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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are continuing to study the review of support programs for official language minority community media.

It is our pleasure to welcome representatives from the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario: Carol Jolin, president, and Bryan Michaud, policy analyst. We will also hear from Marie Hélène Eddie, a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Ottawa, who will testify as an individual.

We will start with you, Mr. Jolin. You will have the floor for 10 minutes. Then we will hear from Ms. Eddie, who will have 10 minutes or so. Lastly, we will go around the table so that members can ask their questions and make comments.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre, go ahead, please.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I did last week, I would like to declare that, as the owner of local newspapers in northern Ontario, I have a conflict of interest and therefore will not take part in this discussion. I will recuse myself once again, will not take part in drafting the report, and will not vote on its adoption.

The Chair: Let the record show that Paul Lefebvre has declared his conflict of interest and will refrain from commenting on the presentations and from voting.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Jolin.

Mr. Carol Jolin (President, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the 622,340 Franco-Ontarians, I want to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for welcoming us today and giving us the opportunity to discuss a topic of great importance, the survival and vitality of our minority language media. I am here today with Bryan Michaud, our organization's policy analyst.

The Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario has prepared four white papers in recent years to provide an environmental overview and make recommendations on the complex issues that require careful consideration. One of those white papers focuses on the francophone media in Ontario.

The conventional media world is changing, its business model wavering, and that of the online media uncertain. While the situation

of Franco-Ontarian institutions has improved over the past 30 years, the reality of our media has sharply deteriorated. Furthermore, Franco-Ontarian media leaders claim that digital platforms generate additional costs but very little revenue. Our media organizations are suffering because they are constantly in survival mode.

Our private and not-for-profit francophone community media make a major contribution to expanding the francophone space across Canada. They enhance the economic vitality of our country by employing 550 professionals across the country. That figure represents only direct jobs and does not include the freelancers, printers, and vendors those media concerns also employ.

Through our Franco-Ontarian media, our population is regularly informed about municipal, regional, provincial, and federal affairs, francophone current affairs, and what is happening in their neighbourhoods. Without those media outlets, our fellow citizens would be deprived of essential information on how their communities function in French. They are part of the social and community fabric of the greater francophone community in Ontario.

Consequently, I would like to ask you a question. What impact would the disappearance of our Franco-Ontarian media have? We can't deny that's where we're headed: down the road to assimilation.

In this presentation, I would like to address three central themes concerning the survival and vitality of our media: government advertising, the digital shift, and minority language media support programs.

The drastic cuts the governments of Canada and Ontario have made to their advertising placements have left our media in an extremely vulnerable financial position. This year, for the first time, the Canadian government's spending on digital advertising represented more than half of its advertising budget.

According to Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages, from 2006-2007 to 2014-2015, francophone newspapers experienced a 78% drop in federal advertising placements, and community radio stations a 73% decline. That trend continued in 2016-2017. The Government of Canada spent \$6 million less on advertising placed in the traditional media than in the previous year. Given this major revenue loss, our media are finding it hard to proceed with their digital shift and to hire enough journalists to provide full media coverage.

In our white paper entitled "Francophone Media in Ontario", we make two recommendations to the Government of Canada.

First, the Government of Canada must provide prompt follow-up to the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada's report to ensure that advertising placements are reinstated as soon as possible.

Second, the Government of Canada must direct 5% of its advertising placement budget specifically to Ontario's francophone media if the campaign targets Ontario exclusively and 15% of the budget if the campaign targets all of Canada's francophone communities.

The digital shift is a challenge for our media. Although it is essential, it provides few financial benefits. In our white paper, we recommend that the government provide bridge funding equivalent to one half-time salary for all private and not-for-profit community media organizations so they can offer up-to-date and enriched digital content.

We also support the joint request of the Association de la presse francophone du Québec, the Quebec Community Groups Network, and the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, which are also seeking Canadian government investments in digital infrastructure and training development.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage wants to bring creative Canada into the digital era. The Canadian government could help the country achieve that objective by making these kinds of investments.

• (1540)

Lastly, AFO and its members would like the Government of Canada to establish an assistance fund to enable our media not just to survive, but also to flourish. We recommend that, in the next three months, an assistance fund be created and managed by and for the French Canadian and English Quebec communities.

We would like to see a minimum annual investment of \$1.85 million to assist the private and not-for-profit minority language community media.

We also believe it is essential that the Government of Canada establish a permanent official language community media program backed by annual funding of approximately \$4 million.

By establishing that program, the Government of Canada could implement a recommendation we make in our white paper, that a financial support program be put in place providing 10 years of guaranteed funding with a possibility of renewal for our community radio stations.

For existing radio stations, the fund would make available an annual operating budget of \$50,000 indexed annually to the cost of living. For emerging radio projects, it would provide \$100,000 in the start-up year and \$50,000 in subsequent years.

Franco-Ontarian and minority language media organizations provide an essential service to our community. That service is not a luxury item. If advertising intended for Canada's francophone communities is placed with social and regional media, if they are assisted in their transition to digital technology, and if assistance funding is established, they will be provided with a solid base from which to enhance the vitality of our communities and to contribute to the social debate.

Thank you for your attention.

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

We will continue with Marie Hélène Eddie.

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie (Doctoral student in Sociology, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for inviting me today to take part in this consultation, which I consider very important. I am a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Ottawa. My work focuses on the official language communities, the minority media in Canada, and minorities and the way they use the media to mobilize their members.

As you all know, the media today are going through a period of major change. Both the anglophone and francophone media are encountering challenges, a difficult situation that is exacerbated in the minority communities. Minority media organizations face special challenges in addition to those dogging all other media. The readership and audiences of minority newspapers and radio stations are smaller and scattered over larger areas. The minority media generally have fewer means and less resources than other media. The communities they attempt to support need assistance to ensure their vitality and development. Lastly, in some regions, these outlets are some of the few remaining independent media organizations in a context in which media concentration is increasingly common and widespread.

Like David against Goliath, they are fighting to maintain their position in the media landscape. These media outlets play very important and specific roles in their communities. I will mention three of those roles, and I consider the third particularly important in the context of our discussion.

First, they represent those communities, enabling them to see themselves and to remember that they exist and live in French and that the French fact is real.

Second—and this is related to the first role—they bring those communities together. They unite individuals who, in many cases, live in remote geographic areas but who, thanks to their media, are aware they are part of a community. When they get up in the morning, thousands or tens of thousands of individuals scan the front page of their newspaper at the same time, with their coffee in hand, or else turn on the radio and know that thousands or tens of thousands of other people are doing the same thing at the same time. In other words, for people who live in a region where their culture is in the minority, a newspaper or radio station is one way to maintain a strong connection with their community, with "their world" and their culture.

Third, we tend to forget that community media organizations, like the major media, play the role of democratic watchdogs. As you know, democracy is based on three formal powers: the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. We should also remember that the media form the fourth power. In the minority community, that fourth power focuses on the French fact. These media organizations are the watchdogs of francophones' rights.

The francophone media are thus an instrument of combat for these groups. To borrow an image or a metaphor, they are the community's ears and voice. Their ears because minorities learn that their rights have been abused by reading the newspaper or listening to the radio. Their voice because, when minorities decide to organize and mobilize, they do so through the media. They circulate information in the community through radio and newspapers. They also speak to government through their media organizations, drawing the attention of politicians and dialoguing with government representatives. If these organizations are not strong, the community's ability to mobilize is limited.

I have no specific solutions to suggest, since others are in a better position to do so, including the media organizations themselves. However, I would like to offer some guidelines for framing the solutions that are ultimately selected, some concepts or ideas that should guide that process.

The first is compliance with Canada's Official Languages Act. We know that it is important in a democracy to have strong and independent media organizations. In a bilingual country in which one of the two linguistic communities is in the minority, the role of the francophone media is doubly important. Those organizations help ensure that the country's bilingual identity is respected and the Official Languages Act complied with.

The solutions ultimately selected must comply specifically with Part VII of the Official Languages Act. If the government wants to enhance the vitality and support the development of the francophone minority communities, it must ensure those communities do not lose their ability to mobilize and take action. It must remember that these media organizations are the instruments of those communities. They are their ears and voice.

• (1545)

The Official Languages Act also entails a duty of consultation. The government must clearly ensure that the solutions it adopts genuinely reflect the communities' needs by consulting the media, as you are doing.

The second guideline is adherence to the concept of genuine equality. The concept of genuine equality was highlighted in the CALDECH affair. Formal equality means that two groups must be given exactly the same thing, whereas genuine equality entails giving each of those two groups something different in order to achieve genuine equality between them.

• (1550)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): "Equal" does not mean "equitable".

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: The fact that community media play such a specific role and the fact that their situation is also unique are two reasons why they cannot be evaluated in the same way as the performance of other media would be evaluated. We must take their specific situation into consideration and come up with solutions that help address their specific challenges.

The third idea I would like to discuss is the idea of a comparative analysis between languages. When a new media policy or program is introduced, we must consider whether the effects of that policy or program are the same for the francophone as for the anglophone

media or whether they are the same for the majority as for the minority media.

For example, the Canada Periodical Fund, which provided financial assistance to media organizations in the form of a Canada Post discount on newspaper delivery, has changed its criteria in recent years to include other periodicals that are not necessarily delivered by Canada Post.

Basically, we could say it is good to subsidize the media to a greater degree, but this change has had a specific negatively differentiating effect on minority francophone periodicals. If a comparative analysis had been conducted based on language, it might have been apparent that this measure benefited a number of English-language Quebec publications to the detriment of francophone minority publications that urgently needed funding, a need that could not be compared to those of the other media. Theoretically, of course, it is not a bad thing to fund other media, but this is an example of a policy that has a significant negatively differentiated impact on minority media.

One government idea circulated widely in the media was that businesses with non-viable business models should not be supported. I think that idea refers to the digital shift. In the community media world, everyone agrees that media organizations must move to digital technology, and everyone has begun that shift, although not everyone is able to do so successfully for the simple reason that very few organizations make money based on that model and do not necessarily have the resources to do so.

Furthermore, in many instances, the readership in minority communities does not follow the shift. Either readers are older or uninterested in digital technology or else they live in places where high-speed Internet access is unavailable.

The decision to fund media organizations that have previously demonstrated their ability to make a successful shift to the Internet would not reflect the specific situation of those media organizations and would not be consistent with the Official Languages Act or the principle of genuine equality. Instead of funding media that have already been successful in making that shift, we should instead fund all minority media businesses so they can do the same. This would help ensure that the government enhances the vitality and supports the development of francophone minority communities in a manner consistent with the Official Languages Act.

Here's another example. When the government decides to concentrate federal online advertising sales, in addition to the fact that it doesn't take into account the impact of its decision on the vitality of the media, it seems to overlook the fact that those media organizations actually reach populations. Consider the example of announcements made in recent years concerning the H1N1 flu. What group is at the greatest risk of catching that flu? Probably the elderly. People think they will advertise online because it will help them reach more people. You may indeed be reaching more people online—I don't know the figures—but you may not have reached the right population. Consequently, we must not forget that these community media organizations reach populations that we cannot simply disregard because they are not part of the majority.

I will stop there. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, both of you.

Now we will move on to questions and comments.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, everyone. We are pleased to have you here today.

First, I will go to Mrs. Eddie.

What exactly is the subject of your thesis?

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: My doctoral thesis concerns the way in which three groups—a francophone group, an indigenous group, and an anglophone group—managed to mobilize against shale gas in New Brunswick and how they used the media to do so.

My master's thesis was on the readers of *L'Acadie Nouvelle* and the role of newspapers in the minority communities.

• (1555)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: The digital shift and the media crisis are occurring across most of the western countries that have minority languages, such as Switzerland and Belgium, for example. That may be happening in eastern countries as well, but I'm not sure of it.

Can you tell us whether those two countries, Belgium and Switzerland, have specific programs in this area? What are they doing about the media crisis?

If that is the case, can you tell us what those two countries are doing about their francophone minority media? Do they have periodical assistance programs or funds?

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: I unfortunately don't know.

Generally speaking, many countries fund their media more than Canada does. In England, for example, public media are funded to a much greater degree than in Canada.

I unfortunately don't know what Belgium and Switzerland are doing.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: My next question will be for all three witnesses.

An additional \$600 million was allocated to Radio-Canada. Does that contribute directly or indirectly to the development of the francophone media outside Quebec?

Is this massive \$600 million reinvestment in Radio-Canada helping with the crisis the media are experiencing, the francophone newspapers and radio stations outside Quebec, not Radio-Canada stations, but the others?

Mr. Carol Jolin: I had a chance to speak with Radio-Canada officers Yvan Cloutier and Pierre Ouellette and to discuss what that entailed. They said it was having an enormous impact because it was helping them retain programs and consider new ones. Remember that Radio-Canada wanted to sever its relationship with Windsor at one point. This kind of investment helps guarantee that a place like Windsor will continue to do the job in its community. We had put other projects on ice, not to say in mothballs, because they no longer really believed in them. This major investment gave francophone

officers a second wind because it enabled them to move forward with a number of great initiatives. There was also the issue of modernization. That's what I discussed with Mr. Cloutier.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: You mentioned a \$1.85 million media assistance fund. Do you expect that fund to be included in the action plan, or is it completely separate?

Mr. Carol Jolin: That was in fact an emergency measure that we requested for the next three months.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Oh, I see.

You had a lot to say about federal government advertising placed with francophone newspapers in Ontario, for example. Has the provincial government placed advertising in the newspapers?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It has also reduced its purchases almost as significantly, in fact by about 75%. We make the same presentations to encourage the provincial government to place its advertising with francophone media organizations, since they rely on that revenue.

A few months ago, I was amused to read that the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* were talking about the cuts in advertising placed in the print media by both levels of government and how that put them in a difficult situation. If those two papers were in a difficult position, what does that mean for a small francophone weekly in a remote part of the province that publishes every week, every two weeks, or every month? The impact is enormous.

There is no more fat to cut right now, and media outlets have been down to the bone for some time. Several small media companies continue to operate thanks to the passionate people who work there and who want the francophone community to stay alive and vibrant.

Here's an example from our part of the province. About a year and a half ago, *L'Express d'Ottawa* shut down. A few months later, a francophile leader who had made a promise to his grandmother said he wanted to start up something in French.

• (1600)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's good.

Mr. Carol Jolin: He was very emotional at the first meeting. This evening, immediately following this meeting, I'm going to a wine and cheese event to mark the first anniversary of *L'Orléanais*, a weekly newspaper published in Orleans.

Francophones no longer had a newspaper after *L'Express* shut down.

The man I referred to earlier had just acquired the English-language weekly and included a French-language section in it every month. It's working out very well. He has a lot of community support, which was really necessary. It made no sense for people in the Ottawa area, particularly in Orleans, to lose a means of communicating with francophones from everywhere else.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you.

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

Mr. Arseneault, go ahead, please.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Messrs. Michaud and Jolin and Mrs. Eddie, thank you for being here and sharing your respective expertise with us.

Mrs. Eddie, like you, I come from northern New Brunswick. I know just how important the minority official language media is.

I would like to go back to one of your potential solutions. In a few words, can you explain to me what you mean when you say we should first comply with the Official Languages Act?

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: Since the government has an obligation under Part VII of the Official Languages Act to ensure that the policies and programs it puts in place are consistent with the idea of enhancing the vitality and supporting the development of the communities, I think we could argue that the media is a very important part of that vitality and development.

These guidelines and concepts are not all mutually exclusive. They work together. The concept of genuine equality and the idea of a comparative analysis based on the two languages help ensure that a policy that is put in place has no negative impact on the francophone community.

Mr. René Arseneault: In fact, based on Part VII and what you are telling us, the government has a continuing obligation to ensure that it enhances the vitality of the official language minority communities.

Is that how you understand Part VII?

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: Yes, that's how I understand it.

I'm not a lawyer, but I also think that the fact the Commissioner of Official Languages has looked into these matters suggests it is legitimate for us to consider them as well.

Mr. René Arseneault: I would like to go back to the concept of genuine equality to ensure I understood it correctly.

Government action has less impact on a major media organization in the majority community than on a media outlet in the minority community.

We hear the terms "asymmetrical action" and "asymmetrical funding" used precisely to describe this genuine equality. Is that what you mean?

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: Yes, that's consistent with what I mean.

We should not always give all groups the same thing. In certain instances, we should give one group more so that it can achieve genuine equality. All media organizations are currently experiencing problems. The idea of funding all media organizations is a good idea in theory. However, some organizations are in particularly difficult situations, and those are the organizations of the francophone minorities. Since we live in a bilingual country where bilingualism is part of the country's identity, and since we have the Official Languages Act, it is doubly important to fund those media organizations. Funding need not be symmetrical. In fact, it should be asymmetrical in this case.

Mr. Darrell Samson: "Equal" does not mean "equitable".

Mr. René Arseneault: In fact, your position is that the media forms an integral part of the very identity of the communities they represent.

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: My position is that, without community media, the communities lose their ability to act and mobilize. To my mind, they are really an integral part of the community.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Jolin or Mr. Michaud, I liked your presentation. Since you recommended an investment of 5% in Ontario, I wonder whether the investment in New Brunswick will be 10%.

Mr. Carol Jolin: I'll let New Brunswick speak for itself.

Mr. René Arseneault: That was a joke.

Other witnesses suggested a number of possible solutions to us on Monday. I found one of them very promising, and that was the idea of buying more advertising or of going back to where we used to be.

What do you think about a tax credit for information, for Canadian content?

• (1605)

Mr. Carol Jolin: That's one of the recommendations in our white paper. If a tax credit could be granted to the people, organizations, and businesses that advertise in French, that would be good. That's a recommendation on which we entirely agree. It would be one way to encourage organizations to advertise in French. We obviously compete with all English-language media outlets.

According to our white paper, which I have here—

Mr. Bryan Michaud (Policy Analyst, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario): Since I had given away all my French copies, Mr. Jolin received one in English. I apologize for that.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): I have two French copies.

Mr. Carol Jolin: We recommend that the tax credit for organizations that do business on the Internet be abolished. Here's the excerpt from the recommendation in question:

...collectively present a request for funding to develop an information campaign aimed at all francophone media to promote the tax credit for local advertising.

Obviously, we entirely agree with this recommendation. It's one way of raising funds for our media organizations.

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

Mr. René Arseneault: I still have four and a half minutes.

The Chair: No, four and a half minutes had elapsed, and the other minute and a half came afterward.

Mr. Choquette will continue.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I can summarize correctly, over a 10-year period, advertising placements declined by 78% for francophone newspapers and 73% for francophone community radio stations. That drop obviously has a direct impact. During that time, the Government of Canada tripled its advertising placements on the Internet, not the Internet of our community media organizations, but rather that of giants like Google and Facebook.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That costs it less money.

Mr. François Choquette: Mrs. Eddie, what you said is very important. You have to consider official languages when making spending decisions. People from FCFA, QCGN, and AFO talked about that. Official languages should be considered when making government decisions. The decision made about Netflix reveals a certain amount of spending unfairness. That, generally speaking, is why you are requesting a reinvestment.

Recommendation 1 in your white paper is that 15% of advertising spending target francophone media. You will eventually have to talk about Quebec anglophones as well. That's part of the budget. Is that the main recommendation? The present situation is not new. It's what we've seen for 10 years. You filed a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages saying that this made no sense. How does this recommendation respond to the report of the Commissioner of Official Images?

Mr. Carol Jolin: When our consultant was working on the white paper, he looked at the conditions in which all the organizations operated, the television stations and community radio stations. With those people, he discussed funding and what they would need in order to provide their services, make the digital shift, and do their jobs to ensure the vitality of the communities. It is all well and good to have a community radio station, but, if it is only hanging on by a thread and no one is providing secretarial support, and all that remains are a few hosts to sell advertising, perform hosting duties, and answer the telephone, it's hard to focus on what you have to do.

We need that to ensure the vitality of the communities. We want to improve the quality of the information we provide and to make it uniform everywhere. The community radio stations want to be able to work together on that.

The MICRO organization had to fire its secretary. The executive director cut her own hours and is now working out of her basement because the association can't even pay for a small office.

It is essential that we have efficient structures that help the francophone community remain vibrant. Every time a media outlet finds itself in difficulty or disappears, we have just taken another step toward assimilation.

• (1610)

I would add that three elements work together in a community: the school system, community organizations, and the media. Those three elements must be able to do so constantly in order to keep the community vibrant and informed. The schools organize all kinds of things, and community organizations do the same. Media organizations are thus essential because they pull everything together, make the community vibrant, and encourage it to participate.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Jolin.

Mrs. Eddie, you briefly discussed the announcement that there would not be any investment in media organizations that are not viable. In your view, that may not be the correct approach if we want to maintain the viability of the minority media. Can you clarify your thinking on that? This is an extremely important point because one position currently favours investment, but on the condition that media organizations go digital and are viable.

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: I understand why the government, like everyone else, wants to go digital. No one disagrees with that.

First of all, the idea of a digital shift can mean several things. All media organizations at least have a website, but they have to take an extra step to begin a genuine shift. Others are well engaged in the process, in particular *L'Acadie Nouvelle* and *Le Droit*, if I'm not mistaken. However, the model has apparently not proven profitable for them.

In my view, the current model is not viable for the media in general. I don't think there is a media organization in the world that has achieved a lot of success and made profits on the Internet. Media organizations in Canada generate revenue from their paper versions, partly as a result of advertising. The cost of online advertising is very different from that of advertising intended for paper versions.

Consequently, instead of deciding to invest in media organizations that have proven they can make go digital, let's provide the necessary support instead to all those that would like to do so.

We should also not put all minority community media organizations on the same footing as all other media. They perform very specific roles in those communities in addressing specific needs. Once again, the idea is to provide assistance—which may be asymmetrical—to help those organizations survive and thus contribute to the vitality of the minority communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

I will now turn the floor over to Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us. The information you are providing us is really very interesting.

Mrs. Eddie, earlier you said you were a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa and that your work focuses on the official language communities. You did not have much to say about situations concerning anglophones. We are talking a lot about those involving francophones, and rightly so, but I represent a community in the northern suburbs of Montreal that also has anglophones.

In my riding, there are probably 5,000 anglophones living in Deux-Montagnes and about 2,500 in Rosemère. There are also anglophones in Boisbriand and Laval. They aren't all in Montreal; they also live outside the city.

Can you tell us a little about them? Have you studied the situation of those anglophone communities with regard to local newspapers? I've learned from them that they're in a tough situation.

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: I haven't looked into that subject in particular, but I have seen some studies on the issue. The situations are in fact similar. The only real difference is that francophones are genuinely in the minority across Canada, whereas English Quebecers derive a certain strength from the fact that Canada is majority English.

I think the needs are very similar in a way because the broadcasters, Radio-Canada in particular, don't reach the anglophone or francophone communities living in the regions as much as one might think. That means it's up to the community radio stations and newspapers to play that role.

I am currently conducting a study on the content published in the English-language and French-language newspapers in the Atlantic provinces and the way they address issues such as bilingualism, linguistic duality, and French-language services. Radio-Canada clearly plays an essential role in the communities in those areas. However, I see that, in the Atlantic region, it is the little papers, such as *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, that constantly focus on those issues. I therefore think that the situation must be quite similar in Quebec in this regard. It should not be forgotten that the English-language community radio stations and newspapers also play a truly essential role in Quebec's rural regions.

• (1615)

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I believe that too because, unlike the communities in greater Montreal, those in the suburbs seem stifled. Like it or not, they do not exist. In fact, they exist solely thanks to the community newspapers and what is happening in those communities.

My next question is for Mr. Jolin.

Mr. Jolin, earlier you said that the government must invest in digital infrastructure and training. Can you tell us more precisely what you mean by those words?

Mr. Carol Jolin: We want to reach young people because we want them to get involved, but I get the impression it will be hard to interest them without cellphone apps. There is a loyal clientele for paper versions and radio broadcasts, and there is a youth clientele for anything that involves a cellphone. If we want to make this transition and actually bring young people on board, we have to go that route. From a community standpoint, we're talking about the digital shift, but many organizations still do not see it. They're still driving straight down the road. We know we have to make this transition. The intention and desire are there, but the resources needed to do it, the finances, expertise, and training, are not.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You're thinking about apps. I would like to address certain aspects of your white paper. Recommendation 27, which concerns monitoring, reads as follows:

It is recommended that a neutral Observatory, comprising a board of directors and a small team and funded by the Government of Canada via Canadian Heritage, be created to ensure audience/readership measurement and the monitoring of the reinstatement of government advertising.

That's consistent with what you're saying today. I imagine linguistic minorities are evolving in a way. Some people prefer paper versions, but, as you say, young people are evolving.

How can we adapt to this reality?

I would like you to talk to us about this recommendation.

Mr. Carol Jolin: We must adapt and have an idea about what's happening. Community radio stations, unlike others, cannot afford Numeris surveys. They are very expensive, and it is very hard to determine how well they work.

It's quite easy for a print media business to show its circulation numbers. For media organizations such as radio stations, however, it's hard to determine how many people listen to programs and how many are prepared to take part in them. An organization that conducts a kind of monitoring could give us a very clear idea of those numbers and provide arguments. Then we could argue that many people listen to the programs and that the community revolves around the radio station. It's important for us to be able to do the work we have to do and to do it well. There's also the issue of the shift. That does not happen in isolation.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: This week, on Tuesday to be precise, some people who came to meet with us spoke to us about tax credits. That was mainly in connection with Canadian content, with journalism.

How do you view that?

Mr. Carol Jolin: Canadian content is clearly included in communications.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: If we're talking about local media organizations, whether it be radio or other media, what comes to mind?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It's regional news.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I see.

Mr. Carol Jolin: There is provincial and international news and so on, but I think the primary mandate is to focus on the community. The community radio station I know best here in Ottawa is Unique FM. The news it provides is varied, but it's mainly news about the Outaouais.

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

Mr. Bryan Michaud: I would like to go back to Ms. Lapointe's second last question on polling firms. Even if a media business wanted to invest in a survey, which really costs a lot of money, that would not necessarily help it since those firms are not adapted to minority communities. The survey results might not be as accurate as they would be in another context.

• (1620)

The Chair: We will now begin the second round. Time is passing, and, since four people want to speak—Mr. Samson, Mrs. Boucher, Mr. Vandal, and Mr. Généreux—we will limit ourselves to three minutes of speaking time.

You have three-minutes, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Imagine, he's giving me three minutes! So I'll have to limit myself to a few points.

As you said earlier, "equal" does not mean "equitable". You cannot compare—we spoke the other day—survival in a majority setting with survival in a minority community. It's a major problem.

If the francophone community media outside Quebec and the anglophone media in Quebec disappeared, do you think we would be heading toward assimilation?

Mr. Carol Jolin: We would be headed straight for assimilation because we would lose the community connection. Every month, I tear the community activities page out of *L'Orléanais* and post it on the refrigerator. My sons consult it because they know that, if there is something that might interest them, that's where they'll find it.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You said something else that I find interesting.

You mentioned monitoring, surveys, and so on. You have to have data and an up-to-date picture. I would like to say "census", but the census is very complex with all its questions. I understand that Statistics Canada has other ways of gathering data than the census. We could establish a mechanism to gather data from certain key locations such as the media in order to understand the situation on the ground and determine whether we are heading toward assimilation. That's an interesting idea.

That being said, does the province allocate funding to assist the media? Could there be some joint federal-provincial funding? Has that previously been discussed?

Mr. Carol Jolin: As far as I know, there is no special media budget. We also speak with the provincial government to ensure that advertising will be restored in support of the francophone media. The province also has a responsibility for the quality of its francophone communities.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I can tell you that, if we had *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse* and the community radio station in Nova Scotia, we would not be heard across the province or the country because there would be no local francophone presence. Consequently, something is to be done.

I enjoyed your presentation today.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Please go ahead, Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good evening.

Thank you for being here.

I'm going to ask you two very brief questions, and I want you to speak frankly.

I'm going to start with the words, "Erase everything and start over." What should we tell the leaders of all the political parties to make them understand that minority francophones and anglophones need to be heard? What does it take for them to shift into action?

That's a tough question, but I want you to be frank.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Are you asking me what we want from leaders?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

Mr. Carol Jolin: I think an elected representative has a responsibility for official languages. To shoulder that responsibility he or she must address the vitality and development of the communities, and that depends on funding.

We talked about genuine equality. I see three little figures standing behind a fence. They are of three different sizes, each six inches shorter than the figure to its left. Only one can look over the fence and see the baseball game being played on the other side. Genuine equality means providing stools of different sizes so everybody can watch the game.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's a very good example.

I live in a rural area. I know that the local media organizations in my region are very important. I'm not in the minority; all of us back home are francophone. I come from Quebec, and there are no anglophones in my region.

I have sat on the Official languages committee for a very long time. I wonder what we could have done. In the past, budget cuts were sometimes made under both the Conservatives and the Liberals, and I won't say which ones made them.

This is 2018, and new media are emerging. The government gave Radio-Canada \$675 million. The party is of little importance here. Could we have given Radio-Canada less and the official language minority communities more? We could have given Radio-Canada \$400 million and the rest to the official language minority communities to ensure the media organizations of those communities got their share of the pie.

• (1625)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: In exchange for poorer coverage.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's right.

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: I wouldn't take money away from Radio-Canada. Ideally, some should be given to the community media organizations because they play quite different roles. I don't think one can replace the other.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's what I want to know.

Mrs. Marie Hélène Eddie: Radio-Canada obviously plays an essential role in the minority communities and should represent the francophone communities even more. Ideally, it should have more resources to play that role more effectively. It does not have the resources it needs to spread into the regions. Even when it's in Acadie, it's in Moncton. It doesn't have the resources to be everywhere.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Boucher.

Mr. Vandal, go ahead, please.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Messrs. Jolin and Michaud.

You represent daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and community radio and television stations. Are the communities facing the same challenges?

Mr. Carol Jolin: The challenges are the same. Advertising has been cut everywhere. Radio-Canada may be in a better position thanks to the reinvestments that have been made. And that appears to be guaranteed. Before that, however, we were always at risk of losing some French-language services in the province.

The situation regarding community radio stations, weeklies, and community television stations is also difficult from one place to the next. For example, Rogers cancelled a lot of channels last fall.

I'm making the connection with an application that we submitted to Radio-Canada and that it approved. We asked it to direct 15% of the allocated budget to regional francophone stations outside Quebec. We want a budget allocated to that. Radio-Canada's officers agree with us.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Is it for community radio?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It's for all the services combined.

Mr. Bryan Michaud: It's actually Radio-Canada.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Yes, it's Radio-Canada.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What is the percentage now?

Mr. Carol Jolin: You want to know what percentage of the envelope goes outside Quebec?

Mr. Bryan Michaud: We should ask Radio-Canada, but I think it used to be about 10% or 12%.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I have not had the chance to read your white paper yet. However, if we went to the good old days when we used to give money to the media for advertising to allow them to shift to digital, would everything be solved?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It would certainly be a step in the right direction, if we could count on the revenue to be able to do the job. Most organizations had to cut positions and reduce their hours. Take the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada. The shows are largely pre-recorded. We then are able to produce a small block of local content with the help of the means at our disposal. It is important to have this local flavour we are looking for. We cannot provide only a lot of music content. As long as it's francophone music, it's great, but then there's little room for news and public affairs. However, those are important. As we mentioned, when people are aware of activities and informed about politics and their rights, the communities are affected.

I have been working for the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario for 15 months and I have given almost 300 interviews in that time. This means that the people in the community and all sorts of media are following us. They want to know what is happening and they want to communicate with other people in their community. In so doing, the community is much more involved.

Earlier, we talked about our media disappearing. If our media disappear, how will the communities be able to develop, grow and follow political news that concern them?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Généreux is last to speak.

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

Mr. Jolin, you mentioned an amount just now. Did you say \$1.1 million?

Mr. Bryan Michaud: It is \$1.8 million.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: How will the \$1.8 million be shared? Actually, in the minority settings in Canada, what percentage do the private and community organizations represent?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It is almost one-third, one-third and one-third.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So it's one-third for the private sector and one-third for the community sector. What about the other one-third? Is it not one half to the private sector and the other half to the community sector?

Mr. Carol Jolin: No.

I will let my colleague give you the figures.

Mr. Bryan Michaud: I will answer, considering that I was mostly the one who held the discussions.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Could you answer quickly, please?

Mr. Bryan Michaud: Yes. It is almost one-third for francophone newspapers, one-third for francophone radio stations and one-third for anglophone media.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

We agree that an amount of \$1.8 million is not earth-shattering. We are not talking about billions, but \$1.8 million.

Do you know whether anyone in the government has heard your request for the funding? Has the minister already heard you?

• (1630)

Mr. Carol Jolin: We made presentations. Just last week, we met with Ms. Joly.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That's good.

I agree that the media in minority settings must receive help, in whatever shape or form. I have no problem with that.

Recently, the government decided not to tax Netflix, or the distributors actually. Since the governments' advertising revenue goes to these companies outside the country, they do not want to tax them for the services they provide to all Canadians. For you, the opposite is true; when you sell advertising, you have to tax your clients.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You want additional money. At the same time, the government decides not to tax those in which it invests money that it used to give you. The money you are requesting could come from taxing those companies. That would actually help you.

We are talking about additional expenditures, and you are not the only ones asking the government for money, of course. However, you make no recommendation about the revenue. Would it be appropriate to recommend going and collecting revenue from those companies? Does your white paper have a recommendation for getting additional revenue somewhere?

Mr. Carol Jolin: Certainly, recommendations need to head in that direction. The white paper had already appeared when the whole Netflix story came out.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So you would agree that the government should force the customers of those companies—the companies are not the ones being taxed, but the customers—to also be taxed for the services they receive. Basically, there is no reason why those people are not taxed either.

Mr. Carol Jolin: We are still waiting for the spinoffs. From the amount of money that will be invested, how much will go to things being done in French?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: In closing, I will say that the BBC taxes every household with a TV \$261 a year. The people therefore have to pay for the television signal that, in Canada, is subsidized much more significantly than Radio-Canada.

So there's a fundamental difference because there is a specific tax on the service, to ensure that revenue goes to that company.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your comments, Mr. Généreux.

My thanks to the witnesses for enlightening the committee. Thank you very much for coming to meet with us today.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Thank you for having us.

The Chair: On everyone's behalf, many thanks.

We are now going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: If you don't mind, we are going to continue the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are continuing our study of the review of literacy and numeracy support programs in Canada.

We are pleased to receive Monika Bertrand, Director General, Employment Program Policy and Design Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development, as well as Éric Perreault, Manager, Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

Ms. Bertrand, Mr. Perreault, welcome to the committee.

We will continue, as we always do, by giving you 10 minutes for your presentation. We will then go around the table so that the members of the committee can ask you questions and make comments.

Ms. Bertrand, the floor is yours.

• (1640)

Ms. Monika Bertrand (Director General, Employment Program Policy and Design Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development): Good afternoon and thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My colleague and I are pleased today to have the privilege of addressing the Standing Committee on Official Languages, especially on such an important topic as the development of skills in official language minority communities (OLMCs).

Joining me is Éric Perreault, the department expert in terms of programming, literacy and essential skills, and also in commitment with our partners, including OLMCs. In addition, as you can see from the department's commitment in the 2013-2018 Roadmap, the vitality of official language minority communities is a very important issue.

Today, I would like to tell you a little about our department's commitment to the roadmap, but especially the commitment of our branch, the importance of essential skills for the job market and the vitality of OLMCs, the strategic changes over the years, and the next steps.

The department has invested about \$80 million over five years to support three initiatives that are part of the roadmap: the Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, the Social Partnership Initiative in OLMCs—in which we are interested a little more today, since it is our expertise—and the Literacy and Essential Skills Initiative in OLMCs.

Literacy and essential skills programs seek to replicate good practices for skills upgrading. We are also investing in innovative approaches to improve the quality of employment and training supports. We do not provide services. Under the most recent roadmap, the activities funded under this initiative focus on workplace essential skills.

I would like to talk about the importance of the link between employment and essential skills. Most Canadians, two-thirds, work and participate in the labour force. They are working or want to work. According to the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, the only program that assesses the skill level of individuals, employed Canadians have higher literacy skills than those who are unemployed, and they also achieve better results than Canadians who are not part of the labour force.

We talk a lot about level 2. Level 2 literacy is the minimum desirable for learning and working. There is therefore a very strong correlation between employment and skill levels.

For Canadians in the labour force, it is also known that those with higher essential skills perform better in the labour market. We know that people with a higher essential skills are more successful in finding a job. Their incomes are higher. We also know that some jobs are requiring increasingly higher essential skills. However, workers with low skill levels are at greater risk of losing their jobs and being unemployed in the long term. They also have difficulty gaining new skills to transition to other jobs.

Literacy and essential skills are important issues for all Canadians but they are even more so in the context of OLMCs. Those living in official language minority communities tend not to obtain as good results as other Canadians.

At national level, depending on their geography, almost 52% of francophones outside Quebec have level 2 or below in literacy.

However, there are also regional differences. Some differences are clearer than others. In New Brunswick, for example, there are significant differences compared to the national level. Factors such as age, gender and level of education in general increase the gap between the two language groups.

•(1645)

The Government of Canada's commitment under the roadmap is intended to strengthen the vitality of official language minority communities. I think that we can all agree that economic development is a key element in developing and maintaining that vitality. Efforts to stimulate the economy and take advantage of economic possibilities depend in large part on the ability to attract employers and develop entrepreneurship. The starting point in that equation is access to and development of qualified labour. It is also the quality of life for that community and its members. The vitality is enhanced if the members of that community are employed and have adequate income and good education.

For us, literacy and skills are essential for employment, and to support the development of training programs and essential skills. Those skills form the basis of what employers need in order to prosper and grow.

[English]

Over the past years, governments have been placing more and more emphasis on the delivery of results. As part of this increased focus on results, government in general, including Employment and Social Development, has moved numerous programs away from core funding towards project-based funding.

We did that in 2014. We decided to move from core funding to project-based funding, which allows for a broader range of organizations to be given consideration for funding. It improves transparency, because obviously you have to apply for funding. As well, you don't blindly give funds to organizations on an ongoing basis.

Then there's the aspect of reporting on results. When we do project-based funding, we very clearly outline the expectations in agreements. We outline the expected results. We have performance measurement indicators in our agreements, and there's always results reporting.

The elimination of core funding was part of a much broader Government of Canada approach in terms of results and delivery, and was not targeted specifically to any one organization. Of course, when we ended core funding, there was a complaint, an important complaint, launched with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The complaint was that ESDC did not address the literacy needs of OLMCs by failing to recognize the realities and challenges specific to OLMCs and how they differ from those of official language majority communities. The final report of the OCOL was received in October.

•(1650)

ESDC agrees with the recommendations. The recommendations were to reassess its direction and eligibility criteria for literacy and essential skills funding to better take into consideration the specific needs and priorities of OLMCs in this area, and to assess the consequences of eliminating the core funding for RESDAC and its provincial and territorial network and to take appropriate measures to mitigate any negative impact.

We have in the context of this report, but also in the context of our regular evaluation findings.... Of course, this is a very important

report, but we always continuously evaluate our programs. Our most recent evaluation said that, with respect to our literacy and essential skills programs, the federal role is very important, there is a need for these types of programs, and that our project results are successful but that more can be done.

More can be done and more must be done. We have already started by working with the University of Ottawa in our engagement. We have asked the research chairs in Canadian francophonie at the University of Ottawa to identify the literacy and essential skills needs of adults living in OLMCs. The final report is expected soon.

We are working with RESDAC. They are leading the *impact collectif* project. A presentation was made.

We are engaging with RESDAC and other OLMC stakeholders to exchange information in our respective research initiatives.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Bertrand, let us try to keep a little time for the committee members.

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Okay.

The Chair: Personally, I would like to have heard you speak more about literacy and perhaps a little less about essential skills.

I do not want to set the tone for my colleagues' questions and comments, so let us immediately move to Mr. Généreux.

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

Thank you, Mr. Perreault and Ms. Bertrand.

Ms. Bertrand, in 2014, did you receive a political directive? If not, did the department decide to make the change and move to project-based funding instead of core funding? You can answer yes or no. Was it a political directive or not? If it was, I will live with the answer. It is not a problem.

[English]

Ms. Monika Bertrand: I think in general there has been an effort to focus on results and delivery. I cannot tell you if it's a political or departmental decision, because I wasn't around at that time. In terms of the focus on results, I think it's sort of a general desire from, I suppose, politicians as well as bureaucrats.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: The desire of the minister was to have results. If I understand correctly, what you just said is that RESDAC and all the other ones, because they're not the only ones that were cut at that time.... Didn't they spend the money correctly? What was the problem with those organizations?

[Translation]

Mr. Éric Perreault (Manager, Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Department of Employment and Social Development): If I may, I will make a kind of general comment.

With core funding—and I am not singling out any organization in particular—it is generally much more difficult to express concrete results than when you fund by project.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What is the difference?

Mr. Éric Perreault: RESDAC's role often involved sharing information and mobilization. It is often more difficult, especially in terms of quantitative results, to say, for example, that this cost such and such an amount, gave such and such a result, and trained so many people. However, it is much easier to do so when you work by project.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Since RESDAC is a network, it does not provide services; its members do. You say that you were not able to assess all the results obtained by RESDAC members.

Were there no quantitative and qualitative measures to see the results achieved with the money you spent?

● (1655)

Mr. Éric Perreault: We had some measures, but they were much more qualitative than quantitative because of the nature of the activities. I am saying, above all, that when you invest money in projects, it's much easier to present the results.

At that time, having to choose between the two types of funding may have had an impact when the time came to make decisions.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Perreault, were you there in 2014?

Ms. Bertrand said that she was not there.

Mr. Éric Perreault: I was at the department, but not at the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: As Ms. Bertrand said, you think those programs are very important for minority communities. They help to improve literacy and train people so that they can enter the job market, start a business, and so on.

The documents I received refer to roadmaps. There is the one for 2013-2018, and the previous one for 2008-2013. So we have been working with roadmaps for 10 years.

Can you distinguish between funds that have been allocated under core funding and those that go directly to projects?

Can you give us quantitative results that would allow us to see the difference between the two? Is there any evidence of that?

Mr. Éric Perreault: I do not have specific quantitative data on that. In general, we can identify the number of Canadians who have been trained under our program, or the number of organizations that have provided essential skills training.

This sort of thing was much more difficult to achieve when we provided core funding. My goal is not to criticize the latter. Core funding had some merit, but it was much harder to break down.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Other departments and agencies still provide core funding. In terms of the funding you have provided or the money you have paid to various organizations left and right, am I to understand that other departments are not able to provide quantitative results either, with respect to the money they receive?

Mr. Éric Perreault: I cannot comment on what other departments do, but what I mean—

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You know that various departments provide core funding to other organizations.

That did not work in your case, so how could it be done elsewhere? Is there a difference?

Ms. Bertrand, if I understand correctly, the department is reviewing its position regarding RESDAC. Is this the case?

[English]

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Consistent with what the department is embarking on, as I said, we agree with the recommendations. One of the complaints was about the department not having consulted or engaged with the community when the decision was taken. Going forward, our commitment is to actually have some engagement. We have an ongoing engagement with RESDAC, but in March, for example, we are also going to have a very targeted consultation with OLMC representative organizations. It's not just RESDAC; there are of course others, and we need to hear their voices. There will be a report that will be made public. Based on thorough consultations and engagement, we will take our decision going forward.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

It is Paul Lefebvre's turn again.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today.

Ms. Bertrand, you just said that other organizations were doing the kind of work done by RESDAC. Last week, representatives from the network told us that it no longer has anyone working there other than volunteers. Could you tell me who is doing RESDAC's work right now?

Mr. Éric Perreault: Actually, when we say that other groups are doing the same work as RESDAC, that is not entirely accurate.

RESDAC was probably quite unique in its niche, as a national organization serving its members first and foremost. What we are saying is that there are a number of organizations across the country that provide literacy development services.

● (1700)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, but they do not provide those services to members of official language minority communities.

Mr. Éric Perreault: In each province, there are still some organizations that provide services in those communities.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Is there a direct link between your office and all those provincial agencies?

Mr. Éric Perreault: They are not always provincial agencies.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Actually, I meant organizations.

Mr. Éric Perreault: There are charities. We are consulting with them all to determine the best way to invest in this area.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: In your opinion, do we need RESDAC?

Mr. Éric Perreault: In fact, I look forward to the consultations, to hear what communities have to say about this.

In the past, we had made decisions that, in the commissioner's view, did not sufficiently take into account what the communities said. So we intend to listen to them before taking a position.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: My understanding is that, in 2014, the decision was to change the core funding for project funding. Suddenly, RESDAC's projects are no longer funded. RESDAC therefore no longer has funding and no longer exists or is, at the very least, in a more than precarious situation. It is waiting to see what will happen in the next few months.

As you just said, you did not hold consultations and you changed the formula. If you are the federal officials in charge of literacy and of developing literacy in our communities, have you also identified a major need for literacy?

If you decided to no longer fund RESDAC, I do not understand what the strategy was to fill that gap. The others, which Ms. Bertrand mentioned, did not exist in the official languages. What was your plan?

Mr. Éric Perreault: If I may, I will clarify what is meant by others. In fact, we replaced core funding with project funding. In our tenders, we have focused on a number of projects that—

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The challenge with project funding is the following. You say that an organization must submit a funding application every time it has a new project. When an organization only does one thing, it is clear that it will never be able to survive. You have called on organizations that have various ways to raise funds. Those organizations are able to survive. They apply somewhere for a program and they receive money, and then they can go somewhere else to get more money. That's how they survive.

RESDAC focuses only on literacy in official language minority communities. Now that you provide project-based funding, after RESDAC submits two projects, you tell them they are doing the same thing. This is its very purpose. I do not understand how we can justify and support this type of strategy being applied to this type of organization.

Are you coming to the same conclusion as me?

Mr. Éric Perreault: What we have to take into account is that there have been some consultations. As Ms. Bertrand was saying earlier, the core funding did not end for RESDAC only. At the time, 23 organizations were working on essential skills and literacy. According to the strategy, funds allocated to those organizations would be made available through competitive bidding.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: How many organizations are left? I think there were 23.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That's what he just said.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: There were 23 organizations. Do they still exist?

Mr. Éric Perreault: Some organizations have closed their doors.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Why?

Mr. Éric Perreault: One of the reasons is that the funding stopped, yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Of the 23 organizations, how many have closed? Two, three or four?

Mr. Éric Perreault: Unfortunately, I cannot tell you.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay.

Ms. Bertrand, what I especially take from your comments is that we can do more. That's what you said. At least you are open. However, I am seriously questioning your department's philosophy or strategy to stop funding and reassess it afterwards. Usually, this is done while the organization is providing services, not when the services no longer exist.

The former executive director of RESDAC now holds another job. RESDAC must then start from scratch and hire another person. The problem with project funding is that we hire people to work on a project, but we have to start from scratch once the project ends.

In my opinion, that strategy does not ensure continuity. For minority communities, the worst thing is that there is no continuity and the approval and support are broken. You have to know it, understand the reality of minority communities and become their champions in different sectors. I think it's really unfortunate. In my opinion, your strategy is absurd, and I hope it will be possible to find a much better approach.

I would like to raise one last thing—

• (1705)

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

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I only used five minutes and 21 seconds of my speaking time.

The Chair: You spoke for five minutes and 50 seconds.

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

Mr. François Choquette: I would just like to say that Mr. Lefebvre's comments make a lot of sense and reflect my thoughts.

I do not know whether you can answer my question, but you should be able to. How many official language minority organizations do you currently fund?

Mr. Éric Perreault: We probably have about 15 projects.

Mr. François Choquette: So it works by projects.

Mr. Éric Perreault: Yes, it works by projects.

Mr. François Choquette: Are those projects by and for official language minority communities?

Mr. Éric Perreault: First, I want to make it clear that those 15 projects are not necessarily in official language minority communities.

Mr. François Choquette: That's why I specified it in my question.

Mr. Éric Perreault: Right now, I think two of those projects are under way.

Mr. François Choquette: They are made by and for official language minority communities.

Mr. Éric Perreault: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

I know you may not have been there, but in general, when you think about financial changes, and before you make funding decisions, do you care about the impact that it can have on official language minority communities?

Mr. Éric Perreault: The answer is yes, with regard to the decisions made in 2014.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay, but do you generally do that?

Mr. Éric Perreault: Yes, we generally look at that, because we still have a number of target populations.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay. I was wondering because you mentioned it yourself.

The officials from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages said that you had not complied with part VII of the Official Languages Act. They gave you three months to implement two recommendations. As I understand it, you accepted the two recommendations, which is very good, and you are starting to implement them.

Can you please tell us in detail how you intend to successfully implement the two recommendations from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages?

Mr. Éric Perreault: This is what we are doing right now. We have a consultation planned for mid-March. We are preparing for this consultation together with a committee from RESDAC, and with people who are not necessarily from RESDAC. We are not imposing the style of consultation; we are deciding that in cooperation with these groups.

We plan to meet for two days in mid-March specifically to set the course for the future together and, in the process, reevaluate the policies pertaining to OLMCs and the funding criteria.

We will discuss the negative impact that eliminating core funding may have had on RESDAC and try to determine together how to move forward.

Mr. François Choquette: Clearly, you will be talking about core funding.

The Official Languages Action Plan is on its way. Your role was not necessarily related to the old Action Plan. If memory serves me well, literacy was not included in the old Action Plan. Is that true?

Mr. Éric Perreault: We were part of that action plan, but the intent was primarily to work horizontally with our other partners. Right now, the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, or OLES, is planning to work with the communities, whether that is under the action plan or not.

Mr. François Choquette: Are you currently in touch with Canadian Heritage officials on a daily basis to find out how things will work under the new Action Plan?

You will be holding a consultation in mid-March. You said that literacy was included in the Action Plan. Are you asking whether

funding will be forthcoming? Have you decided to operate on the basis of projects as opposed to core funding? Are you talking with Canadian Heritage or Treasury Board to find out what is going on?

Mr. Éric Perreault: In the case of the OLES, the program has its own funding, so it does not necessarily depend on the Action Plan.

Mr. François Choquette: It is independent of the Action Plan, very well.

Mr. Éric Perreault: So we can make progress on literacy and basic skills in conjunction with the other programs, but not necessarily...

Mr. François Choquette: I have heard that you have money left over at the end of every year. So there is money in the pot, ready to be invested in official language minority communities. How is it that you know that you have money left over to invest in the communities and yet you are still waiting for the outcome of other consultations? I understand there is a certain process to be followed.

• (1710)

Mr. Éric Perreault: Yes, of course. There are processes to be followed.

Mr. François Choquette: It is not a question of money, though, since you have the money.

Mr. Éric Perreault: No, it is not a lack of funds that is stopping us.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay. It is important though to understand where things stand.

You seem to be on the right path. What are your timelines? There will be consultations in March. What will be happening until then?

[*English*]

Ms. Monika Bertrand: In the meantime, of course, we have our projects that are currently running. We also work by call for proposal or targeted solicitation. We will continuously provide funding for organizations to do innovative work, or to test innovative approaches for literacy and essential skills, to help scale up and introduce good approaches that have good results in other communities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Ms. Bertrand, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I do not have much time left.

You will be consulting the communities and RESDAC. When will you come back to the committee to tell us about the proposals you come up with? Will it be in June?

[*English*]

Ms. Monika Bertrand: With the engagement in March, I would say that it would be the summer. It takes time, as we have internal processes, of course, to develop options and ideas and briefings, etc., but I would think that by the summer we would probably have a better idea of the next steps.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

According to my figures, from 2003 to 2014, the department spent \$1.5 million every year on literacy in our official language minority communities. Of that amount, do you know how much went to RESDAC and how much went to other organizations?

Mr. Éric Perreault: When RESDAC had core funding, it received approximately \$600,000 per year. It also received funding per project and the rest could be allocated to other organizations in the linguistic communities.

Mr. Dan Vandal: That was part of the \$1.5 million in funding.

In 2015, that amount fell to \$1 million. What happened to the remaining \$500,000?

Mr. Éric Perreault: The \$1.5 million was actually an average. Expenditures varied from year to year, depending on the stage of the projects or the time required for their approval. It is not always like clockwork, unfortunately.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Based on the information you presented, it was just noted that official language minority communities have greater needs than other communities.

People are calling me at home, in Saint-Boniface, asking what is going on and why they have to let their employees go. I do not have an answer for them.

What is your answer?

Mr. Éric Perreault: We follow the department's internal process for project approval. We go as fast as we can.

Mr. Dan Vandal: There are still no figures for 2016. Do you have an idea of what you spent? Is it less than \$1 million?

Mr. Éric Perreault: It is hard to say because the figures have not yet been compiled, but I think it will be about \$1 million. That remains to be seen.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I will give Mr. Samson the rest of my speaking time.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will take a bit of time to—

The Chair: You have the rest of Mr. Vandal's time.

Mr. Darrell Samson: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: Three and a half minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: This is not directed at you personally, but I am extremely disappointed by what I have heard today. It worries me tremendously. I will ask my questions quickly because I do not have much time. Please answer yes or no.

You said that funding by project is more effective than core funding.

Mr. Éric Perreault: It is easier to structure.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay.

You said there was some coordination with RESDAC, but now there is none. There are just two projects. Does that mean that people are working more in silos now?

• (1715)

Mr. Éric Perreault: That might be the other side of the coin.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That is a very good answer.

There were 21 organizations and now there are just two projects. What are those two projects?

Mr. Éric Perreault: One is with the Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes, or coalition for adult training in Ontario, and the other is with the organization AIDE, which evaluates the effect of essential skills on newcomers to francophone communities.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Do you think we help people in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta and British Columbia? No, but the 21 organizations help them directly.

This question has already been asked, but I want to confirm the answer. What strategy or lens do you use to ensure that minority communities benefit from your projects?

Mr. Éric Perreault: Our strategy will be to hold a very productive consultation in March.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In March?

Mr. Éric Perreault: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The 21 organizations no longer exist and there are only two projects left. The communities have been weakened. The organizations have been watered down or eliminated and now you will be holding a consultation. Unbelievable!

I am not accusing you personally. Perhaps someone else made the decisions, but right now it is a disaster on the ground. RESDAC is one of the organizations that was involved in coordination and supporting the vitality and viability of minority communities. The communities have been weakened by these losses.

Have minority communities, in Manitoba or elsewhere, blossomed as a result of this change or have they been weakened?

[English]

Ms. Monika Bertrand: These are very good questions. The one thing I would add is that we are focusing on our very small federal pot of money. I think that what we cannot forget is that the biggest amount is being invested by provinces and territories in literacy and essential skills. In our work with provinces and territories, there's strong collaboration, and we're investing almost \$3 billion in provincial and territorial programs. Over the next six years, we will be investing about \$20 billion in provincial and territorial programs and services, so we have a certain responsibility as the federal government, certainly, but through our projects we are also working with provinces and territories.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That sounds good.

[Translation]

Yet the money is allocated to anglophone organizations that do not necessarily redistribute it to the francophone communities. That is the problem.

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

Ms. Lapointe is next.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Perreault, you said earlier that you work horizontally with other partners.

Who are those partners?

Mr. Éric Perreault: First, it is within the department itself. There are programs other than the OLES that work with official language minority communities. There is the enabling fund for official language minority communities, for instance, which focuses more on economic development.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You work horizontally within your department or with other departments?

Mr. Éric Perreault: To begin, it is within our department. It is easier to coordinate our approaches that way. We also hold discussions—at this stage, it is primarily discussions—with officials from Canadian Heritage. We have also had discussions with Industry Canada.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Is it the officials from Canadian Heritage who ask you to support the vitality of linguistic minorities?

Mr. Éric Perreault: No.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: So it is really an initiative by your department. Very good.

Ms. Bertrand, you said earlier that you are not responsible for delivering services. You also said that the territories and provinces do a lot of the work.

Does that mean that services are delivered by the linguistic minority's provincial education system?

For my part, I represent a riding in the Montreal area where the linguistic minority is English-speaking. How can we promote literacy among anglophones and make sure that people get level 2? You mentioned that earlier.

[*English*]

Ms. Monika Bertrand: In terms of the provincial programs, the money that we are providing to provinces and territories is through transfer agreements, so the programs are provincial programs, and the provincial programs don't fall under the Official Languages Act.

Having said that, in each agreement that we have, there are official language provisions, and the official language provisions in these agreements stipulate that a province or a territory will, in an area of significant demand, provide services in the chosen language of the client. We meet with the provinces and territories twice a year, and we ask these questions: "Do you know what the needs of your official language minority communities are? How are you addressing those needs of the official language minority communities?"

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You are talking about the provinces, but how do you specifically evaluate the minority's language skills?

I imagine you draw on the census, where respondents indicate the level of education they have completed, grade school or high school, for instance.

How do you evaluate competency levels?

Mr. Éric Perreault: That is actually done through the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, a skills assessment program designed by the OECD.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Will this program be able to evaluate skills right across Canada?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Yes, definitely.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Does that also include linguistic minorities?

Mr. Éric Perreault: That might not have been done in all the provinces—and I am sticking my neck out here—but I think certain provinces have been targeted for the evaluation of linguistic communities.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I read earlier in your document that the needs are different in Quebec. Yet we went to the Eastern Townships and found that, in the large regions where the linguistic minorities were very separate from one another, people tended not to go to school as long and were facing problems similar to those you described earlier. The less education they had, the harder it was for them to keep a job. The problems were all related to that. You said that this does not apply in Quebec, but I can tell you, based on what we saw and heard in the Eastern Townships, that that is not the case. I think therefore that that statement should be revised.

Mr. Éric Perreault: If I may, I would say that the reality in Quebec is somewhat different, but the situation of the linguistic minority community must not be overlooked. I agree with you.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay.

Mr. Samson, would you like to ask another question?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, but my turn is coming up so you may continue.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Sylvie Boucher now has the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Hello.

I was very pleased that my colleague Bernard Généreux asked you earlier whether the change in policy in 2014 had been the result of a political order. That would have really put mud on our face since the Conservative Party was in power at the time.

So I will ask you the question again, but with reference to 2018. Was the change at RESDAC the result of a political order or did officials at Employment and Social Development Canada decide to take a different approach?

[English]

Ms. Monika Bertrand: We're generally strengthening performance measurement and reporting of results across all our programs. The reason we are doing that is analytical. We are in the business of continuously improving our programs and services to Canadians, and the only way you can do that is when you measure and report on results, and when you collect the right data and you're able to analyze it. If you do not have that, you cannot improve your programs and services.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You just said that is what you wanted. Yet we heard from the witnesses from RESDAC that this decision did not help minority communities whatsoever. Instead, it caused disorganization among francophones in small municipalities outside Quebec. I do not know if the same is true for the anglophone communities in Quebec because we have not heard a lot about them. So I will focus on francophones outside Quebec.

This is 2018. The members of our committee are from the Liberals, Conservatives and NDP. We could certainly play political games, but we are not doing that because our official language minority communities are extremely important to us all.

There is something I am trying to understand. When the government provided core funding to organizations, that helped certain linguistic minorities in remote communities. If funding is now provided on a per project basis, how can you evaluate the results of two different projects? How can you distinguish between the two?

• (1725)

Mr. Éric Perreault: In terms of projects—perhaps I am oversimplifying in my analysis—, let me tell you about a current project that will include essential skills in a tourism program. At the end of the program or project, we will be able to say that a certain number of people were trained. Based on this experience, we will be able to say whether it was a success, as we hope, and whether the model should be used again. We will be able to say that the partners and the employers got involved in the project.

This is more specific than an organization that did good mobilization work. I am not saying that mobilization work is not necessary, but it is easier to talk about the results of a project because they are more concrete, more tangible.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You have discussions with your minister, Minister Duclos, if I am not mistaken. Do you discuss the official languages—

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It is Minister Hajdu.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It is Minister Hajdu? Sorry, I got them mixed up. Thank you for clarifying that.

Do you have discussions with the minister about the direction she wants to take on the official languages?

On this committee, we all defend the official languages. I myself am a member of the opposition. My colleagues in the governing party also fight for the official languages.

Do you have that kind of discussion to determine what approach to take with the current minister?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Yes. Our minister is certainly aware of the upcoming consultations. I think she is anxious to hear the results of the consultations and to make some decisions when the time comes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Samson, you have three minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I will use the three minutes very effectively.

You put your finger on the problem. You said it is because the agreements are between the federal government and the various provinces, and that the provinces distribute the funding as they see fit. In the past, the federal government never wanted to hold the provinces to account. It is unbelievable. The federal government gives money to the provinces and recognizes their jurisdiction over education but, since it is federal money, it should be able to ascertain roughly how it will be spent. Any provinces that refuse to provide that information should be denied funding. That has never happened in the past.

Perhaps your department should do this now. I can tell you that Minister Duclos just did this with regard to funding for early childhood initiatives. A bilateral agreement was signed with the provinces, which stipulates that part of the funding must go to the community. When there was talk of adding this provision 12 months ago, some people said it was not possible and that they could not encroach on provincial jurisdiction. We can encroach on their jurisdiction. It has been done.

Let me tell you a little story. Nova Scotia has a preschool resource centre, the Centre provincial de ressources préscolaires. Roughly translated, here is what the centre wrote in a letter to me:

For over 20 years, the Centre provincial de ressources préscolaires (CPRPS) in Nova Scotia has been trying to obtain the funding that is provided to various family resource centres right across Canada [...] since 1993.

In 2012, the centre filed a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Commissioner found that \$2.1 million had been spent in the communities, but that nothing had gone to the minority communities. In his investigation report, the Commissioner noted:

Of the millions of dollars spent since the creation of CAPC, francophones have received very little: very little services, and very little aid to support their vitality and development. By offering early childhood services in English only, it is likely that young Francophones and their families face an increased risk of assimilation.

It was in 2012 when the Commissioner made that comment. This is serious. You wanted a consultation, and you got a good one here today. Take what you heard and share it with the minister. Once again, I am not blaming you personally at all, but you are following the rules of the game.

Our role is to make sure that the rules of the game are equal, because “equal” does not mean “fair”. One of the previous witnesses used an example that I really liked. There are three people of different heights. The one who is six feet tall can see a baseball game over a fence that is five and half feet high. The person who is five feet tall cannot see it, nor can the person who is three feet tall. In the interest of equality, we have to provide benches so they can all see.

• (1730)

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

I would like to say a few things before we wrap up.

We do not talk about literacy very much, but we do talk about essential skills, among other things.

I know that, years ago, the number of illiterate people in Canada was very high. I would like to know the current rate of illiteracy in Canada. You may send the information to our clerk.

Roughly speaking, what percentage of people in Canada are illiterate, and what is the percentage in minority communities? I would like to be able to compare the two rates of illiteracy.

Moreover, the bells are ringing for a vote. So I will ask your permission to continue the meeting for a few more minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No, I have to be somewhere.

The Chair: Yes, but the committee could continue for a few minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No—

The Chair: We would need about five more minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We have to go vote. The buses do not come by here very often.

The Chair: Yes, but we still have half an hour.

Is that okay?

Okay, we will continue then.

So I would like to know the rate of illiteracy in Canada as a whole. As I recall, the numbers were very high. I would also like to compare the national illiteracy rate with the rate in our official language minority communities.

Finally, I would also ask you to provide the committee with the bilateral agreements you have with the provinces and the territories—you mentioned those agreements earlier—and of course the provinces' and territories' action plans so we can finish our study. Okay?

Please send the documents to our clerk. In the meantime, thank you very much for your testimony today.

Mr. Choquette, would you like to add something?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I would like to make a suggestion to the committee.

In conversation earlier, I learned that we still do not have any witnesses for our meeting next Monday. It would be helpful to hear from anglophones in Quebec with regard to literacy and essential care. I do not know if it is too late.

The Chair: No, Mr. Choquette, it is not too late.

Talk to the clerk about it and we'll see what kind of group we can invite.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you once again.

The committee is adjourned. We will meet again next Monday.

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