that I should be able to benefit from tax incentives meant to support the local economy.

[English]

Joline, I am getting you, really. The first business I had, I was your age, and I closed my shop because I was not able to find help for the growth of my enterprise.

• (0950)

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** I used to work in event planning. I organized the artistic programming for all events in the national capital—be it Canada Day, Winterlude or other events. When someone really wants to grow their business, they often need specialized support. When you create a company in the area of high technology, food service, plumbing, carpentry or forestry, you sometimes need specialized technical assistance in that field. I was in charge of event planning and festivals, but I did not have that kind of expertise, and I could not manage growth.

We also need that kind of support in our communities. I live in a village. In Plantagenet, I see that a third, if not almost half, of the village is receiving social assistance or employment insurance benefits. We have to find ways to create jobs for those marginalized people, based on the kind of employment available in our region. Those people do not necessarily have a vehicle to travel to the big city or elsewhere. They have to find a job in their area. If we find more inclusive ways to create employment for them, those people will also be buying locally. They live in those villages, and they don't want to go to Ottawa or Toronto to shop. They want to do that in Plantagenet, Alfred or Casselman. However, we are lacking the means to help them. Economic growth is necessary to achieving that, and it must be targeted on all fronts.

The government has made some progress by simplifying certain things, but the economic environment requires more to be done. We can work on this together. We are on the ground to study the issue. I invite you to look at my recommendations, among others.

Certain things could be done differently, and that approach may not always be more expensive. Making a small change to one of your policies or programs would suffice. That would have a greater impact on the economic development and growth of our villages and neighbourhoods.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Daniel.

**Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

We've heard how much the francophone community contributes to the economy of Canada. It's obviously a major component of that. Is there a francophone economic space in Canada? If there is, how do we define it?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Is it for me that question?

You know.....

[Translation]

I switched to English. That's part of what being Franco-Ontarian means.

We created a francophone economic space, some 15 years ago, when we decided to talk to governments and the community, and to create chambers of commerce and business groups. We found resources to create the RDEE, support structures for economic development, networks and a variety of things in our communities.

Four or five years ago, we created a steering committee to organize the first pan-Canadian forum on economic development in the Canadian Francophonie, which was held in 2012. The forum brought together stakeholders from government, associations and the private sector of the francophone economy to discuss that space. The idea was to determine needs, decide whether any work needed to be done with regard to the market, policies, regulations or taxation, and to define what that space consisted of. You may be surprised, but a draft definition was just completed. It is actually not easy to define what a francophone economic space in a minority setting is, or what a francophone company in a minority setting is.

Mr. Griffith is absolutely right. Entrepreneurs want to sell their products and services. They will sell them in the language of the client, be they anglophone or francophone.

Francophones consider their companies to be different in terms of ownership and management. However, people can obtain services entirely in English in a francophone company. That space is still being defined. Three years ago, I would not have even been able to provide you with the figures I gave you earlier. We are just now beginning to establish economic partnerships between companies and universities in order to carry out research and prove that the francophone economy has added value.

[English]

**Mr. Joe Daniel:** Mr. Griffith, do you or anybody on your side have any comments?

**Mr. James Franks (Coordinator, Economic Development and Funding, City of Temiskaming Shores, Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce):** From Temiskaming Shores' perspective, is there a specific space for francophone business? We mentioned earlier that 30% of our population is francophone. I would suggest to you that 90% of all business in this community is done in English. A small portion of that business is done in French, and that's among francophones who likely know each other in the community, and know they would speak first in French to those individuals. That's neither here nor there, good nor bad. It's just a reality.

Business is still predominantly done in English because again it's the split of the community. The francophones often advise customers that they're francophones because the concern is that maybe that customer may not come back if it's a francophone business versus an anglophone business. Again, whether that's right or wrong is irrelevant; I'm told that by francophone business owners. The francophone-only business is probably a very small percentage of business just because of that concern. If you're a francophone, you still need the other 70% of the customers in your community to come and shop at your store, so you need all the customers rather than just the 30% who are francophone only.

**Mr. Joe Daniel:** Let me just follow up from that. Obviously, that's one definition, or you're defining it in a very Canadian and introverted fashion. Does the definition include expanding into Francophonie countries? You know that this government is signing up to a European accord. There's a huge opportunity there for Francophonie people to be able to exploit that market.

Any comments?

● (0955)

[Translation]

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** We are already part of an entrepreneurial Francophonie network. Entrepreneurs can also meet at the Rencontre internationale de la Francophonie économique—international meeting of the Francophonie on the economy—and a number of other events organized by associations. Events have been organized in Canada—in Manitoba and Ontario—where some francophone companies from different countries participated. Connections have already been established within the community.

La Francophonie member countries are signing agreements amongst themselves. That adds value to the opportunities we have already started to develop. International meetings are being held already, be it through the Canadian Community Economic Development Network or the Réseau intercontinental de promotion de l'économie sociale solidaire, RIPESS.

People are already meeting around the world and doing business, be it as part of conventional economy—where private companies are participants—a fair trade-based economy, or something similar to that. There is a lot of variety.

The francophone global market has about 900 million francophones, 9 million of whom are in Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Perreault, you have the floor.

**Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP):** I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I will begin with Ms. Côté. Then, I will move on to Mr. Griffith.

Ms. Côté, since the beginning of the meeting, we have been talking about the importance of social economy as a local economy with the goal of fostering the economic development of minority francophone communities.

If you could list only three winning conditions to truly support the economic development of minority francophone communities, what would they be?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Francophones in minority communities who own a business will end up providing their products and services in English, but often, they draft their business plans in French, and they have to be able to present them to various lenders or investors.

A few months ago, I did some research to find out who, in Ontario, had the money to invest in both francophone and anglophone potentially-viable small companies, be they social or cooperative—in short, companies of all kinds. We came up with 60 different sources of funding, in the north, mid north, west, south central and eastern part of the province. In most cases, the documents have to be submitted in English, unless they are meant for the federal or provincial government.

Now that we know that those funding sources are available, we ask them to hire a bilingual individual next time, and we offer to help translate tools. Over the past few months, three organizations have already started creating a review committee for business plans in French and English.

Steering committees have also been created for money-lending activities. One of the winning conditions is to make any money for investment in companies—be they private or social—available to both francophones and anglophones across the country. People need to have access to capital.

Another winning condition is training. Some Canadian regions have no training provided in French. Of course, people can learn their trade or profession in another language to manage their company, but certain things are done better in our mother tongue. Infrastructure is growing, but we are lacking the resources and support in French.

Another key condition is tailored guidance. Every company is unique, as is its context. The context will be different depending on whether you open a bookstore in Vancouver, New Liskeard or Rockland. People need guidance throughout the process. I am not saying that we should do things for those people, but simply provide them with guidance when they need a bit of help to carry out their business plan.

So why is there so much activity in all the regions of Quebec? It's because there is a variety of practices, organizations and intermediaries involved in providing tailored guidance. A private company will turn to the CLD, a cooperative to the Coopérative de développement régional, a social enterprise to the Corporation de développement communautaire.

I can count on the fingers of one hand the organizations from my area, in Ontario, that provide guidance to companies in French. In Alberta and in British Columbia, those organizations are even fewer in number. Yet there are still plenty of people dreaming about starting a company at the community meetings we attend.

Access to capital is needed—regardless of the organization that manages the money—as is access to guidance in French. Some positive practices have been established in Quebec, and elsewhere. It is simply a matter of adapting the tools to the regional context.

• (1000)

**Ms. Manon Perreault:** So you are basically saying that those people are negatively affected by access issues.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Having no access to good funding—be it in terms of grants or loans—and to the right information in French at the right time does have negative consequences. For instance, a francophone may be able to read in English. However, if they do not understand taxation—God knows it can be complicated—and the information is only available in English, how can they know whether there are any measures their company could benefit from? If they have no one to help them in that area, they won't know about any of that.

That is why, during the pan-Canadian forum on economic development in the Canadian Francophonie, we decided that, since we could not be everywhere, we should think about creating a portal for the francophone economy in order to share the resources. There is variety of guides, resources and courses, so they should be made accessible across the country.

We are currently working on implementing such tools, so that we can at least learn from one another by sharing our practices, tools and resources.

**Ms. Manon Perreault:** Thank you so much.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** My pleasure.

**Ms. Manon Perreault:** I will now turn to Ms. Rivard or Mr. Griffith.

Earlier, you talked about businesses with francophone owners. This morning, when we discussed this, someone said that your website was available exclusively in English. I am not saying anything negative, but I would like to know something. Does your website not provide bilingual documentation because you are lacking financial and human resources?

Go ahead, Ms. Rivard.

[English]

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** We basically volunteer our time to translate things that come to us. So again, as an oblivious business owner, I find it more important to help out my chamber of commerce by translating. Other members also offer their services to translate things. But one of our recommendations is that it would be nice to have access to something government funded where we can send these documents to help us translate and promote our businesses.

I just want to go back to the question about tax breaks and regulations. I think that we miss the boat sometimes on that. I'm going to give you an example. I worked for one of the biggest local businesses—not a business, but they have the most employees. For 17 years I worked at a business where I was constantly called out of my office, out of my position, to go translate for someone else while this person, who is anglophone, is sitting beside me. While I do his work, my work goes undone; I'm here translating. So there's no incentive for the French person who's doing double the work, and

there's no incentive for the anglophones who know they can just call Joline, and she'll translate. So I think it's just hard because it's exhausting being a francophone in a community like this because we, as francophones here, are very proud and we work very hard at it, but it's too easy for the anglophones to just step back and say, “Oh yes, I'll provide you someone who is bilingual”.

[Translation]

**Ms. Manon Perreault:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

We'll go to our next member to give everybody an opportunity to comment and ask questions.

Mr. Williamson.

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being in today.

Mr. Griffith, I actually was just checking the geographical location of your community because I was curious about a comment that was made that we kind of hashed over quickly, but that I think even a member of the opposition agreed with. This was that shoppers come from Quebec, really on the other side of your border, to your community to shop. Why do you suppose they're doing this?

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** I think basically they're doing it because we have the shopping capacity. The City of Temiskaming Shores is fortunate in that it's located about two hours from any other large centre, which increases the size of the catchment area for shopping.

In northern Ontario—and I grew up in southern Ontario and relocated up here about four years ago—there seems to be a different Ontario-Quebec relationship than I experienced historically in southern Ontario. The border here truly is invisible. People will relocate from Ontario to Quebec, live in Quebec and work in Ontario, live in Ontario and drive to Quebec to work. The border is just a line on a map and not something that impacts daily life.

We know business owners who draw a great number of customers from Quebec simply because they have the goods and services that the persons living in Quebec want that aren't available on their side of the border. Likewise, my business goes across to Quebec, although we're based in Ontario, to provide services to various businesses and communities that they couldn't otherwise obtain in the area. I think it's an economic necessity that we band together simply because of the geographic location and I think we're better for it. We have a greater understanding of the issues facing Quebec. I think Quebecers in this area have a pretty good understanding of the challenges facing Ontario, and to be honest, we make it work. It benefits both communities and it's good.

• (1005)

**Mr. John Williamson:** One of the primary towns in my district is a border community. I notice the same thing. I'm a member from New Brunswick, next to the state of Maine where some of our consumers go to the U.S. for purchases. Even in the east end of my province, we see Nova Scotians come over to Moncton, which is a francophone-majority city, for consumption.

In both cases, we see that gas prices are cheaper in Maine than they are in New Brunswick, and again, they're cheaper in New Brunswick than they are in Nova Scotia. As well, the sales tax is lower in New Brunswick—13%—than it is in Nova Scotia. Similarly, it's lower still in Maine. Hence, you see this migration, Nova Scotia to New Brunswick and then where there's the opportunity, New Brunswick to Maine. Is that part of the equation for your community? What are gas prices like in your community versus Quebec, and what's the differential in the sales tax?

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** I think when consumers look at it, they tend to look at the overall pricing. I think gas prices are pretty consistent across. We are much higher than communities two hours south or two hours north. It is a little bit cheaper in Quebec for gas on most days than it is in this area. We also are close to the Temiskaming First Nation, and they operate many of their own businesses as well. In some cases their prices are cheaper than what consumers can get either in New Liskeard, Temiskaming Shores, south Temiskaming area, or in other parts of Quebec.

I think consumers tend to look at the overall price and how that impacts them. Whether that's HST, or provincial sales tax, or whether there are discounts that are available, they don't care how the total price for a litre of gas gets added up, it all depends on what it costs them when they buy it.

I think consumers do usually chase the lowest dollar. I think government taxation is a significant part of that, but so is the profit margins that businesses seek, and the labour costs they have to pay, as well as the cost of their supplies and shipping. So I think it's a bit of a dog's breakfast as it were.

**Mr. John Williamson:** No. I'd like to follow up on that. You raise an excellent point.

Can you talk to me then about some of those business costs in your community versus over the border in Quebec?

I'm trying to get a sense of your community because I find this interesting. Again seeing where it is, it seems you have certain advantages, hence consumers are coming to your area. Is it just the size of your economy, your town, or is it some of the factors you just mentioned, some of the business input costs and things like that?

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** I think it's really geographically based. It's because we're located where we are. I've heard it described that we have all the shopping you will need, but maybe not all the shopping you will want. So if you're looking for an extremely specialized item, it may not be available for you to be able to go in and pick it off the rack. You may have to order it in, but there are businesses here that will do that for you.

Likewise, the overall business costs.... To be honest I've never operated a business in Quebec. I don't know what their regulatory or taxation costs are. We did look into it on a personal level because we

do business across the border, just to make sure that we were in full compliance with any of the requirements to operate in Quebec. They have similar administrative burdens and responsibilities to what we have here.

The taxation, again in some cases, if we can cross the border into Quebec and buy something we could not buy locally in Ontario, then we certainly do that. It's all about getting what you need when you need it as a business owner, and sometimes you might pay a little more to get it today instead of next week. So it's a unique community, and I would say that while we benefit in the city of Temiskaming Shores and the south Temiskaming area...for persons coming from Quebec, I also know people who choose to go to Quebec because of their offerings and things they can't get here. It's very much a reciprocal arrangement.

• (1010)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Joline Rivard:** I would say, though, it's probably a little bit higher for Québécois to come to Ontario. A lot of Québécois shop at my store, and they say that. They come because there is a Walmart. They come because there's more to offer. I've discovered that in a 50-kilometre radius, 17 out of the 30 communities that exist are mostly francophone including Quebec, so it's beneficial to them to come our way. It would be beneficial to us, as francophone business owners, to promote that there's more than a Walmart.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Monsieur Dionne Labelle.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

My first question is for Ms. Côté

I want to begin by congratulating you on your work. You seem like a very dynamic individual.

This week, the NDP introduced in the House a buy local policy. Could such a policy help companies in minority francophone communities?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** That would help tremendously. Apart from what was introduced in the House this week, a few weeks ago, in the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, a loyalty card was issued for all francophone and anglophone businesses across eastern Ontario. Companies and individuals will be able to obtain that card, whose purpose is to support local purchases. This is a francophone initiative, but the card will be available to francophones and anglophones, as long as we are talking about small businesses and social enterprises.

People managing a small or local company could not obtain a loyalty card similar to the Aeroplan card to support local economy, as it was too expensive. The card is available in English and in French, and the goal is to support local economy. There will be a loyalty card from coast to coast to truly encourage people to buy locally.

When the people of Moonbeam elected to buy the village grocery store and invest at home, the logic behind their decision was based on buying local. Previously, not all those people would shop at their grocery store. They would travel 45 minutes to Walmart. However, once they realized that they were losing jobs at home and that buying local maintained those jobs, the logic changed.

The number of initiatives is growing. I saw some in northern Ontario, and in central and southwestern parts. For instance, a small coffee shop in Rockland is also issuing a card. Businesses are trying to find ways to encourage people to buy local on a regular basis.

Beyond the small initiative by the business and its clients, whole regions are now organizing themselves. Some of them are doing so strictly in a francophone perspective. The idea is to establish a buy local and buy in French practice in order to support the economy. Other regional initiatives go beyond the language issue and use bilingual tools to encourage people to buy locally and support the local economy. Through job creation, wealth is being built for everyone in the community.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** In the same perspective of buying local, I heard about an experiment in Louisiana. The French speaking merchants launched a campaign entitled “Ici, on cash en français”, or something along those lines.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** That's it.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** I am not familiar with the full reality of linguistic communities across Canada, but are signs being put up in French?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Francophone companies do not want to put up signs in French in some areas. When we were seeking funds to set up a company in Saskatoon, I met some entrepreneurs who did not want to put up signs in French. They were willing to invest in projects, but they do not want to have French signs. According to them, if they put up any signs in French, they may lose some of their clientele.

That said, this is not the reality everywhere. Generally speaking, entrepreneurs will not put up signs only in French. The French cuisine restaurant in Whitby, close to Oshawa and Toronto, has a French name, but its signs are not only in French, since it wants to play a role in the local economy. Its owners did not choose to set up shop there just to sell French cuisine to francophones, but to give people an opportunity to have a French culinary experience. Of course, they will provide services in French if that's the language of their patrons. They want to use their business to help la Francophonie thrive. In short, some people do put up signs in French.

We think that loyalty cards will help make entrepreneurs proud. We also have some campaign that lay out the added value of being a francophone entrepreneur, regardless of the region or country they come from. Those individuals do add value. People can be served in English, as well as in French.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** French is a well-liked language in Canada.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Yes, the number of francophiles is growing.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** It's the language of love.

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** The reason the Alliance française is generating revenue is that many people are learning French. That is happening all over the country now.

• (1015)

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** You have worked in a number of corporations or companies that help business start-ups.

I will now speak to the people from Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce.

Entrepreneurs invest a tremendous amount of energy into creating their business plan. I spent four years working in a local development centre in Quebec. Let's say that I put in the time to write my business plan in French. If I were to go to various economic stakeholders from your region, could I be accepted as an entrepreneur? Will my business plan be judged on its true merit or be discounted in advance because no resources would be available on site to understand my economic adventure?

[English]

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** I would suggest that at the government level, whether you're bringing your business plan to the city, to the small business development centre Enterprise Temiskaming, or to something like the South Temiskaming Community Futures Development Corporation, they would absolutely have the resources to be able to successfully assess the nature of your business plan to make a decision on it. I don't think it would impact you at all.

On a private level, if you were to reach out to private organizations, you might be a little more challenged presenting it in French, but again, I think good businesses tend to get the funding they need, and private enterprise is interested in helping smaller businesses succeed. So I think they would also make it work, perhaps not as seamlessly and flawlessly, but I think at the end of the day they would cross the finish line with it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Griffith.

Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for both organizations. I will begin with Mr. Griffith, from Temiskaming Shores.

Have any companies from your region distinguished themselves internationally in the sale of goods or in service delivery because they were bilingual. For instance, I am thinking of mining corporations and small drilling companies.

[English]

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** Yes, absolutely. I think we have a number of businesses. Mining is one of the sectors that does have the ability to communicate. We also have Three H Furniture. They communicate not only in English and French but also in at least one other language that their founders speak. They sell their furniture across North America, and indeed, are winning design awards down at some of the larger U.S. furniture design competitions.

One of our larger fabricating shops, Nor-Arc, has been successful in competing in Quebec and winning projects. Again, they are primarily a francophone business and can communicate bilingually. Wabi Iron and Steel competes internationally in selling steel down through South America and across over to Europe. That's my understanding. We also have the Temiskaming mining supply company, TIME, and they sell mining products internationally. They've just undergone a significant expansion.

There is a benefit to being able to communicate in the language of choice with your customers, whether that's across a provincial border or across a national border. Certainly I think this region is well positioned. When you hire the right staff who have the skill set to do the job and who understand how to get the information across and can do it in French, then there is a great benefit, a great value, and the ability to succeed where others might not.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you.

What about in your area, Ms. Côté?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** In eastern Ontario, we don't have any mines or companies that are active in that sector, but we do have products. We have numerous consulting firms that support municipal governance development, local development and land-use planning, firms that sign many contracts with Africa, Eastern Europe and even Latin America, where English, French and Spanish are the main languages.

We also have local products such as beer and wine. They were initially marketed at the regional level and then gained popularity as a result of various meetings.

It is also interesting to note that we are exploring new markets through the diaspora. Many immigrants who settle in Canada still have business ties in their native countries. They are frequently interested in running a business here, in Canada, while supporting the economy back in their home country. It is often people like those who serve as links.

With the help of Haitian immigrants who came to Canada and started businesses, we are currently building partnerships with various suppliers of products and services as part of the reconstruction efforts in certain parts of Haiti. Members of the diaspora are often the ones who serve as links and facilitate that type of partnership building.

We do the same thing in Africa. I am part of the Pan-African Institute for Development. I'm the institute's outsider, if you will.

We've also helped support direct ties between companies on the ground in the renewable energy sector, for instance, and renewable

energy cooperatives in Quebec and Ontario. Ties are still being established on that front.

It is often thanks to our network of associations, the diaspora and the other networks I mentioned—which by the way, are increasing in number across the francophonie's economy—that we are able to create opportunities that bring entrepreneurs together. Every event draws between 200 and 300 entrepreneurs, and every single time, real partnerships translate into business opportunities.

• (1020)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** In the wake of the Canada-EU trade agreement, have you noticed any Canadian businesses starting to work on business plans to export their products to Europe?

**Ms. Ethel Côté:** Not yet, but people in my training workshops are talking about it. It's mainly French immigrants to Canada who are realizing they could also do business with their home country. People come for training and information. They want to know how it could be done. But logistics-wise, we aren't yet seeing anything happening on the ground. People don't know how they can benefit under the agreement.

Conversely, in France, as soon as the signing of the agreement was announced, some ministers organized missions with entrepreneurs. They even led a trade mission focused on the social economy sector. They came from France to meet with other communities and social businesses in Canada and discuss opportunities business to business. Though they aren't private businesses, some social enterprises do sell products and services. It would appear, then, that some countries are being more proactive than others.

On my end, I can tell you that people participating in my information sessions have discussed it with me. We can see that the possibility is there, but we don't know how to go about exploiting it, because that isn't our focus.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Nicholls.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Ms. Rivard, Ms. Bateman and others on the other side mentioned the possibility of tax breaks. They also suggested that you should go to talk to your local MP, Jay Aspin.

I was a bit taken aback. I can understand your challenges as a single mother, because I am a single father and I know how difficult it can be to make time to do some things. I would suggest instead that Mr. Aspin should go to talk with you, rather than your having to seek him out.

He was there Friday for a photo op for FedNor, and my question touches on FedNor. Your website says that your agency receives money from FedNor.

I would ask you whether you think a part of that financing from FedNor should be reserved for a person who would be specifically there for francophone businesses, to do translation, and for the anglophone side, to do translation into French. Would it not help your personal productivity and the productivity of other francophones in your community to translate things if they had specific funding from FedNor to do so?



**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** Absolutely. Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce received funding from FedNor for a rebranding effort when the City of Temiskaming Shores was created. We received funding to put towards website design and rebranding initiatives.

On a go-forward basis, having somebody in the community who could provide translation services to translate documents from English into French or French into English for businesses is something that absolutely would help. Whether that funding came from FedNor or whether there were other funding opportunities, I think it would help us be more competitive.

We use some of the FedNor funding, which we get on an annual basis for summer students, to hire part-time help for tourism initiatives. We try to make sure that those students are bilingual. There is also an ACFO organization locally that receives funding federally. They promote francophone services in our community.

So I think FedNor is helping. Additional help is always welcome and is certainly something that would benefit our community.

One of our top recommendations is translation services to try to ensure that businesses can get help, whether it's through the creation of an app for a front counter service or through a capability to have somebody speak French into a smartphone and have it translated into English immediately, to reduce the need to hire somebody with the skill set by having technology fill the void, or whether it's by having somebody with the ability to translate written documents and web pages. All of that would be welcome.

• (1025)

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Right. If it had been included originally, then perhaps the website could have been done in French. As far as I understand it, 30% of the population is francophone, but the website and documents are only in English presently. Is that correct?

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** It's partly correct. The website is only in English. It is something about which we have had discussions for a while. We have some challenges in translation when we have people translate a document and somebody else who speaks French reads it and says that it's not necessarily the same in tone or in meaning. It is always a little bit of a challenge to make sure that not only the words but the flavour comes across in any translation.

Many of our documents are now translated into French after being created in English, or in some cases we have had documents created in French that have been translated into English.

We are moving towards a fully bilingual chamber of commerce. It isn't something we have achieved yet, but it is one of our goals and something that we're moving towards.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Just for reference, in terms of finding out what tax breaks are available, I would suggest, perhaps, to your MP what we often do in our constituencies, which is to send someone out to give workshops. Then the community can come, close to their homes, and learn what the tax breaks are.

I would suggest you suggest this to your MP, and perhaps he can organize a workshop.

**Mr. Darcy Griffith:** I will. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Nicholls.

The last member for today is Mr. Williamson.

**Mr. John Williamson:** I feel as though we're picking on poor "Landslide Jay" here, who won that riding by 18 votes. We have to be kind, because every vote counts here for our colleague.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. John Williamson:** Before I begin, I think I'm going to turn things over to Joyce just for a minute. She has some news on funding that is available.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Bateman.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you so very much, John. I really appreciate sharing your time.

I'll speak just briefly, because the question has been asked and, Darcy, you're serving a broad community, and so are you, Ethel.

[Translation]

The Department of Canadian Heritage offers support for interpretation and translation.

[English]

That's \$5,000 free for you to just apply to get support for interpretation and translation for small organizations.

We did have the honourable Shelly Glover come and speak to this committee earlier and this is one of the services that's offered to people in your riding. The honourable member was obviously not aware of that either and I'm very grateful to be able to share this.

Thanks, John.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Thanks. No problem.

I hope that helps.

I do want to caution that when we talk about funding, the funding doesn't come from FedNor. It doesn't come from government, it actually comes from you people, taxpayers.

Often these business decisions are best left to businesses to decide what support they need as opposed to having the federal staff rolls increase at a cost that's more expensive to taxpayers. But that's just a side comment.

I'm trying to keep this focused on the question at hand, which is minority linguistic communities. I'm trying to get a sense of some of the success around your municipality. You've gone through an amalgamation so have you found that focusing on, or bringing together, different communities has been a strength? How do you explain your success as a community that is attracting customers from throughout the region and across the border from a linguistic group that might not be able to communicate with all shop owners?

**The Chair:** Thank you. That will be our last question for the day.

Go ahead and answer it and at that point we'll adjourn.

Go ahead.

**Mr. James Franks:** I'm going to speak on that from the municipalities' perspective because I was involved through the amalgamation process.

We were three smaller communities that amalgamated and that has, in my opinion, done good things for this community. We came from three communities that fought over every potential investment in the region to see who might get it. On many cases we lost the potential investment to other communities around us because we were too busy fighting with ourselves. By working together now as one larger community we've been able to attract some significant investments and we're being seen as this economic and service hub for the region, because we're the larger player. More and more retail investment keeps coming in, and as we continue to grow we continue to draw folks from further away, which then helps all of the businesses in the community, whether they're francophone or anglophone. But definitely it's impacted us from the Quebec side.

As we've become this larger growth area and attracted some of these national retail chains, that is definitely drawing a significant number of residents from the province of Quebec who generally

have only many small communities to work with and small businesses in those communities, so now they're able to access services from these large retail chains that they just couldn't access previously.

●(1030)

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much to all of our witnesses.

Madame Côté, Madame Rivard, Mr. Griffith, Mr. Franks, Madame Weston-Bernstein, thank you very much for your testimony. It will help us in drafting our report.

We've been looking at all the snow behind you in the window in the video conference. We've named it snow mountain. You clearly have quite a bit of snow up there. Thank you very much for your participation. It's very much appreciated.

This meeting is adjourned.

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