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## Standing Committee on Official Languages

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**Wednesday, March 21, 2018**



**Chair**

**The Honourable Denis Paradis**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study on the issues related to the enumeration of rights-holders under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Joining us today from Statistics Canada, we have Jane Badets, assistant chief statistician, Social, Health and Labour Statistics, and Jean-Pierre Corbeil, assistant director, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division.

Ms. Badets and Mr. Corbeil, we will listen to you for about ten minutes. I don't know if you want to share your speaking time or how you would like to proceed. Then we will have questions and comments from around the table.

Ms. Badets, go ahead.

**Ms. Jane Badets (Assistant Chief Statistician, Social, Health and Labour Statistics, Statistics Canada):** Thank you.

Good afternoon. I will make my presentation in French and English.

I would first like to thank you for inviting Statistics Canada to appear today to talk about the progress in our work on the enumeration of rights-holders.

As we said at our meeting on October 3, 2017, Statistics Canada is fully committed to applying all its science and expertise to adequately and quickly respond to the need to enumerate the children of rights-holder parents under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Consequently, Statistics Canada specifically created an advisory committee on language statistics. The list of members of this new committee was sent to you in December.

[*English*]

Given the many issues surrounding language statistics in Canada, the mandate of Statistics Canada's new advisory committee on language statistics is much broader than the enumeration of rights holders. However, since this issue is a priority, most of the committee's first meeting held at Statistics Canada's offices for the entire day of January 25 was dedicated to it.

In addition to the permanent committee members who were selected based on very specific skills and expertise, Statistics Canada

invited three other experts as guests, who shared their expertise and knowledge of the issue to ensure that all needs regarding the enumeration of rights holders are considered.

[*Translation*]

That first meeting of the advisory committee on language statistics, which was also attended by several Statistics Canada employees, was very productive and extremely useful for our agency and all participants. A number of suggestions, comments and proposals were discussed and debated. The presentations and discussions focused most notably on the processes and timelines for the 2021 census content consultation and touched on considerations of a technical, scientific and methodological nature regarding any changes to the content and wording of questions in the census. Each of the potential questions that aim to enumerate rights-holders was then discussed and debated amongst the various experts, not only in terms of their legal and methodological implications, but also with regards to the collection strategy.

[*English*]

As a follow-up to that advisory committee meeting, Statistics Canada analyzed and took account of the comments and suggestions provided by the committee members in order to act quickly and work on questions to test in the 2021 census qualitative tests, which will be conducted in the spring of 2018.

As agreed and in reference to the October 3, 2017, motion by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, a draft of the questions to be used in qualitative tests will be sent to you before March 31.

[*Translation*]

Moreover, Statistics Canada methodologists have been consulted on the enumeration of rights-holders as part of the 2021 census. A working group made up of experienced analysts and methodologists has recently been set up to ensure that the best statistical methods are used to enumerate this population in the 2021 census or, in the long term, through alternative means.

As you can see, Statistics Canada has been very proactive in this important issue, and it will continue to take its role and responsibilities very seriously. Thank you very much for your attention.

Jean-Pierre Corbeil and I will be pleased to answer your questions on the topic.

Thank you.

[English]

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

[Translation]

We will now move on to questions and comments.

Mr. Généreux, go ahead.

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

I would like to thank Ms. Badets and Mr. Corbeil for being here today.

First of all, what was the committee's influence on the decision to make this reflection. I know the answer, but I want to hear you say it.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil (Assistant Director, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada):** In fact, the committee did not influence Statistics Canada's decision to move forward. Statistics Canada was already moving forward thanks to the support, suggestions and advice of the committee.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** The process was already under way.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Yes.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Right. I thought we had an influence. I wanted to pat myself on the back, but it doesn't matter.

**Some hon. members:** Ha, ha!

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** The expert committee that was set up has surely found potential pitfalls. I imagine that these experts have made assumptions to arrive at the right questions.

Are there minutes of the expert committee meeting? If so, could the committee know what was said? If not, could you tell us what potential pitfalls you might encounter?

I think everyone means well and has good intentions. We want to recognize as many rights-holders as possible, but for that, we must ask the right questions. There were some potential pitfalls, but we shouldn't all fall into the same trap. I imagine the experts have made suggestions to that effect.

• (1540)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Before this expert committee met, we submitted questions. Given the large number of people, it would have been difficult to come up with such questions at the time of the meeting. The objective was to present the various complexities of enumerating the rights-holders. Obviously, the questions submitted were debated and discussed.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Have the questions been submitted for consideration or could they be included directly on the questionnaire?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** They were questions that could be included on the questionnaire, and we need to agree on the wording.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** No pun intended, but you have already gone straight to the heart of the question.

[English]

You went directly to the point of whatever the question would be.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** That was the main goal, since we knew it was a complex issue. We wanted the best exchanges possible. Several discussions did not go in the same direction. Perceptions were different depending on the region where someone lives in the country or according to skills. We had very enlightened opinions from legal experts. It had to be discussed.

The situation in Quebec is different from the one outside Quebec, given section 23 of the Charter of the French Language. All sorts of things were discussed.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I want to make sure I understand.

The committee didn't meet to decide on the relevance of having new questions on the questionnaire, but to determine what the questions would be. The committee didn't consider the relevance of questions for enumerating rights-holders.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** That's correct.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** It was already established. It is important that we know it.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** It had already been recognized that it was relevant. The goal was to find the best methodology.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Corbeil, I don't know if you remember, but the first time we met, last year, it wasn't as clear as that on your side. Or that was the feeling I had anyway.

That's why I wanted to make you say earlier that the committee had an influence. I remember your telling us that, to add questions to a form, you had to remove others to prevent it from being too lengthy or from having too many questions.

Does this mean that you made a deliberate choice to remove some questions? That's not what I understood last time, but perhaps I misunderstood.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** No. We discussed it with members of the advisory committee. The reason we put together a solid team of methodologists and skilled analysts from Statistics Canada was just to examine alternative methods.

In 2016, close to 70% of the population completed the electronic questionnaire. This raises questions about the use of the electronic or paper questionnaire. Are there new ways to use the electronic questionnaire in a way that doesn't burden the respondents? All these issues were discussed.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Right.

I hope my colleagues will pursue the matter of the electronic questionnaire further because it raises several other questions. This potentially opens the door to going much further on the issue of rights-holders. I don't know if the advisory committee has evaluated the possibility of looking for even more specialized questions.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We proposed a number of questions for enumeration. I think we came to a pretty clear understanding of which questions we should at least try to test.

Of course, following the advice of the members of the advisory committee, these questions have been changed. There have been discussions about whether we should take this or that direction. I think the questions we will be sending you by March 31, as agreed, actually reflect the status of the situation as a result of the discussions with the members of the advisory committee.

• (1545)

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

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

I would like to thank you for being with us today. I appreciate it.

As my colleague said earlier, we were frankly anxious to know whether, today, you still doubted the relevance of properly enumerating rights-holders under section 23. From what I understand, you don't doubt it anymore.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I can just say that I have never doubted the relevance of doing so. The key issue was determining how to do it.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Right.

Formerly, we didn't cover all of section 23; it was missing an element.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** There is no doubt about that.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** So you're saying that you are working hard.

Earlier, you talked about challenges and complexity. You said that you would send us the questions by March 31. Do you think you'll manage to meet this deadline?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** You gave us a table of the content determination process. First, there is the consultation with users of census data. This has already been done. Then, you are planning a test. So you are going to give us the questions and then do a qualitative test. After that, in the summer of 2019, there will be a test of the content. Finally, there will be a presentation to cabinet in the fall of 2019 and the winter of 2020. That's a bit late.

I imagine you know that there will be elections in October 2019. So this can't wait until 2019.

I'm simply saying that the schedule you're giving us today doesn't work. It's clear. You have to arrange it so that, before the session, meaning one year from now, we know exactly where we are going.

I have the floor, but I have the impression that we all agree on this. It is imperative that we have the questions next year, in the spring of 2019. I'm really sorry, but despite the good job you've done, this doesn't work. It must move faster than that.

The next census is in 2021. You can't push back the deadline. We were already talking about it in 1990. We can't push it back for the rights-holders, whether it's the francophones or the anglophones I represent. We all experience challenges and complexity.

Could you tell me how you will arrive at a solution next year, and not in the fall of 2019?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** The schedule that was proposed to you is proven. It has been discussed and has been part of every census consultation since it was done. It's important to understand that there is a series of qualitative tests in the spring, that is, we meet with people to make sure they understand the questions, so that we can establish whether the questions pose a problem. Subsequently, having no choice, we must test these questions with a group of Canadians. As you can imagine, it's not just the matter of language in the census: a lot of questions have to be tested. So it's an extremely complex process that applies to the whole of Canadian society.

I can assure you that the schedule provided to you is fully in line with the standards and is based on scientific and methodological considerations. I understand your concerns about the government, but that won't change the operations of Statistics Canada, which is determined to enumerate the rights-holders in the best way in the 2021 census.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** If I understand properly, this schedule is carved in stone, and we can't change it.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We can't change it just because there are political considerations, for instance. It must be based on proven and sound methodology. I can also say that an army of scientists are working on that. We talked about complexity, and it's very real. It isn't enough to say that we all experience it.

Statistics Canada has brought together members of an advisory committee who are experts on this subject, and there has been a lot of disagreement on some aspects. Imagine people who aren't familiar with this topic and who are asked our questions. Where should we put these questions? What path do we need to take to ensure that Canadians understand? We need to test all these questions, including the other questions that relate to the ethnocultural field, work, and so on.

All that to say, this is part of the collection of census information. It's not just the rights-holders that we have to enumerate as part of this process.

• (1550)

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I understand very well that it isn't just the rights-holders that you have to enumerate. Since the 2016 census was published, believe me, I look at the data quite often to find out who is in my riding and who lives there.

However, here at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we may be more concerned with official languages and rights-holders.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I agree with you.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I understand everything about demographics. For example, you ask if a household has zero, one, two, three or four children.

However, with respect to official languages, the census has implications for the education of future generations. My friend Darrell Samson did not receive an education in French when he was young, and Mr. Lefebvre, who is not here, was among the first to manage to obtain education in French. Statistics Canada has a vital role to play because, as a result of the census, school boards have the opportunity to get the money related to the number of students.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I fully agree with all of that, Ms. Lapointe.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I'm confident you understand this.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Our government is very present. You're talking about science, well, it invests in science, and all the measures that are taken must be based on science.

Following the last budget, Statistics Canada received additional money. So presenting us with a schedule that I don't think meets our expectations is not for me.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

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

Thank you for being here again today.

I think we'll invite you back. We need a lot of updates, especially since this process will take place in several stages.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** You like us.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Yes, we like you. We are going to keep you very close.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We feel it.

**Some hon. members:** Ha, ha!

**Mr. François Choquette:** I have a few questions for you.

You completed the pan-Canadian consultation on February 9. I don't remember if we received the list of people, of experts or organizations met. Is it relevant that we keep an eye on this?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** In fact, people across Canada have provided details, particularly in the area of languages. You can imagine that several people mentioned aspects concerning rights-holders, which isn't a surprise. They all pointed to the interest and relevance of gathering information.

I think that at the meetings of our advisory committee, at Statistics Canada, we got quite a good representation. The members of this committee were some of the best experts on the subject in Canada. So there is an interesting balance between the public collection of opinions and wishes. There is a lot on all the subjects.

**Mr. François Choquette:** What exactly are you going to send us by March 31?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We're going to send you the wording of the questions—a draft of the questions—that will be used for the qualitative census tests.

A number of Canadians have specific characteristics that we can identify. We're going to meet with them, have them complete the questionnaire and see if they have any questions to ask, if they understand and if there are any issues. We are very familiar with the issue of schooling and attending immersion programs rather than a minority school. In Quebec, many students attend English school, but they receive their education in French because it is part of an immersion program. However, when they reach high school, they go to English school.

So all these considerations will be checked and tested with a sample of Canadians.

**Mr. François Choquette:** So it's a question with various facets.

**Ms. Jane Badets:** These are several questions.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Is that several suggested questions or a question with many parts?

It is not the same thing. You might say that you have four questions to test to see which is the best, but that is not what you want to do. You have one question, which you have chosen as the best draft. As I understand it, there are various parts that will allow us to identify all the rights holders. That is what I understand. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** It is a question module. This module seeks to identify all the required elements in order to enumerate rights holders pursuant section 23, and its various subsections and paragraphs.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Of course, that will be in the short form.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** As I said, that is being discussed by the methodology specialists because you know that Statistics Canada has to assess—and this is an important consideration—the response burden for the whole population. All I can say right now is that this is all being discussed.

**Mr. François Choquette:** It is something important to know. If the questions are in the long form, they are not for everyone. If they are instead in the short form, they are for everyone. Is that correct?

• (1555)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** The short form is administered to 75% of the population and the long form to 25% of the population.

**Mr. François Choquette:** If the questions about rights holders are in the long form only, we will have a problem. We will be missing data. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** No.

I mean, you are partly right. It depends on methodological considerations.

That is part of Statistics Canada's methodological and scientific work. You know, that is like saying that all the data about the labour market, language of work, questions about housing conditions, education, at this point in the census, are not representative of what is happening in Canada...

**Mr. François Choquette:** I understand, Mr. Corbeil.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** ...because the questions are in the long form only. You have to realize that a lot of very robust and long-standing aspects of methodology are designed to ensure that the results gathered are representative of Canadian society, regardless of whether the short-form or long-form census is used.

**Mr. François Choquette:** When will you decide which form those questions will be in?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We are working on that right now.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Which means?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We are discussing it. That does not in any way impede the qualitative and quantitative testing of the census. That is something different.

**Mr. François Choquette:** We would like to have a clear answer and the accompanying rationale. I am not saying I am completely right, I am not a statistics expert, far from it, but I have some questions.

The enumeration of rights holders is a serious problem and we know that there are problems in all provinces with a francophone minority, so I do not need to repeat all the arguments. If the information is gathered from just 25% of the population, having figures and a methodology is all well and good, but it worries me.

So I would like to know why that might be included in the long-form census only and not in the short form. I need clarification in this regard and I don't know if I am the only one among my colleagues who would like that.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** No.

**Mr. François Choquette:** In any case, I am very worried about it.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** All I can say to reassure you is that no decisions are made lightly. The decisions made will be based on demonstrated proof that the selected option is the most viable and the most effective.

**Mr. François Choquette:** I would like you to come back to the committee before you make the decision. I think this is important to our committee. I would like to know when you can do that, but not in 2019, of course. We need to know before the elections.

**The Chair:** Mr. René Arseneault has the floor.

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

Welcome once again to Mr. Corbeil and Ms. Badets. I will not ask you to repeat what you said, but I feel reassured today, Mr. Corbeil. Perhaps I got the wrong impression, but each time you have appeared before the committee—this is not your first time here—, I have asked you the same question, three times on one occasion.

Do you think it will be ready in time for 2021? You have never been able to confirm that. Perhaps I am dreaming. Today you are saying that there is no problem for the next census, that we will be ready as regards enumeration, of course.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Correct me if I am wrong, but if you read my testimony before this committee, I did not say that we would not be ready in 2021. I even said that the complexity of the issue will not prevent us from being ready.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** What I asked you, Mr. Corbeil, is not whether it will not be ready. I asked you whether we will be ready.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We are making every effort to do that.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** That is the kind of answer I have heard before.

I am asking you if we will be ready for the 2021 census. That is what I want to know. Yes or no?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I don't have a crystal ball so all I can say is that we have an army of people working on it. I don't know

what else I can say to convince you that we truly intend to do it. There are some things beyond our control, but I guarantee that we will do whatever we can to get there. I am committed to that.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** We have lost generations of francophones in schools, Mr. Corbeil. You are the messenger and we do not want to shoot the messenger, but the answer from Statistics Canada today still does not reassure me. When I leave the room today, I will still be very discouraged by what I have heard.

Tell me briefly what catastrophe there could be in 2021 that would prevent you from including questions to fully enumerate rights holders? What could happen?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Problems do arise. For example, we have tested questions in the past. At one point, we realized that people were having problems understanding the questions.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** How many meetings have you had since September 2017? How many times has your group of analysts, scientists, and statisticians met to discuss just the issue of rights holders?

● (1600)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We have been meeting about twice a week for the past three months.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** On this topic?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** On this topic.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Who are the experts at those meetings who do not work for Statistics Canada?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** You asked me a question about Statistics Canada.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I understood your answer. Now I would like to know if you consult outside experts.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Statistics Canada has selected 15 individuals who represent all of Canadian society and who are among the top experts on the topic. The comments and suggestions we have received have been extremely relevant and extremely helpful. With that input, we think we will be able to put forward something robust.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Please reassure me and tell me that I misunderstood because, in a letter that I read, it said that you have not had a single meeting with outside experts since we have been discussing this. Did I understand that correctly?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** The committee's first meeting was on January 25.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Exactly, but you were supposed to start last November, weren't you?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We mentioned November, but as you know, it is not easy getting everyone to the table.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I heard that there was just one expert who spoke about the enumeration of rights holders at the meeting in January.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I don't know what you mean by "expert".

**Mr. René Arseneault:** All the other people were there to talk about other questions in the form.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** No, that is not true.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** That is not true? Okay, thank you.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We have spent roughly five hours with 15 people around the table talking exclusively about rights holders.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I understand your schedule and I heard what you said. I understand that it is complex. We are not in your shoes and you are the experts.

In your determination process, is there some way to separate the issue for the official languages committee? We would like to see much quicker progress, strictly on the census questions related to enumeration.

Can Statistics Canada do that?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We can send you a draft of the questions. You have to remember, however, that it is up to Statistics Canada to determine the content. We cannot make exceptions for one part of the questionnaire over another. We have no choice. It is a matter of consistency.

With regard to methodology, Statistics Canada has the prerogative, under the Statistics Act, to choose the best way of conducting its census. I can assure you that the issue of rights holders is no exception.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Except that, in terms of finding the best way of enumerating rights holders, Statistics Canada has been doing things wrong for a generation; that is a fact. We need you to reassure us.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I do not know if Statistics Canada has been doing things wrong. All I can say is that there was clear pressure in 2006 for Statistics Canada to conduct a study of the vitality of official language minority communities, and thus to enumerate rights holders. Statistics Canada cannot decide to conduct studies on all subjects, even if it is an extremely important subject. There has to be the will to do it.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

If I understood our colleague Mr. Choquette's remarks correctly, 25% of the population will get the long-form census, versus 75% for the short form, and you do not yet know if the questions for the enumeration of rights holders will be in the long form or the short form. Is that right? Why not include them in both?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** That is in fact something we are discussing. As I said earlier, the burden on respondents also has to be considered. There are general statistics, the law of large numbers, and so forth. For decades we have been able to demonstrate that we can get better results using one questionnaire or another. That is part of our prerogative regarding methodology.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Thank you.

Do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** You may ask one last question.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Ms. Badets, you are the chief statistician. There is some catching up to do as regards schools in minority language communities. In your opinion, why not put the enumeration question in both forms? I know you are talking about it, but why not just go ahead and do it?

**Ms. Jane Badets:** I will answer in English.

[*English*]

**Mr. René Arseneault:** No problem. You can speak in English.

**Ms. Jane Badets:** We are in the process right now of determining which questions to ask on this subject, so we are looking at the methodology as well. This is part of the discussions that we will have. We will be doing qualitative testing, and then we do quantitative testing. It's the normal process we use for all censuses.

So we cannot determine that at this point. We have to do the testing in order to know the best place to put these questions.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Samson is next.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I am usually accused of giving long preambles and not asking enough questions. This time I will ask some questions, but I would like the answers to be brief.

I have to say that I was expecting to get the questions today, but you said they will be available on March 31. I was not here the first time you appeared before the committee.

When I did my master's, in 1984, I examined the whole issue of Acadian schools. Everyone clearly agreed that the number of rights holders is the justification for creating francophone classes and schools. Yet we have never taken the necessary steps to determine the real number of rights holders, and that really upset me.

I have three very specific questions.

The deadline for obtaining the questions that will be included in the census can be met, unless there is a catastrophe, such as a world war, that prevents you from getting the work done.

From a financial point of view, there is no problem since you have enough money to do it. Is money a problem or not?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** If we need money, we will get it.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

You said the deadline is not a problem, unless there is a catastrophe.



Can you publicly confirm that please?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** What I can say is that we have a deadline and our goal is to meet it.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** You will meet it unless there is a catastrophe.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Yes, unless there is a catastrophe.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay, thank you.

As we said, the cost is not a problem.

Let's talk about space now. Is there enough space in the questionnaire? This is not going to change the world. It was noted earlier that there might not be enough space because there are a lot of questions and that the whole thing would have to be reviewed.

Is there enough space to add questions?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I cannot say because that is subject to analyses, testing, and so forth. That is up to our methodology specialists. We have to look at all of that. That is why we have to know where to put the questions and how to ask them. As you know, the census forms are very detailed.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay, but you are scaring me a bit, just as you scared my colleague from New Brunswick.

You are scaring me when you say that space is still an issue for Statistics Canada.

After all the analyses, discussions, and work that has been done, you think that adding questions is the best way of getting data pertaining to subsection 23(1) and paragraph 23(3)a. Is that what all the information you have received in the past year and a half tells you?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** All I would say is that we are continuing to examine long-term alternative methods. As you know, there is tremendous change in censuses around the world. All I am saying is that, in order to meet the 2021 deadline, we had no other choice than to examine the census process in order to test those questions.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I really like your answer.

Personally, when things evolve, I do not like to see losses. I would rather build. If there are other methodologies, I suspect they would be added to the future questionnaire. It is okay for now.

Am I correct in saying that, typically, all the questions included in the short form are automatically included in the long form?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Yes, all the language-related questions in the short form are also in the long form.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

That means that 100% of respondents will be asked those questions.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** It means that 100% of respondents will answer the questions in the short form.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

So there is a chance that my 75-year-old uncle will be able to do it.

**Voices:** Ha, ha!

It is important because he will ask me.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** All the population does not answer all the questions in the long-form census, which is much more exhaustive and which is why it is called the long-form census.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** No, but it is an option.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Right now, it is not an option. Otherwise there would be no short form.

In terms of rights holders, we are certainly looking at both options.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** If I understand correctly, you do not think this will negatively impact data consistency since it was not there in the past. Do you also agree on that? Adding new questions that will provide a foundation—for the first time and 36 years late—is not a problem. There will be a foundation to build on and evolve.

• (1610)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** That is why we are doing qualitative and quantitative testing. If the population understands the questions properly, both in a small sample and in quantitative testing, with a much larger sample...

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** That was not really my question.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We will have initial data that is scientific and robust right from the start, if we make sure that...

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I understand, but the fact that those questions were not there before is not a problem.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** No, absolutely not.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** You have twenty seconds left.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** In that case, I would just ask you to continue your work. We hope you succeed, because the minority population has suffered for a very long time. They have not had access to francophone schools and have not had the opportunity to develop. The communities and the people are assimilated. We are counting on you to help Canadians with our country's linguistic duality.

Thank you.

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

Over to you, Ms. Boucher.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC):** Hello, Mr. Corbeil and Ms. Badets.

For my part, I have to say that I would have liked to hear more. In particular, I do not want to sugarcoat things. For as long as the Standing Committee on Official Languages has been preparing reports on linguistic minorities, I cannot believe that, in 2018, you still do not understand.

That being said, as someone who hates statistics, I am anxious for Statistics Canada to start speaking in human terms. We are more than just numbers. Rights holders are more than just numbers. They are French-Canadians right across the country and they have rights.

I am really tired of hearing about figures only. Rights holders are human beings who have suffered from the lack of schools. You just have to look around—the committee has just returned from a trip—to see that people are struggling every day. It is not possible that, in 2018, you have not had the time to consider the situation.

Statistics Canada wears a lot of other hats. There a lot of other subjects, but they are not all as important as the two founding peoples. In 2018, we should not even be having this conversation. That is what makes me angry, Mr. Corbeil.

In your view, we are just figures—and I have nothing against that. Behind those figures, however, are human beings, human beings who have the right to simple questions. Show us those questions and we will see if we understand them. There are people here who come from minority communities. For my part, I am from Quebec. We are more than just numbers, we are human beings, and I want you to treat us and treat rights holders as human beings.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages has been producing annual reports for years. In the past, I was part of the government, a parliamentary secretary. We issued a number of reports. If you do not read them, that is a problem. We put our heart and soul into our work here.

What I am asking you today is to provide the questions on March 31. We will understand them and we will try to help you. We are here to help you. We are here to defend linguistic minorities. Please stop treating us as numbers. When you talk to us that way, I do not feel involved. I am working on issues other than rights holders. The black hole in my riding can still be traced to statistics.

I don't know how things work at Statistics Canada. Behind the numbers, are there human beings who understand the problems we have had for much more than two or three years? I have been in federal politics for 10 years and we have been talking about this the whole time. In the past 10 years, surely you have come up with some numbers somewhere. This is not the first time we have asked you this. You said you did a study of rights holders in 2006. So you do have something to work from.

Why is it so complicated today to talk about issues that are so essential to people in remote regions and minority communities? With all the time we have spent talking about this, I do not want to wait until 2020. It startled me earlier when I saw that because this is not the first time we have talked about this. If it had been the first time, I would not have said anything, but we have been talking about it for 10 years. You must have some figures.

•(1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Boucher.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

**Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

In the report, I read that there had been a meeting with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, in October or November.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Yes, we have had a few meetings and discussions with the FCFA on various topics.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** What came out of those meetings? Is the FCFA taking part in this initiative?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Absolutely. The FCFA has designated someone to be part of our advisory committee. We are discussing this with the people from the FCFA.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Are there members of minorities on your advisory committee, someone representing the anglophone minority in Quebec, for instance? Are those people represented on the advisory committee?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Absolutely. We have Stephen Thompson, the director of strategic policy, research, and public affairs for the Quebec Community Newspapers Association. We also have Eva Ludvig, an education expert, and Jack Jedwab, who is also from Quebec.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** You had six minutes, but now you have just five left.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** From your answer to Mr. Samson's questions, I conclude that the greatest risk in this whole process pertains to the placement of the questions, which could be a problem.

Can you elaborate on this risk and on how we can address it?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** As I said before, you have to understand that where the question module is placed in the questionnaire often has an impact on the answers given to subsequent questions. For instance, information about education is followed by information about the workplace and various aspects of employment.

What we have to verify is the extent to which the place of the questions might destroy comparability with the information we have gathered over the years with regard to education and employment. So we have to make sure that any new questions that are introduced do not destroy comparability, because that can happen. When questions are added, there is a risk that people will switch off and stop answering subsequent questions in the other modules.

When we conduct qualitative and quantitative testing, we can play with the placement of those questions to ensure consistency and that it is logical and can be understood by respondents.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Would you like to continue, Mr. Samson?

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Yes, I have a few more questions, thank you.

I asked you earlier whether the language-related questions in the short form will be included in the long form. You said they will. Personally, I would rather see them in the short form so that 100% of people answer them. If the questions are added as planned, will they be in the short form? That would guarantee that they will also be in the long form.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I hear your question loud and clear. My answer is that we cannot do things purely according to preferences. We have to have scientific certainty that we will obtain the strongest data possible. That is why we will use the best methods possible.

As I told Mr. Choquette earlier, we will be able to demonstrate the most effective approach in order to enumerate this population as accurately as possible.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I am not a scientist, but I see some problems with that.

Once you determine which questions will give you the information you need, whether you put them in the short form or the long form should not make any difference in theory. If you put them in the short form, that will guarantee that 100% of the population will answer them, because they will also be in the long form.

In my opinion, these questions should be in the short form. I would like to hear you say that you intend to put them in the short form. I don't see what difference it would make.

• (1620)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I cannot tell you what I intend to do because it must be based on a robust analysis.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** You will have to do that analysis and delve deeper into the matter. How will you determine whether to put the questions in the long form or the short form? I have not asked anyone about this, but if I asked everyone around the table, I think everyone would want them to be in the short form. That way they would be in both questionnaires and the response rate would be 100%.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We are working on it.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Can you give us that information?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I cannot tell you right now. All I can say with regard to our choice is that we will not simply inform you that we have made a decision. We will provide proof to demonstrate which approach is the best.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay, but I cannot imagine that it would not be preferable to include it in the short form, since the information would then be in both.

In conclusion, I have an important question.

Regarding the committee that has met just once so far, you said that you had considered the questions and analyzed and discussed them. People might have initially been in favour of using the short form or the long form, but I would like to know the group's position at the end of the meeting. I would also like to hear your opinion of the process.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Most of the people in attendance could appreciate the complexity of the issue. At the end of the meeting, we reached a consensus on the approach we will use in our qualitative and quantitative testing. When we provide you with the questions—they have in fact been amended since our meeting on January 25—we will provide them to the members of the advisory committee at the same time. We will then have another meeting to discuss them.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

Mr. Arseneault, you may take over.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Mr. Corbeil, I am not a great scientist much less a statistician, but I am wondering how can you convince

me that 100% of a population is not a better sample than 25% of the same population. Please explain that to me.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** In five minutes?

**Mr. René Arseneault:** No, I think one minute would be enough. Just tell me that it is impossible that a 25% sample of the population is more credible than a 100% sample. It is impossible.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** It is impossible. There might be a 4% or 5% difference. In politics, there is always a margin of error in surveys.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Statistics are based on that. At Statistics Canada, we conduct extremely high quality surveys with extremely large samples, but none is as large as the long-form census. With the long form, we ask questions to 7 million people or more.

In 2021, if we ask those questions to 10,000 people, will we get less accurate data?

Even for small geographic areas, we do not think that will be the case. We have in fact demonstrated that we now have extremely accurate data. Since we address a fairly small population and ask a certain number of questions, as in this case, we want to be sure we choose the most reliable and effective methodology. That is what has to be clearly identified. That is all I can say on the matter.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay, but in the case we are discussing, the enumeration of language minorities, we are talking about a very small population outside Quebec and a very small population inside Quebec. These are not the types of questions that apply to all Canadians, such as whether they are in a relationship, whether they are married or whether they have children, and how many.

You are saying that the short questionnaire will reach 75% of the targeted people and that the long questionnaire will only reach 25% of them. If I understand correctly, if those questions are included in the short questionnaire, they will automatically appear in the long questionnaire. However, 100% of the questionnaires affect Canada as a whole. We are not trying to gather Canada-wide information, but rather to enumerate minorities. They must be sought out and reached.

How can you convince me that, scientifically speaking, a 25% sample size can be better than a sample involving 100% of the people we want to survey?

• (1625)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** All I am saying is that Canada's census is intended for Canadian society as a whole...

**Mr. René Arseneault:** That is what I am saying to you, as well, but the situation is different when it comes to enumeration. I made that distinction by giving you the example of enumeration. We are not talking about issues that affect all Canadians. We want to enumerate linguistic minorities.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I hear you and I completely agree with you. I was not arguing that point.

In terms of the method, I can just tell you that it's our job and it's not just a matter of figures. People who know me know that, in 2010 and 2012, Statistics Canada released more than 800 pages of analysis, which provides a provincial and territorial snapshot of official language minorities. Our goal was to start a discussion on figures.

I am a sociologist by training and not a statistician. We are getting people talking about figures, so that they can understand that human beings are behind those figures. Our work, at Statistics Canada, consists in informing the public debate through statistics. So statistics are necessary.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Choquette, go ahead.

**Mr. François Choquette:** I have no further questions.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I would like to make a comment. I want to come back to what the committee members raised in reference to the determination process. I'm looking at the dates, and in the first table, the period from September 2017 to February 2018 is for consultation with census data users. The second period is spring/summer 2018. The third is spring/summer 2019. Fall 2018 does not appear anywhere. Are you on vacation then?

Could fall 2018 be used to expedite the work? Fall 2018 is not included in your calendar.

**Ms. Jane Badets:** Conducting qualitative and quantitative tests is a complex process.

[English]

We're not on vacation during those periods. We're actually preparing them. It takes a lot of work to prepare even for a quantitative test. There's getting the questionnaire ready, the sampling ready, and the interviewers ready. There's a lot that leads up to any of our surveys, or even the census—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** However, each table contains two periods of the year. Once again, fall 2018 does not appear anywhere.

To follow up on the comments of my colleagues from all parties, is there a way to tighten all that up by using fall 2018 to try to provide the cabinet with a presentation earlier?

We mentioned the situation at the last meeting. Cabinet's presentation will take place at the same time as the election. We said we were not happy about the presentation happening at the same time as the election. During the election, everyone has other things to do than evaluate your questions. We suggested that those questions be submitted to the cabinet before the election. I will officially ask you to revise your schedule for rights holders, so that the presentation will not be done during the election. We want to ensure it is done before the election because, otherwise, the cabinet will not take care of it. It will not have the time to do it during the election period. We want to make sure that the work is done well by you and the cabinet. Okay?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Regarding the period that seems to be missing, let me mention that, once qualitative tests have been

conducted on all the census questions, both in the short and the long questionnaires, we have to analyze the data. For a number of questions, there are a number of possible options. The objective is to identify the best questions for the entire census. Afterwards, we have to conduct quantitative testing.

So we go from the quantitative test to a certain number of wordings; we reduce the options. We can still test a number of options with the same question. That must be analyzed before we can have conclusive results.

**The Chair:** I understand your explanation, but I once again ask you to revise your calendar to get closer to that timeline when it comes to rights holders. People have been complaining for years that rights holders are poorly enumerated. The committee would need to be convinced that this will be done properly.

Mr. Samson, go ahead.

• (1630)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** My memory is coming back to me. My colleague Mr. Clarke will appreciate what I have to say.

If memory serves, when it comes to the enumeration of students in order to get French schools, a British Columbia court said that the samples were insufficient, that a questionnaire should have instead been given to everyone and that the sampling the school board had looked at was insufficient to obtain the information needed to make a decision. If sampling is used and the short questionnaire is not used but only the long one, British Columbia's jurisprudence will not have been taken into account.

I would like you to look into this and provide us with a response.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** We will absolutely do so.

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

Thank you for testifying before our committee. We will suspend the meeting for few minutes, so that we can move on to today's second panel.

• (1630)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1635)

**The Chair:** During this second hour, we will continue our work, pursuant to Standing Order 108, on the review of support programs for official language minority community media.

It is our pleasure to be hearing from François Côté, Director General of the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada; Francis Sonier, President of the Association de la presse francophone; and Richard Tardif, Executive Director of the Quebec Community Newspapers Association.

Good afternoon, everyone.

As we mentioned earlier, we are expecting to be called in for a vote. So we will try to limit the length of statements. I will be pretty strict when it comes to the length of presentations. We will also reduce the discussion time with members because we will most likely have 15 minutes less than anticipated.

We are listening to you.

**Mr. Richard Tardif (Executive Director, Quebec Community Newspapers Association):** Ladies and gentlemen members of the committee and Mr. Chair, thank you for having us.

[English]

We are here before you this afternoon as members of the consortium for official language community media serving anglophone and francophone minority populations. The three members of this consortium are l'Association de la presse francophone, or APF; l'Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, or ARC du Canada; and the Quebec Community Newspapers Association, the QCNA. Since the summer of 2016 we have pooled our expertise, our experience, and the strength of our respective networks. All three organizations in this consortium speak with one voice.

The simple definition of the term “the media” is that it is a singular collective noun referring to an “intervening agency, means, or instrument”. Years ago this instrument was the simple printing press, a newspaper, a radio station, and later a TV outlet in each city, in each community, with local issues discussed between neighbours over the backyard fence—short-distance communications. The role players were owners: press owners, radio and television owners, distinct and identifiable. Today Facebook, Google News, Twitter, YouTube, and other media termed “social” play a role almost without distinction, but it has become long-distance communications, where neighbours are discussing the larger issues across a digital fence.

Traditional media today are publishing also on these platforms. Everyone has a role, and that's good. They may be discussing global issues across a digital fence, but local residents are still in their backyards, and they still want to know what's happening in their local communities.

Recent years have witnessed changing forces in media. Media staffs have been cut by a third since 2000. Major media company stock has fallen over the same period. No one is denying this. The root cause, according to many, is that the Internet has reduced the return that news outlets can earn by selling the attention of their consumers to advertisers.

In the last 18 years, one thing does remain. We are still supporters of Canada's official language communities in a unique way—through traditional media, along with a digital presence. What a delivery system. At your fingertips, we're still there. We've always been there. We were there in October 2016, more than two years ago, as part of the 2016 pan-Canadian consultation on official languages, when we—the QCNA, APF, and ARC du Canada—collaborated on a brief delivered to the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage. Our brief outlined a series of possible solutions and positive measures that will enable Canadian Heritage and targeted government departments and agencies to work closely with the consortium.

Unfortunately, we feel that we are no further ahead today.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Côté (Director General, Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada):** You may be wondering why minority community media should be treated differently from other media.

The role minority community media play is protected by part VII of the Official Languages Act, as it is an essential service and very often the only source of information for the official language community it serves. It is the voice and a reflection of communities that are often isolated, in remote regions or even in urban settings. It is a symbol of attachment to a community, of a development tool of community cohesion and of identity-building that contributes to communities' growth and sustainability. It is a key platform for Canadians to express themselves freely. It is an indicator of the vitality of official language minority communities used by government authorities.

The negative effects of the advent of social media at the expense of traditional media escalated to an emergency a few years ago for many media. You are surely aware that the federal government's decision to invest in advertising on foreign digital platforms to the detriment of domestic traditional and digital media has been devastating. What is even more worrisome for us is that those platforms are not state imposed. By making that decision, the government certainly did not take into account its direct and indirect impact on our economy. For small official language minority media, which are primarily isolated in remote regions or in an urban minority language setting, the impact of the government's decisions can easily be multiplied by 10.

In June 2017, our consortium was relieved to see the report of the acting commissioner of official languages. In her report, she agreed with the organizations that submitted complaints in 2015, according to which Public Services and Procurement Canada, the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat did not take into account their obligations under part VII of the act in their decision to cut community media advertising.

It should certainly not be forgotten that, until complaints were filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages in 2015, government advertising revenues for official language minority community media had been melting before our eyes from year to year.

As of fall 2017, bolstered by the final investigation report and the acting commissioner's recommendations, and more importantly convinced that the affected departments would want to work with our consortium to implement win-win solutions, we have begun a series of meetings with a number of government representatives to move the file forward.

We wanted to propose an aligned action plan that would engage a number of affected departments through an interdepartmental approach. We have noted some openness at the Department of Canadian Heritage and have begun working with them. As for Public Services and Procurement Canada, we ran into a brick wall. Those in charge would accept no responsibility and sent the ball back into the court of the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Privy Council Office.

In December 2017, Public Services and Procurement Canada even published a bogus study on minority language Canadians' media habits, which was ordered immediately after the acting commissioner's preliminary report was submitted, in September 2016, without consulting the community or the members of our consortium, as required by the Official Languages Act. This study has been criticized by many official language minority communities, both francophone or anglophone, owing to questionable methodology and worthless or invalid data, which will have cost Canadian taxpayers \$200,000.

We were told about this study in September 2017, and we ordered the department officials not to publish it and to comply with the Official Languages Act by redoing the study—this time also consulting the members of our consortium. Yet those officials did not see it fit to accommodate our request and made their study public, as planned, in December 2017.

You are probably also aware of the recommendations made by your colleagues from the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. They carried out a study entitled “Reaching Canadians with Effective Government Advertising”, the report on which was submitted in December 2017.

● (1640)

In that report, the committee identified a number of anomalies in the way Public Services and Procurement Canada had managed the government advertising file. So it issued a series of 10 evidence-based recommendations, including this one:

The Government of Canada increase advertising purchasing for weekly, multicultural and community newspapers and other local media, so that the government meets the directive that communications are responsive to the diverse information needs of the public.

From December 2017 to January 2018, we tried to conduct a national awareness-raising campaign with the ministers and deputy ministers in charge, but with no success.

The decisions over the past 10 years have resulted in the slow death of official language minority community media.

● (1645)

**Mr. Francis Sonier (President, Association de la presse francophone):** As you can see, since the acting commissioner of official languages submitted her final investigation report, in June 2017, ARC du Canada, the QCNA and the APF have been facing major challenges in engaging all the affected government authorities in the implementation of the aligned action plan that would meet the recommendations of the report and the urgent needs of official language community media.

On December 22, 2017, we asked the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages to do something it had never done before: facilitate a meeting between various government bodies likely to contribute to the development and implementation of an aligned action plan with emergency measures and short, medium and long-term measures, not only to ensure the survival of official language community media, but also their continuing development.

We saw this meeting of all key stakeholders as an opportunity to create a co-operative space and take concrete measures to ensure a sustainable future for official language minority media.

We need not add that, since some of our community media have already ended or reduced their operations and others are closing their doors, this meeting should be held urgently. Yesterday, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages told us that its mandate did not require it to facilitate such a meeting and that, in any case, some departments were reluctant to participate. It preferred to refer us to the Department of Canadian Heritage to facilitate that meeting.

It is clear that some of the affected departments do not share our sense of urgency, which is real. As a result, within three months, we will need firm commitment from the government on implementing emergency measures—a minimum advertising investment of \$1,850,000 for next year, in addition to emergency fees, including coordination and distribution, will all be under the responsibility of the APF, the QCNA and ARC du Canada. In addition, we need a clear directive on immediate investments for national campaigns, such as a campaign on the legalization of marijuana.

Under the desired aligned action plan, official language minority community media need the government's and its departments' support to ensure their survival and their development in an increasingly digital world.

It is good to specify that ARC du Canada, the QCNA and the APF understand and accept the trend toward a digital presence and that this shift is an integral part of the aligned action plan we are proposing.

Official language minority communities' realities cannot be compared to those of other communities. It is unthinkable that, in the coming years, community media would generate enough revenue through a digital platform to be able to continue their operations and serving their communities.

A transition period adapted to the pace of each official language minority community is essential for official language minority community media to be able to prosper, continue to fulfill their mandate and grow with their communities.

So our objective is to develop an aligned action plan that will help official language minority community media continue to inform Canadians in the language of their choice, pursuant to the Official Languages Act.

To achieve the desired results, this action plan must include the necessary resources. In addition to emergency measures, short, medium and long-term measures must be set out to help our media continue to serve our communities. We must also ensure a digital presence of community media by respecting our communities' pace. Finally, a joint accountability framework should be developed that would include continuing investment by the government as part of an agreement between Canada, the communities and community media.

We believe that the following departments have a duty to contribute to the development and creation of this action plan: the Department of Canadian Heritage; Public Services and Procurement Canada; the Privy Council Office; the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; and Employment and Social Development Canada.

Beyond the emergency measures already set out, here are the short-term measures, over the next 12 months, we advocate in this plan: an envelope dedicated to official language minority community media included in the \$50 million announced in the latest federal budget to support local journalism in poorly served regions; an assistance program for editors; support for employment and internships; support for a digital presence; special projects; a support program for official languages, involving an increase in contributions to the consortium's three member organizations. Over the medium and the long term, between 10 and 36 months, we recommend a permanent program for official language community media with a budget envelope of \$10 million a year, whose parameters could draw inspiration from the community media operating assistance program from Quebec's department of culture and communications.

• (1650)

There would also have to be support for digital presence and for developing business plans and related marketing. We also suggest that a recurrent envelope be dedicated to advertising in minority community media, for each of the official language organizations that receive program funding, or funding for projects under the official languages funding programs.

As you can see, we are proposing measures that are for the most part easy to integrate into the existing budgets envelopes of the federal departments concerned.

You have already heard a series of witnesses who have confirmed that there is an urgent need for action. We hope you will also hear witnesses from the four departments targeted by the complaint filed in 2015.

The members of the consortium are at your disposal if you need any further information.

**The Chair:** I thank you for all of these excellent presentations, which I am sure will raise questions and comments from my colleagues.

I am going to limit speaking time to five minutes because time is passing quickly.

Mr. Clarke, you have the floor.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Sonier, you referred to emergency measures. So here we are; we are facing an emergency. If nothing is done, and the worst case scenario avails, when will French-language newspapers in minority communities close their doors, since their death is imminent?

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** As of April 1, the days of certain newspapers and radio stations are numbered. I would say that by July 1...

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** That's in two weeks. Good grief!

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** The fiscal year ends on March 31. If nothing is done, it will be extremely difficult, I can tell you.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** The last way of coming up with \$1.8 million might be to request an emergency fund, or to submit a request under the Action Plan for Official Languages, which is coming out next week.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** There was a \$50-million envelope in the last budget. Yesterday, we were told that applying those measures would take from 9 to 12 months, and we can't wait six months or a year.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** That answers my second question: for the time being, what is contained in the budget will not improve the situation.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** According to the signals we are being given, absolutely not. That is why we talked about advertising. It might be the fastest way to inject funds into community media. Those funds would not be enormous; we're talking about \$2 million. I think that is possible.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** It's useful for the government.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** It allows the government to transmit its messages and inform people. In addition, in so doing it provides economic support to various media.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** You spoke about your harmonized action plan. Has that plan been committed to paper?

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** Our objective was to meet with the departments concerned and discuss that with them. It's proactive.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** So the plan is under construction.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** Yes, but it is proactive. We could have blamed people, but we decided to work with the departments in question. The response from certain departments has been mixed.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** When you talk to the public servants or the elected representatives of these departments, are they able to understand and to acknowledge that the big pan-Canadian media groups and the minority official language community media are treated differently? In their analysis of the media crisis, do they distinguish between those two media groups?

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** I think so, but at this time we do not feel that there is a sense of urgency. We are talking about a 9 or 12-month horizon, but it will already be too late.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Fine, I understand.

**Ms. Linda Lauzon (Director General, Association de la presse francophone):** May I add something?

• (1655)

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Yes, please.

**Ms. Linda Lauzon:** Unfortunately, it's not the same with regard to Public Services and Procurement Canada. At this time, the people in that department do not understand the situation and don't see the difference at all. They always send us back to their evaluation matrix and to the metadata of the big media groups, but it is utopian to think that minority official language media will reach those types of numbers.

We are asking that we not be evaluated according to the penetration rate of the majority language media, but by a penetration rate that is adapted to the reality of our communities. Public Services and Procurement Canada does not understand that at this time, and it is relying on or hiding behind a Privy Council Office guideline.

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** Very well. Thank you very much.

Mr. Côté, what you said is bold, and it piqued my interest. I don't know if a justice of the Supreme Court, let's say, would agree with you. In your opinion, the decline in government publicity is unconstitutional, in light of the act and the obligations of those three departments. You say that by cutting that advertising, it is as though the departments had removed one of the positive rights of the minority communities. However, I would point out that in the Constitution, housing, for instance, is not a right.

**Mr. François Côté:** However, there is the obligation to reach...

**Mr. Alupa Clarke:** That's incredible; you are saying that advertising would be considered a positive right for official language minority communities.

**Mr. François Côté:** All Canadians must be reached; that is what the act says.

Are all Canadians being reached if you use Facebook? No, because in certain regions of Canada, 56Kbps dial-up access is still being used. Do you think that those people really use digital services? No.

In any case, we see the impact these community media have in small communities. This is how people stay informed. It's not on the Internet. We are the first source of information for those people. If you do not go through us, you are depriving yourself from reaching a lot of people. I will give you an example to illustrate precisely what I have just said.

During the census, all of the media were used, including traditional media, and the response rate was never higher.

I think that this proves what we have been saying for many years, which is that by going through traditional media and some of the digital media, you will reach all Canadians. However, you must not target a single platform.

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

We will immediately give the floor to Mr. Vandal.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you for your presentation.

I think I heard Mr. Tardif's presentation before. It was last year, at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Mr. Samson was also there. I appreciate the fact that you have a united voice, but I must say that my experience in Manitoba was different. In my community, the digital shift affected community newspapers and radio stations in a very different way.

Can you explain to us how the digital transformation affects newspapers?

[English]

**Mr. Richard Tardif:** One of the first problems for many newspaper owners is quite simply that you can't make money on the Internet. The advertising difference between a newspaper and what

you can get on a website is totally different. Three cents per click, or maybe a little bit per space on a banner, will not bring in the function and the revenue needed to keep your newspaper existing.

For example, 14 to 15 people can work at one small newspaper. When we talk about that multiplied impact of 10 on the economy, that's what it means. Let's say that a newspaper does go digital. It doesn't take much to run it, but the advertising still doesn't bring in the revenue. Also, you probably won't reach... We have newspapers up in the northern parts that have interruptions, where the Wi-Fi doesn't work, and where there's no high-speed Internet. The reach is important.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Do your community newspapers publish every day or every week?

**Mr. Richard Tardif:** It's every week.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Every week?

[Translation]

And what has been happening on the francophone side?

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** Let's take *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, the newspaper I head up in New Brunswick. It's the only French-language daily east of Quebec. As Mr. Tardif said, newspaper advertising meant dollars, but publicity on the Web means pennies. Internet advertising does not offset the decline in advertising revenue for print newspapers. It is true that we have never reached so many people, by whatever means, thanks to digital platforms. Ten years ago, we did not reach a quarter million people monthly, though our website. And yet our community has 230,000 or 250,000 members.

In short, the Web reaches a lot of people, but the model is not yet profitable, despite subscriptions and the fact that our content is not entirely free.

● (1700)

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Mr. Côté, did you want to speak?

**Mr. François Côté:** Our situation is a bit different. For us, the digital model means that our signal is retransmitted most of the time. Our website contains community news. It provides information, on contests for instance, and so on. It's used to some degree to promote the station.

However, the fact that our signal is available on the Internet helps us to reach people we could not reach before. People who work in Fort McMurray but live in Nova Scotia can listen to their Chéticamp radio. Providing access to that is important to us, but there is a cost involved, and there is practically no advertising available.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** When Ms. Sophie Gaulin was here, from the *La Liberté* newspaper in Manitoba, she said that when the weekly made the digital transition, it became more demanding for their employees, because they had to produce daily material for Twitter and Facebook. Have you experienced that too?

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** That is indeed the case, because you have to maintain the newspaper you publish, daily or weekly, and in addition, you have to feed the platform. So we now have two media to feed, but with fewer resources and less revenue. The challenge is twofold, because people don't wait till the next day.



**Mr. Dan Vandal:** You are experiencing the same thing as the people in Manitoba.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** That's right.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Mr. Côté, what is your relationship like with Radio-Canada in Quebec, if you have one?

**Mr. François Côté:** We talk to each other, but our dealings are not extensive.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Okay.

**Mr. François Côté:** In some locations, Radio-Canada has allowed us to place an antenna on one of their towers, but we have to pay rent.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** No doubt. How many community media have closed their doors over the past years?

**Mr. François Côté:** One of our radio stations closed in November in Rivière-la-Paix.

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

Mr. François Choquette now has the floor.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of you for being here.

[English]

Thank you very much for being here today.

[Translation]

I'll begin with the acting commissioner's June 2017 report. It's been less than a year, mind you. There were two very clear recommendations in it, recommendations 2 and 3. I think they are really important. They were addressed, among others, to Public Services and Procurement Canada. The problem may lie there. When the minister came to meet with us, she had no idea of the situation you are in. From what I understand, that was your impression as well.

One of those recommendations was that an analysis be done of the impact of advertising on minority official language community media. The department carried out that bogus study you referred to. Why did the department not listen to you, and why does it intend to release it? It does not reflect in any way the real effects of the displacement of advertising.

[English]

**Mr. Richard Tardif:** I don't have any answer to that question, honourable member Monsieur Choquette.

It was a big surprise to us last October when we arrived for our committee consultative meeting. One of the things we were not pleased with was that we were not consulted, nor were we made aware that this was a study to be presented to us.

I want to point out that we were shocked that they did not contact the communities of our respective associations. For example, for Westmount in Quebec, it's well known as 80% plus anglophone, give or take, over the years, but they reduced that to 40% to make their data work. We don't have 40%. We have more. We were not represented. This situation occurred in New Brunswick as well.

I have no way to answer that, other than to explain what they did.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Côté:** The only reason we can think of is that the department wanted to justify its actions. That is what the study reflects.

**Mr. François Choquette:** According to the figures, in 10 years, you lost about \$20 million in advertising. When you ask for \$2 million, is it simply to get back the money that you lost? It isn't an additional investment that would add to what you had before. That seems totally logical to me.

As some have mentioned, not everyone uses Facebook. You mentioned that in addition, Facebook does not pay tax, and that there is no tax on advertising, but especially that it is the government's responsibility to further the vitality of the communities. That seems self-evident.

When the Minister of Canadian Heritage states that her department will not support the digital transition of business models that are no longer viable, what do you have to say to her?

• (1705)

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** In several minority communities—I'm speaking about the APF newspapers here—the newspaper is the only media people can count on. Sometimes the populations are dispersed over certain areas, and they need support in one way or another. That is why certain programs already exist.

If people believe that those newspapers will have a critical mass and quickly become independent following the digital shift, they are mistaken. That is inaccurate. It will not happen. Even those who have good platforms, a large number of visitors and a large readership have trouble. It is an illusion to think that minority newspapers will manage to generate big revenues.

We are open to the idea, and people are heading toward digital platforms, but our population is still very loyal to the traditional paper support. That is the reality. I think that the reference to “business models” was a reference to the big media groups.

**Mr. François Choquette:** It does not apply to minority official language communities.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** No, because the reality is different. We have to be aware of that, because there is a real risk.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here. I appreciate it.

We are talking about loyalty to paper, and we have heard other witnesses before you. It is really from that angle that we want to help minority official language communities. Concretely, what recommendations should we make to help the media maintain their vitality?

I believe I understood that the situation is different for radio, because you seem to attract a greater number of listeners through the Internet. However, the media and the written press are losing some of their clientele. The transition to digital will happen, as you said, but it seems that that is the issue.

You said that you supported the digital shift—and that is where we are headed—but there is an emergency, since you are here. The first recommendation is about advertising, and we heard it clearly.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** The situation is so urgent that I have been in Ottawa for three days. My colleagues are the directors of organizations, and I am a newspaper director. We have had to make decisions this year. Everyone is expecting feedback from meetings I have been to over the past three days, but I have absolutely nothing to report to them. What can I say to my shareholders? What should I say to the employees whose pension fund I had to cut in January? What should I say to them?

Your decisions and your responsibilities hold a promise of hope. I respect your mandate, but I am asking you to go far beyond your mandate. Your study is a good thing, but when you leave the room today, call or send an email to make an appointment with the ministers. It is urgent.

What is happening is really dangerous. If the newspapers, whatever newspapers they may be, are having trouble, we won't make it, I tell you. We have been fighting for 10 years. We have done everything possible, everything imaginable; we went to see all of the departments but we obtained no results. We filed a complaint in 2015, and almost three years later, we still have no results. There are departments that refuse to commit. There are no results.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** You have to target most departments directly; you listed them earlier.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** Indeed.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Some of them were less attentive.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** Yes, some of them were less inclined to listen.

**Mr. François Côté:** I would simply like to add—and I am addressing you, Mr. Samson, because the situation of francophone radio in Nova Scotia is critical—that when we say that some of them will not make it to the end of the year, some of them are in Nova Scotia. We have to act immediately, because we can't wait any longer. Radio Rivière-la-Paix has closed its doors, and other stations are going to close in the west, just as they have in the east. It is unrealistic to hope that we will finish the year with 27 members.

• (1710)

**Ms. Linda Lauzon:** Yesterday, we met with the assistant commissioner. She said to go and fight before the courts, which is rather serious! You know how those court cases will go; they will take five years, everyone will be dead, and we will probably win, but we will have bled to death in the meantime. That is what is going to happen to us. However, in five years, the government will be forced to reinvest, to repair everything it will have broken. We don't want to launch that court challenge, because everyone is going to lose: the government, the community, everyone. We prefer to find a way to work with the government immediately to avoid that court challenge.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

There are three speakers left and time is flying by. We are going to reduce the speaking time to two minutes, to allow one question and one answer.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was going to share my time with Mr. Clarke, but he is not here.

I thank you for your statements and the precision of your interventions.

I do not remember whether it was Mr. Côté or Mr. Sonier who spoke about the very short term and said that we needed to invest \$1.85 million over the next three months, before addressing the medium and long term. You said that the APF, the QCNA and ARC du Canada would manage those funds.

**Ms. Linda Lauzon:** Yes, it would be those three organizations.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I know how ARC du Canada functions, because I worked in community radio. As for the APF, does it only represent daily newspapers, or all official language minority newspapers?

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** All of the newspapers.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** So it includes weeklies and monthlies.

Do you represent all of the newspapers, in every province?

[English]

Monsieur Tardif, in Quebec, when the QCNA speaks, does it speak for every Anglo paper in Quebec—for those on the Gaspesian coast as well in the Montreal area?

**Mr. Richard Tardif:** Yes, for 30 newspapers.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Thirty newspapers?

**Mr. Richard Tardif:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. René Arseneault:** The amount being sought is \$1.85 million in the next three months. Is that right?

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** Yes.

**Ms. Linda Lauzon:** It would be a one-year commitment, in other words, covering 12 months.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** It would be done through advertising.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** Yes. That's the fastest way.

**Ms. Linda Lauzon:** That's the fastest way to do it.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** The criteria for the other measures haven't been defined yet. It will take between 9 and 12 months.

**Ms. Linda Lauzon:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Francis Sonier:** That's already too long.

**Ms. Linda Lauzon:** These would be transitional measures for the next 12 months, long enough for us to put the rest of the action plan in place. We are going to diversify our resources and work within existing budgets. That's what we want to do, but we need time. With that amount, we could do the work properly over the next 12 months.

However, if ministers, deputy ministers, and departmental decision-makers aren't willing to sit down with us to discuss the plan or its implementation.... What we are proposing is comprehensive.

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

Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. G n reux, you may go ahead.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My apologies to the witnesses, but I have to put forward a motion immediately, so they may not have a chance to speak again. Fortunately, I have a good grasp of the problem and your needs.

Mr. Chair, I am proposing the following motion:

That the Committee recommend that Canadian Heritage establish a \$2 million emergency fund for official language minority media to be administered by an *ad hoc* committee composed of the Association de la presse francophone, the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada and the Quebec Community Newspaper Association.

The word "recommend" is used since we, unfortunately, do not have the authority to make the department do it. I suggest we debate the motion so that we can put it to a vote as soon as possible.

**The Chair:** We will debate it.

Mr. Arseneault, you may go ahead.

**Mr. Ren  Arseneault:** I don't need to debate it, because I agree with the member's proposal.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Same goes for me.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** Can we proceed with the vote?

I think it's important that we have a recorded division.

**The Chair:** Would anyone else like to comment?

Mr. Vandal, please go ahead.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** We all know that Minister Joly will be unveiling her action plan for official language minority communities next week. As of yet, though, we still don't know what's in the plan.

• (1715)

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** That's the problem.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** I think there's a strong likelihood it will include funding for community media organizations. Having other groups administer an envelope is not—

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** Mr. Vandal, are you certain that the funding will appear in the official languages action plan?

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** No, I'm not certain, but I'm ready to vote nonetheless.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lapointe, you may go ahead.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I simply want to say that we weren't given 48 hours' notice and that we are meeting next on Monday. Further to

what Mr. Vandal said, the action plan will be released Wednesday of next week.

I think we can debate the motion and come back to it on Monday. We shouldn't forget, however, that the action plan is coming out on Wednesday. We can move forward nonetheless.

**The Chair:** Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Fran ois Choquette:** Is the motion in order now?

**The Chair:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Fran ois Choquette:** In that case, I second it.

I'm not sure whether the right department is Canadian Heritage or Public Services and Procurement Canada. It deals with official languages responsibility. I think we can ask M lanie Joly to take action on that front. In fact, I don't even think she needs to free up any money. All she has to do is stop investing \$2 million in Facebook and spend it on our communities' media organizations.

I therefore second—

**The Chair:** Sorry, but I have to interrupt. The bells are ringing, so we have to go to the House for a vote.

I need unanimous consent from committee members in order to keep the meeting going for another five minutes.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** All right, then. We will continue for another five minutes.

Ms. Lapointe, you may go ahead.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Mr. Chair, I move that the debate be adjourned.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lapointe has moved that the debate be adjourned. We are going to vote on her motion, then.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** That doesn't mean we can't have the discussion later.

Before we conclude, I would like to sincerely thank the witnesses who came all the way here to meet with us. You conveyed the sense of urgency you feel and you provided excellent insight. Rest assured that, even though the meeting is ending this way, your message will be heard loud and clear.

The meeting is adjourned.





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