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• (0810)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)): I'd like to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We're happy to be with you today here in Vancouver.

My name is Yvon Godin. I'm the member for northeastern New Brunswick, and I'll be chairing the meeting today.

As you're no doubt aware, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has been in existence for 25 years. So we decided to do a national tour to meet with people in the field, to see what's going on in the area of official languages. We want to know whether the action plan that was introduced in 2003 is working well, if there's been any impact in the communities.

I'd like to introduce, on my right, the government members: Sylvie Boucher, parliamentary secretary, and Pierre Lemieux and Steven Blaney, committee members. On my left, we have Brian Murphy, from the official opposition, and Paule Brunelle, from the Bloc québécois. As I always mention, normally, being an NDP member, I take my place beside Ms. Brunelle.

We're going to begin with five-minute presentations. You may say that's not a lot, but, as you'll see, we'll be able to talk for two hours during the question period. So we ask you to make quite brief speeches, but then we'll be asking you questions. The members will have five minutes each to ask questions.

We'll begin with Mr. Donald Cyr.

Mr. Donald Cyr (Executive Director, Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique): Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

I'm from northwestern New Brunswick—a beautiful province—but I've been living in Vancouver for a long time. I'd like to talk to you a little, if you will, about the success of the program in the context of things that the union is doing at SDE, the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique, rather than talk about la Francophonie, which I believe will be the subject addressed by the federation.

So SDE is responsible for creating an economic area for the Francophone community in British Columbia. Our purpose is to try to help Francophones start up businesses in British Columbia. For that purpose, we engage in strategic planning to help Francophones start out in business in British Columbia. Here's a brochure on this matter.

We're also working with our Anglophone counterparts who are doing more or less the same thing. These are the SADCs, the equivalent of the Community Futures Development Corporations. This is a promotion that we're doing jointly to show that we're working and that there's no overlap: Anglophones and Francophones are working together to ensure that the Francophone community is well served everywhere.

We also have a project designed to attract tourists from France and Quebec to visit our beautiful province. I hope you've had a chance to see the city and that you've seen it's worth the trouble; we also boast about our beautiful city. We send out 50,000 brochures a year in which we talk about the Francophone products that can be found here in British Columbia. We're doing the same thing in the four western provinces. We often work together to obtain economies of scale, and we've sent 660,000 brochures like this to Quebec City in recent years to ensure that Quebecers know we exist and to invite them to come and see us.

The economic impact for a single province, for an investment of \$400,000, is more than \$25 million. So that's an impact that's really worth the trouble. That's a conservative assessment. Generally, when they travel, Quebecers stay here for 21 days. So I did my evaluation on the basis of 14-day stays. All that to say that your investment is really worth it because the impact of spending in the order of \$400,000 has been \$25 million for a single province. That's the case for Alberta; British Columbia gets even more tourists.

We're also working with the federal government, naturally, to ensure that an economic area is represented in British Columbia, but we're also working very closely with the province. Together we're doing promotion to encourage investment in British Columbia. We're doing advertising, called *Vivre à l'étranger*, in countries like France. In it, we were saying that Vancouver is a beautiful city to travel to, of course, but that it's also a beautiful city to invest in, a beautiful city for doing business in British Columbia.

Every dollar spent in New York corresponds to 69¢ spent in Vancouver. So it's less expensive than travelling to the United States. We therefore encourage people to come to British Columbia, where it costs a lot less to do business. We're working very closely with the province to encourage people to invest here. As you know, we have a labour shortage. So we're also working very closely with the province to encourage immigrants to settle in British Columbia.

Thus, in broad terms, our mandate is to create an economic area for the Francophone community. We're doing a lot of things to raise the Francophone community's visibility and to ensure that there are a lot of jobs and good businesses in British Columbia.

I'd like to thank you for your support because it really makes a difference. There really is a positive impact, and we'd like that to continue.

Thank you.

●(0815)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you very much, Mr. Cyr.

We'll now hear from the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo (President, Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique): Mr. Chair, and honourable committee members, I want to thank you for this invitation and to welcome you to British Columbia. The Action Plan for Official Languages, which you want to hear us talk about, has been the framework in which our communities have been operating since 2003.

However, we know that the government is pondering the matter, and since the plan will undergo a review between now and 2008, we would like, in the circumstances, to offer you some suggestions for reinforcing the federal policy and better responding to the needs of the official language communities.

I'm here today with Yseult Friolet, Executive Director of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, and Jamal Nawri, who is our Immigration Coordinator.

The Fédération des francophones is the voice of the community, and our role is to promote, represent and defend the interests of Francophones and, of course, to protect the linguistic and cultural heritage of our community.

The history of Francophones in British Columbia dates back to the very start, to 1793, when six French Canadian voyageurs accompanied Alexander Mackenzie. Today, the Francophone community is 64,000 strong, according to the 2001 census, and we know that number will be further increasing soon. As regards bilingual individuals who have joined our Francophone area in British Columbia, nearly 270,000 persons can communicate in French, 7% of the population of our province.

The Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique was founded in 1945 and represents and supports some 40 associations representing the Francophones of the various regions that operate in a number of sectors: the economy, community development, culture, social affairs, youth, seniors, justice and, of course, education.

Apart from the Action Plan for Official Languages, our community has had a federal-provincial agreement for the promotion of official languages. It thus maintains close ties with the provincial government and certain key departments, in the social field, for example. It also maintains close ties with certain municipalities such as Vancouver, Coquitlam, Nanaimo, Prince George and others, where that's also being done.

A few months ago, we signed a memorandum of understanding with VANOC and the Fédération canadienne pour le dialogue des cultures, establishing that the Francophone community of British

Columbia will play its rightful crucial role in the 2010 Winter Games.

The major action areas our community has focused on are mainly those previously identified in the action plan: education, early childhood, economic development, health, immigration and justice. However, our communities determined at the outset that the federal action plan didn't give community development its rightful place in the everyday lives of Francophones in British Columbia. Furthermore, the importance of arts and culture as driving forces in the Francophone region isn't expressly recognized. These are deficiencies that should be corrected.

I'd like to speak to you briefly about each of the axes in the action plan, but I'll leave it to a number of people here to talk about the health system, the economy — we've already talked about that — and education. I'd just like to say a brief word on that.

As you know, our schools help to reinforce the network formed by our community centres. We've managed to create a structured, inclusive environment conducive to the vitality of the French language and culture.

Our young people are forging a Franco-Columbian identity that won't resemble that of previous generations. Parents and the schools are also focusing on the needs of the very young: a joint strategy on early childhood will enable us to work in cooperation with the provincial government. We need to provide future parents with a broad range of services and resources in French. Our community naturally needs French-language child care centres, but also, for example, resources to help us better understand the at times complex linguistic development of our children living in minority or exogamous situations.

Postsecondary education is also developing quickly. Simon Fraser University, through the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles, is increasingly offering courses, including a bachelor's degree in public administration and community services and on-the-job training for the future teachers that the school boards schools and immersion schools need.

We've also recognized that college education and continuing training are also essential to the development of our community. That's why the Collège Éducentre is constantly growing and offers a very broad range of programs, running from palliative care to the training required to work in child care centres and to work with autistic individuals.

●(0820)

The Association des juristes de langue française de la Colombie-Britannique will discuss justice later on.

Immigration, which you asked us to talk about, is very definitely one of our priorities. Our province is, by definition, a province of immigration, and has been for some years. Some 72.5% of Francophones here come from other provinces, and 14% come from outside the country. The federal government made an announcement on its policy on Francophone immigration outside Quebec only a few months ago. Ministers Monte Solberg and Josée Verner announced in Winnipeg that the government was going to increase numbers and provide financial assistance to the province and the community to provide these people with a better reception and promote their social and economic integration.

So our community has become very multicultural. The children in our schools speak some 40 languages, and our community centres are putting on more and more shows based on the traditions of Francophones from outside Canada.

The Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique has been working on this issue since 2002. We're taking part in all the projects developed by the FCFA du Canada. We've conducted a study on the reception, settlement and integration of Francophones in the Greater Vancouver region, and we've put a regional committee in place. That committee has developed an action plan to promote Francophone immigration in British Columbia.

Since 2004...

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Your five minutes are up.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: In any case, we've given you some documentation. It's a bit difficult to talk about the Francophone community in general in five minutes. So you've received that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I know that five minutes is very short, but our time is limited.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: May I take one more minute?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): No, you've already taken five minutes. When we move on to the question period, perhaps you'll be able to elaborate on the subject further.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: Perhaps, because we also would have liked to talk a little about the Olympic Games and other subjects.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): All right.

Mr. Pierre Gagnon.

Mr. Pierre Gagnon (Chairman of the Board, Association des juristes d'expression française de la Colombie-Britannique): I'm the Chairman of the Association des juristes d'expression française de la Colombie-Britannique. The purpose of the association, which has been in existence for a little more than five years, is to facilitate and promote access to justice in French in British Columbia.

Apart from all the federal legal bodies, such as the Tax Court of Canada and employment insurance cases, the only access to justice in French in British Columbia is provided by section 530 of the Criminal Code. That section provides that an accused may elect to be tried in the official language of his choice, in the language that most suits him: English or French.

Consequently, there have to be judges, prosecutors and defence counsel capable of speaking the language chosen by the accused. We will therefore have to ensure the succession of all justice

professionals who must work in French and English, the two official languages.

On this point, one of British Columbia's problems is that education in French is offered up to grade 12, in the French-language and immersion schools. There are also colleges enabling students in eastern Canada to get a college education or even to complete the first year of university. However, there are few job opportunities in law or related fields. Students finish their high school or college educations and, if they want to study law, have to go to Ottawa, Montreal or Moncton. Do they come back? We'll see.

One of the challenges facing British Columbia is to ensure a succession in the justice field, not only among lawyers, but also among support staff. We need clerks, court reporters and probation officers who can write reports in both official languages.

A report was submitted to you. I want to congratulate the Access to Justice in Both Official Languages Support Fund because, without it, the Francophone jurors study that was prepared, a copy of which was submitted to you, would not have been possible. That study shows that, in a minority setting, it is difficult to identify which people are bilingual, Francophone or Anglophone. To date, there's been no mechanism under provincial law for that purpose.

To provide a brief summary, in virtually all the provinces, a list of potential jurors is prepared based on the voter list. That's the way it is in virtually all the provinces. That's also the case in British Columbia, except that the way people are selected, using the voters list, doesn't enable us to identify whether they are Francophone, Anglophone or bilingual, because they can be of another nationality or speak either official language.

This is generally a provincial jurisdiction. We called upon your provincial counterparts. We would emphasize, however, that this is also a matter of national interest. Section 530 of the Criminal Code, which is a federal statute, applies across Canada, and the criminal justice system cannot operate if one day there's a shortage of jurors. So ways have to be found to identify jurors.

We suggest two. First, we suggest using the federal voters list. When the federal voters list is prepared, could we have mechanisms for identifying persons among voters who are Francophone, Anglophone or bilingual, across Canada? Then that information would be forwarded to the provinces so that they could use it to establish lists of prospective jurors.

We're making a second suggestion. We've seen from our analysis of the Statistics Act that this is probably the best current survey of official languages. The questions that are put to Canadian citizens are such that, based on the statistics, and if people have answered the questions honestly—we assume so—we can identify segments of the population that have linguistic ability in French, English and both official languages.

● (0825)

We suggest that this information be available to the provinces at the time a list of prospective jurors is prepared.

In the reports that we've submitted—the summaries—on page 10, for example, one suggested question could be included in the questionnaire submitted under the Statistics Act or in a questionnaire submitted under the Canada Elections Act. That question reads as follows:

Do you agree that the information collected with respect to the official language (s) learned and still understood by you be used to compile lists of prospective jurors pursuant to section 530 of the Criminal Code which provides that persons accused of a criminal offence in Canada have the right to be tried in the official language of their choice?

I'll close by adding that it is in everyone's interest that the justice system works well. Consequently, it's in the interest of an accused to be able to defend himself in the language of his choice, and it's also in the interest of the prosecution to be able to prosecute an accused in either official language.

Thank you.

• (0830)

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

We'll now hear from the Association franco-yukonnaise. Ms. Marianne Théorêt-Poupart, I turn the floor over to you.

Mrs. Marianne Théorêt-Poupart (Communication Coordinator, Association franco-yukonnaise): Thank you.

Good morning. I represent the Association franco-yukonnaise, which is more commonly called the AFY. I'm going to give you a few details, to clarify a little the background of the association, which isn't always known outside its area.

The Association franco-yukonnaise is the voice of the 1,200 Francophones in the Yukon. It's also one of the youngest Francophone communities in Canada. In 2007, we'll be celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of AFY, which is central to the community's development. It's often said in the rest of the country that we're an exemplary, innovative and responsible community. One of the best examples that I can give you is the following. We're now champions of funding diversification. In 1991, 70% of our funding came from Canadian Heritage, whereas that department now provides only 20%.

The association operates somewhat like a federation. It has a number of sectors, a cultural sector, a youth sector, which we call the Youth Hope Committee, and the Adult Orientation and Training Service, in the area of continuing education. There's also the Yukon RDÉE, the Regroupement de développement économique et d'employabilité, which operates in economic development, and the Carrefour d'immigration rurale, our latest program. In fact, it was created in the wake of the Action Plan for Official Languages, which encouraged immigration. So we've only very recently acquired an immigration sector.

Some organizations created over the years also support community development. The oldest of them is *Aurore boréale*, a bimonthly newspaper founded in 1983. It thus had its twentieth anniversary in 2003. There's also an organization representing Francophone women of the Yukon, the Partenariat communauté en santé, which aims to facilitate access for Francophones to French-language services, and the Comité francophone catholique. We also have a child care centre and Émilie-Tremblay school for students from junior kindergarten to

grade 12. Lastly, there's the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon. A lot of these organizations are housed under the same roof, the Centre de la francophonie. The centre is, in a way, the heart of community development. People who go there are almost certain to find what they're looking for. If they can't, we tell them where to go.

Having said that, we have done everything possible with the financial and material resources at our disposal to pursue the development of the Francophone community.

Now I'll get to the heart of the matter. You've asked us to tell you about our community's challenges and expectations with regard to the Action Plan for Official Languages. The plan is closely linked to the Northern Strategy that was implemented in the Yukon during the year.

Under that strategy, the Franco-Yukon community was virtually disregarded. When it implemented the strategy, the Canadian government didn't require the territorial governments to support the Francophone communities. The Northern Strategy contains no provision for the territorial government to be required to provide services in French. Furthermore, it defines a new parameter that is really unfavourable to the Francophone community.

• (0835)

Under this strategy, which is mainly designed to promote economic development, only the territorial and First Nations governments can file project funding applications. If the Franco-Yukon community wants to file a project, it has to go through the First Nations government, which is excluded, or through the territorial government. This isn't at all advantageous. It undermines more than helps the community's development.

The Dion Plan has had promising consequences for the Franco-Yukon community, mainly in two areas. In immigration, as I told you earlier, one sector was created under at the AFY. In education, a bilateral agreement was signed and funding allocated for family literacy. Except for these two sectors, this action plan hasn't had any effect in the Yukon.

We're still having as much trouble getting services in French from the federal and territorial governments. In fact, the two federal departments with which we can work in French are Service Canada and Justice Canada. Apart from those two departments, we're not offered services in both official languages, even though it is the government's responsibility to do so. People no longer even ask to be served in French because, in some cases, if the person who speaks French is on a break or gone to lunch, you have to wait for him or her to come back. The chairman recently told me that he no longer even asked to be served in French, whereas he's the chairman of the board of AFY.

I simply want to say that health is a sensitive sector in the Yukon, as it is in the rest of the country. On December 14, in Ottawa, you'll be hearing from Sandra St-Laurent, the coordinator of Partenariat communauté en santé, as well as two people from the other two territories. The health issue will be on the agenda. Sandra will be in a much better position than I to answer health questions.

Whatever the case may be, I'll be pleased to answer your questions.

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

Ms. Bourgeois.

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois (Executive Director, Société Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm proud to be here today on behalf of the 4,000 learners enrolled in the Francophone program across this province. We're happy to identify certain aspects of the Action Plan for Official Languages that are priorities for us.

The Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, or CSF, is convinced that, under its mandate to contribute to the development and linguistic and cultural vitality of the Francophone population of this province, it is providing for the education of our province's Francophones and strengthening linguistic duality in the country.

It's important to emphasize that CSF stands out at the national level, since it's considered the most culturally diversified board in French Canada. The board serves a mixed population that comes from 72 countries and speaks a total of 58 languages. Another essential point to bear in mind is that more than 80% of our children come from exogamous families, including my own two children.

Through our activities and strategic orientations, we directly reach two or your three targets: education and development of the community aspect in our schools. In addition, by promoting Francophone education, we're providing the federal government with the next generation that will provide the federal public service with bilingual staff in this province.

I can definitely cite the example of the daughter of one of the former chairs of the Conseil scolaire francophone, Ms. JoAnne Hennessey. She now works for the federal government in British Columbia, after going through the Francophone system in this province.

We support this major initiative by the federal government since it provides the school board with access to essential tools and funding enabling it to achieve its objectives as identified in our strategic orientations.

If we want to continue growing and providing a French-language education to the largest possible number of Francophone rights holders, it's important that we be able to provide the Francophone community of our province with high-quality schools. On the one hand, we have to establish new structures in certain communities where French-language instruction has never been provided and build new schools where the facilities that have been leased to us are inadequate. On the other hand, as a result of our growth in certain centres, it is essential that we be able to expand our facilities or build new schools, in order to meet the constantly increasing demand and ensure our institutions are visible by providing them with a strategic location. Let's not forget that we have experienced the highest growth rate of any provincial school board and that it is important that this growth not be halted by non-existent school infrastructure.

Unless we receive federal government support for the construction or acquisition of certain schools, as has been the case in recent years in Surrey, Kelowna, Victoria and North Vancouver, and the upcoming construction of the first French-language secondary

school in Vancouver, our growth could well be slowed, and we may not be able to meet the expectations of a growing Francophone community that at least has a French-language school system. Since census data suggest to us that we're only reaching a fraction of eligible Francophone students, we think it is important to afford Francophone students the opportunity to study in French. If the Government of Canada still hopes to increase the percentage of eligible students enrolled at Francophone schools outside Quebec, it is essential that that population be provided with a system of high-quality schools that can serve that population.

The creation of the Conseil scolaire francophone has been made possible by parents' desire to educate their children in French. Our parents and community partners feel that strengthening our community and preparing our children for school call for the creation of a system of French-language child care centres and community spaces. You've already heard that today, and you'll be hearing it again a number of times.

Since the Conseil scolaire francophone is established in the various regions of the province, we feel that our schools have a role to play in our communities. These institutions must become community spaces, community schools capable of serving the Francophone community and of providing essential services for the development of our community and reinforcement of the Francophone community. Child care centres and preschool programs are still an essential component of francization.

For our school establishments to become community schools and provide essential services, it is important that the CSF and the Francophone community have access to a funding program that promotes and facilitates the creation of Francophone community spaces and child care centres.

● (0840)

Today, we see that schools that have Francophone child care are guaranteed of being able to recruit student rights holders, and our kindergarten classes are overflowing. However, this essential service is not offered in all our communities. To that end, the CSF is working in close cooperation with the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

We believe that the future of our Francophone community depends on our ability to reach our children, from the cradle, and that francization must occur as soon as possible, since everything in child development occurs before the age of five.

The school board wishes to conclude its presentation by emphasizing its support for the government's action plan for official languages, since it recognizes how important it is to support Canada's Francophone communities and recognize the importance of linguistic duality.

We recently celebrated our tenth anniversary and are constantly expanding our school system throughout the province thanks in large part to the federal government's support. We therefore take this opportunity to thank you for your past support and emphasize how important it is to continue further strengthening and developing our Francophone community in this province.

My colleagues, Jean Watters, director general of the school board, and Paul de la Riva, the board's director of communications, will no doubt be speaking during the question period.

Thank you.

• (0845)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you very much, Ms. Bourgeois.

We'll now move on to the question period.

Mr. Murphy, go ahead.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

After discussing this with the Liberal team here, we decided that I would start asking questions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Was that the Dion plan?

Mr. Brian Murphy: He always teases me because I come from New Brunswick too.

I'd like to say a big thanks to the witnesses. I come from Moncton, New Brunswick, and I'm the member for the riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe. The city of Moncton has a bilingual population: more than one-third of our citizens are Acadian Francophones.

It's interesting to note that the City of Moncton previously had a councillor called Mr. Cyr. At the time, Mayor Jones was completely opposed to bilingualism. This created strong opposition. In 2002, when I was mayor of the city, we passed a motion declaring the city bilingual, which was supported by another councillor by the name of Cyr. So I have a lot of respect for the people who bear that name.

Mr. Cyr, it's very important that our region at least have a bilingualism policy in order to promote a certain level of service in French and to show Anglophones that an official policy on bilingualism is a good thing. I know that the situation is different in British Columbia, because the percentage of people who speak French there is lower than in New Brunswick.

All the members of this committee and in the House of Commons agree that the issue of the rights of Francophones outside Quebec and Anglophones in Quebec is fundamentally important. In addition, the role that you play in promoting minority languages, bilingualism and French-language services has an economic impact in all regions of the province and country. Having a Francophone population and providing it with French-language services is a good thing for immigration and tourism.

Am I right in saying it's a good thing for your career?

Mr. Donald Cyr: Mr. Murphy, first, I'm pleased to see that someone named Cyr strongly opposed that mayor of Moncton. I remember that time, which somewhat betrays my age. I was in Edmundston.

I'm going to answer your question in the affirmative. Absolutely, we have the role of showing that the Francophone population's presence does in fact have an economic impact. That's one of the things I very often say to our funding agencies. In our case, that's

Western Economic Diversification Canada. They see us as a Community Futures organization. They recognize our Francophone community and the Francophone communities of Nelson and Nanaimo. They see the positive side in that.

When I meet our funding agencies and all our Anglophone counterparts, I remind them that we're lucky in Canada because we have two official languages, English and French. According to the polls and surveys, Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world, and English is in second place. There are a lot of countries where English is the first language spoken, followed by French. English is the language of economic power, publishing power and political power. I note that that's what's revealed by the findings of the study that was conducted by some Americans, because a Quebecker might believe it's biased. So English and French are respectively the first and second languages of the world in terms of political and economic power.

There's something else that I always tell my Anglophone counterparts, and that's that, if we work together, we speak the two most powerful languages in the world in economic and political terms. So it's worth the trouble for us to work together: if there's one thing that Anglophones understand, it's the economy. So when we're able to show that our presence has an economic impact, suddenly we're accepted, not only because it's the law, but because we contribute something.

I agree with you: we have a duty to demonstrate that our presence has an impact. That's why I talked about impact in that sense in my presentation.

Thank you.

• (0850)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I should remind witnesses and members that I will warn them one minute before the end of the five minutes allocated to them that that's all the time they have left.

Ms. Brunelle, go ahead, please.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Chair. Based on your vast experience, will we have the time to do one more round?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Good morning, everyone. This is so interesting, and I have so many questions to ask. You'll allow me to put my first question to Pierre Gagnon. I've discovered a cousin; it's great to see that you have them across Canada.

Mr. Gagnon, we were told that there were delays in getting a trial in French. You also told us about this problem. What are these delays? Ultimately, getting a trial in French is virtually mission impossible. People probably agree to a trial in English so they don't have to wait a year or two.

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: It's not mission impossible. It's just that it causes difficulties in some cases in British Columbia. One of those difficulties, for example, is that we can't locate the bilingual population and Francophone population. We know where these people are, but we can't identify them individually. So, in 2002, we decided to centralize all trials by jury in the municipality of New Westminster. That works, except that, if a person is charged in Prince George or Fort St. John, for example...

Ms. Paule Brunelle: That's far away!

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: ...that person will have to be tried here. So that's inconvenient for the accused and witnesses, who generally live where the offence is presumed to have been committed.

That's one difficulty, and we discuss it in our report.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Very well, thank you.

Ms. Rakotonaivo, you say that the identity of Franco-Columbians will no longer be what it used to be. I'd like you to explain to me what you mean by that, although we can guess, given the high immigration rate.

Perhaps Mr. Nawri, who's mainly interested in the immigration problem, could answer my next question. You also told us that there were immigration problems. What do you think of the Quebec model, which enables us to choose a certain number of francophile or "francophonizable" immigrants? Do you think it's a good model? Could you consider that avenue?

Lastly, Ms. Bourgeois, I'd like to hear your comments on the early childhood centres. I'm the Bloc québécois critic for intergovernmental affairs and child care. I believe this is one way of integrating immigrants, which is why it's important for you to tell us more. It's clear that, if we could integrate children from the earliest possible age, that would be effective. It goes without saying that we're talking about child care centres, not about "child parking" centres. These are places of education, where language learning is done at the same time as learning community life. So I'm pleased to see that you've adopted that point of view, and I'd like you to tell us more about it.

• (0855)

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: Thank you.

First, I'll tell you about identity. We've just celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique. We had a very typical image. Sixty years ago, they were all white French Canadian Catholics sitting around a table in a room. Last year, we had a seminar on our identity, and, looking round the table, we saw people of all colours. That image alone may answer your question.

In addition, as we said earlier, we speak 72 languages in our schools. There are immigrants and others who've been here for a long time. That's part of the reality. We're also talking about exogamy. So when we talk about identity, it's not just the fact that of coming from somewhere else, of having another culture; there are other spoken languages as well. So all that together brings about a change in identity.

Lastly, I'd like to emphasize that, in British Columbia, we have what's called the *[Inaudible - Editor's note]* of the provinces. So we're also looking at what we need here.

Perhaps Mr. Nawri can add something else concerning immigration.

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

Mr. Jamal Nawri (Coordinator, Immigration, Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique): Thank you, it's over.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jamal Nawri: To go back very briefly to the immigration problems, it's true that there are a lot of barriers to integrating immigrants into Francophone communities, because they are taken in through Anglophone organizations. So they aren't as aware as we are of all the French-language services that immigrants can access, such as schools, continuing training centres, Francophone associations, community centres, and so on.

We'd like to adopt some things from the Quebec model. It's already being promoted outside Canada for Francophone immigration outside Quebec, in particular in British Columbia, but we'd also like to keep the model, which enables us to recruit immigrants, in addition to integrating them ourselves, that is to say having our own intake and orientation services in British Columbia, and to do that through Francophone, not Anglophone organizations.

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

Mr. Lemieux, go ahead, please.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you. It's a pleasure for me to be here with you. Thank you for your presentations this morning.

I'd like to emphasize that you have the government's support. We represent the four parties, and, as the member said at the outset, this is our first trip. We'd like to know whether the action plan is working well and, if not, how we can improve it. Your presentations were therefore excellent, because there was a mix of successes and challenges.

I'd also like to emphasize the recent initiatives, particularly as regards education. We've just signed a \$1 billion, four-year agreement with the provinces.

I'd like to ask Ms. Bourgeois a question on education. How is it working between you and the government? We respect the provincial government's mandate, and we signed a \$1 billion agreement with the provinces, including this one. How are you working with the provincial government here to put specific initiatives in place?

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois: With your permission, I'm going to ask our executive director to answer your question. He's the one conducting the official negotiations.

Dr. Jean Watters (Director General, Conseil scolaire francophone de Colombie-Britannique): First of all, we've just signed an agreement with the provincial government. It approved our strategic orientation plan and granted a 15% increase in our core budget, which has never previously been done in this province. That will enable us to implement our action plan over the next four years. That doesn't mean, however, that there won't be any more progress to make.

What currently concerns me—Ms. Boucher heard this in Halifax, but I'm going to repeat it: some issues are an enormous concern for us, including child care centres. What the Conservatives recently signed is working very well wherever there are majority groups. However, for our minorities, where parents don't know where to go or where there are incredible waiting lists for child care, it's not working. It's essential to have infrastructures in place. I've worked in very close cooperation with the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, in Prince George, for example, or with the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

The other factor—Ms. Boucher has already heard this 50 times and she's going to hear it once again—is the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program. It didn't represent a lot of money, but its cancellation has hurt us a lot. If there's one change that the federal government should make, it would be to restore the Court Challenges Program, which is very often the only weapon—pardon that choice of word—that Francophones have with regard to education in this country to advance their rights and efforts.

There's currently an incredible openness on the provincial side. At first, I didn't expect that. Our minister, Ms. Bond, is doing an utterly outstanding job. Our minister of Francophone Affairs doesn't speak French, but he's also doing an outstanding job. So there's support, an openness that we've never previously seen, in my opinion. In that regard, I think that the fact that the Olympic Games will be held soon and that the groups meeting here around the table are working very hard on this issue has opened the eyes of many people to the importance of Francophones in British Columbia.

I'll emphasize one final point on this subject. There are as many people who speak French in British Columbia as there are in New Brunswick: 270,000 persons. That's a fact that should be greatly emphasized, particularly in the context of the upcoming Olympic Games in 2010.

We're very satisfied with the progress recently made on the provincial plan, and we're still working very closely with those people.

Lastly, we need infrastructures in order to make the plans to build our schools, our community areas, child care centres. It's essential that considerable investments be made. Those investments must come from the federal government. The province is already investing. In the past, we inherited left-overs that nobody wanted. So it's essential that the federal government continue investing in the program to build our schools.

● (0900)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Does the province consider a child care centre as a day care or is it a preschool educational institution? Is that its mandate, or not?

Dr. Jean Watters: It's not even in our mandate as a school board. However, we recognize its importance. That's why, through the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, we've made room in our schools for child care facilities. As the chairwoman said earlier, it's important to reach young people right from the cradle, as soon as possible. Moreover, a few years ago, when they approved the junior kindergarten program, we saw a startling increase in registration. If we could get them almost at birth, we'd have a guarantee that assimilation...

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: There's still a challenge. In my opinion, the family is the most important factor. Child care centres exist, that's true, but it's in the family that we learn our history, our heritage, our mother tongue.

Dr. Jean Watters: I'll emphasize one point, and then...

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): No, your time is up. It's my turn.

Ms. Poupard, earlier you mentioned French-language services. Under the Canadian act, you're entitled to French-language services. It's unfortunate to hear that the Chair has become so discouraged that he asks his questions in English. I don't know whether you take measures immediately when that occurs, such as filing a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages, sending letters to our committee, but I think all that has to be done. Personally, I've made the following decision: when I call Service Canada, if I don't get services in my language, I file a complaint.

Mrs. Marianne Théorêt-Poupard: The territorial government has had a French-Language Services Directorate since last year. Previously it was the French-Language Services Office, but, in response to repeated requests by the association, it became the French-Language Services Directorate. That change in name is important because the director of that office now has direct access to the Council of Deputy Ministers and reports directly to the minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, who doesn't speak French either, but who's making major efforts.

However, there's currently no remedial body for challenging Francophone rights violations in French-language services. So the French-Language Services Directorate, which was created in the spring of 2005, is working to create a recourse mechanism. The association has been in existence for 25 years, and considerable action has been taken to make it known that we're not receiving French-language services. We constantly have to repeat the same thing. We can't assert our rights by force of numbers: there are only 1,200 of us. That's not going to impress people. When they learn that there are Francophones in the Yukon, that's always their first surprise, but we can't then assert our rights based on our numbers. We assert our rights based on the fact that we live in a bilingual country, but we have a lot more trouble being heard than people living in a place where there are a lot of Francophones.

● (0905)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): In a way, I'm pleased you mentioned court challenges without us asking you the question. Perhaps the government can understand that it's a problem across the country.

As regards child care centres, the Conservative government is putting the emphasis on the family, it's true, but I don't think it understands that, when say child care centres, you're talking about families where the parent or parents have to go to work. People may not want to have to use child care centres. Perhaps they would prefer one of the parents to stay at home to take care of the children, but the problem is that both have to go to work. The purpose of taking part in child care funding was to give parents the chance, the opportunity to have access to child care centres. So we shouldn't take any other path to do anything else but respond to the situation. The situation is that governments are responsible for providing child care access, especially to Francophones, because, as Ms. Bourgeois said so well, we should stop speaking like a minority community: we are Francophones, and that's recognized in Canada's laws. Under the Official Languages Act, we are one of the country's two linguistic communities. The goal of our efforts to get child care centres and schools is to be able to bring our children together in a Francophone area so that they can keep the French language. Family is also part of that.

Pardon me, Ms. Boucher, but, on a point of order, I want to tell you that, when you ask a question, I don't interrupt you to tell you that someone is going to answer it. Thank you.

The witnesses heard my question. Now I'd like them to answer it.

Ms. Friolet.

Ms. Yseult Friolet (Executive Director, Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique): I'd like to say two things, Mr. Godin. As regards the Action Plan for Official Languages, I'm going to tell you what our community's major need is. There's an obvious deficiency in this action plan, which incidentally is a good plan. It has enabled progress to be made in various sectors.

The Support for Official Language Communities Program wasn't part of the Action Plan for Official Languages. The Support for Official Language Communities Program is the fund managed by Canadian Heritage under which core funding is provided to Francophone associations across the country. This fund was increased by 11% in 2005-2006. So when the plan is renewed, I think we should look at that.

The other major deficiency is that the entire cultural sector was excluded. So we have to think about that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Pardon me, but I wouldn't want to abuse the time allotted me because I'm going to be told that.

So we'll now move on to Mr. Murphy.

Ms. Yseult Friolet: I only want to tell you one thing about the education sector. We talked about the school board here, but there's the entire postsecondary sector, which is vital for British Columbia. We have to be able to continue having courses in French at Simon Fraser University.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions for Mr. Gagnon. I'm a lawyer as well, and I'm a member of the Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I have a few questions to ask you in order to clarify your recommendations.

In short, you want amendments to be made to the Statistics Act and the Elections Act. You say it's very important to have a lot more names in order to establish lists of jurors and that that could be done only if the act were amended.

Is there another way that would enable us to give you the tools you need to improve your situation here?

• (0910)

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: What you have before you, Mr. Murphy, is a summary. In the full report, which is available on the Internet, and a copy of which was also sent to the Department of Justice, obvious solutions are proposed at the provincial level. We also ask the provincial government to take steps, to improve its elections act, to provide, for example, that membership in the health system be used so that it can be determined who, among health system beneficiaries, are Francophone, Anglophone or bilingual.

The suggestions submitted in the summary that you have are intended for Parliament, that is to say they concern the federal statutes that may be of some use in this regard. So there's the federal Elections Act, which also refers to the Income Tax Act. When a Canadian taxpayer completes his tax return, he answers the question whether he agrees to share certain information contained in his return with the Chief Electoral Officer. For example, you have to check a box to indicate whether you want to receive your correspondence in English or French. That's one way to achieve our ends. So the Elections Act, combined with taxpayers' annual tax returns, could help.

The second suggestion we've made concerns the Statistics Act. There's a census every five years, if I'm not mistaken. At the time of the census, certain information is gathered. On pages 8 and 9, we cite certain examples in which the Statistics Act permits the communication of information. Often there's a debate as to whether or not the information will be transmitted. The Statistics Act already contains exceptions in this regard, and what we're asking is that there also be an exception to make it possible to identify bilingual citizens and those who are strictly Anglophone or Francophone.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Do I have the time to ask another question, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have 15 seconds left.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I'll go quickly, but I'd like a specific answer. The question you suggest asking on page 9 of your presentation would be very useful for you in British Columbia.

Could that be done without amending the Income Tax Act, or could this committee simply make the suggestion to the Department of National Revenue?

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: Exactly, it's a question that the report created, saying that it was a question that could be put to Canadian taxpayers when they complete their tax returns.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Without amendment.

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: There would have to be an amendment because, thus far, this question doesn't appear in any of these acts.

Mr. Brian Murphy: All right, thank you.

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: I'd simply like to close by saying that, considering the way it's drafted, it doesn't necessarily address the Francophone minorities; it addresses everyone, the Anglophone minorities as well. There are regions in Quebec, for example, that could benefit from this.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, everyone.

The discussion this morning is really very interesting, which I very much appreciate, since I'm the parliamentary secretary for official languages. It's crucial for me, the government and this committee that we find potential solutions. I see that you're quite a lively community, and that's very much appreciated. My first question is for Mr. Watters.

You talked about challenges and achievements. I'd like you to tell me the major challenges your community will have to face in the coming years, your greatest achievement and, lastly, the solution you'd like to suggest to the government because you think it's the most important.

• (0915)

Dr. Jean Watters: Thank you very much.

As regards current challenges, I'd say that, above all, the challenge for us is to reach the majority of young people. The most recent statistics show that it would be possible for us to reach 20,000. But we're only reaching 4,000 right now. In a minority setting, they say that you learn French and catch English. I don't want to exaggerate this, but the fact remains that many Francophone parents still think that sending their children to an immersion school is better for them, since they learn English there. There is a distinction to be drawn here: French school is for living in French, whereas immersion school is for learning French.

I'm going to respond indirectly to the question asked earlier by Mr. Lemieux, talking about child care centres. Don't forget that 80% of our children come from exogamous families. The common language in the home is thus very often English. We have to be able to offer our young people services in French, but that's a choice that is up to the parents. Whatever the case may be, that choice has to exist, which isn't the case right now with regard to child care centres. We have endless waiting lists. It's essential that these young people be able to live in French at the outset. When French-language services aren't offered, families often have only one choice, and that's to be assimilated. We could cite a number of examples in that regard.

Furthermore, in the context of changing governments, it would be important for official languages that the government continue to support child care programs, capital investment and community spaces.

As for successes, I'd say that the school board's greatest success is undeniably growth. Ms. Bourgeois has been working on this file from the start. We're already exceeding the objective we set in terms

of the number of people reached. We're also very satisfied to see that our provincial government has approved our action plan for the next five years and that it has agreed to fund it. That can be explained by the fact that we're a provincial school board that will be undergoing radical change in the next five years. The fact that our action plan is in effect for the next five years is an incredible success for us.

Before turning the floor over to my chairwoman, I want to emphasize capital investment. I beg you: release the necessary funding so that we can stop inheriting the leftovers that the Anglophones don't want any more. Francophones are entitled to an education in French equal to that offered to Anglophones. That's not currently the case.

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois: Thank you, Mr. Watters.

Thank you too, Mr. Godin.

Earlier we talked about the Court Challenges Program. As you probably know, without that program, the Conseil scolaire francophone de Colombie-Britannique wouldn't exist. It's what enabled us to come into existence. The process was a long one. Ms. Friolet, the federation's executive director is one of those who, with myself and other parents, led the struggle. It was mainly Francophone mothers whose husbands were Anglophone. The goal was to gain access to schools that we would control.

We didn't want a Francophone program offered by the Vancouver School Board, but rather a program in French offered by a Francophone school board in British Columbia. Had it not been for the Court Challenges Program, we wouldn't have obtained it. We wouldn't have had the successes of the past 10 years; we wouldn't have been able to innovate as we've done and thus to attract as many students. So keep in mind the essential gist of my message: the Court Challenges Program must be restored.

Thank you.

• (0920)

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

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I don't want this round to end without me congratulating you. Having done a great deal of work, before becoming a member, to protect and ensure the survival of the French language in Quebec, I know how much courage it takes and how very difficult it can be.

Of course, you have to be able to prove that the language is useful. So that must be a major challenge for you. And that's difficult at times to the extent it's not the language used in the work place. We want our language to be useful and for it to be an advantage to possess it.

I was recently told that people of Asian origin show a great deal of interest in learning our language. Perhaps that will help you increase the number of your Francophones.

Ms. Bourgeois, you talked about the first French-language secondary school in Vancouver. Is it a private or public school?

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois: It will be a public school. A secondary program is already being offered in French in Vancouver, but at an Anglophone secondary school. It would obviously be preferable for our students to be in their own space.

Lastly, we've obtained the funding to build or acquire a school. That's what's in preparation right now.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Let's talk about the child care issue. In Quebec, we definitely have a child care system, which is a provincial jurisdiction; we know that. It's very important for us that that continue to develop.

I see that an NDP member recently tabled a bill on child care centres in Canada. Elsewhere in Canada, most people, except the present government, want a pan-Canadian child care system. Consequently, it's a need. I also see that the two ways of doing things are different. However, women and families really need a child care service. I can't help but say that \$1,200 a year is a family allowance at most; it's not a child care service.

The educational aspect of child care centres make complete sense and becomes important when you're ensuring Francophone integration. It's very interesting and very stimulating. I simply want to let you take some time to tell us more about that.

In addition, Mr. Watters, perhaps you could conclude on your point.

At the same time, I'd like to tell you that you have the full support of Quebeckers.

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois: I only have one comment to make on the issue of child care centres and preschool programs.

Ms. Friolet and I have previously fought for child care centres and preschool programs. It is essential that preschool aged children be in a Francophone environment. The offer made so far by the government in power, in a province like British Columbia and a region like Vancouver, is frankly not worth much, because the cost of living in this region is the highest in the country. Both parents work. There are very few mothers who stay at home.

I can turn the floor over to Mr. Watters to follow up on that.

Dr. Jean Watters: We're about to open a new school in Victoria. The school will open in January, and there's already a waiting list twice as long as what we had anticipated. Don't forget that the school boards in British Columbia, as is the case elsewhere, are declining; whereas we're growing.

In our frequent talks with the province, we request permission to build schools big enough to be able to provide necessary services. For example—our chairwoman knows something about this—the child care at Gabrielle-Roy school was built for 600 students three years ago. Next year, we'll be adding portable classrooms because people don't understand that the Francophone program is actually growing. We have to be given the necessary funding so that we can build. Build it, and they will come!

Let me raise one final point.

I may be straying from the question a little, but I want to add to what Ms. Friolet said earlier about the importance of postsecondary education. Students currently pursuing a postsecondary education attend the Collège Éducacentre, at the college level, and the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles of Simon Fraser University. It's very important to continue encouraging these studies. In January,

we'll also be offering a doctoral program in which 19 Francophones and Francophiles are registered.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'd perhaps like to hear from Ms. Rakotonaivo.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: Thank you.

It's just to follow up on Ms. Brunelle's comments. Since the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique isn't here, we can also speak.

First, with regard to early childhood, we're working together with Quebec, the early childhood centres. The Fédération des parents is working together with the early childhood centres in Quebec and is also sending educators to work there, because we in British Columbia want to introduce a similar system of early childhood centres.

Our challenge is related to human resources. There are equivalence problems and so on. We're currently working together with Manitoba and Quebec's colleges to obtain equivalences so that we can work in the province. To be an educator in British Columbia, you have to hold a British Columbia diploma. A lot of work as part of a partnership is already under way in this area.

• (0925)

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

The representatives of the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique will testify between 10:00 a.m. and noon.

I'm going to put a question to the Association franco-yukonnaise. Ms. Théorêt-Poupart mentioned earlier that the association had undergone budget cuts. Did I understand correctly?

Mrs. Marianne Théorêt-Poupart: There haven't been any cuts, but funding from Canadian Heritage hasn't increased since 1999. Funding that doesn't increase is tantamount to cuts because the cost of living continues to rise.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): The Association canadienne française de l'Ontario told us it had the same problem. How does that affect you? In Ontario, for example, the ACFO régionale Supérieur-Nord, in Sault Ste. Marie, and another agency had to close. I think they were receiving funding of approximately \$10,500, whereas they needed \$50,000 in order to operate. I mention those two examples because there are a lot of ACFOs in Ontario.

How do you view the future of your association? When we were in Sudbury, representatives from the health field, from Collège Boréal, in short, everyone told us the same thing: if it had not been for the Francophone association, nothing would have started up.

An association always consists of the same members. Ms. Bourgeois said she had fought her fight with Ms. Friolet. We Francophones have to help each other because we're a small group. We're not a minority; we're a small group.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: I'm going to start, then I'll let Ms. Friolet continue.

The funding we receive from Canadian Heritage is vital: it forms the basis of our community. As you said, Mr. Godin, our community is tiring. There's no room for growth. That's where we stand.

In British Columbia, we determined our needs and submitted a comprehensive development plan together with supporting figures. In spite of everything, the cost of living is rising, and we now only have one employee. That's all we have, whereas development has to be done.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Watters said that they were building schools and that enrolment was doubling. So people speak French here. A number of immigrants arriving in Canada learn French, including the Chinese. During the tour that I did with the French, we observed the same thing, that the French language is alive here.

Can the committee follow or go back? In Sudbury, people told us they were still there and that they were the ones making things happen, but that they seemed to have been abandoned.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: You're entirely right.

Ms. Yseult Friolet: Perhaps we should emphasize two points. We have immersion here. At the postsecondary level, it's important, once grade 12 is completed—if we really want a bilingual country—to give students and every citizen opportunities to function in French. In British Columbia, 7% of the population is bilingual, but French must not be spoken solely at school or in the home. It has to be spoken in other places. A little earlier, we were talking about community spaces. Our school system is operating and developing, but we need other places, once students have left school. For the community as a whole, things have been frozen since about 1999. So there's no room for growth.

We want immigrants to enroll in our schools, but we also want them to attend our community centres and associations. The Action Plan for Official Languages has been very beneficial in that regard. Believe me, this initiative has to continue, but we have to consider matters at the grassroots level. When there are no more Francophones, what will be the point of immersion? It has to be done together. I'm very pleased to show that the Chinese are learning French, but why are they learning it except so that they can live and take part in something in French? It's not out of snobbery; they acknowledge that.

To conclude, a major initiative is coming: the 2010 Olympic Games. We need approximately 30,000 bilingual people in the greater Vancouver region and in Whistler. These people won't come from Moncton—except a few perhaps—but it's here that we need them. We and the Francophone community and francophiles—we're working with Canadian Parents for French—are ready to welcome the world, but we have to be given the means to do so.

Unfortunately, Canadian Heritage is slow in recognizing the Francophone community as the host community. It's starting to do so, but we need funding in order to play host to the world. We mustn't wait until the last minute in January 2010 before we realize that we should allocate some funding to this. I say this because this is also one of the major challenges that we have to address.

Earlier we talked about challenges. The City of Vancouver is a major challenge. Like Toronto, Vancouver is a city where the Francophone community is developing. There are three major cities in the country, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Developing and obtaining French-language services is harder. You've seen the urban sprawl. So we need to be established, we need child care centres,

schools and community centres in order to be recognized. We also want to work. As a result of bilingualism, people are using French more and more. We're increasingly asked whether we're bilingual. The event that's coming to our country—the 2010 Olympic Games— isn't a minor affair. Our population is increasingly being asked if it can provide bilingual people. So we're going to be able to work increasingly in French, but we need the support of all of you.

• (0930)

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

Mr. Murphy, go ahead, please.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have two questions, including one for Michelle, if I may call you by your first name. We're all friends here, and members are usually friendly during their trips outside Ottawa.

I read in one presentation that, except for the City of Coquitlam, no municipal services are provided in French at any other municipalities in British Columbia.

First, is that true? I imagine so. Second, why is it that way in Coquitlam? I don't know that region. Third, how did Coquitlam come up with that kind of solution? Are the French-language services in Coquitlam limited to phrases like "Hello!", "How are you?", "Would you like a coffee?" or "Do you want to pay your taxes?" I'm a former municipal politician, and I know perfectly well that it's very important for people to pay taxes.

Those are my three questions.

Ms. Michelle Rakotonaivo: With regard to municipalities that offer French-language services, I can tell you that it's a start. Recently, the City of Nanaimo translated its Web site into French. Earlier it was asked what the associations were doing. In Maillardville and Coquitlam, the Société Maillardville-Uni is working in close cooperation with the municipality. Perhaps you'll have occasion to take a closer look at our history, but let's say for the moment that Maillardville is in a way the cradle of the Francophone community in British Columbia. That's where it all started. That community has been in existence for a long time, and that's why it has such close ties with the city.

The associations are increasingly working together with the municipalities. They're starting to do that in Prince George, for example. The Francophone community is being promoted, and you often see the mayors of the cities at the activities that are organized. In one way or another, there's no choice. Some associations, which are out of resources, are starting to cooperate with the province and municipalities so that they can continue community development.

I don't know whether Donald has anything to add.

• (0935)

Mr. Donald Cyr: The Société de développement économique often works with entrepreneurs, but we're also working on community economic development. We joined the Maillardville association to see whether it was possible to restore to the municipality of Maillardville the appearance it had 80 years ago. We prepared a development plan to revitalize Maillardville together with those people and with the help of Industry Canada. We have the support of the municipal council and the mayor of Coquitlam. In fact, Maillardville is part of Coquitlam. It's been mentioned a number of times that the 2010 Winter Olympic Games are a very positive factor for us. In working with these people, our objective is to develop this Francophone face that even Mr. Campbell, the premier, recognizes.

In addition, the Société de développement économique is working with the Nanaimo people on the Bonjour project. The goal in that case is to establish exchanges between the city and Quebec. Things are going very well. In anticipation of the 2010 Games, the Quebec City and Montreal Chambers of Commerce are being encouraged to come and do business in cooperation with the Francophone community of British Columbia. I attended some meetings last week. We were very successful. Even Mr. Furlong, the Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Games' Organizing Committee, came with us to encourage Quebec to join us.

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

Ms. Brunelle.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Cyr, you're very good at knowing how to sell Vancouver. This is the fourth time I've come here since 2004, and I like this city more and more. I've seen Nanaimo and Victoria, which are also very beautiful places.

Your Société de développement économique wants to create an economic area for the Francophone community. Is your organization different from that of an Anglophone EDC? Do you, as we do back home, have EDCs everywhere that mainly attract businesses and that are provided with support and conditions in which they can establish themselves? How does that fit into the mission of the Francophone community? Are you associated with other EDCs elsewhere in British Columbia and Canada?

Mr. Donald Cyr: Yes to all your questions. Tomorrow I'm leaving for Saskatoon to meet with our Anglophone counterparts. The four western provinces have joined forces as part of the Community Futures program. I belong to the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité de la francophone canadienne, RDÉE Canada. We cooperate with equivalent organizations in all the provinces of Canada, except Quebec.

However, RDÉE Canada has signed an agreement with the Quebec SADCs. We're exchanging information instruments. In Quebec, you have very good research tools, whereas we have very good socio-economic tools. We're working in close cooperation with the Quebec SADCs and with similar organizations to ours in all the other provinces and territories. Here in British Columbia, the work done in cooperation with Community Futures has been very positive.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: On a previous trip, I thought I heard—and correct me if I'm wrong—that the Chamber of Commerce was offering French courses. I was surprised to see that it had taken on

that responsibility. We were at a meeting with French parliamentarians. Brochures from the Chamber of Commerce were distributed to us announcing these French immersion courses. Do you know what that's about?

• (0940)

Ms. Yseult Friolet: I can answer you. In fact, they're courses offered by the Alliance Française Vancouver to the Chinese community, among others. That organization signed an agreement with representatives of this community. The mission of Alliance Française is to promote French culture, but also to teach French.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Are the Alliances Françaises separate organizations, corporations?

Ms. Yseult Friolet: They are creations of the French government. In Vancouver, the Alliance Française is a support member of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

Mr. Donald Cyr: Perhaps the confusion stems from the fact that Mr. Becker is president of both the Chamber of Commerce and the Alliance Française.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: That may be the case. Thank you for that information.

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

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to be with you today. I'm a replacement on this committee.

As a Quebecker, I have a great deal of admiration for what you're doing. You're in the vanguard in the promotion of linguistic duality. In my opinion, the positive effects are being felt as far as Lévis. Unfortunately, the situation of Francophones outside Quebec is not known in Quebec.

So here I have the opportunity to become aware of that situation. I listened closely to your comments. Like you, I believe that the 2010 Olympic Games are clearly an invaluable opportunity for Francophones across the country. Yesterday, I saw the logo in a little store and was delighted to see it was bilingual. I should have brought one.

Mr. Cyr, does your program stem strictly from the Action Plan for Official Languages, or did it exist before that?

Mr. Donald Cyr: It existed before.

Mr. Steven Blaney: I believe we're talking about approximately \$300 million in the case of the federal government's official languages program, whereas the action plan totals \$150 million. That may be because I'm an engineer, but whatever the case may be, what you said about capital investment and child care centres got me interested. I think the idea that children should be in a Francophone environment before kindergarten is brilliant.

Could you explain to me how the federal government contributes to capital investment in child care centres? What percentage comes respectively from the regular program and the action plan? If you had any recommendations to make, how would you suggest matters should develop in this regard?

Dr. Jean Watters: As regards capital investment, the federal government provides two kinds of spaces, community spaces and child care spaces. But it must be kept in mind that child care centres aren't managed by the Francophone school boards, but rather by the Fédération des parents francophones and the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

In Prince George, for example, there's already a child care service. So it's very important to understand that the role of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique isn't to duplicate what already exists. People are working in close cooperation on that.

As for funding, I don't think the Action Plan for Official Languages provides anything for capital investment.

Mr. Steven Blaney: There's \$10.8 million for child care services.

Dr. Jean Watters: Capital investment is very important. I'm going back to that once again.

In many cases, we originally inherited leftovers that people no longer wanted, schools that were about to be closed and that had asbestos, for example.

It's important that Francophones have adequate premises. Otherwise, it's hard to attract young people. Earlier we were talking about the postsecondary level, which is very important, and about the fact that we're starting to offer services. But across Canada, it's not easy to keep Francophone students at the secondary level because facilities are inadequate.

To get back to your government, I'd say that the essential points are restoring the Court Challenges Program and granting extensive capital investment to enable Francophones to have access to schools equivalent to those of the Anglophone majority.

Mr. Steven Blaney: I'm not sure I understood you clearly. You're telling me that that's not included in the action plan? Perhaps Ms. Friolet could give us some more details on that subject.

• (0945)

Ms. Ysult Friolet: I haven't seen any funding for capital investment under the Action Plan for Official Languages. The provinces have to agree with the federal government on education. At the time of the Mulroney government, among other things, funding was paid to the schools for capital investment. So it's feasible.

There are Francophone associations everywhere. Mr. Watters talked about those that we represent and that have built child care centres or after-school services, among other things. In some places, the infrastructure already exists. This isn't a matter of duplication in a city where there's already a child care centre or a given service. The board is expanding; it's expanding across the province. So people want preschool services and child care centres to be provided near the schools. That's very important.

Mr. Steven Blaney: That component could be added.

Ms. Ysult Friolet: I think that's essential for the future of Francophone communities. At least that's the case of ours, in British Columbia. I don't know the situation in the other provinces. However, I imagine that all the child care centres in New Brunswick are already operational. This is really still an issue for us.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'm not prepared to say that they're all operational. We have the same problem in Moncton. There was a conference at which 70 people were interviewed, solely on the subject of child care centres. People want adequate child care centres and qualified staff who are properly paid.

I'd like to go back to immigration. Mr. Nawri, who has been very quiet until now, could speak on this subject.

With all due respect to Quebec, I consider myself a French Acadian Canadian, not a Francophone outside Quebec.

Because of the number of Francophones in Quebec, the government has decided to set up immigration services there. They're part of Immigration Canada. It's a bit like the Canada Pension Plan. In Quebec, it's a pension plan managed by Quebec.

One of the problems with Francophone immigration is that a way has to be found to help the other provinces of the country. When they invite immigrants to come here, the people from the Quebec immigration offices, whether in Africa or in France, encourage them to come to Quebec, not to the rest of Canada.

How are we represented elsewhere? I've visited many countries, and I've gone into the Canadian embassies. I've seen that people don't speak a lot of French there. In some cases, there isn't even a brochure in French. I've filed complaints on the subject at each embassy where there weren't any services in French.

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

Mr. Jamal Nawri: That's a very important question. It's true that Quebec's presence in the embassies around the world is very important, at least in the Francophone countries. The brochures found there concern Quebec much more than the other provinces.

Our action plan provides a little more information to people through the Internet and overseas recruitment missions. Last year, the province took part in a mission to Paris and Nice, in France, in order to spread information on Francophones outside Quebec, particularly those in British Columbia. There's talk of conducting another mission this year, but we haven't yet determined where it will go.

We lost a little ground when the federal government signed an agreement with the province containing a Francophone clause. Everyone interprets that Francophone clause in his own way, which rekindles the debate over the number of Francophone immigrants arriving in Canada. We can't determine their numbers because we only count those who apply to settle in British Columbia, whereas all those arriving in other provinces and who wind up in British Columbia aren't counted.

We think that, if the Francophone communities offer French-language services, immigrants will go and settle there. If there's a French-language school, they'll attend it. Francophone immigrants will use those services, and then we'll be able to show the number of people using them.

However, before giving us money so that we can provide those services, the province is asking us how many people would use them. That's a problem. The province moreover is getting involved in this issue. The interpretation of official languages under the federal-provincial agreement is very important.

For our part, we think we should first create the services, which will then enable us to demonstrate the number of Francophone immigrants requesting them.

● (0950)

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

We can do a fourth round for members who have questions to ask.

Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I have a brief and direct question.

Mr. Gagnon, you're Chairman of the Association des juristes d'expression française de la Colombie-Britannique. I'm your counterpart in New Brunswick.

Is your association opposed to the decision to cancel the Court Challenges Program?

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: The case is already before the courts. Is that correct? So I'm going to avoid commenting on it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I have a point of order. This is the only parliamentary committee where you're entitled to comment on that decision. Since it's not a criminal case, you have a right to comment on it.

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: I'll be brief. Before proceedings were even instituted, the Association des juristes d'expression française de la Colombie-Britannique expressed its support for the Court Challenges Program.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have some time left.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Doucet from the University of Moncton in New Brunswick filed suit against the government. We'll obviously have the opportunity to intervene officially.

My question is very simple: do you have a plan for that?

Mr. Pierre Gagnon: I'm aware of the actions taken in that regard. These kinds of decisions are taken more at the national level. Our association is a member of the Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française de common law. These decisions are made at that level.

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

Mr. Steven Blaney: Ms. Friolet, you mentioned that the Dion Plan contained good measures, but that there were also deficiencies. What additional measures would you like to see the most? What would you like us to add to the plan?

Ms. Ysueult Friolet: I insist that we call it the federal government's Action Plan for Official Languages because that's important. Mr. Dion pushed it, but now it's up to your government to ensure that the official languages are everywhere.

● (0955)

Mr. Steven Blaney: Yes. Now it's up to our government.

Ms. Ysueult Friolet: What this plan shows isn't new. Just refer to section 41 of the Official Languages Act. It starts from there.

Here's what we did with this plan: we targeted departments in order to help Canadian citizens living in a minority setting. Here it's Francophones; in Quebec, it's Anglophones.

We were talking about immigration and health and so on. Of course, this push has enabled us, in immigration, for example, to continue our immigration in French, because we never could have done so without this initiative. That's very important. We also thank the federal government for the announcements it's recently made in that regard.

There's something else that's very important: RésoSanté. We're going to be hearing about that later. The initiative in the Action Plan for Official Languages concerning the health sector has enabled our province to develop the delivery of services in French in that area. I believe you're going to come and meet us this afternoon; that was in fact planned.

It also made it possible to support Simon Fraser University, which agreed to develop French-language services for the graduates of our immersion and French program schools, but also for people who, like me, want to continue studying or developing French.

These are three very important areas in the life of a citizen.

It should be added—I repeat—that the support fund managed by Canadian Heritage has been frozen. We received an 11 percent increase in 2005-2006, but we asked for a lot more. We would like that \$30 million fund to be increased to at least \$42 million. Our shortfall in order to continue the work amounts to \$1.2 million.

I understand there must be priorities, but we're in the vanguard—you said so, Mr. Blaney—and we need the federal government's support. Until the provincial governments become like those of New Brunswick, Manitoba and even Ontario, we'll need a French-language services act.

It's very important that you, as the federal big brother or federal grandmother, support the provinces in their work to provide French-language services.

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

Ms. Brunelle.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: That's a very good argument. Bravo, madame!

Let's continue the discussion a little. In immigration, is British Columbia the province that takes in the largest number of immigrants? That's the question I'm asking myself.

What could we do to have a more effective strategy for integrating these many immigrants into the Francophone community?

Mr. Jamal Nawri: I believe British Columbia is the number two destination for immigrants. As the provincial premier said, our objective is to be the number one destination in the country, and we're not very far from becoming that, especially since the 2010 Olympic Games are a major contribution.

As I said earlier, regarding the second part, perhaps we could clarify that wording relative to the agreement. We could say that French-language services should be the following, and then enumerate them.

However, that should also be done by the Francophone community at all levels. We're talking about taking immigrants in and orienting them from their arrival. However, as soon as they're in the Francophone community, they also have to be welcomed into the Francophone community and integrated socially, economically and culturally.

The schools also need funding so they can take in these immigrants and, in some instances, provide some children with remedial instruction. They mustn't be turned down, since they are the rights holders for these services. Something should be done for the schools that are so much in demand for this.

Resources should also be made available to the Francophone community to take these immigrants in.

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

A little earlier, Ms. Théorêt-Poupart, you referred to the problem in the Northwest Territories. The federal government is trying to make decisions, and it's hard to provide French-language services in the Northwest Territories. Could you tell us more on that subject? I know you say that the Francophone community in the Yukon is small, but you're nevertheless there. What challenges are you facing?

Mrs. Marianne Théorêt-Poupart: I have two actual examples to give you. In 1988, the Yukon passed the Languages Act. That act provides that the territory isn't bilingual, that it's Anglophone, but it recognizes that Canada is a bilingual country and wants to contribute to the advancement of French and Aboriginal languages. I don't know whether I mentioned it to you earlier, but that act stipulates that the federal government undertakes to provide 100% funding to implement French-language services. The federal government is responsible for that. So we're having trouble getting French-language services.

• (1000)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Did you check to see what the new act could give you? For example, section 41 of Part VII is now binding rather than declaratory. It's no longer declaratory, but rather binding.

Mrs. Marianne Théorêt-Poupart: Ms. Beaudoin, our executive director, said that we still had a lot of work to do. We'll see what happens as a result of this new name. We have a lot of expectations now that it's binding rather than declaratory.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'd like to suggest that you file a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages, who will conduct a study, if that hasn't already been done.

Mrs. Marianne Théorêt-Poupart: We're seriously considering going to see him to move this matter forward. We simply want to bring to your attention the fact that, 25 years after the Association franco-yukonnaise was incorporated, we're still having trouble getting services in French. We're constantly fighting for that. It's one of the most important issues we've raised before your committee. We want to say that we're here, even though few people know us. Even though we're a bilingual country, we're having trouble getting services in French, which is absolutely not normal.

I'd like to cite you a case pertaining to the Action Plan for Official Languages. The plan provided money for early childhood. Early childhood organizations received a lot of money to carry out applied

research projects. The purpose of one of the projects was to determine the difference between children enrolled in a regular program and those enrolled in an enriched program. They chose to study 20 children from each group. However, there aren't 40 Francophone children three to four years of age in the Yukon. The Yukon Francophone community therefore can't even try to register for programs like that because it doesn't have enough people. Does that make us second-class citizens? No.

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

I'd sincerely like to thank you for being here. As you've seen, despite the fact that you only had five minutes, I believe you had the time to express yourself. There was a dialogue, and we're going to write a report that will be submitted to Parliament. Next week, we'll be meeting other communities in Ottawa. This afternoon, Ms. Friolet, we're going to meet with the people from the health system. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I thank you and hope that we'll be hearing more French across the country.

Thank you. I'm going to suspend for 10 minutes.

• (1000)

(Pause)

• (1015)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): First, I'd like to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. It's a great pleasure for us to travel here to Vancouver. As I said earlier, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has been in existence for 25 years.

It appears that we're celebrating that anniversary with a cross-Canada tour. However, that decision to do a tour is important. It pleased the committee to recommend it to Parliament so that we could go into the regions in the various provinces to meet people in the field, visit locations, see how the action plan is working, and lastly hear recommendations so that we can report on what's working and what isn't.

As you can see, I'm here today with representatives of the government: Sylvie Boucher is parliamentary secretary, Pierre Lemieux is a committee member and Conservative MP; Steven Blaney, who will be joining us, is a Conservative Party member. Brian Murphy is member of the official opposition; Paule Brunelle is from the Bloc québécois. My name is Yvon Godin, an NDP member, and I'm chairing this meeting.

I apologize for the delay. We should have started at 10 o'clock sharp. However, we'll be able to establish a good dialogue. You know how we operate, from what you saw in the first part. I ask each group to make a five-minute presentation, after which we'll move on to questions. Then we'll have a chance to establish a dialogue.

Sometimes people think they don't have a lot of time to make their presentation. You should know, however, that most members are quite familiar with the issues and have specific questions to ask for the purpose of writing a report that we'll be tabling in the Parliament of Canada.

As I said, the five-minute period for each presentation will be followed by a five-minute question period.

We'll begin with Brian Conway, from RésoSanté de la Colombie-Britannique.

• (1020)

Dr. Brian Conway (President, RésoSanté de la Colombie-Britannique): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Distinguished committee members, it's an honour and pleasure for me to testify this morning on the work done by RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique over the past three years to support the development of health services for the Francophone population of British Columbia.

Our mission is to improve access to health services in French in British Columbia in an integrated manner within existing structures. First of all, I want to draw your attention to the notion of partnership that has led to the major successes that we've experienced over the past three years. RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique, like the 16 other member networks of Société Santé en français, aims to do business with five types of partners that are considered essential by the World Health Organization in order to take effective action on public health. Through the support of Health Canada's networking support program, our network, which has been in existence since 2003, now includes health professionals, representatives of the provincial health ministry, representatives of the institutional community—which includes health boards—the Foyer Maillard, Health Canada representatives, training institutions and, of course, a strong representation from the Francophone community.

The value of the partnership that we've established lies in the actions that we've already taken. From the outset, we managed to mobilize all the components of the health system to develop programs, starting with the BC Health Guide, or Guide-santé - Colombie-Britannique, in French. The provincial Health Department acted as RésoSanté's main partner for that project since it's a departmental program.

To date, we've distributed more than 13,000 copies of the guide to the public, and more than 150 health cards have been translated. We've conducted some 20 awareness workshops in order to reach the Francophone community and health professionals who will be providing health services in French.

Our greatest success is without a doubt related to the fact that, as a result of that project, the department completely took charge of the ongoing distribution of the Francophone components of its program, while asking RésoSanté to continue its advisory role. The provincial health board, which is responsible for specialized services, the children's hospital and the women's hospital, itself directed two projects under the transition fund through the Provincial Language Service, or PLS.

In the context of the first project, the board developed health education material in French, created tools to assist parents and the Francophone school board in better supporting children who have special needs, developed the Francophone capability of its interpretation service and took part in the identification of several hundreds of service beneficiaries who speak French.

Incidentally, a study was conducted of medical school graduates in British Columbia. Seventeen percent of graduates from Vancouver said they could provide health care in French. So we have a critical

mass of health professionals who could eventually take part in a Francophone health system. In cooperation with all the projects that we've carried out through the transition fund, we're starting to identify and mobilize those resources in order to improve public health.

Another PLS pilot project led to the creation and adaptation of material in French on mental disorders and drug addicts, to assist individuals, families and caseworkers in exchanging crucial information in French. Like the ministry, the provincial board and the PLS are pursuing their work in French well beyond the project's limits. The board has obtained additional support from the province enabling it to maintain a Francophone liaison officer position and to ensure ongoing distribution of information and material in French.

The regional health authority Vancouver Coastal Health also piloted a transition project making it possible to develop health education material, identify more French-speaking professionals and improve the system's ability to match Francophone patients with specialists who speak their language.

We're proud to announce the opening of a clinic, the Pender Community Health Centre in the eastern section of downtown Vancouver, which will soon be providing dedicated French-language services, where Francophones will be able to make appointments with doctors and other health professionals who will provide them with health care in French.

• (1025)

All that's starting at RésoSanté, with the development of the Guide - santé Colombie-Britannique and the partnership with the health authorities. The purpose of that is to improve the health of the Francophone population and the population of British Columbia in general.

We're pleased to know that, in the very long term, the infrastructure of RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique will now be assured. It now remains to be determined whether the funding for the projects now guaranteed until March 2008 will be extended to enable us to continue building the Francophone health system that we all hope to see develop here in British Columbia.

Training is another important component, and we're beginning to develop it with Collège Éducacentre for the personal support services attendants, with Simon Fraser University and in cooperation with the University of British Columbia. I would add that all the work that we're doing in the health field is supported by all stakeholders in all parts of the Ministry of Health, and we hope to be able to continue working with the federal government to ensure that the services we've begun to develop continue to be provided.

Thank you.

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

We'll now move on to Ms. Bourgeois, from the Société Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver.

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois (Executive Director, Société Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver): Thank you. I'm changing the hat that I had on a little earlier this morning. And I was told earlier that I should have worn my hairpiece on the other side, since I'm not talking about the Maison de la francophonie.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I've tried, and it doesn't work.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois: Thank you.

I am the Executive Director of the Société Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver, which manages the building known as Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver. The president of the corporation, Pierre Senay, is also President of the Chambre de commerce franco-colombienne. He'll be able to tell you more about the future development of the Maison de la francophonie.

I'm going to start by telling you a little about the history of the Maison de la francophonie.

The largest number of Francophones in British Columbia live in the Vancouver region. Some 20 years ago, we discussed the possibility of putting in place a Francophone community centre because a number of Francophone associations were scattered over the city of Vancouver. A community isn't visible when it's scattered all over.

We tried four or five times to create a community centre, but without success. We got a boost in 1988, when the Francophone communities, the various associations, the cultural centre, the Francophone federation and other organizations started talking about that kind of centre. The Francophone community wanted to be visible and have its own space, but we needed funding to buy a building or build one. Steps were taken in that direction, and the federal government, provincial government, the city of Vancouver and the Government of Quebec were approached.

It took two years to obtain funding and get the project going. As a Francophone centre, the Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver is unique in Canada, in that it was to house all the associations in the Vancouver region, not just one association. To all intents and purposes, it was the federal government that set that requirement before granting funding for the purchase or construction of a building.

That's what we did. We chose the legal structure of a limited partnership. We created a limited partnership consisting of 10 Francophone associations, which were established in Vancouver at the time. Today the limited partnership has 15 partners.

When we confirmed with the federal government that the building we wanted to construct or buy would house all the associations, it confirmed its funding. Lucien Bouchard, who was called the Secretary of State—the Department of Canadian Heritage did not exist at the time—told me at a meeting in Ottawa in December 1988, that I would be finding the Maison de la francophonie under my Christmas tree.

That confirmed the funding, and we went looking for a site. We found a building located at 1555 7th Avenue West in Vancouver, which is a very good and safe location with easy access by public transit. Our associations had space in the house when we bought the building. Those that didn't necessarily need offices nevertheless had a postal address at the Maison de la francophonie and the legal status of partner in the limited partnership.

We also managed to obtain charitable status, which gave us property tax exemptions based on the square footage occupied by the partner associations. We also have Anglophone tenants. The mix of Anglophone commercial tenants and Francophone association owner tenants has worked very well. The Anglophone commercial tenants have attracted visitors to the house who probably wouldn't have come if the building had housed only Francophone occupants. This situation has raised interest in linguistic duality and bilingualism. People wanted to take French courses, among other things.

We have a café that attracts a very large clientele, and you can see that for yourselves when you visit the Maison de la francophonie today. Last year, we celebrated our fifteenth anniversary; the success of the Maison de la francophonie is a model for a number of other centres in Canada.

● (1030)

You talked about the centre in the Yukon earlier. Before building that centre, they consulted the Maison de la francophonie to obtain information. We're collaborating with an organization at Collège Boréal in Toronto because it wants to establish a Maison de la francophonie in that city.

There was a Maison de la francophonie in Quebec City, funded by the City of Quebec. However, the city withdrew its funding for the space, but the association wants to take it back.

This is a model that we've created. The Maritime provinces also wanted to use the model of the Maison de la francophonie; it can bring everyone together, but not be an exclusively Francophone space.

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

Mr. Senay, from the Chambre de commerce franco-colombienne de Vancouver.

Mr. Pierre Senay (President, Chambre de commerce franco-colombienne de Vancouver): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me as President of the Chambre de commerce franco-colombienne to discuss the vitality of the linguistic minority communities.

The Chambre de commerce franco-colombienne was founded in 1983. It's a non-profit organization whose mandate is to develop and improve business relations among French-speaking business people in British Columbia.

I'd simply like to make a brief aside. Earlier, when you were speaking to Mr. Cyr, he talked about the Chambre française and Mr. Becker. That was the Chambre de commerce française au Canada, Vancouver branch, which is a separate organization.

The Official Languages Act derives, among other things, from the federal government's objective of promoting the vitality of the Francophone and Anglophone minorities, supporting their development and promoting full recognition of the use of English and French in Canadian society.

The great threat to the vitality of the official language minority communities is assimilation, as witnessed by the high linguistic assimilation rates, particularly in British Columbia. It isn't enough to send in reinforcements, particularly through immigration, in order to build a growing community.

Business people are concerned about the impact of assimilation on two levels: growth in the Francophone clientele base in order to make offering services in French cost-effective and the challenges involved in ensuring that their language is also that of their children and grandchildren.

In a world with extensive means of communication and transportation, the opportunity to serve Francophones here remotely in an increasing number of fields tends to fragment the minority communities. This offer of service must be made not only in primary services provided by governments, but also in all areas normally available in society.

The assimilation process occurs in two phases. The first phase is learning a second language. For virtually all members of official language minority communities, that phase is already complete. The second phase is giving up one's first language. This phenomenon rarely occurs during the lifetime of a single person because only a minority of people can forget a language that they used to master. It is therefore preferable to view linguistic assimilation as a process that takes place over at least two generations.

Consequently, actions promoting the vitality and development of the official language minority communities must take into account the intergenerational nature of assimilation and include positive action measures in that area.

Recent years have witnessed major achievements in this field, in particular the creation of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. Earlier you talked about RésoSanté. However, the availability of early childhood and education services is still limited. Support for the development of these services is important in establishing the trust of citizens who have or are considering having children and in the intake capacity of minority communities, and that includes business people.

That trust also depends on whether the community is able to have its rights respected, which legislative will is not always enough to guarantee. The court system has been put in place to resolve disputes, in accordance with the law, including those concerning the way in which executive and legislative powers are exercised.

However, the Court Challenges Program has just been cancelled, which will limit the communities' ability to assert their rights and to combat assimilation and linguistic drift.

In addition, the availability of community services won't completely offset the lack of services and benefits normally available in a modern society. The limited availability of mass cultural services in French, the equivalent of MuchMusic via cable television, for example, makes it hard for young people to access culture in French and contributes to linguistic drift.

It should be noted that the sense of being a minority is not experienced in the same way in all communities across the country. In British Columbia, the Francophone community is scattered across the province, making it virtually invisible. And yet there are federal government service points providing service in both official languages. Such offices should be points for meeting and noticing the presence of minority language constituents. However, the various federal institutions have designated various offices to provide those services. As a result, instead of grouping the members of the

minority community in one place that belongs to them, the use of services in the minority language disperses them, reinforces the sense of minority and does not promote the development of related French-language services that Francophone business people, among others, could establish.

• (1035)

On behalf of the board of directors of the Société Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver, which I also chair, I want to express the hope that the Maison can make a more active contribution to the visibility of Canada's linguistic duality and of the Francophone community, even more particularly on the occasion of the 2010 Olympic Games.

The central role that the Maison de la francophonie plays as a synergistic presence housing a critical mass of Francophones working in French in Vancouver promotes the development and integration of the Francophone community. Its location, the major roadways in the area and the availability of public transit help make the Maison de la francophonie a showcase for the Francophone presence in the City of Vancouver.

We hope that the Maison de la francophonie can serve as a gathering place for Francophones and a place with which they can identify during the Games and subsequently continue to serve not only the Francophones of B.C., but the Francophones from everywhere who have gotten to know Vancouver through the Games.

To achieve the objective of promoting the development of the official language minority community, sustainable infrastructure projects must be carried out that could showcase Francophones' cultural and linguistic heritage and their contribution to Canadian society.

The future depends on a correction of assimilation factors and a tenacious application of corrective action. Results will appear and can only be evaluated over generations.

Mr. Chair, with those words I complete my remarks. I'll be happy to answer members' questions.

• (1040)

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

Now it's the turn of Pauline Gobeil, Vice-President of the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique.

Mrs. Pauline Gobeil (Vice-President, Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique): Mr. Chair, committee members, the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique represents the parents of some 20,000 children who are entitled to French-language education in the province. It has been intervening in the matter of Francophone education for nearly 30 years. Over the years, it has called for and taken part in the establishment of a high-quality Francophone education system accessible across British Columbia. Its efforts have resulted in the establishment of the Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, which is responsible for governing and managing the province's Francophone education system.

Another issue closely related to education and on which the Fédération des parents francophones has been working for some 12 years is early childhood services. Research clearly shows that, starting in early childhood, intervention is required to give children the best possible chance to develop to their full potential and to be well prepared to enter school. As a result, it is by intervening in early childhood that we can increase the rate of transmission of the French language to children with one Francophone parent. According to Statistics Canada's 2001 census data, the transmission rate was only 24% for children zero to four years of age.

The federation thus began its development work in this area with the primary objective of recruiting and francizing students for the Francophone schools. However, it was not until 1996, when the school board was established, that these efforts began to produce results, with the introduction of junior kindergarten classes and child care centres in a few Francophone schools. However, the lack of resources and the inertia of various stakeholders in this issue did not really make it possible to develop access to a range of early childhood services in French. However, the Action Plan for Official Languages, which was adopted in 2003, altered the situation. Early childhood was included among the plan's priorities, and a portion of the funding necessary to move it forward was available.

That enabled the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique and its early childhood partners to develop more cohesive action and to establish a solid foundation. Results were not slow in coming: five junior kindergarten and child care services were added in three years. The Collège Éducacentre now offers an early childhood education diploma program; RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique is starting to prepare the way to offer its health services in French; the Société de développement économique offers start-up support for family child care services; and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone has included the provision of early childhood services in its major orientations. It is also finalizing a service agreement with the Fédération des parents francophones to support it in implementing this orientation.

It is certain that not all these results are directly related to the Action Plan for Official Languages, but the plan has clearly played an essential role in creating considerable momentum on the issue. All the partners are now at the table and ready to act, and the early childhood action plan that they have developed together shows the path that must be taken. It must absolutely be ensured that the resources are available to fund its implementation.

That is why the federal government must now actively maintain its involvement with the province's Francophone communities which are still trying to accept the cancellation of the Canada-British Columbia agreement in principle on learning and child care. The various stakeholders must have access to the necessary resources to continue building on a solid foundation. If we want to ensure the development and vitality of the Francophone community in British Columbia, we must take action at the grassroots level. We must not only continue recruiting and preparing children to enter Francophone schools, we must also guarantee them and their families access to a range of French-language services covering all their needs. And a great deal remains to be done.

The Francophone schools currently serve only 25% of their potential clientele. The junior kindergartens and child care centres

can only accommodate 400 children out of a Francophone population of 4,000. There are few or no health service programs. Assimilation continues to take three out of every four children before they enter kindergarten. For Francophone parents, living west of the Rockies should not result in the linguistic assimilation of their children. Canada's linguistic duality must be extended and experienced daily across the country.

The Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique recognizes the essential role that the federal government must play in achieving that duality and reiterates its support for the Action Plan for Official Languages.

Thank you very much.

•(1045)

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

Now we'll hear from Alexandre Houle from the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver.

Mr. Alexandre Houle (Interim Executive and Artistic Director, Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver): Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, I want to thank you for your invitation to this consultation exercise of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Allow me to begin my remarks by providing a brief description of the organization I represent, by profiling Vancouver's artistic community and giving you an overview of the clientele we serve.

Since 1974, the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver has provided annual programming of French-language activities. That programming offers activities as varied as the Festival d'été de Vancouver, the Coup de Coeur francophone, an art gallery, a library and video library service, educational services and programs, cafés-philosophie, a day camp for children, newcomer intake and integration services, a community Internet access site and other activities.

So the centre presents cultural events and professional-quality shows. It offers the entire population of Vancouver French-language and cultural artistic products in the visual arts, media arts and performing arts. With 24,100 artists, British Columbia is the province with the highest percentage of its labour force engaged in an artistic profession, 1.1%, whereas artists constitute 0.8% of the labour force in Canada. Vancouver has the highest concentration of artists of all of Canada's major cities. Thirty percent of British Columbia artists, 7,250 persons, live in Vancouver, where 14% of the province's labour force is located.

The Francophones in the Vancouver region represent nearly 2% of the region's population. That population is expanding. The Francophone population of the Greater Vancouver area increased from 27,245 inhabitants in 1996 to 29,795 in 2001, a 10% rise. It represents 50% of the Francophone population of British Columbia. Furthermore, according to census data, there were 113,525 French speakers living in the Greater Vancouver area in 1996, compared to 147,755 in 2001, a 10.5% increase. That population is equivalent to that of cities such as Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Oshawa, Ontario and Sherbrooke, Quebec.

The Greater Vancouver area thus has a large Francophone and francophile population pool looking for a French cultural life. With its programming, actions and infrastructure at the Maison de la francophonie, the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver is a major contribution to the maintenance and vitality of a Francophone cultural area.

I'd like to read you a few quotes that show how the arts and cultural activities contribute to the vitality of communities.

Culture is fundamentally important to a community's health and vitality. Through it, a society, with its customs, traditions and creative ability, sees itself and fully realizes itself. The ecosystem of Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities, through its creators, citizens, cultural and community organizations and institutions, nourishes and protects its identity. Cultural development is the cornerstone that ensures the community's continuity.

That's the vision that was adopted by the members of the first national forum on cultural development of the Canadian francophonie, held in September 2003.

The arts and cultural activities are at the very heart of communities; they transform the community into a more attractive place to live, while enabling it to grow and develop by defining its unique characteristics; they provide a tourist attraction and contribute to the community's economic competitiveness around the world.

The arts—as we have agreed to call them—are not secondary. They are essential. ... A society without the arts would be a society that has broken its mirror and broken its heart. It would lose everything that today, in our view, is human.

We create social value and we allocate resources to improving the lives of people and society as a whole. Investment in the arts thus produces results with high intrinsic value, a return on invested social capital that is not easy to quantify. Quality of life issues are very important for business in the provinces, where companies want to attract and retain employees and their families so that they live and work in our communities. This is as important a factor for a small town with one mill as it is for a major city that wants to welcome a large head office. Families want to live in rich and diversified communities that afford significant opportunities for personal development, including musical activities, dance and the performing and visual arts.

The arts reflect the members of a community. They offer them diversity, enhance mutual understanding and promote active participation by citizens as audience members and volunteers. Every year, nearly 14 million people attend performances of dance or music, the theatre and opera. In 2001, they spent \$815 per capita on these types of activities. Twice as many Canadians attend live artistic performances as sports events.

• (1050)

Their contribution to Canada's gross domestic product amounts to \$26 billion, and they provide employment for approximately 740,000 persons. Exports of Canadian cultural products, for example, increased by 80% between 1996 and 2002, to \$2.3 billion. The potential for greater growth is impressive.

The arts and culture are essential factors in the new world economy, not only because of their entertainment value, but also for the skills they lead people to develop. Knowledge of the arts, for example, stimulates young people to develop critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills, talents currently in high demand. In the 1990s, the cultural labour force grew 31%, compared to 20% for the Canadian labour force as a whole.

The arts and cultural activities instill greater self-assurance in young people, including those at risk, by developing their social skills, helping students to learn other subjects and enhancing academic performance. For example, music helps in learning mathematics, whereas theatre and dance improve reading, writing and language skills. Parents recognize these benefits: 85% of them believe that their children's creativity develops through arts programs, while 70% believe their children's personal development is improved and 78% that the arts enhance their self-assurance and self-confidence.

The impact of arts and culture in Canada is tangible and their benefits flow to all Canadians. Many of their effects are quantifiable. Beyond a doubt, they attest to the importance of the arts and are undeniably essential to the Canadian economy. However, their greatest impact isn't quantifiable since it represents the acquisition of works of art in all their forms by Canadian artists and artistic organizations, of works that produce a feeling of...

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Sir, you should...

Mr. Alexandre Houle: Yes, I'm going to finish.

Like the vast majority of organizations operating in the cultural sector, the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver has faced major challenges in the past 10 years. Inadequate and unstable operating funding causes high turnover among human resources and a decline in the number of volunteers, which makes it increasingly difficult to achieve objectives.

The Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, with more than 300 participants in the cultural sector from all regions of Canada, has adopted a common vision for minority cultural development. These joint efforts have made it possible to identify concrete solutions for supporting the arts and culture sector: adding an arts and culture axis providing for the necessary financial resources to support the actions of provincial and local cultural organizations in their communities; taking arts and culture into consideration in the other axes identified in the plan, such as education and community development; including federal cultural agencies in the accountability framework proposed by the action plan; the professionalization and training of human resources and volunteers; supported networking to compensate for scattered population and a sense of isolation; and consolidating operating funding to ensure recruitment and retention of qualified human resources.

In conclusion, the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver, as the “lungs of the Francophone community”, is located in the Canadian city with the highest concentration of artists. In our view, we now have a consensus on recognition of the positive aspects of investment in the arts and culture. It is high time the federal government provided adequate support for our initiatives. The future of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games will provide a platform for the artists and crafts people from this area, enabling them to express the very essence of Canada's identity, not only to the country as a whole, but also to the entire world.

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

We'll now begin our question period.

Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

I come from Moncton, New Brunswick, and I'm an Anglophone. In New Brunswick, we have a very strong, very real Acadian presence.

Mr. Houle, your statistics and those cited in the other presentations show that there may be more Francophones in Vancouver than in Moncton, New Brunswick. I often promote the fact that I'm the member for a riding that has the largest urban Acadian population in the country. Whatever the case may be, we're a federal committee, and we have to recognize the presence and size of the Francophone population of British Columbia.

In 1999, Moncton played host to the Francophone Summit. I was the city's mayor at that time. I observed a major change in the philosophy of the majority Anglophone community, which became convinced at that time of the economic and cultural importance and utility in promoting the Francophone community.

In four years, you'll be hosting a major international event: the Olympic Games. In Moncton during the Francophone Summit, we received support from France to install an Alliance Française office. For a small city like Moncton, that's an important and unique thing.

Like us, you have a French Consulate General and an office of the Alliance Française in Vancouver. Little mention is made of the role that France and the Alliance Française play in promoting the Francophone population here.

When the Olympic Games are held, will you have the support of the Alliance Française, France and your community in promoting your Francophone population in cultural and economic terms?

• (1055)

Mr. Pierre Senay: First, I'd like to draw a subtle distinction. The Alliance Française is mainly dedicated to promoting French culture, not necessarily the culture of French Canadians. The linguistic notion is the same, but it's more specific to France.

We contacted the Vancouver branch of the *Chambre de commerce française au Canada* so that we could work together to bring together all Francophones. As is the case of the Alliance Française, the purpose of the *Chambre de commerce française* is to stimulate trade with France and to bring together French expats, because they have more in common with each other than with Canadian Francophones.

This isn't a homogeneous community. The goal of France's Consulate General is to protect the interests of French citizens, not those of French Canadians. We can indeed work together. Will the Consulate support us? That's not its purpose; that's not its priority. It takes part in the community, but its institutions are somewhat specific.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Are you preparing for the economic impact that the next Olympic Games will have on the promotion of your Francophone community?

Mr. Pierre Senay: In general, the people from the community are doing a lot for the Olympic Games, and every organization is working in a specific area. We're talking about the Centre culturel francophone, the Conseil culturel et artistique francophone, the federation and other organizations.

Fifteen years ago, we established the *Maison de la francophonie*, which is essentially a place for offices and commercial space. That made it possible to create a critical mass, but, apart from the offices and the Centre culturel francophone, the community at large doesn't have a community space, a place where they can meet. So they meet on the sidewalk.

The community at large needs a Francophone place where they can meet, with which they can identify and where they can also have access to services. That would enable us to create an even greater mass and thus to attract businesses.

I'm talking about Vancouver, of course, but, as others have mentioned, British Columbia has approximately 70,000 Francophones, including 30,000 in Vancouver. Probably 150,000 out of 250,000 speak French. So I don't want to minimize the impact on other communities, but, for the moment, I'm talking just about Vancouver.

• (1100)

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

Ms. Brunelle.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure for me to meet you today. As I did with the first group that we heard from, I take the liberty of congratulating you for your courage and determination in maintaining the French language here. We realize that the need to save the French language is intimately related to culture and everything we are as individuals.

Mr. Senay, you talked about two stages of assimilation: learning a second language and forgetting the first language. You're telling us that this is a process that definitely operates over two generations.

In Quebec, when it became mandatory for immigrants to attend Francophone schools, we realized that the second generation spoke French. That's how French has become the common language.

You're saying that the future will be assured by correcting assimilation factors. Could you tell us how?

Mr. Pierre Senay: If I had a magic formula, I'd be a rich man.

The next generation consists of young people who are under their families' influence for a certain time, but early childhood services definitely have a role to play. I'm going to let my colleagues talk to you about that subject. The availability of those services is definitely a contributing factor in fighting assimilation.

Young people can attend French schools all they want, but when they meet their friends in the street, when they play hockey or when they're in the school yard, they're no longer just under the family's influence, in a preschool or school setting. They're in the community. So they talk about what's part of their world.

We could also expand the subject. For example, if you go to a hotel in Whistler, the French Radio-Canada signal is probably the one from Montreal, with a three-hour time difference. No mention is made of the fact that there is a Francophone community in British Columbia. The Olympic Games will be broadcast in French on RDS, which is a pay TV service, or TQS, which isn't available in British Columbia. I know that the Olympic Committee is working on this issue, but, for the moment, there's nothing.

For someone who wants to talk to a friend, who wants to talk about music or culture, that's fine, but MusiquePlus is no longer part of the cable service in Vancouver. It will eventually be available on Telus, on Web TV, but that too will be a pay TV service combined with other television stations that aren't necessarily family-oriented. So it's not specifically available. The idea is to be able to benefit from things that are available.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Houle, we could make a connection with culture. I was very interested in your presentation. I was thinking that culture is obviously important and that it's intrinsically related to the vitality of Francophone communities. In my opinion, culture is always very important for the French language. It also creates beauty and happiness. I think that, beyond all the big speeches, it's the important central point in our lives.

What grants do you receive from the federal government for the Centre culturel francophone? What are the needs, if that indeed doesn't meet all the needs? I imagine so.

• (1105)

Mr. Alexandre Houle: The needs are always growing. We mentioned in the presentations this morning that funding has stagnated since 1999. There was an 11% increase last year, but that nevertheless didn't make up the gap between current expenses and available funding.

Most of the funding of the Centre culturel francophone comes from our funding agencies, in particular Canadian Heritage, as regards the linguistic communities. We also receive minimal supplementary funding from Quebec, from the Canadian intergovernmental affairs secretariat, SAIC. Various initiatives of the Government of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver provide supplementary funding, but ultimately it should be kept in mind that we never have enough. As you mentioned earlier, this city has the largest concentration of artists in Canada, and there's chronic underfunding. I believe it was Michel or Yseult who said this morning that just meeting the basic programming needs of our organizations was enough to wear us out. We need the support of government institutions to ensure adequate service to our communities, to represent Canada's linguistic duality and to promote culture.

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

Ms. Boucher, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure for me to meet you. I find it unusual to see people from nearly all sectors here today. We've met with the representatives of all the sectors, which gives us a very good overview.

I like culture very much, and I come from a cultural background. So, Mr. Houle, I think that what you said earlier is important. As parliamentary secretary for official languages, I've met with people from the Francophone cultural communities who told me it could be difficult to export la Francophonie elsewhere in Canada.

Why is that such a challenge? Is it because of a lack of communication, a lack of funding? What's your biggest achievement in the cultural area, the one you're most proud of and that could give us some potential solutions for other projects in the future?

Mr. Alexandre Houle: To answer the first part of your question, I believe that the challenges in exporting Francophone culture to the other provinces stem from the fact that we have to break through into the Anglophone majority.

In Quebec, culture is self-sufficient; that is to say that the market is self-sufficient. They have their star system, if I may use that expression; that is to say that Quebec's artists and crafts people can live from their art in that province.

We, on the other hand, have a kind of twofold challenge. We have to find the necessary funding to sponsor the arts, and at the same time we have to find niches in order to promote and distribute them. There, too, funding sources are always inadequate. I don't think it's a lack of will or poor public reception, because the comments and our interactions with the Anglophone majority are always or nearly always positive. We're taking advantage of a climate of openness here, in British Columbia. I don't exactly know all the statistics, but I think that most people in British Columbia come from elsewhere. This is a land of immigration, and that creates a favourable prejudice toward other cultures.

To answer your second question, one of the greatest successes of the Centre culturel francophone is the Vancouver Francophone summer festival. It's the biggest street festival west of Ontario. There's massive participation by the people of the Francophone community and all the communities of Vancouver. Music, among other things, and the performing arts are a unifying message, a message of openness to all other cultures. The culminating point is the Olympic Games, where we want to present Canada's linguistic duality to the rest of the world and enjoy the benefits it produces.

• (1110)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much. If you had a solution to propose to the government to advance the French fact in your community, in the cultural community, what would it be?

Mr. Alexandre Houle: The easiest thing would be to adapt...

Ms. Sylvie Boucher: Adapt funding.

Mr. Alexandre Houle: ...funding to the day-to-day situations our organizations face.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: All right. Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask Brian Conway a question on health.

Is it easier now to get services in French than it used to be? Do you constantly have to work in the field to get access to services?

Dr. Brian Conway: There's clearly still work to be done, but it's much easier than three years ago. Our first studies showed that people wanted French-language services. We surveyed the population of 70,000 Francophones, of 250,000 persons who can speak French. We asked them, if they had the choice, whether they'd like to receive services in French and whether they would use those services if they were available. The answer was a clear yes. We surveyed health professionals to determine whether they spoke French, whether they could provide services in French, and a very large number of them said they could.

So the job was to link supply and demand. Health authorities supported us at the outset in developing projects for this purpose, and a clinic will be opening shortly where French-language services will be provided.

So progress has been made, but a great deal remains to be done. I'm thinking, for example, of orthophonic services, which are still provided through an interpreter. When we try to correct language problems by translation, it's neither easy nor useful. So, apart from primary services that have to be extended outside the areas where they're currently available, the idea is to try to make all other health services more accessible.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much.

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

I'd like to put my question to the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique. I'd like to have your opinion on what the government member said this morning, that the government was focusing on the family and that certain funds will be invested in child care centres. He said that the government will be creating child care spaces. That remains to be seen.

I'd like to have your comments on the \$1,200 amount that's allocated to parents, to the family, since you represent the Fédération des parents francophones. When we say parents, we're talking about families and the welfare of children. So I'd like to have your opinion on the direction the government's currently taking.

Mrs. Pauline Gobeil: I'm going to ask Marc to answer that.

Mr. Marc Gignac (Director of Strategic Development, Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique): We're not opposed to a subsidy made directly to families to help them pay child care expenses. However, the problem here in British Columbia is that there aren't any Francophone child care centres. There's one in Vancouver: there's space for 15 children, and 60 more are on a waiting list. Right now, there are four institutional child care centres in the province providing service to Francophones. That's not a lot.

If we can't afford to put our own structure in place, the subsidies will be used by Francophone families to put their children in Anglophone child care. That's the greatest tool for assimilation.

When children are in an Anglophone environment at the preschool stage, in the vast majority of cases, they remain in that situation until they enter English school, because they've already begun to develop a network of friends and so on.

The memoranda of understanding that were signed last winter or fall, a year ago, for learning and early childhood care services were really focused on the development of programs and services in that sector, because that's where the need is.

• (1115)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You told us you couldn't disagree on payments to parents to help them pay child care expenses.

Do you think that money will really be used for that? The comments made by the government representative earlier were that parents should be encouraged to stay at home rather than put their children in child care. When we talk about child care centres, it's more for the purpose of getting parents to stay at home than to give them \$1,200 a year.

You're right in your other comments: if children don't start living in a Francophone community or living with Francophones very young, they'll definitely lose their French. If the caregiver sees the children more than their mothers, that's a problem, particularly if the caregiver is an Anglophone or the child care is Anglophone.

What would your recommendations on that subject be?

Mr. Marc Gignac: It's hard to strike the right balance.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Is there one?

Mr. Marc Gignac: That's a good question. What we know after doing a provincial survey on the subject is that the priority of families is the creation of spaces in junior kindergartens and child care centres.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): People have made comments in New Brunswick. From the moment the child care people learned that parents would be receiving additional money, they increased child care expenses. Ultimately, spaces weren't created; they merely increased rates.

Mr. Marc Gignac: That's why we think the resources should be invested on a priority basis in creating spaces, not in the form of family subsidies. That's obvious.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): But you were talking about striking a balance. I'd like to know more on that subject.

Mr. Marc Gignac: We have to know whether children will be in child care or with their families.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Do you think financial assistance of \$1,200 a year will encourage people to stay at home?

Mr. Marc Gignac: No, I don't think that amount will enable one of the parents to stop working and stay at home; at least I'd really be very surprised.

With regard to junior kindergarten centres, to ensure that children spend as much time as possible with their parents, the concept adopted here in British Columbia is probably a good solution. In junior kindergarten, it involves the parents' active participation. In addition, play groups respond to another need that has been identified. Every week, mothers and fathers join other Francophone families one morning a week to play.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you. My five minutes are up.

Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The research that I've done with my assistant in my region, Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, shows that 5,200 students are enrolled in French-language programs in Moncton. As you know, there's also an English system, in which the majority of students are enrolled in an immersion program.

It was said that there were more than 4,000 students in your system. Education is still a provincial responsibility. Unless I'm mistaken, there are only two very important tools at the federal level supporting sound education. There's the Official Languages Act, of course. I also think that the Court Challenges Program can help solve some problems, such as cases in which there is conflict with the province.

The question is simple: can the federal government take measures and take on additional responsibilities to support healthy education in your province?

• (1120)

Mrs. Pauline Gobeil: I'm going to say a few words, then I'll hand over to Marc. Since he's been with the association from its inception, he knows a lot more than I do about the subject.

I believe that the federal government's role is mainly to set a direction by giving priority to the establishment of junior kindergartens, kindergartens or schools. The necessary funding to buy buildings so that we can continue providing services to the public is what's lacking the most everywhere.

Abundant funding is granted for official language immersion. A lot of money is invested in bilingual language learning. In addition to immersion classes, these amounts are used for curriculum guidelines. Whatever the case may be, we need more money: we're lacking the entire infrastructure, which counts for a lot.

Marc, you can continue.

Mr. Marc Gignac: I can continue by saying that the federal government can also encourage or motivate the provinces to respond better to the needs of the Francophone communities. When funding programs are established, the federal government could tell the provinces that, for example, in the case of an early childhood funding program, they should ensure, within the budget granted, that they focus on the needs of the Francophone communities.

That's important because, in the past, we've too often seen large amounts allocated to British Columbia, under Health Canada programs, for example, and we were able to claim absolutely nothing because, as a result of our specific situation, we weren't

eligible or didn't meet the criteria. That's one aspect that the federal government could develop.

Mr. Brian Murphy: For example, a number of infrastructure programs included environmental requirements. Do you think it would be a good idea in future to require that certain parts of infrastructure programs have a linguistic component?

Mr. Marc Gignac: Yes. As regards the memorandum of understanding on learning and child care services that we talked about in our presentation, that was the first time in British Columbia that there was a sentence in the protocol dealing with the needs of the Francophone communities. That was a historic step. Yes, I think it would be a good idea to include that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Murphy. It's Mr. Lemieux's turn.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you very much.

I asked a question about the family this morning. Thank you for your comments, Mr. Godin, but I didn't have time to develop my position. I'm going to do that now.

In my opinion, the family plays a key role in language promotion. It's the parents who raise their children. When I spoke this morning, it wasn't so much to discuss various assistance programs for child care centres, families and so on, but simply to emphasize the role of the family, particularly in the Francophonie issue.

There are resources outside the family to help parents, to help families, but I think families should be helped directly if we want parents to promote la Francophonie, our heritage, and the French language within the family. It's in the family that we learn the most important things, particularly concerning values. If we want the Francophone community and the French language to be important, that's a value that we have to transmit to our children within the family.

We spoke a little about exogamous marriages and concerns on that subject. However, when the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique made its presentation, it didn't talk about the parents of children born in exogamous unions or about how to provide direct assistance to families in promoting the French language at home. We talked about child care centres; I say yes, child care centres occupy an important place, but that's not the key to success. If children can speak French or learn French in child care centres, that's part of a solution, but it isn't the entire solution, because, if the French language isn't considered important in the family or isn't the first language in the family, we'll lose what we've gained in the child care centres.

I'd like to know your strategies for working directly with families, particularly exogamous families, because that's where the French language must be promoted. We'd like to assist in promoting the French language, our culture, in the family. That's my question.

• (1125)

Mrs. Pauline Gobeil: Yes, that's very important because 80% of the families that use our system are exogamous. That means that only one of the two parents speaks French.

In a majority of those homes, the language spoken is English. I think we're talking about two different subjects. There's assistance to families and there are child care centres and junior kindergartens. They shouldn't be mixed up because those are really two separate situations in the Francophone community. The majority speak English in the home.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: But how can we change that? That's the key.

If French becomes more important at home, the children will learn Francophone values. The Francophone community, our heritage and our language are really important, and that's what they'll take into the world.

Mr. Marc Gignac: We're very much aware of that, and we're taking realistic action in that area. Three years ago, we set up the Ex Team, for Exogamous Families Team. These are Anglophone parents who have taken training, which is based on the guide for exogamous families entitled *I'm with You*, which was prepared in Alberta. These parents will meet with other Anglophone parents in the school—because we know they're close to the school—to discuss what a Francophone school is and how they can get involved, despite the language barrier. Lastly, they'll determine the expectations that the Francophone school people have of the parents who don't speak French. So this is a question of attitude and awareness. In fact, we call that family linguistic development, that is to say the place that the family gives to French in the home. These are the kinds of discussions that will be conducted.

We're in the process of developing this workshop, and we want to alter it for the parents of preschool-aged children. We really want to get down to the basic level and make families aware of the importance of linguistic development in the home. That's underway. This workshop will be systematically offered to all families who have children registered in junior kindergarten programs or child care centres.

I'd also like to recall that there are four Francophone child care centres and 16 Francophone junior kindergartens in British Columbia. We've set up a lot of junior kindergartens that are increasingly offering a child care program to accommodate the parents.

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

Ms. Brunelle.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I'd like to make a brief comment on what was just said.

I don't think you can set the family and child care centres against each other. I think both are part of a living environment and that the major challenge is to see that French is seductive enough to attract people and make them want to live in French, and make them understand the need to do so. It's definitely a complex problem. Minority groups must be seductive while they're increasing awareness. Since there's no coercion, no act to require people to speak French, as there is in Quebec, it's difficult at times. We have to try to convince people. That was my brief message as a Quebecker.

Mr. Conway, I'd like to talk to you about health. I'd like to get a better understanding of what you're doing. Is there a shortage of doctors in British Columbia? Back home, we have trouble finding a

family doctor, period. However, you have the additional challenge of finding a doctor who speaks French.

Second, you're distributing health cards, which you call health guides. What are they used for? What do you do with those? We know that health is a provincial jurisdiction. How does that fit in with your province's other responsibilities? So how does that work?

• (1130)

Dr. Brian Conway: I'll start by answering your last question. The federal government's role within RésoSanté is really as a catalyst. It has to establish a structure to group together all the participants, that is the institutions, governments, community groups, health professionals and so on, to bring them together to discuss a problem and then to provide solutions or partial solutions and create projects that can address the problem identified. Furthermore, when the time comes to deliver services or implement solutions, a partnership has to be forged with the provincial authorities.

That's where the federal government's role stops. By that I mean the structure is put in place, we propose the solution and then it's up to us to convince provincial authorities. Thus far, in British Columbia, we've really been lucky to have the support and cooperation of all health authorities, including Vancouver Coastal Health and others, in establishing effective programs. The first one we put in place, which was really a winning solution, was the BC HealthGuide, which is distributed to all homes in the province. It's a French guide distributed to all Francophone households that people can consult in the event of a minor, or major, health problem to determine whether they should consult a doctor or whether there is a home remedy that can be used, and so on. When we introduced the guide in French, we immediately had the uncontested support of the Ministry of Health because, ultimately, this was less a linguistic issue than a public health issue. The best delivered service is the one that's delivered in the best way the first time, that is delivered in the most appropriate language.

From there, we realized that we probably had more Francophone resources than we had thought, that there were doctors and other professionals who could speak French and who would be prepared to provide services in French, not within a separate structure, but within their usual framework. They'd be ready to make themselves available to see Francophones on a special or preferential basis. So that would be the next step toward introducing programs, once again, with the federal government as a catalyst and provincial authorities to help us adapt the solution. That's how we're managing to make progress.

Furthermore, the cards are another tool. They're available in the form of written documents and on the Web site, and they provide more information to improve the health guide. The idea is really to establish a Francophone health system integrated into existing structures. In British Columbia, this will also serve as a model for the delivery of health care services to other linguistic communities and cultural minorities. This is how we're really managing to improve the delivery of health care services in French.

I'd like to say one final thing: 25 percent of young street people in Vancouver are Francophones. So we have a population at risk that has to be considered, and that's another element that has helped us get our program accepted.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Conway. Your five minutes are up.

Does the Société Maison de la francophonie de Vancouver compare to the Centre francophone de Toronto? In Toronto, there's a centre where a number of different services are offered directly. In Vancouver, are any services provided in French? I know that since the centre in Toronto is quite popular, even though it's housed on various floors, the people responsible want to expand it and have their own building. That's one of my questions.

My second question is this: how do you see the Olympic Games here in Vancouver? Do you think they're making enough room for the Francophone community? Does the Francophone community have its place in the Games?

•(1135)

Mrs. Marie Bourgeois: With your permission, perhaps I can answer the first part of your question. I'll ask Pierre Senay to answer the second part.

With regard to the services offered at Maison de la francophonie, since the Maison accommodates the associations, it's the associations housed there that provide services. As for the Centre culturel francophone, it's clearly one of the biggest focal points. People go there to see the art gallery, for shows, for courses, for a full range of activities. But all our other Francophone tenants are associations, like the Fédération des parents francophones and now the Fédération des francophones. So anyone looking for information on the francophone community will be directed to the Maison de la francophonie.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Now let's talk about the Olympic Games.

Mr. Pierre Senay: There are two ways of looking at the Olympic Games. First, it's an event about two weeks long during which there'll be a lot of people here. I don't mean that it's only going to be a party: it will also be an opportunity for advertising and promotion, whether it be for Canada, British Columbia, Vancouver or Francophones. The associations have the matter in hand.

However, as regards the way in which we're preparing and will experience the event and what follows, the Francophone population and tourists interested in Francophone culture need a place where they can meet. During the Games, that will involve volunteers, spectators and people who won't necessarily be participating in all the events. They'll need a place where they can be in French. There is no such place in Vancouver. I believe that establishing a place of that kind is part of the action plan of the Fondation canadienne pour le dialogue des cultures. We'd like it to become a lasting legacy for the community. So we'd like there to be a French quarter, regardless of how you want to call it, in the area around the Maison de la francophonie.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): "French quarter" would be very suitable.

Mr. Pierre Senay: Mayor Sullivan said that five languages were spoken at Vancouver city hall, but French wasn't one of them. How do we go about promoting the offer of services in French in Vancouver? We have to create places and a critical mass; federal services have to be grouped together in one place so that Francophones are no longer invisible and there are sufficient

numbers of them to generate other services. The Maison de la francophonie would like to be at the heart of that development.

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

You say that Vancouver and British Columbia aren't culturally self-sufficient. We've previously had the idea of establishing exchanges between the provinces. What do you think of that?

Mr. Alexandre Houle: I think that's a brilliant idea.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We could send you Wilfred or Jean-François, and you could send someone to New Brunswick.

Mr. Alexandre Houle: Mr. Godin, Wilfred Le Bouthillier gave a show at Kitsilano school last Thursday.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I'd like to see you in New Brunswick, in Acadia.

Mr. Alexandre Houle: It's really easy to use culture to bring communities together. It acts like a bridge, both provincially and nationally.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I mentioned that idea because I think it has value. When the French came last year, I have to admit they thought that all Francophones were in Quebec. They were really surprised when they arrived in British Columbia. It was simply incredible; they loved that.

They also went to Nova Scotia for the 400th anniversary of the French presence in Canada. As I often remind Mesdames Brunelle and Barbeau, we celebrated two years ago, whereas they're going to celebrate two years from now. We were the first to do it; you have to remember that.

This exchange is important, not only in order to prove a point to visitors from France. We could also prove to Canadians that French is everywhere.

Mr. Alexandre Houle: Absolutely. Various events play that role, such as Chant'Ouest. There's also an organization, an association of music competitions. Each province holds its own competition, then sends its winners to the Festival international de la chanson de Granby. I think that's a good idea. In fact, we should get the necessary resources to support that kind of project.

Earlier I was asked for examples of concrete avenues to explore for developing culture. In my presentation, I mentioned that there was no cultural axis in the action plan for the linguistic communities. Culture isn't considered either in the framework for education and community development. And yet there's no further need to prove the importance or role of the arts and culture in society.

•(1140)

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

If you agree, I propose that we let the Conservative Party speaker use his five minutes to ask questions. In that way, everyone will have contributed, and we won't have come here for nothing. Then we'll continue the meeting in camera in order to resolve one or two matters.

Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair; I appreciate that.

I come from an Irish family that let itself be seduced by the French language in Quebec. I'm happy to be here today, in Vancouver, to look at how we can promote that language, which comes along with all its cultural baggage.

I heard your remarks, Mr. Senay. Without being pessimistic, you nevertheless painted a troubling picture of the situation of the French language. In particular, you mentioned that it was important to develop sustainable infrastructure projects and to correct assimilation factors. You were quite clear on that point. You would like to create a Francophone space here in Vancouver which could be associated with the Olympic Games.

How can the basic official language programs and the action plan help you correct the problems involved in promoting the French language?

Mr. Pierre Senay: I see a difference between promotion and defence. When you defend, you're in reaction mode because you're facing a problem. When you promote, you are proactive and do things because that's good.

Infrastructure enables people to have a sense of belonging. That feeling is expressed toward individuals, that's true, but it's also expressed towards places and events. The representative from the Centre culturel francophone talked about the Festival d'été francophone de Vancouver. That centre is creating opportunities to get together, but it's not necessarily reaching everyone. For example, when Wilfred Le Bouthillier gives a show for young people at a high school, that's fantastic, and I'm not opposed to that kind of event. However, only part of the population was able to enjoy it.

Exogamous marriage, which we talked about earlier, consists of two persons. It's not necessarily the Francophone who's going to win out. Sometimes it's the other person. You say it's French that's won out where you're from. I almost fell on the other side, not because I had an Anglophone mother or father. I was living in suburban Montreal and, at the age of nine, I knew three English words: table, chair and ketchup. When the time came to start secondary school, I asked my father to send me to an English school because my friends were going there.

What happens in the street and the availability of means for disseminating culture don't work against the influence exercised by the family, because the family transmits solid values that must be

defended. We agree on that. However, starting at a certain age, the family's influence is greatly affected by outside influences.

It takes resources to put infrastructures in place and to promote language. People have to be aware of what's going on in French. I know people who had been living in Vancouver for 25 years and didn't know there was a professional French-language theatre in their city. Exogamous marriages and English-language television and newspapers mean that information doesn't always get through. Ways have to be found to make that work.

Earlier I talked about a hotel in Whistler that receives the Montreal television signal, but not the British Columbia signal; that's also the case in a number of regions of the province. The same is true for radio: we get the Montreal signal, not the local signal. So people feel isolated. Proactive action has to be taken so that the community develops a sense of belonging and begins to resist linguistic drift.

You can view assimilation as a kind of attack, but linguistic drift is a boat that follows a current and calmly strikes an island and sinks.

We've taken a number of positive measures, particularly with regard to immigration. However, they say that 70% of the children of immigrants who represent the second generation will be assimilated. Measures have to be taken. Health care services in French are fundamentally important, but something else has to be done, or else it won't last.

Fourteen percent of the Francophone population of British Columbia was born in this province, and approximately 70% comes from Francophone provinces. So there is significant interprovincial migration. This is the Canadian reality that's on the altar. Are we going to sacrifice it or are we going to promote it?

• (1145)

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses who have appeared before us this morning. I think this will help us draft our report to Parliament.

With that, I wish you a good day.

We'll suspend now and resume in camera in two minutes.

[The committee continued in camera]

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