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Mr. Guy Lauzon

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)): I'd like to welcome you. As you all know, my name is Yvon Godin, and I am the second Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

This is the second province we've visited. Yesterday, we visited Newfoundland; we went to St. John's, Newfoundland. This is the first time in its 25 years of existence that the Standing Committee on Official Languages has travelled in the country to meet its citizens directly in the provinces. One may perhaps wonder why we didn't go to Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia to visit people directly in their province. As you can see, the committee has been around for 25 years and has never travelled. Let's put our cards on the table right off the top: it wasn't even easy to get to Moncton. We were supposed to travel last year, but that was cancelled because of the election.

Our committee consists of members from all the political parties. As you can see, the government is represented by Sylvie Boucher, Pierre Lemieux and Daniel Petit, the official opposition is represented by Jean-Claude D'Amours and Raymond Simard, and Guy André represents the Bloc québécois.

This morning, we'll start with Prince Edward Island. The purpose of this trip was to go to the regions. That made it possible to meet with the organizations that very often don't have a chance to come to Ottawa. However, that wasn't the only reason. It also gave us the chance to make some checks. For example, is the Action Plan for Official Languages working in the region? Do citizens have any questions? Do they have any suggestions to make to the government? Based on that, we'll draft a report and also examine the Action Plan for Official Languages. We're looking at health, education, culture, in short, everything. I want to hear what you have to say on those subjects.

We're here with our analyst, Jean-Rodrigue Paré, Samy Agha, the committee clerk, Louise Thibault, procedural clerk, our technicians and our translators. On the technical side, in particular for translation, you don't have to touch the microphones because everything will be done automatically.

With that, we're going to start, and you'll have to introduce yourselves. As I said, we'll start with Prince Edward Island. Mr. Landry isn't really from Prince Edward Island, but, from what I've been told, he's representing the Atlantic Region as a whole.

Mr. Rodrigue Landry (Director, Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities): I represent the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): So we invited him to this meeting. People from Prince Edward Island will join us later, including Ms. Thorne, who's just now arriving. Good morning, Ms. Thorne. We're just starting.

Each of you will have three minutes. You'll tell me that's very short, but the committee is quite aware of what is going on, and we want to give members the chance to ask you questions. Then you can elaborate on your ideas. You're the experts in the field.

With that, we can begin. Thank you.

Mr. Rodrigue Landry: Good morning. My name is Rodrigue Landry, and I am the director of the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities.

The Institute is funded by the federal government and is concerned with official language minorities. As researchers, we conduct studies on Anglophones in Quebec and Francophones outside Quebec.

We would have had a lot of things to say about the action plan, but we chose to emphasize four points. We've submitted a written brief to you that we didn't have the time to have translated, but it will soon be submitted to you in both languages.

During the three minutes I have, I can't give as many details as I would like about the four points that I want to emphasize. They're explained much more clearly in our brief.

The first point concerns early childhood. In our opinion, this is the biggest challenge for the Francophone and Acadian communities. Currently, at least 40% of child rights holders under section 23 are not attending French-language schools.

One of the decisive factors is exogamy, which is increasing. Approximately two-thirds of these children come from exogamous couples; they have a Francophone parent and an Anglophone parent. In most cases, unfortunately, those families choose English as the language spoken at home. French is the spoken language for one in five children.

Our research shows that exogamy isn't a direct cause of assimilation. The choice made by parents is the direct cause. Some parents make an informed choice. For example, all parents transmit their knowledge of their language to their children, who go to French-language school because that's the school where the minority studies. That enables children to be bilingual. Our research also shows that the children of exogamous families who attend French-language schools are the best bilinguals in the country.

The exogamous family is a microcosm of Canadian society. The relationship between the two official languages exists within a family. These parents must be encouraged to make an informed choice in order to respect both cultures. Very often, it's not a matter of bad will. I can't say any more on that here, but parents aren't always aware of the conditions.

By way of a solution, we refer you to an excellent study that was conducted by the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, which tabled its preliminary report in June 2005. In that report, the committee recommended that education be monitored from early childhood until the postsecondary level. We think it contains excellent suggestions and we refer you to that report because we can't immediately give you more details on our recommendations.

The second point we would like to emphasize concerns economic development. Economic development was initially not part of the action plan. We gave it a certain amount of attention after the mid-term report. We think that projects aren't yet being funded directly enough. Feasibility studies and business plans are mainly being done, and there's not really any money to pursue projects.

We therefore ask those who'll be preparing the plan to see whether they couldn't elaborate more on this entire approach.

The third point, and I think this is very important, concerns the action plan's overall approach. I've been conducting studies on linguistic minorities for approximately 30 years, and I'm convinced that the action plan, as interesting as it may be, will never be able to reverse the situation, if I may say, in order to help the official language communities revitalize, particularly the Francophone communities.

A lot of attempts have been made in the world. Canada could become an example of minority language revitalization in the world because it already has a well-structured approach. We think the plan should have a much more comprehensive approach and also include the actions of the provinces and communities. That may be a lot, but we're really serious about this. If we want the plan to have real impact, the federal government has to establish a comprehensive partnership with, for example, the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie and the communities. I think we could even include Quebec.

The last point I want to raise concerns research.

• (0910)

Research is obviously of interest to us. We think that, in the first plan, it wasn't pushed enough in terms of linguistic planning. A linguistic plan should address the needs of the communities. If you want to meet needs, you have to know what they are, and research can help a great deal in that respect. Praiseworthy attempts have been made. For example, the Humanities Research Council of Canada is conducting a three-year project that will end this year. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the CIHR, is starting to take an interest in the subject. It has an advisory committee on official languages, and that committee is considering introducing programs. In our view, however, there will still have to be a much more stable program.

Linguistic duality is at the core of the Canadian identity. It seems to me there could be a permanent fund providing research grants on this question.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Landry. The time available to you is quite short, but you can send us a brief. That would help us in developing our report.

Mr. Rodrigue Landry: We submitted it this morning.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Okay. You can add other things to it as well.

Ms. Gilman.

Ms. Julie Gilman (Coordinator, Prince Edward Island French Language Health Services Network): Thank you very much. On behalf of the Prince Edward Island French-Language Health Services Network, I'd like to thank you for having us today. My name is Julie Gilman, and I'm the coordinator of the network and French-language services analyst at the Prince Edward Island Ministry of Health.

I'd like to introduce Ms. Jeannita Bernard, who is a member of the network's board and a nurse by training. She is currently head of the regular training department at the Société éducative, the Francophone community college of Prince Edward Island.

Our network differs from the other 16 French-language health services networks in Canada in that its structure reflects a close joint effort between the provincial government and the Acadian and Francophone community of Prince Edward Island. We have two co-chairs, one on the community side and the other on the government side. I would remind you that you met the government co-chair, Donald DesRoches, in Ottawa on October 5. Unfortunately, neither Claude Blaqui re nor Donald DesRoches could be here today.

Our network enjoys community, provincial and federal support and has had success with the four projects introduced by Health Canada's Primary Health Care Transition Fund. A virtual French-language health care services site, a French-language resource centre, a health prevention and promotion program for Francophones and a videoconferencing initiative have been established. As a result of this last project, the students at La-Belle-Cloche school in Souris have communicated with the public health nurse for the first time in French. The videoconferencing project, like the others, has developed into a habit. Now the health care system is equipped to provide services in French in the region where the Acadian and Francophone community is most isolated.

In addition, we are particularly proud of our action plan to provide primary health care services in French, which is part of the *Pr parer le terrain* project. That plan, which has been validated by our community and government partners, provides a detailed presentation of necessary primary health care services by region.

Our partnerships are established, our plan is prepared. Now we need the necessary resources to implement it all so that we can provide quality health care services to the Acadians and Francophones of Prince Edward Island.

● (0915)

Mrs. Jeannita Bernard (Member, Prince Edward Island French Language Health Services Network): The shortage of human resources capable of providing services in French is a real challenge facing our province. If our action plan were implemented today, Prince Edward Island would be unable to fill all the positions required to provide French-language health care services to the public. We therefore need the federal government's support in order to make progress on training in French in the health field.

In Prince Edward Island, the Francophone postsecondary institution Société éducative de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard is not a full-fledged member of the Consortium national de formation en français, the CNFS. Until it becomes one, we'll be facing major barriers to the training and retention of health professionals. Our network is working hard to support the planning and delivery of quality health care services in French that are suited to the local reality and the needs of the Acadian and Francophone community of Prince Edward Island.

The results of our efforts are obvious when you consider the commitment of our partners. However, you still can't make a lasting change in four years. To achieve that goal, it is important that the federal government provide continuing, long-term support beyond 2008, whether it be through the Société Santé en français, which ensures the operation of networks and improved access to services, or for the Consortium national de formation en santé, which facilitates the recruitment of Francophone professionals through the training offered by its members.

The government of Prince Edward Island is resolutely committed to supporting the vitality of the province's Acadian and Francophone community. The enactment of the French-Language Services Act in 2000 attests to that. The fact that your committee is here in the region shows that you support the vitality of the linguistic minority community that is so important to us.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Ms. Thorne.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne (Director general, Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin): Good morning, everyone. I represent the Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, the organism that is the mouthpiece of Acadians and Francophones in the province. I apologize on behalf of our new president, Mr. Edmond Richard. He wanted to be here today, but had to go to Quebec City for the launch of the new policy.

We have approximately 136,000 inhabitants in Prince Edward Island. Of that number, approximately 4.4% have French as their mother tongue. However, if you add all those who speak French, there is a total of more than 16,000 Francophones, 12% of the population. In Prince Edward Island, we have significant potential for developing the Acadian and Francophone community.

As Mr. Landry has already said, exogamy and assimilation are very important issues for us. In Prince Edward Island, the Acadian assimilation rate is much higher than it is nationally. It is approximately 56%, whereas the national average is 31%. That means we're facing serious challenges.

The action plan has enabled us to make the targeted departments more aware of the provision of services and of the challenges facing the Acadian and Francophone community. However, we haven't enjoyed significant investment directly related to community development, that is to say of our French-language communities in an English-dominant environment. If we have one recommendation to make, it would be that this deficiency be corrected.

Since 2001, the number of French-language schools in Prince Edward Island has increased from two to six. The offer of services has risen and demand is still increasing. Unfortunately, funding allocated to our communities has not increased. Consequently, we are having trouble meeting the demand that we have created by establishing these centres.

As their name suggests, the school-community centres have a community development component, and that component is related to the French-language schools. That makes all the difference in our communities when it comes to developing Francophonie and fighting assimilation. However, to do this, we need significant investment at the federal and provincial levels. Similarly to what Mr. Landry said, I would say that our provinces should be included in the action plan as regards the areas of jurisdiction for which they're responsible.

In addition, the preschool centres are of the highest importance for us. I know that my colleague Nicole Drouin will be talking about that as well. For the moment, our young children start school without good knowledge of the language. Not every generation of parents has had access to French-language schools. That's another very important priority that would require greater investment.

In spite of everything, good things are happening in Prince Edward Island. Among other things, we've created a tripartite human resources development committee, consisting of representatives of the federal and provincial governments as well as the community. Since the action plan went into effect, we note that the group has expanded. That has created work. More and more federal governments targeted by the action plan are being added, thus making the services provided by the federal and provincial governments and by the communities more accessible to the French-language communities. Among other things, we've seen a number of departments get involved in developing an action plan that will help specifically to enhance the accessibility of services offered in French.

● (0920)

A large part of the action plan could involve the tripartite group and, among other things, the Vision Plan, the comprehensive development plan for the Acadian and Francophone community. This is an exhaustive plan in which more than 500-member stakeholders of our community have taken part, either through consultations or the plan's development. The plan touches on all aspects of the development of our community.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Ms. Thorne.

Ms. Drouin.

Ms. Nicole Drouin (Director general, Fédération des parents francophones de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard): My name is Nicole Drouin, and I'm Director General of the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard. Our federation represents parents on all issues relating to education and early childhood in Prince Edward Island.

As regards education in French, we've made enormous progress in Prince Edward Island in the past five or six years. As Ms. Thorne mentioned, the number of French-language schools has increased from two to six. There is now one school per Francophone academic region, which is a good step forward.

Our current priorities are mainly in the area of early childhood. We are affiliated with the Commission nationale des parents francophones, whose main priority for a number of years now has been early childhood. Last year, we were able to work with our partners on the development of a strategic plan to develop early childhood in Prince Edward Island through the support of the CNPF and the Department of Social Development.

There's still a lot to do in this area. To supplement Mr. Landry's remarks, I would say that there are many challenges because needs are numerous. In many cases, families are exogamous, and often hard to reach. It's not easy to provide full services meeting all needs in the area of early childhood. The regions are small, but the clientele is large. It's hard to secure human, financial and material resources. In a minority setting, for early childhood purposes, it's even difficult to get access to books, video cassettes and so on.

According to the research, language develops very early. We're talking about the period between the age of six months and three years. Early childhood services suffer major deficiencies in this area in Prince Edward Island, particularly with regard to exogamous families, where the use of both English and French in the home is common. It is all the more important to provide children with the opportunity to learn French and to access all kinds of activities.

Under the Action Plan for Official Languages, major funding has been allocated to early childhood for research and family literacy. That's good, but there should be more investment in this area. Ad hoc projects are appreciated, but we need longer-term plans in order to extend projects that are helping us in the short term.

● (0925)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you very much. We'll now move on to questions.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to come and present your demands to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I'd also like to welcome colleagues from my province, New Brunswick. I want to welcome you to our beautiful bilingual province.

My first question could be for Ms. Drouin or Ms. Thorne.

Both of you mentioned that the number of French-language schools in Prince Edward Island has increased from two to six. I suppose that whole process wasn't easy. Could you tell me whether

the Court Challenges Program has been useful to you in this process? Ultimately, the point for you is to promote your demands in a positive way and to ensure you can provide young people with an education in French in Prince Edward Island.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: The Court Challenges Program was obviously essential and crucial in getting our six schools. We had two, and, if we hadn't taken the Government of Prince Edward Island to court to get schools in the regions that didn't have any, that is Summerside, West Prince and Rustico first of all, we still might not have our schools today.

It's thanks to the Court Challenges Program that we were able to get to the Supreme Court to win the right to have our schools in our communities.

Before that, we sent our children to Francophone schools by bus, and the trip sometimes took more than an hour.

Even now, at least two or three of our schools don't have adequate facilities. They are currently in leased buildings or leased space. One primary school, among others, shares a building with a bar, and the facility is distinctly inadequate.

We were even about to prepare and file another application with the Court Challenges Program to make some progress on that school issue.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Ms. Thorne, if I understand correctly, you couldn't have had six schools if the program hadn't existed, but the need is even more obvious now. The minority Francophone communities, where the markets are small and the population smaller, need help, and we see that your efforts to assist the Francophones and young people in your community are impossible now that you no longer have the necessary resources to move forward.

The shame in all that is that you're forced to lease space next to a bar in order to provide the Francophone communities with the service they deserve.

● (0930)

This is an example of what distresses me the most. These are horror stories that we prefer not to hear, but some government members must hear them and understand them today. In actual fact, it's the Court Challenges Program that has helped you in the past, but, since it's been cut, you're forced to keep these students in an inappropriate environment in order to enable them to learn French and study in French. You don't have a choice.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: Exactly.

The government often relies on the clause that states: "where numbers warrant". However, it's hard to determine that number without adequate facilities, and if we don't have service of equal quality to that of the English-language schools. We've seen it in all our centres: from the moment the school centre came into existence, our numbers rose incredibly.

In 2000, the Summerside elementary school had space in our offices. There were four students in grade 1. That's all. In 2006, we had a great school centre that met a lot of the community's needs. We think it's a model for all other regions. We had four students in 2000, and now we have 65 to 70. At the preschool centre day care for children 22 months to six years of age, there are more than 50 students.

This confirms the theory that, where services exist, people use them. If you limit yourself to the people who attend our schools, in inadequate rooms and facilities, it's really hard to judge clientele potential.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Ultimately, you're living proof that Francophones outside Quebec are looking toward the future.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: Absolutely.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You're living proof of that, and that's praiseworthy.

It's incredible, you went from 40 to 60 students...

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: ... in five years...

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: ... simply because you had the resources to assert your rights in court.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: Yes.

In addition, another school, Carrefour de l'Isle-Saint-Jean in Charlottetown, was built in 1991. The building was constructed to accommodate 150 students. In the first years, there were between 50 and 75 students; now there are more than 250. They have a nice centre, but they've exceeded the school's capacity in 15 years.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you.

Now I'm going to address a more general issue concerning early childhood. Virtually all of you have touched on the subject.

Although I know that the cuts have had an indirect impact, I'd nevertheless like to know whether, when cuts were made to the funding for the national early childhood development program, you had any hope of being able to further facilitate the children's integration. Did you hope at the time that the children would receive training in French starting in early childhood, which would have made starting school in grade 1 easier for them? Did those cuts set you back? Did you hope that that was going to facilitate matters, move them forward more, help you look even more toward the future?

Ms. Nicole Drouin: What we foresaw in our province, Prince Edward Island, was going to greatly improve the existing early childhood system; it was going to improve access to services for the youngest children; it was going to increase funding for early childhood services so that more children could receive them.

Right now there's a major deficiency: there's no service for children from zero to 22 months. According to the model developed in our province, during the five years of the program's lifetime, we were going to be able to add more services as we went along.

Consequently, these cuts have really hurt our development with regard to French-language services provided in early childhood. We've been greatly disappointed.

• (0935)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): It's now Mr. André's turn.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning. My name is Guy André, and I'm originally from Quebec, where, as you know, the majority is Francophone.

By way of introduction, I must say how much I admire the way you've fought in Prince Edward Island in an attempt to maintain the vitality of the French language. That's a struggle that we are also carrying on in Quebec. Internationally and globally, there is still a struggle over the issue of cultural diversity. An attempt is being made to anglicize the entire planet somewhat, through Americanization and so on, and to make culture the subject of negotiations at the World Trade Organization.

We're also fighting that fight in Quebec, but you have to fight it even harder given the fact that you form a smaller minority.

We've heard about health, but we haven't heard about culture in Prince Edward Island. How do you experience Francophone culture, theatre, cinema, radio, television? Is it stimulated? Is there a certain amount of vitality? Do you need more support to promote that culture and to organize it together with the community centres? I'd like to hear some of your views on the subject.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: I'll answer the question.

Cultural development is done somewhat like the development of all our other organizational structures in Prince Edward Island. The funding envelope for the major part of the organization of cultural development comes from the cooperation agreement with Canadian Heritage.

As you probably know, there has been no significant increase in that envelope in Prince Edward Island since 1992. So things are very hard for us. Since our communities are growing exponentially, demands are becoming greater and greater. We now have community school centres in certain regions, which add to the challenge of managing those bodies.

We don't have the necessary critical mass, like in other provinces, for cultural development to become self-sufficient. Our clientele isn't large enough to pay the inherent expenses of high-quality entertainment or trainers. Consequently, major investment is necessary in order to develop culture and stimulate cultural interest.

To really contribute to the development of our communities, you have to learn the language, of course, but you also have to adopt the culture. In that respect, we have an enormous lack of human and financial resources to achieve our goals and meet the needs of our clientele.

In spite of that—and you're no doubt aware of this—artists and cultural groups from Prince Edward Island, like Barachois, Angèle Arsenault and Clack'Azing have achieved considerable success. We have a lot of talented people. Our clientele show their interest and want culture and cultural development, but we haven't achieved the necessary level of support to meet these growing needs.

Mr. Guy André: In my opinion, as a result of your assimilation rate, the Francophone community in Prince Edward Island will have to wake up and be vital so that people are stimulated and send their children to school. It has to be promoted. There has to be a comprehensive approach.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: In addition, culture helps us make the other community aware of the value that our community adds in this province. Prince Edward Island relies a lot on tourism. Our Anglophone community increasingly recognizes the value our community adds and the need not only to promote folk culture, but also to provide tourists with a unique experience related to a culture different from their own.

• (0940)

Mr. Guy André: Thank you. I have a little time left.

Ms. Gilman and Ms. Bernard, you talked about health. You said that there were problems related to the recruitment and training of health care personnel in Prince Edward Island.

What are your resource needs? We know there are currently similar problems virtually everywhere, particularly in the rural regions, where it's harder to recruit doctors and nurses. Since I've previously worked in that system, I know it very well.

What kind of training is being offered? What collaborative efforts are you making with the Francophone world outside Prince Edward Island? And what would the solutions be?

In two and a half minutes, that's not too bad! I'd simply like to know a little about the situation.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): A minute and a half.

Mrs. Jeannita Bernard: Our problems aren't any different from yours: recruitment and retention. I can't say that the health care system is in full crisis, but there's nevertheless a deficiency in the health care system.

Mr. Guy André: There's the aging of the population, and therefore too much pressure on the...

Mrs. Jeannita Bernard: Exactly.

I belong to an organization that does training, but we can't do training alone because we aren't equipped to do so. On the island, we're very small.

Having said that, we'll need the Consortium national de formation en santé, the CNFS. So our membership in that organization is essential to us.

We've previously established partnerships with organizations such as the Cégep de Saint-Félicien, where early childhood training is offered. We've entered into other partnerships with the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, where training related to health assistance is provided. We're planning other types of training.

We don't have the presence we need within the consortium. However, that could be a major lever for us in establishing more partnerships and making it known what's going on in health training at the national level.

Mr. Guy André: Is that a recommendation?

Mrs. Jeannita Bernard: Yes, that's a recommendation.

Mr. Guy André: We'll take that into account. Thank you.

May I continue, Mr. Godin?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): No, you're finished, Mr. André. You'll be entitled to another round. The researcher was distracting me. It's his fault, and only his fault!

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Good morning. Thank you for being here today. I'm a member from Eastern Ontario. There are 65,000 Franco-Ontarians in my riding.

I'd like to start by making a comment. Unfortunately, my colleague Mr. D'Amours started by making a brief political presentation on the Court Challenges Program. I'd like to add that his comments were not entirely accurate.

What's really important is that Francophone associations and individuals have access to the courts. And that's the case, whether it be directly or through the Commissioner of Official Languages. That's guaranteed by the Official Languages Act. It's access that's really important, and you have it directly or through the Commissioner.

I'd also like to emphasize that we are incurring expenses to improve services and education in the minority linguistic communities. For example, we've announced a \$1 billion education agreement. We're working with the provinces to improve education services. As regards services to Francophones, an agreement has been reached under the Official Languages Act with \$64 million, a 25 percent increase; and there's \$120 million for our communities. The money is there to help communities and improve services.

I'd like to know whether you have the mechanisms to determine which local associations receive money from the federal government because money is indeed allocated to local associations.

Do you have a system or a network for determining the total number of organizations in existence, whether it be 20, 25 or 50, and that share the money earmarked for improved services to Francophones?

• (0945)

Mr. Rodrigue Landry: I'd like to take the opportunity to talk about this subject. Indeed, I believe this is one of the harmful effects of the current action plan, an effect that I don't think is intentional. The wish was to make each of the departments accountable. So the money is distributed very widely.

It's entirely normal for organizations seeking to know where the money is for their needs and their organizations. This has created a certain amount of fragmentation. We see it. I sit on a lot of committees in Ottawa with all kinds of groups and organizations. I find that there's very little cooperation. The officers of the organizations before this committee may have a different point of view. I think it's quite obvious that this aspect of the plan somewhat forces communities to become one of the small enterprises trying to survive and keep what they have. I've even heard people use the term "neocorporatism". People are looking for money, but aren't concerned with the total needs of the community. It's not because they don't want to, it's because they can't. There's no central agency to do the planning and to establish the plan's major priorities.

I started my presentation by talking about early childhood. Let's look at the funding allocated to early childhood compared to that earmarked for health. I don't want to compare funding, but early childhood is crucial. If half the children don't go to French schools, obviously, at the end of their lives, Francophone hospitals won't be of much use to them since they haven't first been able to live in French.

I think that's unfortunate because the action plan is lacking a communications plan. Do the rounds. Here you're mainly talking to organizations. Make some random calls and ask the public if they know there's a plan. I've previously made the following analogy. It's somewhat as though someone had wanted to plan a party for the community. The government organizes the party and works with the community. Through some form of horizontal governance, the community has taken part in organizing the party. A mid-term evaluation is conducted. An evaluation is done on how the party is being organized. But perhaps you have to realize that everyone forgot one important thing: the community wasn't invited to the party. No one was responsible for sending out invitations. The public doesn't know the action plan.

That's where our research becomes important. For example, when we conduct surveys of the parents of exogamous families—an Anglophone parent and a Francophone parent—they're asked what the best solution would be for their children to become bilingual. The vast majority of parents answer simply that it's half and half, that immersion or something similar is required. They forget that a society exists. They only think about school, an equal division of time between English and French will solve the problem. The term "social naiveté" has previously been used. That's what this is. They don't understand that, in a North American society where English is very strong, school has to compensate for that.

If there was a good communications plan, parents would know that the children of exogamous minority families who continue their education until grade 12 don't just become good bilingual students, but rather the best bilingual individuals in the country. Our research shows that they are equivalent to Francophones. Statistically, they can't be distinguished from Francophones who have two Francophone parents, and they are as good in English as Anglophones. So they're excellent bilinguals. However, parents still think that the best solution is half and half. They're not sociolinguists and they don't do research in the field. This sort of information should be known. The plan shouldn't simply exist. First, parents don't even know they have rights. A lot of people don't even know what it means when someone talks about section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

• (0950)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Pardon me for interrupting you, but your speaking time is up.

Now it's the NDP's turn. Since Yvon Godin normally sits here, I'm going to take the floor.

I don't really agree with Mr. Lemieux when he flares up against those who ask political questions. If they're political questions, they're welcome in politics. Since we're all politicians, some are going to ask political questions. We often say we shouldn't mix politics with our remarks, but we're a group of politicians. Let's not be hypocrites: we're engaged in politics.

Having said that, I'd like to talk about the question that was asked concerning the Court Challenges Program.

First, we have to shoulder our responsibilities in this regard. The government has decided—and that's its choice—to cancel the Court Challenges Program. We mustn't say that they're now engaging in politics. The government has decided to eliminate the program. It has to shoulder its responsibilities and accept the arguments that come with them.

The first argument concerns Minister Baird's remarks. He told the House that the government wouldn't be giving money to people so that they could fight it, that it wouldn't be giving money to people or groups so that they could challenge its laws, because he's perfect. When he passes an act, he complies with it. I'm not the one who said that; it was the minister. I asked the present government to get rid of courts, judges and lawyers because it's perfect.

As regards the Court Challenges Program, we've taken an enormous step back, or we are about to do so. There were two schools in Prince Edward Island; now there are six. In New Brunswick, when the Electoral Boundaries and Representation Act was passed, the government wanted to include the Francophone town in Miramichi, but the Francophones won their case thanks to the Court Challenges Program.

We are required to use the Court Challenges Program because the former government wanted to violate the act. It wasn't complying with the act, and, thanks to the Court Challenges Program, citizens as a group were able to challenge its decision.

Other cases have been won. You need only think of the Shippagan food inspectors that the government wanted to send to Dieppe or Shediac, of Montfort Hospital or the British Columbia schools.

Can you tell us about the harm that the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program, which you have used, will cause to Francophone minorities? What harm will it do if citizens are left to their own devices or the Commission of Official Languages alone is given responsibility for representing all minorities in Canada?

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: We don't violate laws and we don't challenge them. The laws exist for our protection. We took the provincial government to court. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages offers us no protection from decisions made by our province. We had to take our province to court, not the federal government. The province couldn't build Francophone schools in Prince Edward Island or had chosen not to do so.

We always had access to justice, but the community didn't have the financial means to go to court. It cost thousands and thousands of dollars to appeal to the Supreme Court. The community of 6,100 Francophones in Prince Edward Island would never have been able to afford that. The court exists, but if you can't afford it, you don't get schools.

Without the Court Challenges Program, I very much doubt that we could have gotten our schools in Prince Edward Island. Yes, there's a commitment from the federal government, but if the province has no obligation to grant us funding, nothing's possible. When you transfer money to the province, there's no language clause or anything written stating that a particular amount must be used for the Acadian and Francophone community. Sometimes the province can't afford to allocate that money to us.

Prince Edward Island is the province with the largest deficit. It's not always a lack of will: it's inability. So we need federal government support in order to have the same rights as all other Canadians in the country.

• (0955)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Once again, let's look at the early childhood services component. For example, one couple sends their child to French school. The trend is toward child care centres in the schools, and parents are inclined to register their children at a school that has a day care.

The present government has decided to give parents \$1,200 per child, money that the former government intended for child care centres.

In your opinion, can that decision affect development of the early childhood sector, particularly that of child care centres? Children first go to day care, a Francophone environment—since we're talking about the Francophone minorities of Prince Edward Island—then continue their education at a school or institute that they're encouraged to attend because of the place they come from.

Ms. Nicole Drouin: That's particularly important for the parents. The parents' federations agree that parents need funding enabling them to choose services.

However, it's very difficult to ensure that the services we're currently able to provide are of equal quality to those of the Anglophones.

For example, I live in Summerside. There's one Francophone day care and six or seven Anglophone day cares. Francophones only have one choice. Furthermore, there's a waiting list, and a number of factors do not facilitate access to that day care centre.

The early childhood sector is lacking certain elements, and I'm not convinced that the \$1,200 per child will enable those elements to exist. It's very important to support parents. We agree on that principle, but we have to go further in order to be able to offer quality services that meet the needs of families and children.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Simard, over to you.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to welcome our guests.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We'll now have a round of five minutes.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I was going to ask a question on another subject, but I was very interested by Mr. Landry's remarks. I have three brief questions to ask him.

Mr. Landry, you spoke about the horizontal responsibilities of the departments. Personally, that intrigues me, and I'd like you to say

more about that. I think the Department of Health, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the other departments have a specific responsibility toward minority communities. They too must comply with the Official Languages Act. In the past, Francophones have always depended on Canadian Heritage. If the person in the position was not sensitive to their problems, their communities suffered as a result. That's my first question.

As regards the mid-term report, you said that Francophones had not been invited to the table. Over the past three years, I've taken part in a number of events where Francophones were the leaders. The communities were invited once a year with the ministers responsible for those departments. As regards the mid-term report, there was a major event at the Government Conference Centre in Ottawa, where some 50 or more people were in attendance to talk about the deficiencies of the Action Plan for Official Languages. I'd like you to comment on that.

Lastly, the government began to include specific envelopes in the agreements it signed with the provinces. In my view, that's very important. For example, in early childhood, I know that Manitoba had a specific envelope intended for Francophones in the five-year agreement.

This committee's mandate is to determine whether the Action Plan for Official Languages has worked well. I hope that we'll be able to recommend that the government renew the plan, and improve it, and perhaps even amend it. No doubt some things have worked better than others. I'd also like to have your comments on that subject.

• (1000)

Mr. Rodrigue Landry: First, I think I'll answer the second question because it involves a number of things.

I drew an analogy with a community party. When I talk about the public, I'm not talking about organizations; I'm talking about civil society, about the society that takes part and that is well aware of its rights.

That wasn't a criticism I was making of a government. This kind of thing is normal when you're in a minority situation. For an ordinary parent who is trying to earn a living and give his or her children certain goods, linguistic concerns are not always the most important ones. Many immigrants and minorities assimilate because they think there are more important things in life, and so on. That, in a way, creates habits.

I was talking about the general public. There are a lot of good things in the action plan, but it's as though no one had ever included a public awareness campaign. That's the point I wanted to raise.

The organizations know their rights. I'm not worried about them. They're even very good in their representations. It's different in the case of the general public. Currently, two-thirds of parents who are Francophone rights holders live in an exogamous situation. That's more than 80% in all the western provinces. That's not a minor point. These parents must really be made aware of their rights and know that there are opportunities that yield excellent results. The solution is ultimately so simple. That's what's frustrating.

This is a choice, and, of course, it's the parents who must make it. Parents won't be forced to send their children to French school. They have to make an informed choice in knowledge of the facts. They have to know that the children of these families who go to French school will, once they're finished, be the best bilinguals in the country.

Hon. Raymond Simard: And what about the responsibility of the departments?

Mr. Rodrigue Landry: I'm not an expert on that. However, I think that, regardless of the colour of the government, if there were genuine leadership, the federal government would seek to forge ties with the other provincial ministries in order to form a whole.

For example, while we have a right to schools, we have no right as regards early childhood. Sixty percent of these children could go to French school if their parents were aware of the fact and if there was a child care system associated with the school. That has an enormous impact on the Francophone community. Since there's no coordination of services, everyone acts individually. Everyone does their own little part, and there's no whole.

I believe Manitoba was the first province to sign an agreement. I think the CNPF, the Commission nationale des parents francophones, signed agreements on child care with virtually all the provinces. There had to be special assistance for child care. I don't know the details of the agreements, but I've been told that they clearly provided for assistance for official language minorities. The present government came in with a new vision and doesn't appear to want to resolve the situation immediately.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you all for being here. You're enlightening us a great deal on what you're experiencing.

We're here as the government to listen to you, to see what is going on in the field and to take the public's pulse. You know that our government will be creating 125,000 child care spaces. I dare hope that you'll have all the spaces we'll be creating for you.

Furthermore, we hear a lot about challenges. I'm going to put my question to Ms. Thorne.

You talked about the challenges you're facing. I'd like to know what your biggest immediate challenge is. I'd also like to know what achievement you're most proud of. We know you've had achievements, and I'd like you to tell us about them, please.

•(1005)

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: Right now, our greatest challenge is to provide adequate support to our community school centres because they're really the developmental core of our communities. Our regions are so isolated and we don't have the critical mass, as a result of which it's impossible for these centres to become self-sufficient, to be business entities, if you will.

Since the centres were developed, we've been trying to become more efficient. We've conducted a number of restructuring and redevelopment exercises. A human resources redeployment process is currently under way to increase our efficiency and to see if there wouldn't be a better way to do things. Here again, we can't balance

our budgets. Funding is distinctly inadequate: heating costs are rising, we can't offer competitive salaries, and we have enormous staff turnover. The people in place have made an extraordinary commitment, but, if we can't be competitive, those people will go to work for the provincial or federal government. We're a training centre for the governments, and we do a good job because they're always pleased to have them.

That's our major challenge. First we need adequate facilities. Not all centres can be called "community school centres". In the leased spaces, there are only classrooms; there isn't even a gymnasium or music room or theatre. It's very hard to be self-sufficient when you don't have facilities to provide adequate services.

Furthermore, we can always try to supplement our budgets and sell our services. Sometimes we're not carrying out our mandate. We can't reach our clientele when we want, since we have to put on Anglophone shows and Anglophone groups use our facilities so that we can pay the bills.

That, to a large degree, is our biggest challenge right now. Human resources, facilities and financial resources can't meet current needs. The other side of the coin is that the creation of these schools and centres is probably our biggest success. And we see it spreading. We are recovering a lost generation, and even two generations in certain regions.

In Souris and Rustico, for example, we owe the survival of the language to grandparents and, in some instances, great-grandparents, who are Acadians, because Francophones have not had the opportunity for a number of generations to be educated in French. But these people are proud. We see it in their faces, just as we see it in the communities. They register their children in French schools without knowing a single word of French, but that's what they want for their children. They take French courses so that they can have conversations with their children in French.

All that gives visibility to a community that has linguistic duality. All this belongs to us as Canadians. In Prince Edward Island, we're transmitting it in an incredible manner. That's our greatest pleasure. Our greatest pleasure is also to go into a region where you don't expect to have a meeting in French and suddenly to meet a parents committee in which 12 parents try to speak a language they scarcely know in order to communicate with us. They show us that they're proud, that, even though it's unfortunate that they didn't have a chance to go to a French school, they don't want to lose another generation. So these parents enrol their children in a school that's completely inadequate, when, just opposite, or nearly opposite, another school has everything, but is virtually empty because of declining birth rates.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Now it's Mr. André's turn.

Mr. Guy André: If the Court Challenges Program disappears, that may be a major setback for Francophone communities outside Quebec. Do you see any other solutions? If this program disappears, what will we do? How will we get organized? How will we succeed, ultimately, in asserting our rights and needs?

On another point, have the cuts to literacy programs affected you? I'd like you to tell me about that.

Then, with regard to economic development, Ms. Gilman, you said that feasibility studies were being funded, but not actual projects. Are there currently any projects in Prince Edward Island that are important for promoting La Francophonie and culture and that are lacking resources? Are there any major, structural initiatives for the Francophone community of Prince Edward Island that are lacking resources?

• (1010)

Three questions in five minutes, that's good.

Ms. Julie Gilman: Yes, there's one. In Prince Edward Island, the network has prepared an action plan for contracting for health services in French. It's a great plan, very detailed, very feasible, but there's no funding anywhere to implement it. It would be important for health services in French in Prince Edward Island for the federal government funding program to release money in order to move this matter forward.

Mr. Guy André: Isn't the announced funding consistent with the action plan?

Ms. Julie Gilman: No, not right now. To my knowledge, no program can help implement this program.

Mr. Guy André: As regards the Court Challenges Program, do you see any solutions or ways of offsetting it? I believe that literacy is Ms. Thorne's field.

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: As regards the Court Challenges Program, our relations with our provincial government have been the most critical for us.

As I said earlier, I don't think that there's a lack of will most of the time. Our provincial government lacks resources to meet its educational obligations towards its Francophone minority. If the federal government and our provincial government formed a more solid partnership, so that our government could have the necessary funding to meet the needs of our communities, I'm pretty sure it would meet its obligations in this area.

Our minister said it at the ministerial conference. It's thanks to the Court Challenges Program that Prince Edward Island was able to get its schools. That's the way the funding goes when you're dealing with a major deficit: it's hard to make a decision involving large amounts of money for a minority. It's hard for a government in a deficit situation.

Furthermore, that's also transposed to our next plan, regarding the Court Challenges Program, which was more focused on early childhood services. In Prince Edward Island, early childhood services are viewed more as part of the private domain. That's quite true for Anglophones, who enjoy a broad variety of services. It's a fairly lucrative business for Anglophones. However, for Francophones, it's harder to recruit human resources, and material resources are much more costly. In addition, since there's only one centre per region and our population is smaller, our services are aimed exclusively at the elites. And that's not really what we want; we want the service to be accessible to everyone.

Twelve hundred dollars a year doesn't necessarily promote access to this service, particularly when people have to travel an extra hour to drop their children off at Francophone day care centres.

In our view, a greater commitment by the federal government toward the provincial government would definitely be an asset that would fill the void created by the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program.

Mr. Guy André: Will the literacy cuts affect you?

Ms. Lizanne Thorne: Absolutely.

This isn't necessarily my field, but I know that the illiteracy rate among the Francophones of Prince Edward Island is much higher than among Anglophones. Many people 40 to 60 years of age were educated in a language that was not their own. They were forced to attend Anglophone schools, so that they sometimes have trouble in both English and French.

This is a major challenge in our rural communities. In all regions, we're still facing major problems with family literacy. We were just starting to take major steps. We were starting to be able to offer programs providing tools in French.

I repeat that, when we need tools for any teaching, support or screening program, they cost a lot more because we don't have tools available to us in our province.

• (1015)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'm going to pass my turn this time. We're going to start another round, which will be of three minutes.

I'm also going to allow Mr. Petit to ask a question. In doing this kind of round, we give all members a chance to ask questions.

Mr. D'Amours, you have three minutes for questions and answers.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I understood. I also thank you for giving us your time. That's very much appreciated.

My riding, Madawaska—Restigouche, comprises a portion of northern New Brunswick. It's hard to attract and retain health professionals, even in a region where the percentage of Francophones is very high.

Do you have any miracle methods for attracting and retaining health professionals in your various communities? Do they work well? If so, have you done certain things? Have you relied on something like *La grande séduction* to convince professionals to stay in the regions?

Mrs. Jeannita Bernard: That's virtually all we have, our beautiful countryside and our quality of life. We're all in the same boat. We train people in Prince Edward Island, and, in spite of everything, some nurses choose to move to Alberta. The current lack of mobility among the population also affects us a great deal.

Right now we're trying to work together with an immigration coop, which could perhaps help us fill a few positions in the health field, but we have the same problem as all the Maritime provinces. That problem is even more serious in Prince Edward Island because it is doubly difficult to live there in French.

As Ms. Gilman mentioned, we have a plan to remedy the labour retention problem and to establish a Francophone presence in all the health institutions of Prince Edward Island, if only by filling three-quarters of the positions. But staffing those positions requires funding, and we don't have it.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Ms. Gilman, we recently met the president of the Consortium national de formation en santé, Mr. Patry, in Ottawa. He told us that funding was to be renewed in 2008 and that not much was currently being done. Ultimately, there is some urgency in your case because, if your funding isn't renewed, the crisis could worsen in your region. If you're already in one, it could be amplified...

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. D'Amours; your 20 seconds are up.

Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

As Mr. Godin said, this is the first time in 25 years that we've visited the minority communities. I'm pleased it's my government that's doing it, and, since I'm newly elected, I'm taking advantage of the opportunity.

Mr. Landry, you also mentioned, and perhaps you're going to cover [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

• (1020)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I think our technical difficulties are being caused by the BlackBerries. I suggest we turn those devices off during the meeting.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Landry, you mentioned a number of things that drew my attention.

First of all, I'm the product of an exogamous marriage and my children are as well. I can travel just as well among the people of the Anglophone minority as among those of the Francophone minority. I know virtually all the related problems.

We advocate an open federalism, but there's a provincial element. You all spoke about your respective provinces. Mr. Landry, you said that the present action plan should perhaps take the provinces into account so that we get along better with them.

Can you talk about that more?

Mr. Rodrigue Landry: I recently wrote an article on the subject, and our brief cites it in the references. I'm going to use Ms. Thorne's example, which illustrates the subject well.

The community school centre is a good example of the vitality of the minority communities, which the Official Languages Act aims to promote. And Bill C-3 reinforces that act.

Education is a provincial jurisdiction. If the provincial government says that it has a duty to attend to the school component and the federal government addresses the community component, we get a good mix, with a great community school centre as a result. That centre would offer community activities enabling all generations to meet in the context of all kinds of activities. For young people, there'd be a school. We could even add a day care centre to it.

With this kind of institution, you provide what the community is lacking. This is all the more important in the major urban centres, where it's very hard to find a school near home.

This is a good example of cooperation.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Landry.

Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Godin, since we're in New Brunswick, in your province, and you've passed your turn, I'll give you the three minutes allocated to me.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, you're very kind. Then we're going to take two minutes and 50 seconds.

We're coming to the end of the meeting because we'd like to stop before 10:30 and resume at 10:30.

I'd like you to give a fairly brief answer to the question I'm going to ask you.

What are the main challenges the community will have to face in the coming years? What are you asking for? What do you recommend to Parliament?

Mrs. Jeannita Bernard: There's one thing that wasn't mentioned here this morning.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): That's what we want to hear: things that haven't been mentioned.

Mrs. Jeannita Bernard: In our Francophone community, we don't have any sustainable economic development, as a result of which our community is dissipating. You have to be present at all times in order to seize all opportunities. We talked about literacy. Education is what feeds the population, but we have to find the thing or the machine that will give us a sustainable economy and enable us to establish a health system and an education system.

If we need assistance, it will be for that.

Mr. Rodrigue Landry: As regards the main challenge, I hope the federal government will exercise leadership and work with the provinces, territories and communities in the true spirit of Canadian linguistic duality to establish a genuine action plan. If Canada manages to establish a well organized plan that includes the provinces and territories, as well as the communities themselves, which will become accountable as a result, instead of merely scattering money here and there, that could be an example to the world. If we manage to do that, a lot of other issues could be resolved.

• (1025)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'd like to thank you sincerely on behalf of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

The committee will suspend its proceedings until 10:30. At 10:30, we'll be hearing the witnesses from Nova Scotia.

Thank you very much and have a good trip home. Good day.

• (1025) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1035)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Now we'll hear from our guests from Nova Scotia. Welcome. Since you were here this morning at the start of the session, you're already familiar with the purpose of the meeting. So I won't waste your time by repeating myself. We're going to begin.

Will Ms. Nicole Inamura be present?

Mr. Paul d'Entremont (Coordinator, Réseau santé Nouvelle-Écosse): She told me yesterday that, if everything went well, she'd be here, but since she had a backache, she didn't know if she could make the trip today.

However, she didn't send a message that she wouldn't be coming.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We've asked you to limit yourselves to three minutes, but since there are fewer guests, we could give you 10 minutes. I'm sure you have a lot of things to tell us. So if it's not too hard for you to adjust, you can take advantage of that additional time. Mr. d'Entremont, having seen you at work, I know that won't be a problem for you.

You may begin.

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier (Chair, Réseau santé Nouvelle-Écosse): In fact, I'm going to begin.

Thank you very much. We very much appreciate being able to meet with you and to discuss certain concerns affecting Nova Scotia.

My name is Alphonsine Saulnier, and I'm the Chair of the Réseau santé Nouvelle-Écosse, which has been in existence since 2003. From what I understood this morning, you're quite familiar with the Société Santé en français, the national network, and the 17 networks across Canada. Since I'm going to be speaking for 10 minutes, I'm going to tell you a little about Nova Scotia's Acadian community and its concerns. Incidentally, we filed a brief containing the full text this morning.

The Acadian community of Nova Scotia dates back to the seventeenth century. You're undoubtedly familiar with the history of Grand-Pré. Today, the province's Acadians and Francophones represent approximately four percent of the total population, some 9,000 inhabitants. The community's numbers have been stable for 50 years, but have been declining as a percentage of total population. Although our demographic weight is small, we are concentrated in fairly homogeneous rural communities, which gives us a certain political weight. For example, in Argyle and Clare counties, in southwestern Nova Scotia, Acadians form the majority. There are also two Acadian and Francophone concentrations in urban areas, the metropolitan region of Halifax-Dartmouth and in Sydney, Cape Breton. Acadians form more than 15% of the population in four of our counties.

In Nova Scotia, the longstanding absence of provincial legislation and policies on French-language services is the reason why French-language health services are so inaccessible. Where they do exist, it

is as a result of the hard work of individuals and community organizations. Progress in the delivery of French-language services is very often the result of chance, and the community fears it will lose those services. The comments gathered in our eight Acadian regions during the consultations of the Acadian and Francophone population in 2002, 2003 and 2005-2006 attest to the fact that French-language services are not very accessible.

However, we have every hope that the legislation on government services in French, which was enacted in the fall of 2004, and subsequent regulations will encourage the regional health authorities to take measures in that direction. Implementation of the act and regulations is planned for December 31 of this year. The regulations were posted to the government Web site yesterday. A two-week period has been scheduled for community consultations.

Nevertheless, some regions receive very few services in French. I could cite the example of the Chéticamp region, which has a Francophone majority. The board has agreed to require that individuals in the health care system who have direct access to the clientele be bilingual. This requirement is now part of the hiring process. That's a rare exception for Nova Scotia.

In the other regions, services are largely inaccessible, although a number of Acadians and Francophones work in hospitals and other health services. Offering services in French is currently out of the question, but it goes without saying that the new regulations will change matters.

One of the biggest authorities in the province, Capital Health, is located in the Halifax area. It has been given responsibility for tertiary and specialized care. These services, which are provided in the centre of the province, are rarely accessible in French. In addition, citizens must travel to the offices, which involves a three-hour drive. I'm thinking in particular of the women from the regions of Cape Breton and southwestern Nova Scotia, who don't have access to specialized services, except in the metropolitan area.

• (1040)

Now I'd like to tell you about Réseau Santé Nouvelle-Écosse, which is devoted above all to the accessibility of health care services and better living in French in Nova Scotia. Our network was founded in 2003 as a result of a consultation project led, in 2002, by the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse, called French-language health care services in Nova Scotia. Through the financial support of Health Canada and Canadian Heritage, FANE, together with its partners, consulted the Acadian and Francophone community, health professionals and health leaders and decision-makers on action strategies for health care services in French. To do that, a public consultation tour was conducted in eight regions of the province.

By describing the situation in each of the regions and calling on the expertise of health professionals, participants clarified the issues, problems, concerns, existing initiatives, intervention needs and strategies that could improve access to health care services and well-being in French. The proposed initiatives promote the reinforcement of community capabilities through strategies and policies for the delivery of health care services in French.

At this point in my presentation, I'd like to emphasize the good will of our province's Ministry of Health. With the support of the Office des affaires acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse, it hired a French-language health care services coordinator in February 2004. It was the first to hire a person specifically responsible for services in French. In addition, for three years now, the ministry has been implementing a cultural sensitization and awareness program, focusing on minority groups living in the province and the importance of the language and culture of service users. This cultural diversity and social inclusion program was designed for all recipients of primary health care services. As regards the success of these initiatives, we have obtained a commitment from the provincial government, through its Department of Health, and of a number of major partners. It is now up to the Government of Canada to do the same.

For a few years now, Health Canada has shown a desire to open up to this question. In September 2001, the Consultative Committee for French-Speaking Minority Communities filed its report with the Department of Health. That report quite specifically describes five levers that must be created and used in order to ensure the development of French-language health care services in minority communities. We support the proposed action plan to facilitate community initiatives and improve access to health care services in French.

Since then, Health Canada has shown more good will by providing tangible support for the following initiatives: networking until March 2008; the primary health care adjustment fund, which enables us in Nova Scotia to benefit from the implementation of five projects to improve access to health care services in French, including a directory of health care professionals who can provide services in French, a health program for youth and seniors and the development and adaptation of educational, promotional and prevention material. In addition, we have just completed another project, entitled "Setting the Stage", which has enabled us to plan a strategy for improving access to primary health care and to make recommendations to the provincial Health Ministry, the regional health authorities and agencies responsible for the delivery of health care services on the subject.

Obviously, in order to provide health care services in French, we need health care professionals in the regions. As you have heard, the situation in Prince Edward Island is not at all different from our own. Training shouldn't be limited to family medicine, although we consider it the top priority, but it must include the professions in the rehabilitation sciences and interdisciplinary teams responsible for providing primary health care services.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate the importance of the role that the federal government must play in French-language health services. As the protector of official language minorities, it must make an obvious contribution to their development.

• (1045)

We remind it of its responsibility for health and we count on your support.

I would like to offer you the following two recommendations, which you could pass on to the federal government.

First, we propose that the federal government create a joint federal-provincial program comparable to the Official Languages in Education Program, to support the development of French-language health care services in minority communities. Such a program will guarantee partnerships and continuity. Second, we suggest that the federal government add a sixth principle concerning linguistic duality to the Canada Health Act.

With your permission, I'll reiterate the following points. On September 31 of this year, we, the Réseau santé Nouvelle-Écosse, like all our fellow networks across the country, will lose the government's financial support for organizing health services in French. The importance of financial support for the organization of services in 2007-2008 and the long term is established.

Through the keen support of Société Santé en français, we'll be able to continue focusing on two issues until March 2008. However, that's only two issues: training for health professionals, the main issue involving the Consortium national de formation en santé, with which we're working in close cooperation, and networking, through which we have consulted and involved our partners in the initiative to improve access to health services in French. We have established very important and very effective partnerships with the Office of Acadian Affairs, the provincial Department of Health and other organizations, including the CNFS.

If I may draw an analogy, I'd say that the plane has left the runway but that, without sustained federal support, it could crash.

Thank you very much.

• (1050)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Ms. Saulnier.

Mr. d'Entremont.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Before discussing the Fédération acadienne, I want to add to Ms. Saulnier's remarks.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): All that in 10 minutes.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Yes, it's very brief.

She said we hadn't had any support for ad hoc projects since the end of the stage this past September. That's true. Although it's not official, since the minister hasn't yet announced it, we're preparing to carry out two projects until March 2007. After that, there's nothing tangible yet.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the President of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse, Mr. Désiré Boudreau, and its Executive Director, Jean Léger, both of whom are in Quebec City today, I thank you for this opportunity to provide you with the perspective of the Acadians and Francophones of Nova Scotia regarding their issues and the major challenges they must face as official language communities of Canada.

In addition to the group that is in Quebec City today, another group wanted to be here, but the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is in Halifax, which was chosen as one of the four cities where our study is being conducted on the vitality of a minority community in an urban centre. We pass on the apologies of those individuals, who can't be here with us today.

Here are a few points. First, as you know, and as Ms. Saulnier said, our community consists of more than 35,000 Acadians whose mother tongue is French. We can't wait to see the figures from the last census, to determine where we stand in that regard. In addition, we have a large immigrant community whose mother tongue, which I often call a "second mother tongue", is French, mainly in the Halifax-Dartmouth urban area.

FANE plays the role of mouthpiece of the Acadian and Francophone communities and has 23 member organizations representing most aspects of society. In addition to those organizations, FANE handles a number of issues, including the Community Access Program, CAP—until it stops—and immigration issues, in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia and Immigration Canada.

Our Acadian and Francophone communities are scattered over a number of regions across the province. If I have to travel from where I live, in West Pubnico, to Sydney in the far north of the province, I have to drive 10 hours. The Province of Nova Scotia is very small, but it's nevertheless quite big if you take into account the province's Acadian and Francophone communities. The challenge of distances is a significant one, as is community cooperation.

However, we manage with various tools to organize that cooperative effort and enable the community to develop and grow to a certain degree, as a result of our work using whatever resources are available. We nevertheless have very well organized and structured groups, which have a lot of development objectives, but often very little in the way of resources to achieve them.

We must still continue our efforts for the survival of our communities, as the status quo for our community currently means a step backward. It is important that the federal government support us throughout this development process with values of openness, innovation and respect.

As you know, in recent years, the federal government has been the key to this maintenance and survival, and it is thanks to funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage, through the Canada-community agreements, that our regions have acquired a minimum level of community infrastructure. This federal effort and support must continue and be reinforced and improved.

The ultimate priority of our communities is to enter into framework agreements or collaborations with the Government of Canada to ensure implementation of our action plan and of our overall development action plan, which is the road map for development of our communities and is regularly validated by the communities. However, our communities have not yet renewed their agreement with the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Any uncertainty could kill the initiative of volunteers and employees, thus leaving our communities in a tenuous situation. In our view, the main reason for our situation is the government's lack of openness to the idea of developing new development approaches with the communities.

We therefore ask that these agreements be renewed as soon as possible in a manner consistent with the needs of the communities. The communities' priorities must be the priorities set out in those

agreements, and the necessary resources to achieve them must be stated there.

● (1055)

These new agreements should therefore be based on the communities' priorities, not on those of government officials or, in certain cases, of politicians.

For a number of years now, we have had this overall development plan to develop our communities, but the government often finds reasons to fund only a small part of what can ensure the vitality of our communities.

We even want the federal government to sign with our communities—as it has done with the Aboriginal communities—specific sectoral agreements, as we've just seen in the case of the national health and economic sectors. This should also be done at the provincial level, in order to really give the communities the boost they need to encourage and monitor development.

In recent decades—Rodrigue Landry talked about this—French has lost ground in the Francophone communities outside Quebec. Why is that occurring, when the federal government says it is establishing programs and policies to support those communities? Aren't the communities the ones that know what they need?

Established policies and programs very often cannot ensure long-term development and do not receive adequate funding. They are always established on a temporary, virtually uncertain basis, which has a major impact on volunteers and employees. It exhausts those two groups. Some programs have also been cancelled. There was some discussion of that this morning, and I won't go back to that point for the moment.

We have to find a better way to ensure regular, constant and respectful dialogue between the two parties, in order to do what is good for the communities. We cannot pass over in silence the challenges related to the administrative requirements of the various programs. This is often a very slow and arduous process that differs from department to department. And yet they all receive directives from the Treasury Board. I see this in health and in other areas: the requirements are not always the same. In addition, decision-making is slow when it comes to announcing that a project has been approved.

Let's mention some other points. The Community Access Program has been cut. This is a major loss for the communities. In addition, we want to reiterate that it is important that an adequate community consultation process be established immediately so that there is no down time between plans, that is the Dion Plan or the Action Plan for Official Languages and the communities' plans.

In closing, we also want to publicly support our national organization, the FCFA, in the matter of the application for judicial review recently filed concerning the federal government's decision to cancel the Court Challenges Program. We join with all the other Canadian organizations in condemning the recent budget cuts affecting our communities, the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, Status of Women Canada, literacy and so on.

With that, I thank you for listening to us.

•(1100)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. d'Entremont and Ms. Saulnier.

Now we'll start our first round of questions with Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our guests for travelling here this morning from Nova Scotia.

Mr. d'Entremont, this morning we heard from the people from Prince Edward Island say that there were 6,000 Francophones on the island, but 16,000 French speakers. Back home in Manitoba, there are 45,000 old stock Francophones, but 110,000 French speakers. These figures are starting to get interesting. We've invested, under the action plan, more than 50% of the funding for education, immersion and so on.

I'd like to know whether efforts are being made in Nova Scotia to better integrate people from the immersion sector and those from Canadian Parents for French into the community, to invite them to take part in your activities. Is an effort being made in that area?

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Yes, an effort is being made, not only with the people from Canadian Parents for French, but also with the immigrants association, because this concerns French speakers. I said earlier that there were immigrants for whom French is their mother tongue or second mother tongue. In the census, those people aren't counted as French speakers. That's why I was happy to see that the second question in the last census was a little clearer. We often have to address our major challenge with these people who tell us that they spoke French, but that they didn't receive their education in French. What do I say to that?

Yes, there are Canadian Parents for French, immigrants and other organizations. The idea, increasingly for these groups, is to work in cooperation in order to build a critical mass and become a force.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Where do the Francophone immigrants that go to Nova Scotia usually come from?

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Many come from Lebanon. We received one who arrived as a doctor. After leaving his country, he went through France and then apparently worked in Denmark for a number of years. He wanted to come to Canada, and Nova Scotia was the most welcoming province for him in the entire process of immigrating to Canada. He settled and, in one week, his practice was full. *[Editor's note: Inaudible]* plus 80% French speakers in the Halifax urban community.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I find that interesting. Yesterday in St. John's, the people from Newfoundland told us that their target market for immigration was Eastern Europe. Back home, it's Francophone Africa, and where you are, it's Lebanon.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Right now, it's the Lebanese community first, then the Arab community.

Hon. Raymond Simard: That's interesting that it's as varied across the country.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Ms. Saulnier talked about the Capital Health Authority of Greater Halifax. French speakers and Arabs are there now, on equal terms.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Ms. Saulnier, with regard to health, is there a French-language health centre in Halifax?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: There's no French-language health centre in Halifax. Currently, access to health services in French in Halifax is entirely a matter of chance. That's why the professional directory has become very important for us. We're starting to locate professionals. We found a certain number of Francophones in one centre, but it's an Anglophone centre that operates in French. In Chéticamp, which is a very homogeneous region, there is a system that could unofficially be called a Francophone centre.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is that so?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Yes.

•(1105)

Hon. Raymond Simard: In Manitoba, we have a health centre that has had such success that Anglophones want to become patients there. More than 50% of the clientele is now Anglophone. It would be interesting to consider that option. I don't know what you're planning for the future. I imagine that's part of your future plans.

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Yes, absolutely. You're probably talking about Denis Fortier...

Hon. Raymond Simard: That's it.

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Whom I know well. In fact, that's a model that we're constantly monitoring. In the region where I live, we're planning a health centre, and we're studying the entire question of French-language services. That's very much a question of recruitment and retention.

Hon. Raymond Simard: In Manitoba, we're also studying the possibility of having walk-in clinics. When Francophone populations are dispersed, it's more practical to have people move around. Is that an option you're considering as well?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: That will probably come in a second phase. We're currently at such a basic level of service that we're only considering primary services. With the regulations that are in place and the three-year plan to introduce the regulations, we're clearly headed toward a second stage; at that point, we'll look at this kind of team.

Hon. Raymond Simard: You referred to training as one of the biggest challenges. I think it's one of the biggest challenges across the country. Do you have any universities where you can train nurses and doctors? Do you have any agreements with Moncton or Ottawa? How does that work?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Through the CNFS, we're now starting to have things in place. We have institutions. There is the Université Sainte-Anne in the province. Even at the college level, we've managed to put certain programs in place, including a paramedic-ambulance care program. In the past four years, we've managed to train 50 ambulance attendants. So we have 50 Franco-phone paramedic-ambulance attendants who are ready to enter the system as soon as the regulations are in place. This is one of the areas where we've had good success.

With regard to social service, we've entered into an agreement with Laurentian University in Sudbury, which has a distance education program in French. So our students can stay in Nova Scotia. I believe that's the key to retention. We can very well recruit professionals, but they come for a year or two, acquire experience, then go elsewhere.

Hon. Raymond Simard: We lose them.

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Those two are now in place. We're currently negotiating the bachelor of nursing degree with the University of Moncton. We'll obviously have to wait a year or two until it's in place, but we hope to be able to train nurses in Nova Scotia and thus to retain some professionals.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I have a final question to ask you, Mr. d'Entremont. I very much appreciated your recommendation that a specific health fund be created, like those we have in education. I believe an effort has been made, in particular in the area of early childhood. There were specific envelopes for early childhood and for Francophones, because needs are not necessarily the same. I cite the example of Manitoba because that's what I know best. French-language schools rarely have day care centres. If operating funds are limited when there's no child care, that's pointless. You need to have funding for the principal activity. Do you have a comment to make on that subject? When we sign agreements with the provinces, there must be funding and special envelopes for Francophones, which are used for their needs.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have 20 seconds left.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: The funding has to be used based on the needs determined by and for the community, and federal programs must respect those needs. That's what's being done in health. We're the ones who have decided how the funding will be used.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André: Good morning, Ms. Saulnier and Mr. d'Entremont. Thank you for being here today. You left Nova Scotia to come here; that's a long trip. We're pleased that you're here among us.

Mr. d'Entremont, you talked a lot about the community fabric. I come from that environment. It's an environment that enables us to strengthen our community, our social fabric. A good fabric of organizations definitely enables Francophones to develop a sense of belonging to their community and to obtain services. You said that there had been cuts to certain programs, including community access and literacy programs, Status of Women, and volunteerism initiatives. You also talked about the Court Challenges Program, which has made it possible to have schools and to provide services to the public.

What impact will these budget cuts have on the community fabric, on the community services networks and, indirectly, on the Francophone community in Nova Scotia?

• (1110)

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: In health as in other issues with which the Acadian federation is concerned, we have been promoting active offer for a number of years now. We tell the provincial government to make an active offer of service.

We talked about the literacy cuts. People who were taking advantage of those programs were not young school-aged people. They were people 40 years of age and over who hadn't been able to receive training in French and now wanted to play an active role in their community.

These people want to be alive and, as the Sagouine says, "to be full-fledged" members of their community.

Mr. Guy André: They also want their children to be educated in their language.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Yes. It's often young parents and grandparents who say to themselves that, even though they didn't have the chance to learn French formally at school, they can nevertheless learn to write their sentences better. The goal isn't to become so many Molières.

The provinces and other government bodies must offer their programs actively. In that way, when people become aware of those programs, they'll feel more comfortable requesting services in French. They don't necessarily want documents in French, but they nevertheless want to be able to express themselves in that language.

One of the benefits of a literacy program is that it creates a will in these people, a desire to be full-fledged members of the Acadian and Francophone communities. That's been missing. I'm also involved in the community, on the facility that's both a museum and a research centre, which offers the community a community access program.

Mr. Guy André: Yes.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: When I get to the office, the people who are there don't have the same financial means as you and I. Perhaps they can't afford it, but they use it and are accompanied by someone who can help them. That's part of this vital need to grow. The federal government is increasingly telling citizens that they must communicate with it via the Internet.

Mr. Guy André: Yes, that's the case of Human Resources Canada, Service Canada and all the departments.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: It was you who created this situation. Why pull the rug out from under us? Increasingly, both spouses in a family work, and there are fewer and fewer volunteers. Those who are called upon to do volunteer work are people like Ms. Saulnier, who has just taken very early retirement and who will become a volunteer par excellence. I also retired a few years ago. I'm still a volunteer, and I'm going to continue, but we're getting burned out.

Mr. Guy André: We should support volunteers.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Yes.

Mr. Guy André: Among permanent staff and in organizations.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Financial support from the federal government or through federal-provincial agreements isn't enough to meet all needs at all times. Volunteers have to give their time and combine their efforts to get the job done.

Mr. Guy André: It's a political decision that has an impact on your community.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: Absolutely, and especially on a community like ours, in Nova Scotia, where 90% of our Francophone Acadians live in rural areas, not urban areas.

Mr. Guy André: Has the Court Challenges Program been used by the people of Nova Scotia, and for what purposes?

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: It's mainly been used in education.

Mr. Guy André: For schools?

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: For schools. I don't think the Doucet case is settled yet. Let's hope it will be before March 31, when funding will be terminated.

The Court Challenges Program has been successful. As Ms. Thorne mentioned earlier, the idea isn't to challenge what the federal government does, but what's done by the provincial government, which doesn't meet its obligations.

In Nova Scotia, it's like elsewhere: we have some catching up to do.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have a minute and a half left.

Mr. Guy André: You spoke about a new act on French-language services in Nova Scotia. Can you tell me a little about what that would contribute to the Francophone communities? It's a new act, isn't it?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: It's a new act that was passed two years ago. It concerns French-language services in all the departments, not just Health. The community has been involved in introducing the regulations. There was a lot of consultation at first. The health field has been defined as one of the priorities for the offer of services in French.

This will make it possible to identify services and access to French-language services where there are concentrations of Acadians. The government has even identified the agencies concerned: this affects all the authorities where there are Francophones in the province. It also concerns third parties who work on contract, such as the VON and ambulance services.

Within three years, we should see an enormous change in French-language services in Nova Scotia, at all levels. The province has already established a "bonjour" identification system. Our own "bonjour" is blue. It's like the Nova Scotia blue. There's also a small yellow star. So you immediately recognize the professionals. That was implemented even before the regulations were revealed.

I think the province takes the issue of French-language services very seriously. I don't believe we need to convince you that health services in the language of the patient are important.

• (1115)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentations. I think our meetings are really important because we've come here to listen to you. This also affords us the opportunity to make those who aren't aware understand the message.

I'd like to say that the government will be spending \$81 million on literacy over the next two years.

I'd also like to mention, with regard to early childhood, that we intended to create 125,000 child care spaces across Canada.

Minister Finley struck a committee to find the best way to create those spaces. We'd also like to work directly with specific associations and groups in the communities to establish those 125,000 spaces.

If you have any ideas to submit to us, please contact Minister Finley's office as soon as possible because we're looking for key information.

Ms. Saulnier, I was very pleased to hear you talk about health. The former commissioner said that the health sector deserved the gold medal for improving the services the government offers to the minority language communities.

You also talked about challenges. You mentioned a training program for paramedic-ambulance attendants. Do you have any other training programs? When you offer training, do people tend to stay here, in the province, to continue providing services?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Over the long term?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Over the long term, yes.

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: As Paul said earlier, I'm now a full-time volunteer, but a week and a half ago, I had a job. I was Director of the Health Professions Department at Université Sainte-Anne. I'll answer your question somewhat in that capacity.

There's the program for paramedic-ambulance attendants. We're also looking at the possibility of offering a similar program as part of the nursing program at the University of Moncton. The Université Sainte-Anne has already made the decision to put a program in place for nursing assistants. We also have the Acadie-Québec agreement for spaces in medicine in Quebec. There are three places for that: Sherbrooke, the University of Montreal and Laval University. I'm a nurse and social worker by training, and I think the key is to offer training as near as possible to home. To do that, you have to be very creative. For example, the agreement concerning our medical students provides, among other things, that those students do their practicums back home.

We know we'll never have a Francophone faculty of medicine in Nova Scotia. So we have to be creative and ensure that our students come back: that's the key, it seems to me. I'm sure that the New Brunswick people will tell you about that this afternoon. We have the opportunity to benefit from their experience and they're well disposed toward helping us put practicums in place for medical students in Nova Scotia. It isn't signed yet, but the first medical graduate under this agreement will very likely come back home to practise next summer. That's being negotiated. She's negotiating with the province to come and practise back home. We're very optimistic. She'd be the first and would attest to the major success in this file.

I believe that French-language training as close to home as possible is the key. That's why we have high hopes for the agreement with Sudbury. Students can study back home and take their courses remotely. They'll do practicums organized by our health professionals in Nova Scotia. Then they'll be on site and will know what it is to practise in Nova Scotia. Employers will come looking for them. In Nova Scotia, there's a shortage of health professionals in general, and the shortage is even greater among Francophone professionals. So we have to make major efforts to train and retain these young people.

•(1120)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have a minute and a half left.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: As I said, we heard a presentation by the CNFS representatives. They talked about networks, provincial networks, but especially about the national network. They were really satisfied with the progress that has been made in this area, and I'm glad to hear you're working within a network on training.

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: In fact, we can't break out of the training triangle: there are networks, there's the department, and there's training. Not one of them can work without the others.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

As was the case in Prince Edward Island, member Godin will resume his place and ask his questions.

Mr. Saulnier talked about the Nova Scotia action plan for health services provided to minority Francophones. What kind of talks have you had with the province? I was wondering why my Bloc colleague hadn't asked any questions on health. That's because it's a provincial jurisdiction. I think the question has to be asked. We're wondering how this provincial health jurisdiction can be reconciled with the action plan. What does your action plan consist of? I know that Prince Edward Island has an action plan and that New Brunswick has one as well, and you're telling us that you have one too. Can you give us more details on your action plan and tell us how the federal action plan can better respond to the needs of the Francophone minorities?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: We have an excellent collaborative relationship with the Department of Health. I think I can say that it's more than a collaboration. The network is having major success because it automatically includes the Department of Health. When network members have discussions, the department is already at the table. It's represented by the French-language services coordinator, who has been in that position since 2004.

So the network doesn't exist without the department. The department can exist without the network, but the latter doesn't exist without the department. The department has been there from the outset.

We're talking about the action plan. The first recommendation is that the role of the network as the mouthpiece of the Acadian community on health issues in Nova Scotia be made official. We're discussing with the department how to do that and what it all means in concrete terms. We already agree on the principle of the recommendation, that the network be the mouthpiece of the Acadian community. So we have very close relations with the department.

We were consulted concerning the regulations under the act. Public consultations were held for everyone, and we were also consulted on all health issues. So the relationship is very close. I believe the Department of Health would tell you that they don't make any decisions without seeking the networks' input.

This is a privileged relationship. I've never seen a similar relationship in any other area.

The other action plan recommendations concern much more concrete matters in terms of implementation, which will be done at the same time as the regulations are implemented. So there's a very close relationship between the network and the department.

•(1125)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Now we'll begin the second round. Each of you will have five minutes.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'd like to tell you what we're going to do. Around 11:50, we'll sit in camera to discuss matters concerning our trip and what we're going to do this afternoon.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you for allotting me an additional 30 seconds, Mr. Chair.

Mr. d'Entremont, you mentioned the matter of the Community Access Program, the CAP. You used the term "community access centre" a number of times. Let's look at the actual situation. In the past few weeks, we've discussed certain budget cuts that have been announced and that were easier to identify.

We currently have a situation where funding for community access centres won't be renewed by the present federal government. This program should be terminated on March 31. However, based on information I've received, it has been requested that the program be terminated on December 31 so that we can finalize the funding that has been allocated, so that March 31 will really be the end. That indicates that it's really the end of this program.

We could also talk about literacy and many other things, but this community access centre program enabled people in isolated rural areas to get training and to use computers and other services to prepare their CVs and job search documents. These things existed, but few people were aware of them, except those who used the services of the community access centres.

Federal government funding is expiring, and no renewal is in sight, no plan for the future. That means that we're leaving these community access centres to their own devices, or virtually so, because the federal portion of their funding will be stopping. I'd like to have your opinion. I think this is a contradiction. The federal government is investing in a partnership with Aliant Telecom and the provinces to make broadband available in virtually all the regions of our provinces, so that all citizens, regardless of the region where they live, can use high speed. But what will broadband be used for when the community access centres no longer exist in their present form to provide these people with training and the necessary tools to help them develop?

I'd like to hear what you have to say on this point because I know that the budget cuts will have a dramatic impact on the community access centres. Some people may not realize that right now, but when the centres have ceased to exist in a few months, it will be too late to stand up and say it's a mistake for the federal government to stop funding the Community Access Program.

I'd like to hear what you have to say on that subject.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: You're perfectly right. Mr. Lemieux said earlier that the government wanted to know how it could do things better. Who did it listen to before deciding to make these cuts?

It didn't consult the communities or CAP site users. What are we going to do? In some communities, the member organizations of the Canadian federation are wondering if their offices will have the necessary equipment for their operations. They're looking for ways to continue operations after March 31.

These people can't afford a home computer. The poverty rate across the country is quite high, and that affects the urban areas as well as the rural ones. They'll have to find other ways, but which ones? Perhaps the government could send every citizen \$1,200 so they can buy a computer?

● (1130)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. d'Entremont, don't you think everything is being done to keep the public in the dark and not give it the necessary tools to develop and grow?

I have an 18-month-old daughter. When my wife isn't sure what's wrong with her, she gets on the Internet to try to find out what it is.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Your five minutes are up. Your daughter won't be able to get on the Internet.

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I'd like to thank you for travelling here. It's very important for us in the government.

Before anything else, I'd like to say that our government has an unshakable commitment to official languages and issues relating to La Francophonie. Ms. Verner, our minister, is working very hard to that end with all the committees concerned.

You talked a lot about the challenges you're facing, and we understand them. What is your biggest challenge right now?

I'm speaking to Ms. Saulnier or Mr. d'Entremont. We see you've worked very hard. What is your biggest achievement, the one that makes you proudest after all that work?

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: In Nova Scotia, our biggest success is the partnership we've achieved with the province. We often talk about the influence of policies.

Mr. Lemieux, we hope that what you hear today will help you and that perhaps you'll talk to the government. I hope that that "perhaps" becomes a "yes", that you'll convince your government after hearing the communities.

The provincial partnership is a major success. We're increasingly recognized and we're consulted because we work with them in good faith. We want to work in good faith for the community's vitality. Our Acadian and Francophone community is, for the vast majority, rural. So this is a major success.

The challenge is to do it. At the end of my presentation, I talked about distances and support from governments. We often hear employees, politicians and federal government officials ask what the province is investing in this area. The Health Department was the first department to hire a person whose one and only responsibility is the provision of services in French. Other departments will imitate it.

With the little funding we have, we've managed to introduce health initiatives for the Francophone Acadians of Nova Scotia.

The persons responsible for providing services, 99.9% of whom are Anglophones, told us they would cooperate with us in developing projects. They also told us that they had been given permission to rethink the programs and that they were copying our models in order to implement them in the majority language communities.

With support, we can get there. We aren't just little guys and girls who are fiddling around with little projects. We're doing our best to promote the vitality of our communities. We want people to be able to live healthy lives in French until their dying day. We also want them, regardless of their employers, to be able to work in French in their communities, to be educated and have services in their language.

The challenge is to maintain infrastructures and programs that will make it possible to create the community that we want. You don't do that overnight.

● (1135)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): There's a little time left.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In health, you've made a lot of progress, and you still have a lot of work to do. I thought you said that the biggest challenge in health was retaining health professionals.

Have you developed an action plan for that purpose?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Our plan is to implement programs. That's why I referred to creativity. We won't have a faculty of medicine in our province. How do we go about ensuring that our young people can study medicine in French and then come back home?

The organization of practicums is also important because that's what encourages them to come back home. If they see what it means to work in Nova Scotia, they'll be much more inclined to come back than if they do their practicum in Ontario or New Brunswick. They'll be much more attracted to home.

Medical training takes seven years. When you send a young person to study outside the province, we know it'll be seven years before we see them again. That's just an example. The introduction of French-language services is a long-term project. So program continuity is important. Having to restart programs and projects every year or two slows us down. In every case, we have to wait six months to a year before another program is implemented.

Long-term programs are extremely important in health.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you.

Mr. André, it's your turn.

Mr. Guy André: I'm going to continue talking about health because I worked in that field for a number of years before going into politics. I'm a social worker by training, somewhat like you; so we sort of come from the same world. I worked at a CLSC. The issue of recruiting doctors is virtually a national issue. I even wonder whether it isn't international. The Americans are coping quite well with this problem because they're doing a lot of privatizing. We know a little about this file. It's nevertheless an important issue.

I have a very brief question about delegating tasks. We're short of doctors, that's true, but we have nurses. I'm one of those people who believe that nurses should have more delegated duties. We're short of doctors, but nurses are competent. We know we're short of doctors and there's an aging population. Where does this debate stand in Nova Scotia?

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Nurse practitioners are increasingly being recognized in Nova Scotia. I know that 23 nurses are currently doing their master's degrees at Arthabaska University in order to become nurse practitioners. There are some Francophones among those 23 nurses. Others want to register for the program. Nurse practitioners are increasingly in evidence in Nova Scotia. There remain some details and agreements to be finalized with the doctors, but we are putting a lot of hopes—especially in the rural communities—in nurse practitioners. I entirely agree with you—I'm also a nurse by training—that nurses can do a lot of things. That would free up doctors and enable them to manage their time better.

Mr. Guy André: We're experiencing the same things, and that's why I ask the question. There's nevertheless a division of power.

I'd briefly like to hear what you have to say on the question of culture. How is Francophone culture experienced in Nova Scotia? Are any resources made available to the Francophone communities to promote that culture? How does that work?

Do you have any projects? You mentioned development projects and administrative foot-dragging. You also said you often submit projects, but that the administrative process is slow. We understand that. We have a technocratic system that sometimes takes a very long time. What is the impact of this administrative foot-dragging on projects in the field? Do you see any ways of expediting the process of responding to projects that would reinforce the communities' capabilities? They would be able to have budgets and to manage them, take concrete actions without having to go through the administrative machinery or expose themselves to rejections, and to put those projects forward.

• (1140)

Mrs. Alphonsine Saulnier: Culture isn't my field, but you've probably heard of the 2004 World Acadian Congress. Perhaps you know Grand Dérangement, Blou, La Baie en Joie, visual artists like Denise Comeau and many others in the province. I know there's an association of artists in all disciplines in Nova Scotia and that it's blazing trails. But, from what I hear, they're experiencing the same thing as we are: foot-dragging. After getting a response to a project, there's only five months left, instead of a year. So you have to spin the wheels and turn them as fast as possible to achieve the maximum. The artistic and cultural vitality in Nova Scotia is incredible, among the author-composers, among others. I think, I guess, they'd say more or less the same thing as we're saying about

support and slow decisions. As a result, the wheels don't turn quickly.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: I'm aware of one case in particular concerning support for cultural development, entertainment and so on in the schools. From the public's standpoint, the average person has to bring in and pay artists. Ms. Thorne talked about that: there are challenges that must be met. But I can talk about the operation within the schools, because I was on the province's Acadia School Board until 1988. I took early retirement. At that time, we were working to create a federal student cultural development support program. We brought in artists from the outside, but the costs became increasingly exorbitant. We wanted to find support to do this more with artists and crafts people from the community, who were working with the students. Eight years later, after filing a lot of applications, a program will be starting soon. We're talking about foot-dragging, aren't we? This came from the community, which will be working with the students. We can't afford to bring in well-known artists. So we have to work in the other direction, with them, but with programs integrated into the schools.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. d'Entremont and Mr. André.

I'd like to ask you a brief question, but I'd like to turn the floor over to Mr. Petit for the rest of the time, three or four minutes.

You referred to the little "Bonjour". I think that's really fantastic. I went to Sault Ste. Marie, and the Francophone committee had decided to make an identical little pin. When I arrived at the airport, a woman spoke to me in French. I asked her how she had guessed I was a Francophone, and she answered that it was because of the pin bearing the word "Bonjour". That's incredible. In fact, they say a lot of people in Sault Ste. Marie have met and recognized each other as a result of this identifying pin.

I would like one thing to be noted in our report. You say that the important thing is not only for us to invest money here and to fight with the federal government and so on, but also to give the Francophone community the opportunity to take charge of itself and for the province to decide that someone is there to hear you. That gives you the opportunity to communicate with the provincial government so that it can see all the work you're doing to find solutions. That's what I understood. However, there has to be money for the organizations. They're doing a good job, and I congratulate you on that, because that's important.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Petit. There's about three and a half minutes left.

• (1145)

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Ms. Saulnier and Mr. d'Entremont.

My question is mainly for Mr. d'Entremont because he has an overview. First of all, I'm a new Conservative Party member. You see that we've travelled to meet you. We haven't been here for 25 years. So, bonjour la visite, as we say back home.

I've had legal training and I'm still a lawyer. The fact that you have a partnership agreement that seems to be a very strong one with the provincial government, as madame has confirmed, attracted my attention. You even talked about an act that's apparently a sign of openness. Will that act cover all the fields we're talking about today, such as health, education and early childhood? Could you tell me about the origins of that act? You had to work on its development. That's very interesting because your province isn't officially bilingual, as New Brunswick is, for example. However, you have an act that seems to say something in particular. Could you tell me about it?

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: The act we referred to a little earlier is the Act Respecting the Office of Acadian Affairs and the Delivery of French-Language Services by the Public Service, which used to be called the Bureau of Acadian Affairs. Despite its official title, it has the status of a department, and has for a number of years. Minister d'Entremont, and the current government, introduced the bill in the House, a bill on government services in French.

Mr. Daniel Petit: We're talking about the province's government services.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: That's correct.

The act was unanimously passed in October 2004 and came into force on December 9.

We've seen the regulations establishing the way we'll be proceeding. It clearly states that all departments are targeted. Designated departments, commissions and government agencies are targeted. For example, the Workers' Compensation Board is an agency governed by the labour standards code. That agency will have to work and provide services in French.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: The department is responsible for health. It mandates regional authorities, which can then hire contract employees. The department is responsible for continuing care. For that, it hires contract employees, who are third parties. They will all have to provide services in French.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you. That completes our...

Mr. Daniel Petit: I'd like to know the name of the act. We're talking about the new act, and I don't have it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Can you give us...

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: It's Bill 111, the French-language Services Act.

Mr. Daniel Petit: That's what I needed.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: It's Bill 111, the French-language Services Act.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'd like to thank our witnesses from Nova Scotia for travelling here today. As I told you this morning, I'm sure you would have liked us to go to Nova Scotia. At least we got close, for the first time in 25 years. It isn't thanks to the new government that we're here, but to the parliamentary committee, which consists of members from all political parties and which made a request to the Parliament of Canada for that purpose.

Mr. Paul d'Entremont: We thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I simply wanted to set the record straight.

We'll be back in two minutes to sit in camera. The public meeting is adjourned.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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