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Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Order. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the needs of remote francophone organizations. This is meeting 23.

We welcome today witness Pierre Bélanger. Any relation to Mauril?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger (Chairman of the Board, Alliance de la francophonie de Timmins): None.

An hon. member: He's obviously from the better half of that big clan.

The Chair: We also welcome Suzanne Roy.

I will mention to our witnesses that we do have other business today, but it's very important that we hear from you today. We welcome you here for that.

This part of the meeting will last roughly an hour and 15 minutes, or earlier, depending on whether or not we feel enough questions have been answered.

Who will be the first speaker?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: I guess I will be.

The Chair: Go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: I'd like to thank the committee for agreeing to hear our opinion on the situation of remote Francophone organizations. This is the opinion of representative Francophone organizations like the various Ontario ACFOs, particularly those in remote regions.

As you can see, from the briefs presented, the ACFO community organizations have played and continue to play a really very important role in the development and vitality of the Franco-Ontarian communities. The provincial ACFO, but especially the regional ACFOs, which are separate entities, have been very important instruments for making our demands. The gains they have managed to achieve through their keen work include French-language secondary schools in Ontario in 1968-1969, community health centres, Francophone day care centres, literacy centres, cultural centres, French-language newspapers and, most recently, Francophone colleges. The goal in this last case was to ensure that

all Francophones, all those who could contribute to Ontario society, obtained complete and adequate training in their language.

Many challenges remain. We don't have community health centres or French-language newspapers in all regions. We must also fight the downloading of provincial government services. That phenomenon hit us particularly hard in the 1990s. I believe the Liberal government will be transferring Service Canada to the provincial governments. The ACFOs must be vigilant and ensure that, in the context of this downloading of services to the municipalities and provinces, the Francophone community has access to French-language services.

We must also create a socio-cultural environment conducive to the economic development and cultural vitality of the remote communities. We must fight assimilation, which is a major challenge. What makes matters even more difficult is that our communities are going through profound economic restructuring. I won't even discuss the crisis in the forest industry: it's already quite obvious. We must diversify economically, and the presence of the Francophone communities, whether it be in artistic creativity, tourism or any other area, can be an advantage.

Securing funding for these organizations so that they can play their role is the biggest challenge we're facing. Obviously, we could discuss at length the \$4.2 million envelope that Canadian Heritage grants to Franco-Ontarian organizations as a whole. It is distinctly inadequate. There are 500,000 Francophones in Ontario, and yet we receive the same amount as Francophones in Alberta. It's not that I want to take away anything from them, but we are scattered across the province. In the minority regions where there are obvious needs, we need more resources so we can play our role effectively.

In addition, we experienced major cuts in the 1990s. If you look at that chart that shows Canadian Heritage grants, you'll see that there are figures from 1985, when we became organizations independent of the provincial ACFO, until 2006. These are solid and established figures, based on the grants that have been made by Canadian Heritage. In the chart showing Canadian Heritage grants, you'll see inflation-adjusted figures in the red part. In 1985, for example, the \$50,000 amount is a grant that the Timmins ACFO received. To achieve an equivalent action capability and purchasing power in 2006, we would need the figure in red that appears just above, that is \$86,000.

● (1535)

In 2006, we received exactly \$37,100 in grants. In 1985, a \$50,000 amount enabled us to have two full-time employees. Since the early 1990s, our employees have been part time. We're forced to work on projects associated with Service Canada or other institutions in order to have permanent staff. We have to implement projects in order to exist. Of course, those projects are positive.

The second chart, showing the various shades of blue, shows revenue sources. You can see Canadian Heritage grants in dark blue, money we received from the community, friends of ACFO and economic institutions in lighter blue and, in very light blue, the first peak represents the money for the Clin-D'oeil day care project. All this revenue totalled \$180,000, and we were able to operate for four or five years.

In 1996, we fell into a no man's land. We subsequently obtained funding for other projects that met the community's needs, but we had to work very hard. At that point, we were unable to work on all issues affecting the French-language services of the municipalities. It seems to me the figures are quite clear and eloquent.

Let's take a look at what ACFO can do and provide for these regions. It is an essential instrument in the development of Franco-Ontarian societies. The problem is that we don't have the financial means to do our job. We owe our volunteers a lot. I'm a teacher and I have a life outside ACFO, but I have to do what I've previously called extreme volunteerism. If I didn't do that kind of volunteer work, like all members of the board of directors, there wouldn't be any ACFO, and we would have closed up shop. Today, we're in a serious crisis. The ACFOs of Supérieur-Nord, Kirkland Lake and Cochrane-Iroquois Falls have received an incredible grant of \$18,000 for one year. What can you do with \$18,000 in 2006? Receiving \$37,100 in a town like Timmins with a population of 19,000 Francophones is hardly any better. What can you do to ensure that that population develops and gets the French-language services it deserves? It's quite difficult.

We're a grassroots, close-to-the-people organization. We're close to the community. I think we should be adequately funded. Being close to the community, we're able to respond to it, express its needs and find adequate solutions to its problems. We've proved this in the past.

The solution we're proposing is simple. Adequate and direct funding should be provided to the communities. Not all the money from the agreements that have been signed, as well as other sums that have been allocated through Mr. Dion's plan or through the Canada-Ontario Agreement, has made it to the organizations that do the work in the field in the North. If I were realistic, I'd say that \$50,000 in 1985 is worth \$86,000 in 2006. That's what we're requesting, but we're fiscally responsible. We're asking you for \$60,000, with a variable formula thereafter, based on community needs. In the regions where there are no services, no support, there should be a little more money. Additional funding should also be granted based on the number of Francophones served, the number of Francophones who will receive those services. I have nothing else to add on this subject. I await your questions and I turn the floor over to Suzanne.

● (1540)

Mrs. Suzanne Roy (Director General, Alliance de la francophonie du grand Sudbury): Good afternoon. I'm going to add to what Mr. Bélanger said.

The purpose of the ACFOs is to provide the community with the necessary tools for its development and to ensure its vitality. We obviously want to achieve tangible and sustainable results. The ACFOs are still the only organizations in the province that have a community development mandate for the entire community they represent. In general, groups engage in development within very limited communities. Seniors work with seniors, youths with youths. We, on the other hand, have a duty to serve the community as a whole.

It is therefore essential that we project a very positive image of the work done in the field, and the perception of that work is currently very wrong. We hear it said that a large number of volunteers are working in the field, but this isn't volunteer work that we're doing; it's support work to ensure the vitality of the Francophone community.

Greater recognition for the Francophone community and its organizations is thus fundamentally important. We want to be able to live in French right across Ontario. That isn't the situation at the moment. Community development is done differently in Toronto, which has its own particular characteristics, in Sudbury, which is a major centre and in Thunder Bay, which is remote, or in all the little towns like Kirkland Lake and Hearst, where a majority of Francophones live. So you can't compare what's being done and what succeeds in one place and automatically want to introduce it elsewhere. That's not realistic.

Every community is responsible for its own development and vitality and must identify its own needs. That's where the ACFOs come into play, that is to say when each community defines its own particular characteristics. We do development based on the community's actual needs. Those needs are expressed in the field, at the grassroots level.

We talked about accomplishments. There have obviously been a number of them. We recall the creation of French-language divisions within school boards, the opening of community radio stations — achievements that are still hard to subsidize — the establishment of French-language health networks. A lot of things have been done, but a lot of things remain to be done because there's probably been a regression in recent years. We're facing increasing challenges and we want to continue to ensure the vitality of our respective communities.

The restructuring of the association movement has been harmful, the downloading of services and government restructurings has been very harmful to the association movement and has considerably weakened the ACFOs in the field. What we're asking is that you promote sustainable long-term development through a fair funding formula: we're asking for operating grants, not project grants, multi-year funding so that we don't have to go through the same process every year. To secure a grant of \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 or \$40,000 for the luckiest organizations, the administrative maze we have to go through is unthinkable.

We also want to promote the establishment of a provincial coalition of ACFOs, financially supported, because that no longer exists. The provincial ACFO had that mandate a number of years ago. Over time, the provincial ACFO became more important than the regional ACFOs alone, and the new organization in place now has a community development sector, but it isn't structured and it's under-funded. This is the sector that represents the largest number of members. Everyone, the entire community falls into that sector.

Another tool that could be very promising, and that we're requesting, is support for training the program officers of the Department of Canadian Heritage. That department used to have development officers who worked with the communities, whereas now it has program officers who work in an office. Those officers must be able to tell the difference between community development and development projects.

• (1545)

To ensure project development, there must be adequate operating funding so that we can go after projects and programs that will support the work we're doing at the grassroots level.

I'm ready to answer your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Bélanger is next.

[*Translation*]

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

First of all, I can tell you that I'm in favour of operating funding rather than project funding. In the previous government, I tried, unsuccessfully, to influence my colleagues in that direction. However, I am still convinced that that's the best approach.

I also agree on the subject of multi-year funding, and we've previously tried to do that. I'm somewhat surprised to hear that this is not the case under the Canada-community agreements, because they're multi-year agreements. Management of the agreement currently falls to the AFO, if I'm not mistaken. It is up to that organization to move toward multi-year funding. This capability exists within the community itself, and it is up to the community to ensure that's done. I don't believe the governments are preventing multi-year funding. Tell me if I'm wrong, because I think that can be corrected, if that's the case.

Mr. Bélanger, at the start of your presentation, you made a statement that raised an eyebrow for me. You said that the federal government was preparing a kind of downloading of services to the provinces.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That will be in effect in January for Service Canada.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Can you give us more details on that, please?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Service Canada provides all the services, such as manpower training and so on. Government officials have already been advised and they were surprised. For example, people from Kirkland Lake requested a review of the proposed projects and

they were simply told that, from now on, there would be no possible review because the officials would henceforth be working in the provincial government.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That's new.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It's new for me.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: It's new for me too. I wasn't aware, and that concerns us very much. We already had trouble working with Service Canada on the proposed projects. It isn't easy.

At the time of the cuts in the 1990s, we were told that, under sections 41 and 42 of the Official Languages Act, which concern the joint effort between the departments, there would be specific things for us and that the departments would have an obligation to propose concrete things to the organizations representing Francophone society.

However, that never materialized in northern Ontario. We were working with what is now Service Canada and, often, when we proposed projects — we didn't have a choice to operate by projects, because we didn't have the money — obstacles were put in our path. The only recourse we had was to ask our MP to intervene. Interdepartmental cooperation never really materialized.

That's why I like the first part of your comment. For multi-year funding and everything that's complementary, that's fine because we can make do with what will be proposed. However, one thing is certain: for us to be players in this area, we need adequate base funding. This deficiency has to be corrected from the outset. Subsequently, if we get funding, we'll be able to act with the economic stakeholders and political interests; we'll be at one end of the spectrum. If we aren't, we won't be able to do anything.

• (1550)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Since our time is limited, I encourage you to answer a little more quickly.

With regard to Service Canada, as far as I know, the intention was to work jointly with provincial and municipal authorities. It was modelled somewhat on what was being done in Winnipeg, offering stopping points to enable citizens to enter and be served by people in the country's two official languages for any need, whether it was municipal, provincial or federal. However, I don't believe they were going to transfer employees to provincial authorities.

You also referred to section 41 of the Official Languages Act, which I know quite well. There's an obligation for the Crown to consult the communities. Were the AFO or regional ACFOs consulted in any way on the transfer of Service Canada to the provinces?

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: There was a consultation in Sudbury, on a few days' notice, and it was by invitation only. The invitation was not extended to the association movement as a whole.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: When did that consultation take place?

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: About a month ago, but things were already moving and changing. The decisions were made and we were consulted afterwards, and that's what happened.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: And it was staggering, Mr. Bélanger. We in the real North, in the really remote regions, were never consulted. I'm talking about Kirkland Lake, Elliot Lake, Timmins, Cochrane-Iroquois Falls, Hearst and Kapuskasing, where 70,000 Francophones live. We were never consulted.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The period allotted me is over, but I'm definitely going to make it my duty to pass this information on to our official languages critic, because I believe this kind of thing must be explored more carefully in the Official Languages Committee. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kotto, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome.

I'll continue in Mr. Bélanger's footsteps. If government employees were transferred to the provincial level, what would be the potential effects for you?

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: Since the province isn't bilingual, we must absolutely ensure that things happen properly. We're currently seeing problems in Sudbury, a problem with the Job Connect program, among other things, all these employment assistance services that will be grouped together not under the aegis of Francophone and Anglophone organizations, but under that of a currently bilingual organization, the YMCA, whose French-language programs leave quite a bit to be desired. People have already been told that it's preferable for them to submit their CVs in English because that's the way to do things in order to enter the labour market. They're already being encouraged to work and do things in English, instead of showing up as Francophones and being recognized as such.

• (1555)

Mr. Maka Kotto: Okay.

I've been here on the Hill for two years and I haven't had the opportunity to meet you.

I'd like to know whether you've previously been called upon to conduct the exercise you're doing here today. Are the battles you're waging to ensure your survival as a specific group in your region recurring?

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: It wasn't that way in the past; it was done much more informally and through direct contact. It was done somewhat through the provincial ACFO, which no longer exists. And the AFO, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, which we should be able to rely on, is still being structured. So there should eventually be some advances, but for the moment, it's still... I'm the representative of the community development sector at the AFO, and it wasn't the AFO that took this action.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Yes, but it appears from the information I have that you're always conducting a battle for your survival.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: You're entirely right: it's constant. You know, the organizations in the field are the ones with the biggest problems, whose existence is very precarious. We've been doing this work for 10 or 15 years, since the major government cuts started. We

nearly shut down operations in 1998. With a grant of \$30,000, we had no more full-time employees and we had to appeal to the community. Fortunately, we were able to gather \$14,000 or \$15,000, but the time we spend preparing projects so that we can survive, trying to find administrative personnel, the time we spend raising money, isn't time spent working effectively, providing services.

The downloading of provincial government services — the situation Suzanne spoke about — has resulted in a terrible situation because it's a constant struggle, and, ultimately, we wind up operating with organizations that are not that bilingual. We're redoing the work that was previously done when we fought for Bill 8, the Ontario French-Language Services Act; we're restarting the work that was previously done at the provincial level. The former Conservative government of Mr. Harris is the one that gave the municipalities responsibility for many services. I don't know whether the municipalities were able to provide the services, whether they had the funds to do so. The fight is very tough because we're in a minority situation.

Mr. Maka Kotto: As the saying goes, there is always someone in worse shape than oneself.

Are you envious when you draw a parallel with Quebec's Anglophone community?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: We're envious, but that's a good thing. Despite what can be said about the Government of Quebec, it treats its Anglophone minority well. They've had their education system in both languages for a long time, from primary school to university. In Quebec, the Anglophone minority has all its essential institutions, be they hospitals or community colleges. It's a model for us, and we're happy that they're well treated. A democracy is measured by the way it treats its minorities.

We continue our fight, but we fundamentally believe that the future of the country depends on the vitality and development of the Francophone communities outside Quebec. We fought for Montfort Hospital and so on, but an enormous amount of work remains to be done because our situation is really precarious. Outside the centres where Francophones are in the majority, the assimilation rate is 30%. That's an endless struggle. We never make any progress, and we still have to fight for our rights.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus is next.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I recognize that ACFO makes an enormous contribution to all the northern communities, but I was very surprised to learn that there was a lack of funding for your organization, in particular in Kirkland Lake. You have to meet the needs of a number of small rural and remote Francophone communities with a budget of \$18,000.

With an \$18,000 budget, how can you meet the language, cultural, health and general service needs of the Francophones in that region?

•(1600)

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: I'm going to ask Suzanne to answer your question.

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: We can't make any predictions because we're in reaction and survival mode.

You mentioned Kirkland Lake, but we've just shut down in Sault Ste. Marie. The Sault Ste. Marie ACFO didn't have enough staff to work in a place that was quite unique because the city has declared itself unilingual Anglophone. We really need a lot of people to work in the field because it's a very tough environment, but we can't get enough support. It's not even a matter of developing health services; we're just doing basic work right now. We're trying to work together with the community, but we're finding it hard to do so. It's even harder to identify the major projects and major problems.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: In Cochrane and Iroquois Falls, it nearly had to shut down. Service Canada had to introduce a project, but there wasn't any administrative staff to run it. We're talking about providing training and services to communities that are still hard-hit by the lumber crisis, which has also hit Smooth Rock Falls. So we're in a strange situation.

In Timmins, the work remains to be done. The town has approximately 45,000 inhabitants, 19,000 of whom are Francophones. There's no Francophone community health centre to do prevention or provide services in French. A committee has to be organized to redo all the feasibility studies in order to obtain those services. We're lacking Francophone doctors. In fact, we're simply lacking doctors.

The needs are obvious, and now that the major battles have been fought for education and health services, we view ourselves as agents of economic development. We're not asking for charity; we simply want what is owed us according to the ideal that's been set at the language level and at Canadian Heritage. We sort of represent the fibre of Canada. We want to be able to do our job to adequately develop our communities in northern Ontario in order to prevent our young people from migrating. There are economic diversification projects in tourism and other fields, but we can't make adequate progress.

Now is the time to do it. Global economic circumstances call for economic diversification, which means more manpower training. For example, in Timmins, there is a French-language college that's completely inadequate. We need 65,000 people to work in the mining and forestry sectors, but we aren't able to train them because we don't have either the institutions or the qualified personnel to do it.

We're fighting because we want to contribute to the economic vitality of our communities, and not simply that of the Francophone communities.

Mr. Charlie Angus: We're talking about the relationship between ACFO and the cultural or linguistic issues, but I'd like to discuss the relationship between a very strong Francophone identity and economic development in the northern part of the province. For example, for northeastern Ontario and Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the natural market is the same. It's the same economy, the same culture, the same issues.

Can you give us examples of economic success in the case of the Ontario communities that promote Francophone identity?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: In Témiscamingue, there's the Foire gourmande, a tourist and gastronomical project that was developed on both sides of the border by the Anglophones and Francophones of Témiscamingue in Ontario and the Francophones of Témiscamingue on the Quebec side. It's a success. These people won the gold medal for the tourism project of the year in Quebec. I think they were finalists at the national level. A total of 50,000 persons visited the Foire Gourmande this summer. The event was spread over five days.

We have a problem in Canada: we have a free trade agreement with the United States, but we're not even trying to reach one that really works among the provinces. We're letting golden economic opportunities go by. There are approximately 200,000 Francophones in northern Ontario. We represent value-added, an asset for tourism and creativity. We should be able to work more in a synergistic way with northern Quebec. We share the same reality, and we operate in the same economic sectors. And yet the project is still undeveloped. Everything remains to be done. As far as we're concerned, we view ourselves in a way as orchestra conductors on these projects.

•(1605)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fast is next.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to both of you for coming this afternoon.

I noticed, Mr. Bélanger, you made reference to the fact that it's becoming more difficult for you to...I believe the term you used was "fight assimilation".

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Yes.

Mr. Ed Fast: I'm assuming that by "assimilation" you mean specifically the loss of language, the official language being French.

I would like to refer you again to the graph that you gave to us. Around 1997 there appears to have been a fairly significant drop in funding on both counts, whether allowing for inflation or not. Have you been involved with your organization long enough to understand some of the rationale behind those funding cuts? What were the reasons for those funding cuts? I don't know what they were.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Well, basically, if you recall, there was a big cleanup to be made in the government's finances in the nineties. There were deficits; deficit after deficit. I think the rationale of the government was that every program had to be cut to do its share of the hard work that had to be done.

We may agree on the principle, but some areas need to be protected. They need to make their fair share, but they also need to be protected because of the work they do, their pluses and the effect of what they're doing in the communities.

That year was a particularly tough year, and it was not because we hadn't presented good projects, because if you follow that graph, every peak of the different projects we prepared related to the community and the needs of the city. The second one here was a project that was designed to protect old people against violence and fraud. We were working with a formation program to give experience to our francophone youth. We were working with the Timmins police corps so we could register all the bicycles, because there were maybe stolen bicycles. We handmade the project. It was really linked to the needs of our community, not only the francophones.

But you know, when you work project by project, you see the bottom part coming afterwards. You can't develop projects every year, because you don't have the manpower to do so, and you don't necessarily have the money to do so. Even though we had good projects, or if we had been more efficient and had done something positive for our community, it didn't mean or wouldn't have meant that the next year we would have had more funds. The rationale of cuts simply continued. It got a bit better by the end, but still, as you noticed with the other graph, to be able to just function with the means we had in 1985, we should have gotten raises in our basic funding. And we didn't get them.

It's like the tax we developed for the First World War: once you're in a pattern, it's tough to get out of it. If you recall, income taxes on individuals and businesses were supposedly temporary. They ended up not being temporary, but being the real thing. Now they're tough to get back.

And you know, it's normal. Governments were scared of overspending, because there were spending sprees in the seventies. Every government wanted to make sure they would get the extra mile for their bucks. I agree with that, but we thought they would have recognized the efficient work we were doing with the few funds we were getting. We're exceptionally efficient, but we can't go on; people are tired. We've asked the community year after year to help us financially, but the pie is not growing bigger and all these organizations are playing for the same pie.

I don't know if I've been clear, but now we need to have a global strategy, otherwise we will miss the boat—the formation, the economic diversification, and the out-migration of our youth elsewhere in the province.

• (1610)

Mr. Ed Fast: My follow-up question comes out of my own experience. I'm bilingual, but not in French, actually in German. The community I come from on the west coast considered that protecting the German language was of enough importance that my family, parents, extended family, and many other families in my area actually put significant dollars into making sure we had that German-language education.

Of course in your case it's even more important, because French is one of the two official languages and we want to make sure we protect it.

I do notice from your second graph that there's a significant component of local fundraising involved. Correct?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Exactly, because we did our share of work.

Mr. Ed Fast: Yes, but I do notice it has remained relatively static over the years.

Again, in exploring ways of how this maybe can be done better and how we can get more value for money—and I'm not committing our government to this at all, because this is just an exploration—would there be any objection on the part of either of you to the notion of perhaps tying increased funding for official languages to an increased level of local fundraising? Whether it's on a one-to-one or two-to-one or three-to-one basis, forget about the formula, but what do you think about the notion of both parties perhaps working to develop a strategy to improve funding for official languages?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: It would be complicated, and I'll explain why. In a community such as Timmins, we had a good sector of the forest industry. It was owned by a francophone from Timmins. But he had takeovers. These people grow old. I'm talking about Malette Lumber Inc., which is really, really big. Now parts of it have been sold to Columbia Forest Products, which is an American company. Parts of it have been sold to Tembec. They're not from our community. They don't care that much about what's going on. And especially, they're not francophones either.

The same problem occurred in Hearst, because down there you had all the Levesques and the Lecours, who used to own the economy, and basically 90% of the sector. Now it's Columbia and Grant, and these people are not from the north.

That's the problem we face, and that's why we're static, because there's so much you can get out in dollars and it all depends on the economic strength of your community. Now there's a big crisis in the forestry industry and we're going downwards, because some of these businesses simply closed and some are being bought by multinational corporations that don't see much importance in taking care of the French community. That's why the government has a very important role to play.

What I would attach to it is results. If you're using the public's money, we agree with the principle that you have to do something with it, something efficient, something that's really connected to the needs of the community. That's why I like that graph, because with everything you see there, we did our job. We delivered the merchandise; we delivered the goods. That's why we're here. If we didn't believe we were spending the taxpayers' money adequately, we would not face this committee.

You know what it is? Some of the MPs around the table are from western Canada, from small cities. You know how tough it is to deal with a government when you're not close to it. That's our problem. We're so far up north that it's not easy for us to get the help we need, to talk to the right people and get the right connections.

Suzanne, do you want to follow up on that?

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: There might be some problems in this with some of the communities, such as Sault Ste. Marie, for example, where, if you're francophone, you would need to go deep to get some other funding. Eventually we might get to that point, but at this point it might be something very difficult. In Toronto, for another example, the diversity of the francophone community might not be the best way to try to get some extra dollars. It's feasible for Sudbury, it might be feasible for Timmins, but it's not feasible for everywhere. This would need to be worked, and I don't know how, but I don't see at this point something developing in this sort of way.

• (1615)

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: If you would allow me to just finish on that, that's why our message today is to skip the big bureaucratic creatures, if I can use that word, because basically the problem is that the money stays in Ottawa and Toronto and doesn't percolate up north. If you deal directly with the organizations that are close-knit with our community, that are working in their environment, they know their environment and their communities. Then you get the most out of it. Then you can have accountability, because you deal directly with people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First I want to thank you for being with us. I had the pleasure of working with the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse between 1981 and 1993, at a time when resources were quite abundant. That didn't prevent us from complaining all the same. I was president of that same organization during tougher years, from 1995 to 1997. During that time, we had to deal with all kinds of budget constraints. We nevertheless set up issue tables and, in the context of those tables, commitments were made to work with other departments and maximize revenues.

Before going any further, I'd like to respond to Mr. Fast's question. In fact, this type of funding would be good for the strongest communities, but it would further weaken the remote and weaker communities. Those in the Atlantic, Moncton, for example, could benefit from it, but communities such as Baie Sainte-Marie or Chéticamp would be penalized by it.

To go back to those years of budget cuts, I must say that some commitments were made. Other departments granted operating funding. You mentioned the issue of French-language services in the minority communities. Back home, we worked hard and long to obtain education in French. I believe the Court Challenges Program was established in 1995 or 1996. That doesn't necessarily appear in your document. That was a basic support. When our rights weren't respected, we could challenge the provincial government, school boards or the federal government.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That program's been cancelled, hasn't it?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Indeed. Since we're losing that tool, the problem is worsening. In literacy, we found funding to help people. You mentioned a number of people who had problems. Whether in health, education or literacy, it has to be acknowledged that

providing services in the remote minority communities is more costly on a per capita basis.

With your communities, we also established a community radio station in Baie Sainte-Marie, of which I was the first treasurer. I believe there were three stations in your communities.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Indeed, I had the pleasure of working with Guy Lizotte at the community radio station in Hearst, Ontario. Radio de l'Épinette noir is still going very well. It's firmly rooted in its community.

Hon. Robert Thibault: We're a small community. So a French-language newspaper is out of the question. Instead we're talking about weeklies and small savings. It's hard to sell advertising. Consequently, we depend more on federal government investment.

Unfortunately, that investment has been reduced. Here we're talking not only about financial support for your organizations, but also all the other forms of support we rely on, particularly the Court Challenges Program. The entire question surrounding Bill S-3 is in jeopardy. That bill will be a dead letter if we don't get the necessary funding. That's what would breathe life into the bill.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about the effects of this problem on our communities.

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: This association movement has made it possible to create all the literacy centres and health centres. Today, those centres are in a somewhat fragile position. From the grass-roots level, we're having trouble supporting them. Of course, the Montfort case was decisive, but we probably wouldn't have had the same results without the Court Challenges Program. In the case of the Sudbury Community Health Centre, the problem is imminent. The provincial government is refusing to subsidize that centre's satellites. This is the kind of situation in which, in the context of the strategy, we relied on that program. But it's been cancelled.

We're seeing a regression. At the same time, a need is increasingly being felt among the associations in the field. They want to be supported so that they can do what must be done to help everyone. The literacy field is in difficulty. The same is true of our museums. This is our culture, and we want to transmit it to our young people and to everyone else. There have been cuts there too.

Earlier we were talking about assimilation. On that point, we have to be able to convey this culture through programs and activities for everyone. It's increasingly necessary that the work we have to do be funded so that we can support everything that's been created over the years.

• (1620)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Ms. Roy, let's talk about early childhood. Do you believe that, in the current context, in the absence of federal funding programs, contributions from the provinces and work by the communities, the private sector will be interested in setting up day care centres for remote communities with the few dollars that the parents of children under six years of age provide? Is that possible? Isn't the government abandoning them?

• (1625)

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: That can't be done in the private sector. It will become very difficult. Even child care in a family setting has to be managed because we want quality service for the children. I don't think it's possible to put that in the private sector's hands. Some partnerships may be created, but we haven't really looked at that option. If we want to counter assimilation, we have to do it with our children starting in childhood, in day care centres.

We also have to engage in literacy because francophones have the highest illiteracy rate. We have to be able to increase literacy among parents so that they can help their children. We're talking about children dropping out of school and a lot of other things. We've gone far in education, but it's still very tough at the post-secondary level. We still have to do everything.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: There's no magic solution. Consider the example of the Garderie Clin D'oeil in Timmins. We did all the work. We did the feasibility studies, we stated the community's needs, we marketed it, and we set it up in a secondary school, which, at the time, was the largest secondary school in Ontario. We worked in partnership with the provincial government, with a federal government program and with the school board. Now things are working on their own. There is a private party, since the parents have chosen to take their children to that day care and are paying registration fees.

We don't have any ideological approach to this. We don't want to say that it should be totally private or totally government. We're in favour of a mixed approach.

Hon. Robert Thibault: I was talking about the capital budget, to start up.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Absolutely, and I understand you perfectly well. We believe that the organizations need basic funding because the work that remains to be done is manpower training and economic diversification work. For that, we need quite strong Francophone communities to fight assimilation.

I'll give you a concrete example. We need 60,000 workers in the mining and forestry sectors in Ontario's High North region, from Hearst to New Liskeard to Timmins. We don't have those workers. They aren't trained. We need a Francophone community college focusing on trades in Timmins, which would be a regional centre. We don't just want to train workers, but entrepreneurs as well. The worker for the twenty-first century isn't just someone who knows a trade; it's someone who can start up a business. We need to create these winning economic conditions so that our young people can live in solid cultural communities. This culture will enable them to develop the economic aspect. We didn't talk about tourism or value-added on the Francophone side. You can't do that any more simply by means of a model. We believe that the organizations in the field have a responsibility to make requests. They have to be sufficiently funded so that they can find the right government programs and work in partnership with the private sector, as we've done in order to survive. We're asking that those who play the game have the means to play it.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Your survival paradigms have been tested. In fact, the problem that arises is the sinews of your war: it's money. I'd like to know whether the Government of Quebec is adequately playing its role in this regard. If so, are you satisfied with it?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: I don't think so. We don't have any direct link with the Government of Quebec or with any program whatever. I heard that Benoît Pelletier was changing that.

Mr. Maka Kotto: He is precisely the one I was alluding to.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: He just talked about it. That's something new, that didn't exist before.

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: There has been some contact on the cultural side. In the arts and culture, there have been exchanges with Quebec for a number of years, but there are very few in other areas and very few in the regions.

Mr. Maka Kotto: But, in concrete terms, with regard to what the Parti Québécois has previously said about the place of the Francophone communities outside Quebec, do you see in Mr. Pelletier's talk any positive points for your survival?

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: I hope so. I'm meeting him tomorrow. So we'll see. The plan seems interesting. There's an opening, but it remains to be seen how we can work at the grass-roots level. It's that aspect that isn't obvious. How will it help us in the field? It helps us for major celebrations and in certain events, but, at the grass-roots level, I don't know. We'll have to see.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: It remains to be seen exactly what there is in Mr. Pelletier's proposal. He has good intentions, he has a desire for openness, for working together, but, in concrete terms, it remains to be seen. We'll have to try it.

Mr. Maka Kotto: On another matter all together, you referred earlier to the years of budget cuts. Which was the toughest year, in your view?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: In my opinion, it was 1997-1998. Our budget fell to \$30,358.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Did you see the blow coming or did it take you by surprise?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: It took us by surprise. From one year to the next, we couldn't foresee it, because you have to apply for grants and justify every penny that's spent. There was no way to predict what would happen in that regard. Let's be serious, my friends: what could we get with \$30,000 in 1998? Not even a cheap car. We could buy a vehicle with seats and an AM/FM radio. But we're an organization trying to work with for the advancement and vitality of a community in a given area. Honestly, we don't cost a lot for the work we do. We're not asking for the moon. We're not talking about millions, but rather hundreds of thousands of dollars.

• (1630)

Mr. Maka Kotto: Can you summarize the major effects that you've felt as a result of those cuts?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Starting in 1993, we had no more permanent staff. Try to imagine what it means to run an organization, whatever it may be, without a full-time secretary, without a general manager or without a full-time project officer. We work during the day and in the evening we try to hold meetings. We try to do things, but it's very difficult to discuss matters, for example, with the municipalities, with the officials of the various departments or with community stakeholders when we're at work during the day and unable to establish good contacts. We did what I call extreme volunteerism. And believe me, it is extreme volunteerism.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good afternoon, Mr. Roy and Mr. Bélanger.

As I'm also a member of the Official Languages Committee, I've had the opportunity to meet Ms. Roy, but unfortunately not Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That's because we're farther north, three and a half hours from Sudbury.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I'm pleased to meet you today, since this has enabled us to understand your demands, in the field, and to observe the community's vitality and so on. All this has proven to be very interesting for our committee.

You referred to the importance of working at the grass-roots level, with the people in the community environment. We know very well that the needs of the communities are very diverse and very different from town to town. Even though they are located side by side, their realities may be quite different.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: In the north, towns are always 150, 200 or 300 kilometres from one another.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In sectors such as health, manpower training and education, what are your relations with the other stakeholders in the Francophone community and with the leaders of the Franco-Ontarian community? Do you work in cooperation with them in other areas of activity?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Yes, we've done that on a number of projects. For example, in the case of the Garderie Clin D'oeil project, we worked with the school board people and with the various women's groups because it was they who had this need. It's complex and tragic when you live in a minority setting. If both parents have to work, they want to ensure that their children can experience their childhood in their mother tongue so that they don't lose it. This is a good example of working in a partnership. The problem is that we're both the strong link and the weak link. It isn't the school board's job to subsidize us and to always be helping us with \$2,000 or \$3,000 at a time. That's not its fundamental purpose. Its purpose is to educate our children as well as possible. That doesn't mean that we can't work together on projects. We have worked on training projects so that our Grade 12 students can acquire work experience and put that experience on their CVs when they want to find a full-time job.

It's hard because we operate after hours in class and hours at the office. We're always the game leg. We nevertheless get extraordinary

support from people. You know how hard it is today, with the crazy life we lead, to find people who want to sit on boards of directors. You also lead crazy lives, because you're in politics. I don't know how you do it. It's extremely difficult. If we had a little permanence somewhere, we could be much more effective than we are now. We wouldn't have problems with communication or delays. We wouldn't have to take three months to do something that we could do in one or two weeks. That's what was the toughest. We went through the period before the cuts and the one after the cuts. It was extremely difficult. Without the support of people in our community—they also have jobs to do and they're involved in various committees—and their good intentions, we wouldn't have done it. Now we're at the end of our rope, and it's very tough. The bags under our eyes are there for a reason.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: How can government stakeholders, whether it be at the federal, provincial or municipal level, promote the vitality of the official language minority communities? What is their role in that regard? Do you have the support of those stakeholders?

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: At the municipal level, it's very complicated in one way. The municipalities aren't subject to Ontario's French Language Services Act, and that's a problem for us. In addition, the municipalities aren't officially bilingual. That's another problem for us. We have to be able to rely on the good will of our municipalities. Over the years, our municipalities, Sudbury among others, have boasted about their bilingual labour force in order to attract people. However, we have to work with them. If we want to attract people and businesses, we have to be able to provide them with a good quality of life and thus to offer them good municipal recreation programs. We have to be able to give the community a good standard of living. For us, in the field, it's an everyday struggle. We have to work with the municipality to obtain every small service, every little advance, and sometimes there's even a regression. Since we've just had a municipal election, we have to start the work over. At the provincial level, there's an openness, but there's very little money for that. Cooperation is probably better in Sudbury because it's a major centre, and people in the field see the people from the various departments.

It's problematical.

• (1635)

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: It's very problematical because changes in municipal administration can change the situation from black to white. We saw that in Timmins.

At one point, we had a municipal council that was very open, and we worked on a number of issues. We worked very hard on a tourism file in partnership with Témiscamingue and Rouyn-Noranda. After the election, it all fell through because the new administration didn't consider that a priority. It may wait until it's too late. The forest industry is completely in crisis. We're in a mining boom, but you know that, with globalization, Canada has to carve out a place in new technology. We need a hyper-skilled labour force because we can't compete with China. It's time we worked together. This is a new way of looking at things. People have always worked in isolation. Now the federal government, provinces, municipalities and community organizations must work together. This is a culture that hasn't spread everywhere. Where it does exist, in Moncton, New Brunswick, for example, there has been extraordinary success. There are places where people have decided to take the bull by the horns, and that's produced good results. We haven't gotten there yet. We always have to go again, hat in hand, to convince people, always to show that we aren't dangerous dissenters, who want to contest for the pleasure of contesting.

Our concern is economic development. I'll give you an example. In Timmins, we're fighting for a Francophone college and a trades centre because 30% of our population has no training. This group will miss the technological conversion and will depend on government. We don't want these people to depend on government. We want them to have the necessary training to function in the twenty-first century. We want these people to be citizens who pay taxes, start up businesses, and make northern Ontario a place with a healthy economy. We now have an opportunity to do that in the forest industry crisis. We must do primary, secondary and tertiary processing. We think we can play a role in that, a catalyzing role, a leading role for our communities, so that they can get the services that will enable them to train and to turn the corner of the twenty-first century. This is an eloquent and specific example of the kind of role we want to play.

I have nothing else to add on the subject.

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to ask, in order to do this right, that we go for one full round. But I want to keep the questions short and the answers short.

We'll go to Mr. Bélanger, then Mr. Abbott, and then Mr. Angus.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I want to go back over a number of things, but I'm going to limit myself to one.

With regard to health, I understood that there were four networks in Canada, including one in the Near North and another in the High North of Ontario. Are Timmins and Sudbury in the same network, or is one in the Near North network and the other in the Great North network?

• (1640)

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: They're in two different networks.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Roughly speaking, how does that work? I had a chance to sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages when the people from Société Santé en français testified before it, and I got the impression that the French-language health

network was working well in Ontario. Is that the case, in your opinion?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That's not the case in Timmins, but it is in Hearst and Kapuskasing. We didn't have a community health centre. We were supposed to have one, but we didn't get it. It's working well in Témiscamingue. We suggested to the government that we join forces with Témiscamingue. We don't want to spend money for nothing. But, since we don't have the basic infrastructure, the network doesn't reach the 19,000 Francophones in Timmins.

Mrs. Suzanne Roy: It's a bit different in Sudbury. I can give you another viewpoint because ACFO is the network's trustee. The network is doing big things, but it's barely starting to be perceptible in the field. To date, it's done studies and other things of that kind.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I have a suggestion to make to you, with your permission. When I introduced my bill, the purpose of which was to add a sixth principle to the Official Languages Act, a principle concerning health, I had the opportunity to visit a number of places in the country. In Timmins, I met with the people responsible for the network of halfway houses; there are 11 of them. I asked whether at least one of the 11 houses operated in French, and I was told no. I made a suggestion. I was told that they would consider the matter, but you're suggesting by shaking your head, Mr. Bélanger, that there is still no halfway house for people suffering from psychological or psychiatric disorders that operates in French. These are great centres for assimilation.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That's what we have to fight day after day. If we had the time for it, we could easily work together with the networks.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Perhaps we could put that challenge to the Ontario High North network.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Yes, and if we're given the funding, we'll be able to meet the challenge. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you for being here.

I have just a little housekeeping. I think we should always try to be as efficient as we possibly can be, and I noted that the official languages committee had travelled to Sudbury. That could have been last November 9 or 10. Were you aware of that meeting and that they were coming?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: No. They didn't come to Timmins. As I said, Timmins is about three and a half hours north of Sudbury.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Okay. I apologize, because most people don't know where places are in my constituency. So I apologize. I'm usually critical of people who don't know where these places are, so I may as well be critical of myself.

Again, I'm not trying to make any point. I'm trying to figure out how we can make more efficient use of your time and of the committee's time. Would it have been easier, if you had been able to get from Timmins to Sudbury, if you'd been aware of the meeting in Sudbury?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Yes, for sure. Now, if we have to come to Ottawa, we'll come, because if we can talk directly to the committee

You know, it's a first. It's the first time in 20 years that the grassroots organizations can talk directly to committees. I thank you for the opportunity to discuss these things and for you to know exactly what's going on, because that's really political efficiency. And then we can find proper solutions to the problem.

Mr. Jim Abbott: And I think what we're also going to have to do is make sure that we're half-decently efficient, as well, and that we get the blues, the transcription of this meeting, to the official languages committee, so that they've completed a full circle.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Super.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Thank you.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I remember the time when people from the Francophone community were considered second-class citizens in northern Ontario. At the time, if you were a foreign worker or a Francophone, you worked in the mines, and if you were an Anglophone, you were a manager.

But the situation has changed.

• (1645)

[*English*]

I would say, again, as an anglophone watching, that the francophone community of the north has been very, very successful. So many of our young leaders are francophone. The sense of pride, the sense of identity... We have a flag. It's not the Red Ensign; it's the Franco-Ontarian flag. I see it flying everywhere.

I'd like to get your perspective on how much it has been transformed in the north, and what steps we would need to take in terms of government policy to ensure that it continues. As a supplementary to that, because I'll leave this question to you, I remember when the francophone community in the north began its very vocal struggle to maintain its rights, and there was a sense in the anglophone community that these rights would be coming from the anglophones. That sense seems to have disappeared. And now you have the Cree in the region also speaking on behalf of their rights.

Do you see the success of the francophone community in northern Ontario as being part of the overall success of the community, all the communities, or is there still a need to tug away rights from one group in order to secure rights for the minority?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: I was born in Quebec, but I've lived my entire life in Hearst, Ontario. What was special about Hearst was its economic vitality. It was one of the small towns in Canada where there was the largest number of millionaires per capita. For example, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce was one of the banks that had the biggest deposits in Canada based on population.

There were a number of generations of entrepreneurs: the Fontaines, Lévesques, Lecours, Gosselins. I was educated in that community. The community as a whole didn't have any difficulty. Like the people in the west, New Brunswick or remote regions, we were used to getting by on our own; that's what we did in Hearst. We created cultural centres at first without government assistance.

Then things got complicated. All the large businesses established by Francophones in Northern Ontario, whether in Kapuskasing, Hearst, Timmins or elsewhere, were bought up by U.S. multinationals or other companies. That's a very tough change to follow and live with because we're losing natural allies in the community organizations.

There are still a lot of Francophone entrepreneurs in northern Ontario. In Timmins, even though they have English names, 45 to 48% of businesses are owned by Francophone entrepreneurs. Since these are businesses operated in Ontario, bearing a French name in a city where you're in the minority could cause problems.

Our region still enjoys considerable vitality. Will we be able to make the turn of the twenty-first century, to modernize and to make the necessary changes? I'm quite optimistic, but we need help in doing so.

In the past, believe me, we fought for our rights. I spoke to entrepreneurs like Mr. Brousseau, who was a subcontractor for Malette Lumber Inc. of Timmins. At first, they had to fight for services in French from Bell Canada and bilingual billing from Hydro Ontario.

Battles were fought for every service that we take for granted in the major centres. Those battles are now a thing of the past. We've taken our place and it only remains for us to finish the job for us to have all our institutions. Let's take the example of Quebec. The Anglophone community is solidly rooted there, it's vibrant and it accepts the fact that Francophones are in the majority in that province. It contributes to Quebec's economic development. This is an extraordinary model. Canada has the ability to be a country of tolerance.

What we're asking is for a little assistance in doing the same thing in Ontario. If we develop Francophone rights, I don't see why we couldn't do the same thing for those of the Aboriginal communities. When we fail to train part of the labour force and the education system is not accessible to everyone, we lose the economic contribution and creativity of geniuses, artists and people that Canada can't do without if it wants to develop and take its place in the global economy.

We're going through a terrible crisis. That's why we're sounding the alarm. We want all Canadians—and that has always been Canada's trademark—to be able to find the resources to develop their potential, wherever they may be in the country. That will contribute to everyone's economic development, and that's what our entrepreneurs and communities need.

• (1650)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I must say, before you finish, that at the end I usually give a few little statements that I've picked up as time has run on.

One of my very best friends is from Timmins. He played a little hockey down our way. I always said he must have one day gotten a breakaway. He returns home very often, and I've learned a lot about the north from Dennis.

I'm quite sure French-speaking practitioners could be quite a difficult thing. Just on Saturday evening, in my home town of Stratford in my riding there was quite a thing put on by the hospitals as they try to recruit new doctors, as they come up. The doctor shortage is quite prevalent right across the country, I'm sure, and more prevalent in some of the more remote areas. I live in a rural community, and some of our small rural municipalities are without doctors. I can understand your concern there.

One question I had was whether your organization gets any funding support from Ontario.

It gets none from Ontario?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: None directly. If we prepare a project, sometimes we'll get some funding. That's the only way we get it.

The Chair: Okay.

One other thing you talked about was that a lot of the time it's easier to trade around the world or with our American neighbours than interprovincially. That's been a great concern of mine for years and years, and I think it's something that has to be rectified.

The other thing is that you are not the first person to come before this committee or other committees seeking long-term, sustainable funding. Ever since I have been on this particular committee, I've heard it not only from the CBC, but from sports organizations, from museums, from most people. I think it should be on merit, and long-term, sustainable funding is the way to go, rather than giving you projects so that you have those peaks. And if you can work within certain criteria, that long-term, sustainable funding would be there.

So those are just a few things I've suggested. That's the way I feel. But I understand a lot of your answers and your presentation.

Again, thank you very much for attending this. I'm glad this committee is finally recognizing you and having you before it. I know that for years the museums never got in front of a committee. So I am pleased that you were here today. We've all listened to your concerns.

Have a safe trip home.

We're going to adjourn for about five minutes, and then we'll go back to business again.

•(1650)

(Pause)

•(1655)

The Chair: Welcome back.

Now we'll move to our second part here, to committee business.

First of all, we have a notice of motion from Jim Abbott, a notice of motion from Charlie Angus, and a notice of motion from Maka Kotto. There has not been 48 hours of sitting time for these motions. I would suggest that if we're going to carry forward on these motions

today, to deal with them, we would need unanimous consent around the table to go forward. We've dealt with the 48 hours' notice before.

One is dated the 15th, one is dated the 16th, and one is dated the 8th, but last week doesn't count. It's sitting days. It's 48 hours of sitting days. It's no different from if a motion came in on Friday at three or four o'clock and you wanted to deal with it on Monday; we couldn't deal with it. We went through that before. We can't deal with it until the Wednesday meeting. That's how it is.

Mr. Bélanger.

•(1700)

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

I don't have a problem dealing with these, whether or not it is as you say. My difficulty with what you just said is that the Government of Canada quite often tables notices in the week that the House isn't sitting, as we saw with amendments to Bill C-2, for instance, being tabled in the week the House wasn't sitting, and that counts as the 48 hours' notice. So I'm not sure. I would be interested in getting the verification on that. I'm not sure that you're right, Mr. Chairman, but that's beside the point.

I'm quite prepared personally—and I can't speak for everybody else—to deal with all three of these right now and waive the 48 hours' notice.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Certainly the government is very keen—not that we're not keen on the CBC—particularly on getting into some kind of a discussion, on getting into these motions with respect to the museums. Certainly I think you would find the government members, the Conservative members, to be in favour of unanimous consent. I think that it might be of value—this is just a suggestion, not that I'm doubting your ruling, except that Mr. Bélanger has raised this question—for us to maybe get some detail just for future reference, not for this.

The Chair: I'm taking my direction from what I thought I received when I went to the chairmen's seminar on that particular day. I didn't realize, and I'll still stand by it, that 48 hours' notice, if you're on a break week.... I received these this morning. The clerk gave these motions to me this morning, so that's how long I've had. I would be willing.... We can debate this all the time.

Would someone like to make a motion so we can go forward with that?

An hon. member: I so move.

The Chair: Okay, it's moved that we go ahead with these motions. Are we all in favour?

We have unanimous consent, and we will go forward.

Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: I would like to speak on both of the motions relating to the Museums Association, but I would like to do that after we discuss something first. I've had a very cordial discussion with Mr. Kotto, but unfortunately I didn't have an opportunity to have a discussion with either Mr. Angus or Mr. Bélanger, though I think maybe the Canadian Museums Association people may have.

My motion was not intended to be an antagonistic motion. The purpose of my motion was to move forward with becoming relevant as a committee in providing input to the minister.

The Chair: Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: I have a point of order. Mr. Abbott has already moved on with his motion. We haven't fallen into agreement on your decision not to consider the two motions introduced with 48 hours' notice last week, when we weren't sitting in the House. According to the information I've just received, that's not valid; 48 hours is 48 hours, whether we're sitting or not.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: We agreed to consider them.

• (1705)

Mr. Maka Kotto: Then I withdraw my remarks.

[English]

The Chair: We dispensed with that.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: All right.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Okay.

The committee will be aware of my arguments, and I apologize for repeating them, but the difficulty we have, before we can go ahead and have any meaningful discussion about these motions, is this committee has made a decision that we are going to be having three days on the court challenges program. That being the case, and the agenda of the committee now being completely full, both of these motions become completely unworkable, in my humble judgment.

I apologize, because I am unilingual, but I've taken the time to take a look at the number of pages I have in my hand from the official languages committee, where the issue of the court challenges program was brought up. I also have in my other hand the court challenges program minutes, or Hansard, from the justice committee. So the point of view particularly of the people who oppose the government is well on record, both in the official languages committee and in the justice committee. Maybe the committee wants to revisit the idea of using up three full days of this committee as well, with these other two committees already working on this issue, and get into the museums policy—in other words, to make some time so if either of these motions were voted in favour we would be able to do something about it.

I want to speak to the motions, but I'm just asking about this issue. We don't really have any time in our agenda to be able to react positively, even if we had a positive vote on these motions.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I don't believe the issue of the court challenges program is what we're discussing right now. The committee had discussed it and they had made a decision. So it's what to do with future business, i.e., either implement a museums study at a date we haven't decided, at a date to possibly do a CBC review, or under Mr. Kotto's motion, which is to ask the government to present to us before the budget, so we can look at the policy they're supposed to implement, because we have the recommendations already given by witnesses. So the court challenges program issue is not to be discussed at this time; it's to focus on setting our agenda out of these three motions.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: We have established that we would spend some time on the court challenges program. That's decided. We've had the proposal from the clerk, which we've agreed upon as a committee, and I believe we should move ahead on that.

In terms of the motions before us today, here's the way I intend to vote unless we see some amendments: I will not support Mr. Abbott's motion. It's not that I have anything against museums, but I do believe that in terms of museums, Mr. Kotto's motion is perhaps where we should be going as a committee, because the work's been done—and I'm not the only one saying that: it's the Canadian Museums Association itself.

Also, we had confirmation at the last meeting this committee had with the Museums Associations that indeed the government—the minister—is currently engaged and has asked them to bring forward suggestions before the end of this calendar year. In that situation we would perhaps be doing work for nothing, because if the government has decided to pick it up, as we had encouraged it to do back in the spring, when we tabled a report to that effect, then I'm not sure we'd be doing the right thing.

I'd rather wait and see if indeed the government intends to come forward with a policy. If it wishes to submit it to the committee, I would personally welcome that. It doesn't have to; I respect that; the government can issue its own papers and its own policies as it sees fit. In the spirit of cooperation, it would be welcome to come here so that we could react to it, but I'm not sure that it would be a good use of our time at this juncture to determine that in reality we'll be looking at that in January or February, when in fact the government might have finished its work, as I would hope it would have. That's basically what Mr. Kotto's motion says, *grosso modo*.

I intend to support the one from Mr. Angus. The future of public broadcasting in this country is a priority for us, particularly CBC and Radio-Canada. If the government comes forward with legislation on other issues, as it should have, since we've had commitments made by the minister twice at this committee that we would have legislation tabled in the House and referred to a committee—presumably part of this one—in terms of copyright, at that point that would take precedence.

In the absence of that, if I had to choose between doubling the efforts, *dédoubler*, on what the government's doing in terms of the museum policy—which it is working on, we've had that assurance—and working on the future of the CBC and Radio-Canada and its mandate—which the government is not doing—then I'd rather go to the CBC and Radio-Canada. That's how I intend to vote on these particular motions at this time.

I think all of that can be revisited come January 28, when we reassemble, in light of what may be before us at that time, whether or not we have a review of a policy on museums and whether or not the government is intending to move further on the CBC review mandate. At that point, I'd be perfectly willing to look at this, but for the most part the die is cast for the next four weeks that we have, so I'd stick to that. That's how I intend to vote on these particular motions, subject to revision at the appropriate moment.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kotto, please go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, allow me to refresh the committee's memory.

I'm going to cite Mr. McAvity in relation to Mr. Abbott's motion. At the meeting of June 20, 2006, Mr. Malo spoke to Mr. McAvity in the following terms:

As you know, the previous government initiated a review of the museum policy. I imagine you had an opportunity to make some recommendations to that government.

Mr. McAvity then answered that he had conducted broad consultations and developed proposals and that:

The museum policy was very close to fruition when the election was called. Unfortunately, it was unable to move forward to that point, but literally, consultations were finished and it was ready for a decision.

I agree with Mr. Bélanger on this subject.

At the November 8 meeting, Mr. Vadeboncoeur, of the SMQ, was asked whether a new consultation could lead anywhere. He answered as follows:

We're repeat to you exactly what we said during the other consultations that were held 2, 3, 4 even 10 years ago. It's as simple as that. The situation hasn't changed.

In the same line of thinking, Mr. Gerry Osmond from the Alberta museum community, told us the following:

[English]

To put it in layman's terms, we've been there and done that. You will not hear anything different on consultations any more. We would have been very clear in the last consultation, and delaying this process any further will not give you any new information.

[Translation]

That's why I'm introducing this motion. As regards that of Mr. Angus, one of our major concerns is to review the mandate of Radio-Canada to evaluate the resources that are allocated to it to carry out that mandate. I therefore suggest that we not waste a lot of time on museum policy. Ultimately, it might be harmful to do so, because the words and intentions are clear. Wasting time discussing them further would probably be an attempt to stall for time, to waste

the committee's time and eventually to undermine the good faith that our party is showing.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Abbott, then Mr. Fast.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Well, in goodwill, I suggest to Mr. Angus that the reason why I was talking about that is if our committee wanted to have some relevance and input to the minister, we would want to be able to take a look at a suggestion I'm about to make, but we don't have time to do that.

One of the things that we have never discussed, and which certainly in my judgment is key to this, is the whole issue of national significance. The policy has to establish parameters within which to recognize nationally significant collections, to determine the level and nature of support. We have never had that under either a Conservative government or a Liberal government.

What we need to find out, for example, is the mandate of the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board. Perhaps I may read:

Among its various responsibilities, the Board certifies cultural property for income tax purposes. In this role, it makes determinations with respect to the "outstanding significance and national importance" and the fair market value of objects or collections donated or sold to designated Canadian museums, art galleries, archives and libraries.

For example, I think it would be of value for this committee to call the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board before it and ask the board and other appropriate people like that: If we want to establish the criteria of which museums and which artifacts should be receiving national support, as opposed to regional or as opposed to local support, would you be able to do that? We could do that kind of a hearing and offer this counsel to the minister.

The minister can call those people in. I happen to have a copy of the submission the Canadian Museums Association made on the Canadian museums policy, "New Approach", which all of us can have from the Canadian Museums Association. This was made to the minister on October 30. They're happy to share that with us.

We have all of this documentation, but there still are missing links. All I'm trying to say is that there are questions we don't need to spend a lot of time on, but if we are going to be relevant in the process, we have to gather the information.

• (1715)

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Could I ask, first of all, are we debating a specific motion or are we still dealing with these three amorphous motions all at once?

The Chair: Well, the one we seem to be dealing with right now—or maybe two—is Mr. Kotto's motion primarily.

Mr. Ed Fast: All right. So Mr. Kotto's motion is on the table, is that correct?

The Chair: We've got it on the table.

Mr. Ed Fast: All right. I only wanted to confirm that.

I guess what makes it difficult for me to vote in favour of this at this point in time is that I haven't been able to review everything that was presented at the previous committee, before I was ever here. I would like to have that opportunity, at least until the next meeting, so that staff can prepare a compendium of material that's been submitted, because it's a chance to go back and review not only minutes but the blues on some of the testimony that's been given. Then I'd be in a better position to assess whether we can close the door now and move forward with drafting the policy.

To do this now, I'll have to vote against it, not because I don't support it necessarily; it's simply that I don't have all the information. Had I had it a week or two weeks ago, it would have been easier. And staff, obviously, are in a position where they could provide us with further supporting information.

The Chair: Which particular meeting would you suggest this information would come from?

Mr. Ed Fast: Or come to—?

The Chair: Well, it would come here. The program that's been presented, or that most people are talking about here, or the policy.... There was never a policy reviewed by this committee. There were meetings between the museums associations and the ministry. I don't ever recall.... We did zilch here on policy at this committee.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, I'm looking at the motion, and it refers to the fact that "...the government implement as soon as possible the new museum policy discussed in 2005 and respect the work and consultations undertaken by the Department...". I'd like to see that work before I make an assessment on this motion.

The Chair: I think that's what the motion is saying, that no one has seen that work.

Mr. Ed Fast: How can we then determine that the door is closed?

The Chair: It was passed out earlier.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, there were two documents distributed concerning the consultations that were conducted by the department at that time with museums associations from across the country, and the conclusions of those consultations. It's on the basis of that work that we heard the representatives of the museums associations say here twice that as far as they're concerned all the consultations have been done.

We're getting into things that have not been discussed here. The previous government had a policy prepared, so that's internal documents to the Department of Canadian Heritage that Mr. Abbott, I presume, can access. Those are the documents that the people from the museums associations are referring to in terms of the work having been done. We haven't seen that end result, I agree with you. The consultation papers and the result of the consultation are documents that were circulated to us.

• (1720)

Mr. Ed Fast: There was no report, then.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: By our committee? I don't believe so.

Mr. Ed Fast: Were witnesses heard at the time?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: By the committee? No—by the department.

Mr. Chairman, what I'm saying here is that I'm still open to that concept. Because we now know that the department, the minister, is heading another effort to come up with a museum policy early, as in by the end of this calendar year, I don't want us spinning our wheels, redoubling what the minister and her department are doing. If the minister wishes to share with this committee in January the results of the work that she's undertaking now, that would be great. That might trigger us into a policy review of our own. I don't want to do all these meetings if I know there are people who are far more qualified than I am who are currently doing it, which seems to be the case.

Mr. Ed Fast: The only reason, Mr. Chair, if I can complete.... Mr. Kotto's motion, of course, essentially forecloses any further witnesses appearing before this committee. I would hate to do that, because there may be reasons for us to bring others to this table.

The Chair: Before I hear from anyone else, let's be clear of one thing. If we're going to do this review we're talking about, it will be in February. The agenda is set from now until the recess, and the budgets have been struck. We've gone through that. We can't keep revisiting that. So what we're talking about is if there's going to be any committee work done on museums, that will be in the new year. That's where we stand.

Mr. Kotto.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, as a result of the work previously done, there's nothing preventing the Minister of Canadian Heritage from tabling a bill on museum policy. If she wishes to do so, she can also desist because that's why she's there. The government didn't seek the committee's opinion before cutting the budgets of the organizations and programs. We weren't consulted for that. That was unilateral.

I'll take another example: the government's foreign policy isn't drafted in committee; it's the government that decides it. Serious work has been done on the museum file. The minister can make a proposal on the basis of that work, with a team consisting of competent people, as Mr. Bélanger said. At that point, if we want to amend a particular aspect of the bill, we can invite witnesses, who will either support or oppose the bill or an aspect of the bill.

[*English*]

The Chair: There's just one thing I have to say: I find this quite ironic here today, as we debate some of this. We had some people who might have been able to answer some of these questions we've come across today, in the deputy minister and two bureaucrats we had here not too long ago. We had half an hour—or three-quarters of an hour, almost—at that meeting when we could have asked those people some of the questions that have been asked or talked about here today.

I find it ironic that there were no questions to be asked of those people that day. I just wanted to interject there, a little, wee bit, that maybe we would have found out where they were on some of the policy.

We have five minutes left and we're going to vote on this motion before five minutes are up.

Mr. Angus, and then Mr. Malo, and keep your questions short, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I've just been saying, Mr. Chair, that yes, there has been a great deal of input in this. It wasn't all at committee. For example, on an issue of national significance in 2005 I held a forum with all kinds of small regional museums, and we submitted it to Heritage. We never knew what happened with it, but issues were raised about how the small museums tie into national policy.

What I find interesting about this motion—and I don't think we're all at opposite ends here, but are just talking about timing and how to go about this—is that I've never been in a situation where I've phoned stakeholders and asked whether they wanted us to invite them to come to speak and had them say no, please; we've spoken, we've submitted, we understand that a policy is coming down, and let's see what that policy is.

What I'm hearing from those stakeholders is that they would like to see the policy. That then gives us at committee a chance to review it and a chance to draw witnesses. If it's a great policy, it's going to be very good; if there are problems with it, we'll find out and can then bring back recommendations to the minister. But I believe that if we at this point are doing something when we know another process is under way, we're going to end up having to draw further witnesses when the policy comes down anyway.

So just in terms of finally getting something done here, I would say that I support Mr. Kotto's motion, because we're not saying we're not going to hear witnesses, but we want to hear what's coming first, so that we know how to set our agenda.

• (1725)

The Chair: I'm prepared to call a vote on—

Oh, Mr. Malo, I'm sorry. Be very quick, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Chairman, before we vote on the motion before us, I'd like to point out a minor error in the wording of Mr. Kotto's amendment. I'd simply like to correct it. So I want to move an amendment to make the motion clearer.

The fifth paragraph reads as follows: Whereas the witnesses from the Canadian Museums Association, Alberta Museums and the Société des

Musées Québécois feel there is no point in a new study that would inevitably lead to the same conclusions;

I would delete the word "that" and add the words "because it". The sentence would therefore read: "...feel there is no point in a new study because it would inevitably lead to the same conclusions".

The clerk has already received a copy of the amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Did everyone get the amendment to the motion that Mr. Malo presented?

Mr. Thibault.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Just a point in my understanding of it, Mr. Chair, is that it doesn't change in any way the English version of it. I think it makes it more consistent.

The Chair: We'll take a vote on this.

The vote is on the motion put forward by Mr. Kotto, as amended.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: It being 5:30.... Should we deal with the other two while we're here?

An hon. member: Why don't we just vote?

The Chair: Let's just vote.

Mr. Abbott's motion is mooched; it's done. It doesn't have dates, so it can't go forward.

We have Mr. Angus's motion:

That this committee undertake a full investigation of the role for a public broadcaster in the 21st century, an examination of the various services, including the adequacy of regional programming, and an examination of the issues posed by new media; the study will gather public input from stakeholders and deliver a report to the Minister advising her of our findings; this undertaking shall commence upon the return of the House in January 2007.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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