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—
Chair

Mr. Guy Lauzon

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•(0810)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)): First off, allow me to welcome you all. But perhaps I should allow you to welcome us here.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages is very pleased to travel across Canada. This allows to see the impact that the 2003 Action Plan on official languages has had on official language minority communities, in terms of health care, immigration and other sectors. We now invite you to make your presentations, and then we will move on to questions.

My name is Yvon Godin. I am a member of Parliament from the northeastern part of New Brunswick, in the Acadian Peninsula. On my right are members representing the government. We have with us Sylvie Boucher, the parliamentary secretary for official languages, Pierre Lemieux and Steven Blaney.

On my left are Raymond Simard and Brian Murphy, from the official opposition, as well as Paule Brunelle, from the Bloc Québécois.

You will each have five minutes to make your presentation. That may not seem like a very long time, but once we begin our discussions, you will find that what members are interested in is asking you questions to help us draft a report. We are quite aware of the various situations.

In order to keep to our schedule, I will give you a signal after four minutes indicating that you have one minute left to wrap up your presentations. Members will then have five minutes each to ask their questions.

We will begin with Denis Vincent, President of the Réseau santé albertain.

Dr. Denis Vincent (President, Réseau santé albertain): Good morning to you, honourable committee members.

I am Dr. Denis Vincent, President of the Réseau santé albertain. Allow me to introduce to you Donald Michaud, the educational sector representative on our board of directors. He is the Executive Director of the Conseil scolaire Centre-Est. I also want to introduce Luc Therrien, Director General of the Réseau santé albertain.

Our network is one of the 17 networks created in 2003, as part of the nationwide networking initiative for French-language health care. We thank you for giving us the opportunity to make this presentation.

First of all, let us consider the achievements we have made over the past two years, thanks to financial support by Health Canada. Our network was established to integrate the initiatives that contribute to the health of our community within the provincial health system. We are starting to break the isolation among our francophone communities that are scattered throughout the province. We facilitate exchanges and partnerships between those communities. We help individuals and communities to take charge of their health.

We have just completed the “Setting the Stage” project, a copy of which was handed out to you. This report is entitled “French-Language Primary Health Care in Alberta: Everyone's Business”. It is basically our action plan for the next five years. We have just completed our website. People can use it to search for a wide variety of French-speaking health care professionals. There are close to 1,000 of them, as well as 400 French language health resources.

On our site's virtual centres, you can find information about community achievements that contribute to the health and wellness of Franco-Albertans. Thanks to the website, the network is becoming an information hub where people can find out about health care issues in our province.

A new agreement was signed with Health Canada in early November. With these funds, we will organize, among other things in March 2007, three forums to promote health care in Calgary, Cold Lake and Grande Prairie. The objectives of these forums are to: raise awareness among participants about the needs of francophones with regard to health promotion; inform them of the mandate of the Réseau santé albertain; improve participants' knowledge of health promotion issues; and promote the individual and collective commitment of Franco-Albertans to health promotion projects. As we prepare for those forums, we are also sensitizing a large number of anglophone health organizations. That bodes well for the future.

Let us now talk about our challenges. One of the major challenges is to strengthen the ties with the regional health authorities. There are nine of them in Alberta, and therefore nine doors to knock on. There is at least one regional health authority that refuses to get involved. One of the reasons that is given is the fear of reprisals from the community in the event that the funding dries up. On-going, and stable funding from the federal government would address that concern.

Another concern is that if a regional health authority improves primary health care services in French, then other ethno-cultural communities would also demand that their services be improved. We have to convince people that it not only makes sense to provide services that meet language and cultural requirements, it is also profitable to do so. Health care in French costs less.

We would eventually like to have a language clause in health care funding arrangements, so that minority official language communities can receive adequate health care services. We account for approximately 2% of the population. If we received 2% of all federal health care funds that are transferred to Alberta, we could noticeably improve the health of francophones.

Another major challenge is to operate as an effective community development agency, despite the complicated management mechanisms that are required under the department's funding programs. We understand that we have to follow the rules regarding the administration of public funds, but our team is too small, the project application process too complex and the assessment framework too cumbersome. We spend more time filling out paperwork than working on the ground.

As well, funding is allocated irregularly throughout the year. That causes stress that is often hard to bear. We would like to see some adjustments in the way things are done to lessen the administrative workload. That would allow us to do the work that is expected of us.

That is a brief overview of our role within the Franco-Albertan community as well as our achievements, current activities and challenges. Knowing that you have no doubt met with other networks similar to ours, we have tried to avoid repeating the themes and messages you have already received and understood.

We again invite you to read our report and to get a better understanding of our community and the issues we face.

We are now ready to answer your questions. We sincerely thank you for having given us this unique opportunity.

•(0815)

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

We now move on to the French Canadian Association of Alberta and its Director General, Joël Lavoie.

Mr. Jean Johnson (President, French Canadian Association of Alberta): In fact, I am Jean Johnson and I am the President of the French Canadian Association of Alberta. I am pleased to fill in for my director general, if you would allow me to.

First of all, welcome to Alberta. On behalf of the francophone community, I want to wish you a warm welcome among us. We are pleased to have you here.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Despite the snow and the cold.

Mr. Jean Johnson: We pulled out all the stops to welcome you!

Some Hon. members: Ah, ah!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): That is in keeping with the spirit of Christmas. You can proceed, I will not take away any of your time.

Mr. Jean Johnson: I will talk about two major issues. I will say a few words about our association, the ACFA, and then I will speak about the measures that are needed for the vitality of the Alberta francophone community.

Since 1926, the ACFA has been an institution that speaks on behalf of and defends all of the interests of the francophone community. Our organization is a leader in the development of our community. Regarding its democratic structure and consultative model, the ACFA represents the general interests of over 60 community organizations that work to develop the francophone community in Alberta.

The ACFA channels the efforts of organizations, institutions, agencies and governments—in cooperation with the latter—to achieve four major objectives of the community's comprehensive development plan. The ACFA works in very close cooperation with its institutional and organizational partners, especially with such leaders as the Regroupement artistique francophone de l'Alberta, the RAFA, in the arts and culture sector; the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, in the economic network; the Réseau santé albertain, which you were introduced to earlier; and the Fédération du sport francophone de l'Alberta, the FSFA, in the sports and recreation sector. We also cooperate regularly and closely with the Campus Saint-Jean, in the post-secondary education sector, as well as with five francophone school boards in Alberta. That is a brief overview of the francophonie, or the ACFA.

With regard to the measures to be taken for the vitality of our communities, we believe cooperation is essential between the Office of the Official Languages Commissioner, the Ministerial Council of Francophone Affairs, Canadian Heritage, the Council of Senior Federal Officials and minority official language communities, to develop vitality indicators. With a common definition of the indicators of community vitality, all stakeholders could work on the comprehensive development plans, policies and government programs as well as other partnership and funding mechanisms to achieve shared goals.

The other major issue has to do with establishing measures for the development of minority official language communities in all the federal and provincial agreements that are signed and negotiated. In my view, that is an essential and crucial element for the survival and the vitality of the francophonie. We can look at a number of examples of agreements dealing with education, immigration and early childhood as excellent means to ensure the delivery of services in French.

In Alberta, some measures have helped establish action plans, relationships with provincial public servants and ties to Albertan society. This could not have been done so easily if it had not been mandated. Today's most significant and pressing needs are in infrastructure and health. In fact, if the federal government insists on accommodating the francophonie, provincial government officials, by interpreting the will of the provincial government, will respect the agreements. Without that, it would be impossible to make ourselves heard.

Another key issue is respecting communities that want to take charge of their own development. The ACFA believes that the new Official Languages Act is a means to respect communities. I am referring to changes to the act brought about by Bill S-3.

Without getting into too many details, the ACFA finds that the federal government's duty to take positive measures for the development of minority official language communities will translate into concrete, affirmative, reasoned and practical steps to protect and maintain their rights. In other words, the federal government is bound to prepare its policies together with the communities, while respecting their needs and priorities.

In conclusion, Alberta is experiencing economic, social and political expansion. This human and cultural wealth provides the francophone community with a rare opportunity. With the right tools and good relations between the federal and provincial governments, Alberta can lay the groundwork for francophone vitality for generations to come.

We hope that the Government of Canada and the communities find ways to better work together and achieve their common goal, while respecting their areas of jurisdiction. Ensuring the vitality and the development of francophones across Canada is what we are all about.

Thank you.

● (0820)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Johnson. We will now continue with Marc Arnal, Dean of the St-Jean Campus at the University of Alberta.

Mr. Marc Arnal (Dean, St-Jean Campus, University of Alberta): Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I would like to start by expressing our moral and spiritual support to your colleague Daniel Petit, who is absent today, in light of the trying times he is currently going through. His daughter-in-law works with us and his son used to be a student at the campus. We share a certain emotional bond with him.

Yesterday, I received a call from my friend Jean Watters, who you met in Vancouver. He told me that you had asked many questions about the participation of francophones in the Olympic Games to be held in Vancouver. I am the President of the Canadian Foundation for Cross-Cultural Dialogue, which is responsible for ensuring francophone content at the Games. I would be pleased, together with our Director General, Guy Matte, to come meet with you in Ottawa and talk more specifically about the Olympic Games, if you wish. I would also like to indicate that the Governor General, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, is the honorary president of this foundation, which few people have heard about, but which is very active. This is sort of an invisible organization.

I will now talk to you as a Franco-Manitoban living in Alberta. I am very pleased to welcome you to one of the most dynamic francophone areas in Canada. You have heard from witnesses about the vitality of communities. In my view, vitality depends on a number of factors. Interesting and promising studies are currently being done in Acadia, particularly by Rodrigue Landry and his research centre. They deal with such issues as institutional

completeness and its impact on vitality. Some of our researchers are taking part in those studies.

Furthermore, I think that service delivery models need to be re-examined. Who has not had the experience of going up to a counter at federal office where a sign indicates that services are in both English and French and being told by the person behind the sign that he or she did not speak French? That should warrant a jail term. That completely undermines all the efforts made by the Government of Canada. And yet, we see that happening every day. That is unacceptable.

With regard to the legal and regulatory framework, I think that there has been constant progress since 1969, with the latest provisions enacted under Bill S-3, I think. There has also been an evolution in thinking. I will get back to that later.

The thought patterning in society at large and in minority communities is the last but not the least factor. We become what we perceive ourselves to be, and that is especially true in the case of our minority groups. At the St-Jean Campus, to come back to the issue of institutional completeness, 650 students are receiving their education in French. You are perhaps not aware that the University of Alberta is one of the five largest universities in Canada. I believe it was ranked 37th in the world by *Newsweek*. It is a renowned institution. Our students, some 70% of whom are immersion program graduates, are native English speakers. Our challenge is to turn these students, who are linguistic bilinguals, into complete bilinguals within two or four years, depending on their programs of study. In other words, they are asked to acquire French and English as both individual and common languages.

The process is a long and difficult one, but we will achieve our ends in large part thanks to the support we receive from the Government of Canada through bilateral agreements.

● (0825)

Some people, including the husband of the former Governor General, advocated the idea of "sowing" French-language courses in all Canadian post-secondary institutions. That is very noble and advisable, but it should not be done at the expense of institutions that are equipped to lead students who are theoretically bilingual to become functional bilinguals. I am not sure that this has been thought out in the Department of Canadian Heritage, and elsewhere. I would like to point out that a community college is being established in Alberta. We are expecting to receive the authorization from the university and the province very shortly.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about Bill S-3. This is a wonderful bill, and I commend Parliament for having passed it. My wife, who is a public servant, told me however

[*English*]

that they get lectured at all the time about what it means, but nothing changes.

[Translation]

According to her, departments do not have strong enough accountability mechanisms to ensure that the bill's provisions can be turned into concrete measures, whether in the public service or society at large. Over 50 % of Albertans support official languages. Imagine: we are talking about approximately 59 % of Albertans.

So what are we waiting for to implement a vision and proclaim the importance of our linguistic duality, which I continue to call Canada's common languages? We have to promote linguistic duality as something that unites our country, one of the cornerstones on which today's Canadian citizenship and civic spirit have been established.

I could talk to you for days, but I will stop here.

•(0830)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We will schedule a day just for you, Mr. Arnal.

Mr. Marc Arnal: Thank you, monsieur Godin, you are ever so special.

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

We will now move on to questions.

Mr. Raymond Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Arnal.

In committee, we talk about the vitality of communities, but also about the effectiveness of the Action Plan on Official Languages. Some of us would like to see it renewed and improved, but we first have to consider the positive elements and the not so positive elements. I seem to recall that some \$360 million was invested in education, whether in immersion or French as a second language programs.

You come from the post-secondary education sector. That is why I would like to ask you whether, in your view, there is sufficient information to determine if the investment bore fruit.

Mr. Marc Arnal: I think results have been very significant from kindergarten to grade 12 as well as in post-secondary education. The funding has helped to develop a considerable number of programs and create, among other things, the Canadian association of francophone universities, or AUFC. I am sure that you met a number of their representatives. The current president, Raymonde Gagné, comes from your part of the country, more specifically from the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. As well, the Consortium national de formation en santé received funding to establish health care training programs across Canada. I would be lying if I said that there had not been any very significant results.

Concerning immigration, however, I think that the plan provided for an \$11.2 million investment. Some people, including journalists, have told me that that was not a whole lot. I am the co-chair of the immigration steering committee and I have said that the amount was not very significant, indeed. When you don't have a plan, \$11 million is not so bad. However, we do have one now. As to whether it should

be improved, I would say that the plan will entail costs and that \$11 million over five years is not enough, especially when most of that amount was used to provide government with the tools to deliver services in both official languages.

Hon. Raymond Simard: You recently submitted a new plan. How much do you think it will cost?

Mr. Marc Arnal: According to the planned rate of implementation, it should amount to approximately \$50 million.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is that over five years?

Mr. Marc Arnal: Yes, that is over five years, but it is not excessive, when you think of what is happening in Manitoba, for example. I apologize for thinking back to Manitoba, but that is where my heart lies. Extraordinary things are happening there. The provincial government has set a francophone immigration target of 7% for a population of 4%, recognizing that it had to make up for past mistakes.

Hon. Raymond Simard: We see that the plan has also worked very well in such sectors as immigration. From what we have seen, there have been very positive developments in the health sector.

Do you see some sectors as having been neglected? We have heard people in the cultural sector say that they have been overlooked. If the plan were to be renewed, are there sectors that would have to be added?

Whoever wishes to answer may do so.

Mr. Jean Johnson: Well, if representatives from the arts and culture sector were here with us, they would be able to address the issue.

Personally, I think investments would need to be made. The sectors that are truly developing and experiencing growth in the communities are the ones you invested in, especially the health sector, which, by the way, will need significant funding to pursue its growth. The education sector, for example, also needs support, but investments are bearing fruit. But there is also the arts and culture sector and the youth sector, which encompass a number of sectors.

We believe that there should be nine different development sectors within a comprehensive development plan. We were given the responsibility for developing such plans. We would now need to have the tools to further develop those plans and implement them.

•(0835)

Hon. Raymond Simard: You therefore want to move on to the second phase.

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

Ms. Brunelle, you have the floor.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Good morning, gentlemen.

I am pleased to meet with you this morning. I would first like to ask a question of Mr. Vincent and Mr. Johnson.

You said two things that caught my attention. Mr. Vincent, you said that one of your challenges was to build stronger relationships with provincial authorities. It seemed that there were relational problems with an organization. You did not indicate which one, but that is okay.

Mr. Johnson, you said that it is important to establish provisions in all federal-provincial agreements to ensure they function properly. I think those two statements are linked.

I would like for you to clarify those provisions.

Dr. Denis Vincent: Each province organizes its health care system differently. I think that the funding plan that was set up for all the networks across the country perhaps did not take into account the fact that things work differently in different regions.

In Alberta, the health department has delegated many responsibilities to the regional health authorities. The province is broken up into many smaller jurisdictions, and our francophone communities are scattered among all the regional health authorities. When we go to see the health department, to meet the minister, the deputy minister or officials in Edmonton, they tell us that our action plan is very interesting, but that the decision is not up to them. So we have to meet with each regional health authority in the province, since they are the entities we need to work with.

Our team consists of one person, and there are many people to meet with. Obviously, repeating the same message nine times to people who do not know us very well is quite difficult. It is relatively easy to deal with people in Edmonton who are more exposed to the realities of Canada, but it is something else to meet with people in Fort McMurray or southern Alberta. It constitutes a major obstacle for us in carrying out our work on an ongoing basis.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Can something not be done to change that situation? Could changes be made to how the system works?

Dr. Denis Vincent: We need a more generous travel budget because we need to go to different places. We need to meet with these people regularly so that they get to know us. Our message is clear and convincing. Every time we explain what we have to do, people say that it is good and it works. They learn how things are done in other provinces.

We succeed in building a relationship, but if we visit each region only once a year or if we communicate only by phone or e-mail, that is not enough. We know that in the public service and other areas, there is staff turnover and the people change. We need to be able to get out and meet these people regularly.

Mr. Jean Johnson: I would like to add that it is not always a lack of provisions that is the problem, but rather that programs and projects are not taken seriously even though they are in keeping with the federal government programs.

To come back to your specific question, when you talk about specific clauses, we often find ourselves, as representatives of the francophone communities, dealing with officials who are worried that we are trying to make Alberta bilingual. Our efforts are geared to the promotion of the two official languages. The only way to do that without making them feel threatened is to have a dedicated space somewhere, so that our needs can be respected and we can provide services to the community under the agreements. When things are written in black and white, people tend to take them more seriously.

I will let Joël make another comment.

Mr. Joël Lavoie (Director General, French Canadian Association of Alberta): A good example is all the money that is transferred

for infrastructure. Western Economic Diversification Canada sends money to the province, which passes it along to the municipalities. Since that money goes through three levels of government, we need to lobby all three levels in order to have our infrastructure needs recognized. If there were a provision that covered that, it would help us a great deal.

Four or five years ago, the Government of Canada asked us to identify our top priority with respect to infrastructure. We said that it was the Saint-Thomas Health Centre, and we are still waiting for federal government assistance. Health Canada tells us that it would not give us any assistance, since infrastructure is a provincial jurisdiction, and Canadian Heritage tells us that it does not provide health funding.

So we have come up with a priority that has a five-year timeframe. The political will seems to be there, and everyone seems to be in agreement on this project, but officials are telling us that it is not aligned with their programs. They do not want to create a precedent and therefore they do not want to help the communities.

● (0840)

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

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor.

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

Thank you for welcoming us here in French. That is always enjoyable.

I am replacing Daniel Petit, but I will pass your message along to him.

Yesterday we were talking about education. Mr. Arnal, you work at the postsecondary level. Can you talk to us about supply? Do your 650 students come from outside or is there a network in Alberta that enables you to recruit new candidates?

My second question is more general in nature. How do you see the future of the francophone community in Alberta, and how can the Action Plan for Official Languages help you develop that vision?

Mr. Marc Arnal: Most of the 650 postsecondary students come from Alberta and British Columbia. We do a lot of recruitment in British Columbia and some in Saskatchewan. That is our main recruitment pool.

The difficulty in recruiting students from Quebec is the tuition fees. It costs \$5,000 a year here, but only around \$2,000 in Quebec. We need to find a way to bridge that gap with funding. But where we really have difficulty is at the international level.

I would like to see plans developed—and I have talked about this with the people at Immigration Canada—to make it easier for international students to come here from countries in the Francophonie, despite the bilateral agreements that exist between Quebec and those countries.

As you know, Tunisian students can study in Quebec for less than it would cost someone from Alberta. That is the reality. It costs \$17,000 a year for an international student to study here, and \$2,000 in Quebec. Obviously, that makes it hard for us to recruit students from abroad.

I believe that bilateral agreements between the federal government and certain provinces would be helpful, with a view to making it easier to recruit international students. It would strengthen the linguistic character of our institution and enrich our current population.

Many students here have spent time in Montreal or Quebec City, but especially in Montreal. They have come out West because of the job market. In particular, there are many francophones from Congo and Rwanda who do their postsecondary education with us. Our student population is very diverse, even among the francophone. However, much more could be done with respect to students from abroad and from Quebec.

Concerning the vitality of our communities, I will ask Jean, as the spokesperson for francophonie in Alberta, to answer that part of your question.

Mr. Jean Johnson: Could you please repeat your question?

Mr. Steven Blaney: We are basically talking about health and education this morning. You mentioned the importance of including infrastructure in the agreements.

How would the Action Plan for Official Languages help you achieve your objectives for the Franco-Albertan community?

Mr. Joël Lavoie: I think that francophone communities in Canada will have to adapt to new demographic realities. There is a huge migration of people to the West, to Alberta, and these people are settling in the towns and cities.

So rather than trying to continually struggle to unite francophones in rural and traditional areas, we may need to work to find ways to accommodate them in urban areas and provide them with institutions around which they can develop their identity and be good citizens.

This is something that has not been included in the plan up to this point, and I think that we need to talk about it. The funding and strategies are going to need to adapt to these demographic changes rather than trying to fight them.

• (0845)

Mr. Jean Johnson: We have talked about the cities, but I would like to add that people in more remote regional centres, in rural areas, also have needs. The immigration strategies that Manitoba has implemented have turned out to be very successful. In order to invest in particular regions, they have managed to bring people from France and other countries.

I think that we could do a number of things of that sort in post-secondary education. We could prepare people to go back to their rural communities. If we do nothing, I think that my colleague, Donald Michaud, who heads up a francophone school board in northeastern Alberta, will worry about the francophone population declining in his region. We could take steps attract people to the region. It is important not to think just in terms of urban areas.

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

I usually sit at the other end, but since I am chairing the meeting, I will ask my questions and make my comments from the front, where I am sitting in as vice-chair.

The Olympic Games are an important issue for us, but we did not make the trip here for that reason. However, since we were in Vancouver, we asked questions about the Olympics. I think that we will have time to ask you questions about that, since the Olympics will take place in 2010. So we will certainly have time for detailed discussions on that issue, and we may even invite witnesses to come to Ottawa. That decision will be up to the committee.

Mr. Arnal, you mentioned Bill S-3. Do you agree that it no longer exists and that it is now the law? Section 41 of Part VII has become law. So we need to stop talking about Bill S-3 and say that the act stipulates that federal institutions must provide services in both official languages; otherwise, they are breaking the law. People can complain to the Commissioner of Official Languages as well as to the government and the committee. That is now the law.

Mr. Marc Arnal: It is the law, but I am not sure that everyone understands it. It is an opportunity for me to influence the perception that Canadians have about our linguistic duality or common languages.

Something that I feel very strongly is that these issues have evolved. There is clearly a need for a legal framework in order for that to happen, but we do have that. This bill that was adopted and that amended the Official Languages Act is the most recent step. In 1969, people used to say that we were shoving French down their throats. Things have changed since then. When David Crombie proclaimed the new Official Languages Act in 1988, it was another milestone. Then Senator Gauthier almost on his own but with a lot of support, developed the concept of linguistic duality. We are now at the point where there is not a Canadian to be found who does not acknowledge our linguistic duality to be one of the key components of our Canadian identity.

When will the public service begin to act like this is a fact? When will well-intentioned public servants who want to study French be able to do that in part during their hours of work? I can assure you that many government workers in Edmonton—especially young people and those at lower rungs in the hierarchy—sign up for French courses given at night and on weekends. They rarely get any help from their departments. For example, someone I know quite well started with no knowledge of French and she now has her B level. That person is Stephanie Robinson. She now manages quite well in French. She did it all herself, at her own expense. What is the public service waiting for? When will the hundreds and even thousands of Canadians who must have gone through immersion be able to practise their French? Why do they not practise their French with the help of the public service of Canada? That is a good question.

Instead of being required to provide services, the public service could become a promoter of Canada's linguistic duality. Psychologically, that changes everything.

• (0850)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): With respect to the Action Plan for Official Languages and the communities, we have been told elsewhere that the amount of money getting to the associations is a problem because of the increase in the cost of living. It seems that the funding has not increased in line with the cost of living.

Mr. Johnson, I would like your comments on that.

Mr. Jean Johnson: I can tell you about the situation in Alberta. Right now, we are in a very fortunate position, and that is why we are able to deal with these challenges. Because of the economic boom in Alberta, this is where everyone wants to move. People are coming here in droves. When I talk to my friends in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Maritimes, I tell them that I would not like to see us steal their population and how these people return home anglicized in 10, 20 or 25 years. We want to protect these peoples' culture, but the population is growing so quickly that we are unable to welcome and integrate these people into the francophone community, and they disappear. These are major challenges for us. We need an adequate increase in our financial resources. I do not like to start by talking about money; I prefer to talk about principles and vision, but there has to be adequate funding to back that up.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you very much. We will now go to Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all the witnesses for your presentations.

I come from Moncton, New Brunswick. I am an anglophone, but the community of greater Moncton is well known for being a bilingual community. Over one-third of the population there is Acadian. So it is easy for me to understand how to find health care in French in my own region. It is more difficult to understand how I could find those services here in Edmonton. Imagine that I live in Edmonton and I am part of a minority. Since I am a Liberal, I may be part of a different minority.

Some Hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We forgive you, Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: It is always New Brunswickers against the Néo-Brunswickois.

Suppose that I am sick, not because I am a Liberal, but because I am sick.

Some Hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Brian Murphy: No more jokes, Mr. Chairman. We need to be serious.

So I am sick and I am a francophone. There are over 20,000 francophones in Edmonton, which means that the francophone population is higher than in Fredericton, the capital of New Brunswick. In Fredericton, New Brunswick, it can be hard to find a family doctor that speaks French. What is it like here?

We heard from people yesterday who were talking about the health care system in British Columbia. They talked about how they managed to find French-speaking doctors. Could you please tell us how someone in Edmonton can find a doctor or some other type of health professional who speaks French?

Where health care is concerned, it becomes even more important to be able to express your needs in French, because that is essential when you are sick.

So, Mr. Vincent, can you explain to me exactly how this works?

● (0855)

Dr. Denis Vincent: I am a family doctor myself. I share an office with an associate at the Cité francophone in the francophone area of Edmonton. In my case and that of other doctors, we established ourselves here and decided to serve francophones in the Edmonton region because we wanted to and we cared about the population.

I also spent 10 years working as a physician in the Peace River region. I was the only bilingual doctor in the region, where there is quite a large francophone community.

Obviously, the linguistic and cultural side of health care services is not something that Albertans... They will say that there are so many cultural groups in Alberta that services should be given in English so that no one will complain. Generally speaking, no one will complain, because everyone will be treated equally.

But we know that there is a strong interest in the Ukrainian, Chinese and German communities for having... But every community is making its own efforts.

What professional area have francophones traditionally gone into? Teaching. We have a lot of French-speaking teachers. They are everywhere in the schools and universities, in English and French schools. It is as if our calling as francophones is to become teachers.

In the health care sector, there are not many francophone professionals. For example, there are a few francophone family physicians in Edmonton, but there are a large number of francophone specialists. There are five francophone anesthetists in Edmonton, but anesthetists do not talk very much. The same is true of radiologists.

It is difficult, and it is a problem in the whole health care sector. What do we need to do to encourage doctors and nurses to study primary care rather than become specialists? A well-known fact in Canadian francophone communities is that primary care needs to be given priority because the need for that type of care is much more prevalent than it is for specialized care.

When they need to see a doctor, many people, such as those who have just come to Edmonton, come to the Cité francophone, to the reception centre, because there is a practising physician there. News gets around by word of mouth. That is generally how it works in the area of primary care. I have a cousin who has just arrived here. He asked me if I could be his doctor. Of course, we try to accommodate as many people as we can.

We have an Internet site now. It is surprising how many bilingual health care professionals there are. We have a list of over 1,000 on our Internet site. The problem is that it is not up to us to organize where these people work. There are many bilingual nurses, but it is not up to us to decide where they will work.

It is a challenge. To start with, it is a matter of networking, and that is why we first need to get to know one another. I am at a point now where I know a lot of bilingual specialists. If I have a patient needing specialized care, I already know who I can refer him to, and people know me.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Vincent and Mr. Murphy.

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you for being here today and for your warm welcome.

It is important for the committee to work hard to find some solutions. I am on the government side, and I am here to hear ideas, to understand and to possibly improve things in the area of official languages.

We are talking about challenges and we have talked a great deal about challenges. We have been hearing about them everywhere. Since I am basically an optimist, I would like to know what your greatest achievement has been in your area. Moreover, if you have any ideas to suggest to the government on how to solve the problems you have, what particularly would you like us to concentrate on more?

I will start with Mr. Michaud.

Mr. Donald Michaud (General Director, Réseau santé albertain):

Coming from the education sector, I can tell you that we hit a home run by establishing and maintaining our right to manage our own schools for francophones. That is a pillar for our development. Obviously, that means creating spaces, but we are all aware of how much education contributes to psychological development, strong families, and so on. So that is a huge achievement.

I think that the francophone student population in Alberta has doubled over the past 12 years, and that is a relatively short time. I can talk to you about challenges, but that is certainly a great achievement.

I have the impression that if we can transpose that approach to other areas, such as health care, if we can better deploy those services, it will already be an important step forward. We do not need to create a whole new structure, but rather build on what already exists and use it to best advantage. This might be an incremental approach, but at least it would be progress.

What I mean by that is coordinating francophone services as their own “regional” health board where all these people can be accessed and a formal network created. Then it would be possible to effectively provide real service to the population. That is my opinion in 30 seconds.

• (0900)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: And Mr. Johnson?

Mr. Jean Johnson: I really want to give you a concrete example of an agreement that specifically accommodated the francophone community. This was the agreement on early childhood services.

I know that the current federal government has taken a different position. However, the agreement enabled us to start negotiating things with the province of Alberta right away. The provincial representatives sat down and tried to find ways to develop concrete services. The only reason that we can negotiate with Ms. Forsyth's department—there may be a new minister under the new government—is because we are negotiating two agreements for the greater Calgary and Edmonton regions, but also an umbrella agreement .

In terms of success, when you insert a clause that accommodates francophones in Alberta, you give us the tools we need to continue to develop. That is just one example.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: If you had an idea to pass along to the current government to improve things, what would it be?

Mr. Jean Johnson: As I have said, it would be to develop the reflex to always insert and include such clauses. We are not shy: we would be happy to sit down and discuss these issues with the departments.

We do not want to complicate your process, but we certainly want to tell you that we are here and that we have the same interests. We want to contribute to the development of all Canadian citizens and promote our two official languages. We do this with respect and also with pride.

We can be allies for both the federal and provincial governments. That is the tack we take, especially when we meet with the provincial departments, except that we do not have much weight when we do not have the ear of the federal government.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Brunelle.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I was thinking about this. Earlier, Mr. Godin said that the Act is what it is and you, Mr. Arnal, said that there are no provisions for accountability. That reminded me, for example, of when I was working in the area of the status of women. We were trying to obtain a gender analysis in order to measure equality between men and women within government. Because that analysis had not yet been done, we had very little recourse, very few means to condemn certain situations and to advance the cause of women.

You have a complaints process. We have had an opportunity in Quebec, with the French Language Charter, to experience the limits of the complaints process. We know that without more punitive measures in place, it is difficult to move forward.

I was wondering if there are any provisions for accountability that we should be considering. Have you thought about how we could truly make things happen? It seems to me that as long as we continue to depend on good faith or complaints, we will be severely restricted in what we can do.

• (0905)

Mr. Marc Arnal: The problem with a complaints process is that it puts us in the position of being complainers. We have been complaining for hundreds of years. We are tired of complaining and we want to start building. I have nothing against a complaints process but that is not a solution in itself. I think that we have to allow for—and that may involve proactive measures—the community working together with the public service and creating models.

I was visiting my aunt in Saint-Pierre a few days ago. There was a French services centre in the village, that is also home to three levels of government. My 89-year-old aunt told me how nice it is to be able to go there and speak French, to not have to worry about whether one will be spoken to in French or in English. That may not strike you as being very significant but imagine how it feels to an 89-year-old woman who has lived her whole life in Manitoba where French was not considered to be a legitimate language. That only changed in 1957.

Approaching the government in French constitutes a huge challenge. I think we need to recognize the psychological circumstances in which our communities are living and, unfortunately, I think that the complaints process only reinforces what we are trying to get rid of. We are in a position to build the country and we are constantly being told that if something does not work we just need to complain. That is not what we want to do. We want to be leaders and we want to build, we don't want to whine.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: You stated that the way we perceive ourselves ends up determining our personality. I understand why it is important to perceive oneself in a positive light and as a builder. That brings me back to the topic of francophone athletes competing in the Olympic Games. There was criticism from some athletes from Quebec. I will not go into this at great length, Mr. Vice-Chair, but one can see that there is segregation, there are problems. Do you experience situations where you feel discriminated against because you are francophones? Do you still feel that, or is it not as evident anymore?

Mr. Luc Therrien (Director General, Réseau santé albertain): The way we experience discrimination is that we are not considered to be citizens who speak one of the two official languages. We are perceived as being one of twelve ethno-linguistic cultural communities in the province. That is the type of discrimination we experience and that is why it is difficult for us to move the French health file ahead.

Mr. Marc Arnal: My spouse is from the Punjab, in India. I thought I knew what discrimination was, but allow me to tell you that I have been doing some learning in that area. Compared to what she has experienced and to what she is experiencing, I am sorry, but I do not consider myself to be a victim of discrimination at all.

Dr. Denis Vincent: We are Albertans, we have grown up and lived in Alberta, and we are full-fledged Albertans. I think that in the eyes of other Albertans, as long as we are part of a collective effort, there are no problems nor is there any discrimination. They are very proud to see the work that we do as Albertans. What they do not acknowledge is that there is another dimension to our lives, a francophone dimension. That is something that the majority does not often understand. It is not as if they were preventing us from filling certain positions, it is not that kind of discrimination. We are a minority that is to a great extent invisible. I am not rejecting English, I speak English like an Anglophone, and they themselves would not be able to tell whether I was Franco-Albertan or not. Their problem is in acknowledging that we have another personal, collective and community life that they are not familiar with. It is somewhat of a challenge for them to understand that we want to create a francophone space for ourselves.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I know that we wanted our work to include the discussion on immigration. Here in Alberta,

there is a different kind of immigration, that kind of immigration that is taking place within Canada. I understand that many francophones from our province come here. I was pleased to learn that, if they go back home in 25 years, you don't want them to have lost their French. I hope they come back before 25 years go by.

What kind of services are offered to these people?

We were talking about Edmonton and Calgary but there is also Fort McMurray. I am just giving you one example. Last year, in my region, in one week alone, in a small community called Loggieville that only has about 500 or 600 inhabitants, 70 people left for Fort McMurray. Those 70 individuals include some people who live in what are called camps and go back home every three months. You can see many houses for sale where I come from. So there are people who are moving. Therefore, there is a francophone population that is coming here to Alberta. I am sure that there also people coming here from the Gaspésie.

In fact, the Gaspésie is experiencing the same phenomenon as we are. The federal government made some very significant cuts in employment insurance. They took \$50 billion away from workers. Now these people are saying that if this government does not want to help them then they might have to move. That has destroyed a whole community, the regional economy, and so on. I seem to be sending a national message.

You are the ones receiving these people and there are still more to come than you can image. I had to fight the government at one point in time because they wanted to bring in immigrants from other countries when 400 people with varying skills in New Brunswick were available to go to Alberta. In fact, the government was willing to bring in immigrants from other countries rather than use the services of Canadian men and women. I wanted to tell you this to start a dialogue. That way you know where I am coming from.

A little earlier you mentioned that you did not want to provide services solely in the larger centres but elsewhere as well. However, you will see that there are people who are going to want to live elsewhere. How do you intend on providing them with the services?

• (0910)

Mr. Jean Johnson: First, we view this migration towards Alberta as a huge responsibility that the francophone community has been entrusted with. That huge responsibility lies in being very fair in our reception and integration of these people. However, there are problems emerging: these people are arriving without us noticing them. Once they have landed, they disappear into the mist. In Alberta, these people will make the other official language of Canada their own, because the environment fosters that.

In answer to your question about the services that we offer, I will give you an example. Reception and settlement services are offered in Edmonton and in Calgary. Those services are specialized in that area, but are funded by CIC. Those services are for individuals who have recently arrived from other countries. Yet, we need those reception and settlement services for francophones coming from other parts of the country.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): That is what I was trying to get at, Mr. Johnson. We have these reception services but when people from our part of the country come to Alberta, and the husband has to live in a camp that he can only leave on weekends, he doesn't know where to house his wife and children. Should he be putting them in an apartment in Fort McMurray, when they can't speak any English? There are many cases like that one involving people who have come from our region to this province. There are many other people who would like to come to Alberta but they don't speak English and they don't know who to approach in Alberta to get a job.

Furthermore, the Government of Alberta is promoting jobs and inviting people to come. I don't have a problem with people going voluntarily. However, what kind of services exist to receive these people?

Mr. Jean Johnson: Our challenge lies precisely in meeting that need. I could talk about another institution—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Fine, but what do you propose?

Mr. Jean Johnson: We propose working with the federal government and the Government of Alberta in order to find strategies focused on developing small rural communities such as Plamondon, which is only a two-hour drive from Fort McMurray. That is just one example of a nice community that could grow and could receive a whole new francophone community, and where there are educational services, a school. That would be a nice host community.

I think that would represent a great opportunity to build a rural community and meet the needs of people working two hours away in Fort McMurray. That is one example.

What kind of services would we like to offer? We would like to have the means to develop more services, because the number of consumers of francophone services is increasing at a rate we cannot keep up with. If you are interested in working on a plan, we, for our part, would be interested in providing you with the kind of initiatives we would like to be able to develop.

• (0915)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you very much. My five minutes are up and I would not want to abuse my authority as chairman.

Mr. Vincent, you will have the floor on the next round.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Liberal Party has an official languages caucus which I chair. Our own two priorities have been raised here, this morning.

First, whenever the federal government signs an agreement with provincial governments, an envelope specifically dedicated to minority communities should be established. Without that, we are entirely dependent on the good will of the provinces. We know perfectly well that some provinces are less receptive than others. I would like you to give me your perspective on this.

The francophone envelope for early childhood did have a certain amount of flexibility but that did not last for long. We are often behind, compared to other communities. We need, among other things, daycares. We should be allowed a certain amount of flexibility in order to make up that lag.

In terms of infrastructure, there should be a fund for francophone communities. I'm thinking of, for example, the Saint-Thomas Health Centre, or, where I come from, the Théâtre du Cercle Molière. The federal and provincial governments often invest a million dollars each and then they ask the community to find two or three million more. We represent 4% of the population and we have 20 projects. It's practically impossible to find those funds. In other words, it almost never happens and when it does, it takes 10 years.

What do you think about these two proposals? We could include them in our report and ask the federal government to follow through on them.

Mr. Jean Johnson: I support that. Our greatest challenge involves infrastructure. We're sent from one department to another and all we get in return is frustration.

You said that it takes 10 years to complete a project, but sometimes it's more. We face significant challenges. I absolutely support what you say. Once again, it boils down to the federal government having the responsibility to work directly with the provinces to support the development of these communities.

Mr. Joël Lavoie: We're talking about positive measures and I think that should automatically include provisions for anything that affects communities.

Hon. Raymond Simard: That would be consistent with Bill S-3.

Mr. Jean Johnson: In fact, that would comply with the new Official Languages Act, if I have understood correctly.

Dr. Denis Vincent: We are the experts on the ground, in terms of the development of the francophonie in Canada. We are the French-language promotional agents from sea to sea. It would be much better if we were recognized as such and if the investment of our hearts and souls into this work were acknowledged, rather than having to beg for money.

Mr. Jean Johnson: In our community, we do all the planning work and we identify certain priorities. The federal government or its officials do not necessarily respect those priorities. This has to stop.

Hon. Raymond Simard: We often talk about Manitoba, where there are excellent Liberal members of Parliament.

Some members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Raymond Simard: The provincial government of Manitoba truly participates in this area and is supportive, which is a huge improvement to the situation. On the other hand, I know that it is less involved in other areas.

I think that this has become a tool in Manitoba. It works well in all areas because agreements have been signed and funds have been matched. So there are no arguments and things move ahead quite quickly.

How could we encourage the provinces to be more proactive?

Mr. Marc Arnal: The first thing you could do would be to make sure that this topic is automatically on the agenda for all federal-provincial meetings.

Furthermore, I think that we could be working with the ministers responsible for French services in the provinces. The federal government is now part of this working group, as well as Quebec, I believe. I think that some issues could be resolved within that group. I don't know if we can change any attitudes, but I do believe we can change behaviour.

I'm going to quote your former colleague, Denis Coderre, in the hopes that it won't hurt anybody's feelings. At the time, Lyle Oberg was the provincial minister responsible for immigration. It was said at the time, but those were maybe only rumours, that openness of mind was not his main quality. Mr. Coderre, before a national assembly of approximately 500 people in Calgary, said:

• (0920)

[English]

“My friend Lyle understands that if there's no official language clause in the agreement, there will be no agreement, don't you, Lyle?”

[Translation]

Lyle, who was sitting nearby, replied “Yes, Minister”. I think that federal ministers can also make things happen.

In terms of envelopes, I think that they are a necessary, but temporary, measure. I would like it if they were not necessary, but—

Hon. Raymond Simard: But for now they are.

Mr. Marc Arnal: Let's say that for now, they're not doing any harm.

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

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you for your presentations.

I am a Franco-Ontarian member of Parliament. My riding has 65,000 Franco-Ontarians and I am always listening to the needs of communities. I enjoyed listening to your presentations this morning. I found that you were well informed about what is happening in Alberta with francophones.

I have found, over the course of this trip, that there are many needs. In fact, there are perhaps too many needs given the limited amount of funds and resources that are available. Success always represents a challenge regardless of the area or sector. On the other hand, I think that if their efforts are focused, communities, the federal government and the provincial governments will be successful.

Mr. Michaud spoke about education and a new agreement with the provinces that has just been announced and that is worth one billion dollars over four years. Yes, throughout Canada people are making the needs in the area of education known. There are challenges but there are also success stories. Take, for example, the health networks. There are still challenges that must be met, but significant progress has been made. With respect to immigration, there will be a 309-

million-dollar project for the purposes of settling immigrants in Canada. That also affects francophones. Like any good politician, I'm engaging in an extensive preamble but I will now move on to my question.

You represent groups and associations here in Alberta. You work together in prioritizing your needs. I think, as a politician, that there are several needs. Are you working together to set priorities for Alberta based on an agreed-on list of needs? In order to succeed, the federal government will have to focus its efforts rather than investing small amounts here and there.

I'll start with Mr. Arnal and Mr. Johnson and then continue with Mr. Lavoie.

Mr. Marc Arnal: I believe that there is a provincial bill that acknowledges the FCAA as the organization that speaks on behalf of the Albertan francophonie. The association's mandate is to coordinate what is happening within the community. Where there are many varied needs, it is officially the responsibility of this organization to establish some sort of order.

We, for our part, belong to the francophone community and to the University of Alberta. We will therefore be pursuing our files within the university while keeping the community informed.

Jean could perhaps expand on this. In fact, I suggested to Mr. Johnson that he take the opportunity of the annual assembly of his association to explain what the Saint-Jean Campus of the University of Alberta is doing in terms of community development. I believe that will be happening.

• (0925)

Mr. Jean Johnson: Quite simply, the FCAA, which speaks on behalf of the community, has established strategies for the purposes of consulting the community, community forums and so on. We review our plans, strategies and priorities on a yearly basis in order to ensure that we are on the right path.

In terms of planning, we have a systematic process. Mr. Arnal referred to the fact that we want to make all community organizations accountable to their communities. In order to achieve this, we have signed four cutting-edge agreements in the following sectors: economy, arts and culture, sports and recreation, and health.

These organizations will speak on behalf of their sectors and be leaders in their own sector's development. However, once a year, they will be accountable to their communities and they will meet with the board of each association to provide an update of the situation and to account for the past year. That is what Mr. Arnal was talking about.

We would like to do the same for schools. In other sectors, the FCAA has become a leader by default, because there have been no organizations to represent the interests of, for example, immigrant communities. There are only three stakeholders involved in the early childhood sector. We have therefore taken on that role but there is a systematic planning and auditing process.

Mr. Joël Lavoie: I can speak to the administrative process.

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

Mr. Joël Lavoie: I'll only take a few seconds.

Regardless, Mauril Bélanger, who at the time was the minister responsible for official languages, made the same request. He told us that we had too many priorities and he asked us to choose one. Our priority is very simple, and it took the community 10 minutes to say that it was the Saint-Thomas Health Centre.

That was three years ago. Since then, senior officials have told us that they had the political will, that it may be eligible for funding, but that they did not want to create any precedents within their program.

So, yes, we can establish priorities and yes, we are capable of doing that. We have an entire democratic process in order to do that. However, those priorities have to be respected and the programs have to adjust to the needs of the communities. That is one point.

Furthermore, there used to be yearly agreements between Canada and the community under which joint committees worked with the government in order to establish priorities. That was then dismantled in order to avoid any administrative concerns. Now the community does its work, and Canadian Heritage does its own work and ultimately decides what is good for the community.

We are still trying to figure out exactly what the dialogue and these famous agreements with the Government of Canada mean, because over the past few years, cooperation has been very difficult.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Vincent, earlier on I made a comment about Eastern francophones who come out West and you wanted to speak to that. I would like to hear any comments you wanted to make.

Dr. Denis Vincent: It reminds me of something that happened a few weeks ago. This is a situation that is heart wrenching.

A young family from the Gaspésie settled in Edmonton. The spouse works in Fort McMurray, the mother does not speak English very well or not at all. She became sick, and she ended up in emergency for two days. She did not clearly understand what was happening in the hospital. She therefore decided that her children had to learn English as quickly as possible, that they had to learn English.

We'll see where that family ends up on the assimilation curve over the next few years. Those individuals will be anglicized by the time they return to the Gaspésie, if they ever return. These are things that are happening and that we see.

We never imagined that we would see all these people coming here at once. It happened over the summer. Our schools had 20% more students in September than they had last June. There has been massive immigration. We need the necessary tools to welcome these people properly. If we don't succeed, then they will very quickly become anglicized.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I want to continue talking about the health care sector, which Mr. Lavoie and Mr. Johnson referred to in response to Mr. Lemieux. What do you see as the government's role? One centre can help many people: a centre could be created where people could go.

We saw one such example in Toronto. The Centre francophone de Toronto provides a number of services, it is incredible. This doesn't mean that we haven't heard complaints from people outside Toronto.

We heard many such complaints in Oshawa and other areas, but Toronto was way ahead of the game.

Is this the kind of centre you want?

• (0930)

Dr. Denis Vincent: The health care centre is a no-brainer. It is currently being built despite the fact that the federal government has failed to provide significant funding. In my opinion, this should be easy. It is an essential tool, a priority that our community has identified.

Mr. Joël Lavoie: The amount of \$1.2 million represents 5% of the budget over five years.

Dr. Denis Vincent: This is exactly the kind of thing that our community needs in order to be able to help everyone in need.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): A little earlier, we heard the government representative ask you what your priorities were. You do not want to spread the money around, you want to have something tangible at the end. Your recommendations would be in keeping with this idea.

For example, since 2003, the action plan has brought you to where you are now in health. This has helped you enormously and you have had the time to study the action plan. You want a health care centre, but now that you have reached another stage, the government is telling you that this is not part of its mandate, that it's not in its budget and that it doesn't have an envelope for this.

What stage are you at now?

Mr. Jean Johnson: I want to make two comments.

The first concerns the Saint-Thomas Health Centre. This is a \$24 million project. There is a \$1.2 million shortfall, and we are still waiting. The only contribution from the federal government would be \$1.2 million. Our concern with regard to programs is that there is a program for this, but those responsible don't want to create a precedent. What kind of precedent would be created by giving 5% for a project? The province of Manitoba wouldn't say that, in order to implement a \$25 million project, it needed 5% of that amount from the federal government. I fail to understand the logic behind this refusal.

Second, to give you an idea of the scope of immigration to Alberta, there is a job access centre that helps 100 new job seekers per week here in Edmonton. This means that over 400 people are looking for employment and will ask for service in French. This is an access point, and we want to be able to follow up with these individuals in order to provide them with support and help them integrate into the French community.

Mr. Marc Arnal: In terms of immigration, people are playing with words. If you read our report, you will see that we deliberately play with words. We don't talk about immigrants so much as newcomers. The problem is that these centres receive funding for immigrants. Consequently, there is no funding for newcomers who are not immigrants or refugees.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): New Brunswickers are not immigrants. We are part of Canada. We should be proud of our country and all—

Mr. Marc Arnal: But they have needs.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): But we refuse to be considered as immigrants. You can use the word "migrant". You want such a program to exist, I understand that.

In your recommendations, you mentioned a need for a program to ensure labour force flexibility. There have been discussions for a number of years to ensure flexibility within Canada, meaning that workers could go from one spot to another and feel comfortable and where both official languages are recognized by law.

Mr. Jean Johnson: To come back to your question, without providing you with the solution, the community may identify solutions for you on the ground. We need to be seen as partners in development, intake and settlement.

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

We will now begin another round of questions. If the members agree, each member will have seven minutes. We cannot allow any more time than that, because we only have three more witnesses.

An hon. member: Five minutes would do.

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

Mr. Murphy, you have the floor.

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

I am a lawyer and a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the associate critic for the Liberal Party.

I am well aware of the fact that, in Moncton, New Brunswick, disputes sometimes go before the courts. It is essential to reinforce the legislation. Mr. Arnal, you said, "We get lectured all the time but nothing changes". I listened to all the witnesses during our trip and it is my feeling, currently, that not everything is working perfectly. The example that I want to give, on the national level in health care, is that of the Montfort Hospital in Ottawa.

What do the witnesses who are here think of the abolishing of the Court Challenges Program? Was this a good decision or do you believe that, as a last resort, it was an essential tool for minority communities, not only with regard to language, even if this issue concerns you much more than other minority rights? Are you in favour of this decision, yes or no? Do you dare say it? I think that your opinion is extremely important to our work, Mr. Chairman. I would like to know.

• (0935)

Mr. Jean Johnson: I have no problem answering that question. Ultimately, francophone communities often resort to using the courts. The courts are often their only tool, and often, we challenge the provincial government. The goal is not to identify whether legislation is constitutional or unconstitutional, rather it is the application of legislation that is a problem. We are not challenging the legislation but rather its application. If we are unable to ensure compliance by the federal or provincial government with the legislation, the community's sole recourse is the courts. So, when this tool is taken away from us, we feel that it is another nail in the coffin of the Canadian francophonie.

I am sorry but we refuse to die silently. We will continue to fight, and I think that the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne has taken a position regarding that decision. We, the

representative of the francophone community in Alberta, support the efforts of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne in this regard. I believe that is a mortal blow.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Michaud would like to speak.

Mr. Donald Michaud: I want to add a comment, since our school board benefited from the Court Challenges Program. Clearly, this is an extremely important tool, if only financially or as moral support when making our demands and with regard to how the application of the legislation is interpreted. That said, if the program was ever restored—I don't know whether you are aware of how high legal fees are these days—I can tell you that past rates would be much lower than the rates that lawyers are commanding these days.

I simply wanted to make that comment. In some ways, this loss will hurt less if, in fact, financial aid represents approximately 5% of court costs, even when going before the Court of Queen's Bench in a particular province.

My second comment is this: I want you to know—although this is not my area of expertise—that I read in *Le Franco*, our francophone newspaper in Alberta, that currently with regard to the Caron case, the Government of Alberta is challenging the fact that the Constitution does or should ensure the development of the francophone community. This gives you a good idea of what we are facing at the provincial level and the prevalent mindset with regard to francophone rights.

• (0940)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you. We will now go to Mr. Blaney. I think that he will be sharing his time with Ms. Boucher. Is Ms. Boucher going first?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I am the only woman at this table.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Pardon me, Ms. Boucher. My deepest apologies. Ms. Boucher will be sharing her time with Mr. Blaney.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good day.

First, I want to tell you that our government—a Conservative government, unfortunately for the others—will work tirelessly for the francophonie and official languages, particularly Mr. Harper and Ms. Verner. It is our duty. We are here to listen to you. We understand, we are taking notes and we want to work in a positive way with all minorities because it is important to us. We are all francophones, here around this table, and we understand just how difficult it can be. I come from Quebec, from the greater Quebec City area, and I have not experienced this kind of problem, however, anglophones who live in Quebec City face almost the same problem as you do.

One issue concerns me a great deal. I would like to know whether, in minority communities, it is difficult to keep francophones. When we go to more isolated rural regions, people often talk about retention. What are the best tools to ensure that people who come to work here in French, or are from here, will remain in your communities?

Mr. Jean Johnson: If I may begin with a comment, I will mention the recent statement by the government on the status of Quebecers as a nation. I don't have a problem with Quebec identity; Quebecers believe that they form a people.

For some 10 or 11 months now, we have been waiting for the current government to make a statement in which it would adopt a firm position on the issue of Canadian francophone communities.

When Mr. Harper talks about the francophonie, he always turns to Quebec. I am concerned that we are not really included in what your government is currently saying and I would like confirmation that it is not talking about one aspect of the francophonie within a specific region.

When we hear such discourse in the absence of a firm statement on the status of francophones outside Quebec, we feel as if we are *persona non grata*, we feel that we don't exist and that we are not important. I am not playing the victim, but I am asking you to take a stand, to talk about us and to promote linguistic duality. That is what we want, and we will work with you to make this happen.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Perfect.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We will now go to Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Listening is sometimes more interesting than talking.

I went to Fort McMurray this summer and I found myself in a francophone intake centre that helped people find employment. The centre was located in a school. A Quebecer who had just arrived was there. I was welcomed in my mother tongue and I really liked that.

I would have liked to hear you say more about education because—I think that you stressed this—it is fundamental. Could you tell us more about your Saint-Thomas Health Centre? What is this exactly? Is this a kind of health care clinic? It's a centre for seniors.

Dr. Denis Vincent: You will be getting a presentation from the group shortly.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Are you talking about Mr. Gaudet? I thought that he was to appear between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. So it will be later, that's great.

Dr. Denis Vincent: They will give you all the details.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much for your presentation. I think that there's a time to speak and a time to listen. Today, I greatly appreciated your sincere and heartfelt comments. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Simard, it's your turn.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to know how long you have had your own school board.

• (0945)

Mr. Donald Michaud: Since 1994.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Since 1994. This means that you got yours before or at the same time we did.

Are enrolments going up in French schools? I cannot talk about migration because it may not be accurate but did enrolment increase before migration?

Mr. Donald Michaud: Enrolments have always increased by about 8 to 10% per year.

Hon. Raymond Simard: And children are taught only in French.

Mr. Donald Michaud: Exactly.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is this also true of immersion schools?

Mr. Marc Arnal: The two provinces where immersion is increasing the fastest are British Columbia and Alberta.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is this because legislation in these provinces requires children to learn a second language? Has this had an impact?

Mr. Marc Arnal: The regulations were postponed. Although they officially exist, they have never come into force.

Hon. Raymond Simard: You mentioned a francophone community college. I didn't think there were many in Canada. I think this is an excellent idea.

Would French be the language of work and of instruction?

Mr. Marc Arnal: French would be the language of work and of instruction. To some extent it is based on the technical and professional school at the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. However, in our case, this college will be a part of the University of Alberta. We had to go through the province to change our mandate. The province had to change its legislation so we could do this. This is being done: it will be in place within the next few months.

Hon. Raymond Simard: This is an interesting concept.

Mr. Johnson, you talked about agreements between Canada and the communities. Usually, these agreements bring together representatives of Canadian Heritage and the community. A committee is formed, priorities are identified and obviously the funds are distributed in accordance with those priorities.

Did you say that these agreements no longer existed?

Mr. Jean Johnson: The community created a round table to make proposals to Canadian Heritage's regional office. This is where decisions about the ultimate allocation of funding is made. Last year was the first time. We are working to improve the communication process.

Hon. Raymond Simard: The community is not at the table where the decisions are made.

Mr. Jean Johnson: No. We make a proposal to Canadian Heritage, and its officers make the decisions.

I know that there are concerns and I am trying to be politically correct. There is truth and there is reality. In fact, we are working hard with the structures currently in place, but we would like to change the model. When we talk about positive measures, we're talking about respect for the communities' decisions and priorities without having them questioned. Last year we made some very difficult decisions.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Were they respected?

Mr. Jean Johnson: No.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you.

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

Mr. Lemieux, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I want to take a few moments to talk to you about the nation. We have to put all this into context. First, Mr. Ignatieff proposed the idea, and the Bloc wanted to use the problem to pave the way for separation. So, our government had to respond to this motion by playing a leadership role. The motion was worded that way because it was a response.

I want to assure you that we have not forgotten you and that Minister Verner is there for you and for Franco-Ontarians who live in my riding. There are francophone, Franco-Ontarian members who are taking care of your needs and those of francophones across Canada. You are here, and we are there to support you. This is the first time in 25 or 26 years that we have travelled across Canada. I hope that it is clear to you that we are here for you and for all other francophones, because this is one of our priorities.

• (0950)

Mr. Jean Johnson: First, I was not trying to be aggressive, but rather to say that we recognize the special status of Quebecers. Then, we would like to obtain the same official recognition. I would like Mr. Harper to say this. When he talks about the Canadian Francophonie, I would like him to also talk about minority communities.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I want to talk about this issue, since it has already been mentioned. As a Canadian francophone, I never like saying that I am a francophone outside Quebec: I am a French Canadian and an Acadian who celebrated, two years ago, the 400th anniversary of Acadia. We know where the Acadians stand. Since Quebec will celebrate its 400th anniversary in two years, this means that we were here first. Good! We are in agreement, and it's clear.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): It's not complicated: it started in the East and moved west. We all agree on that.

Mr. Lemieux also mentioned that the Standing Committee on Official Languages has been around for 25 years and never before travelled. This was one of the reasons for our trip: we wanted to meet with people in their communities so that they felt at home, in their municipality, to talk about their problems. When we invite you to come to Ottawa, to Parliament, you wonder who we are. We wanted to come to you to meet with local organizations at the same time. This is what we will be doing this afternoon, and it will be very interesting.

There is another topic I want to mention that concerns me. Mr. Johnson raised it. Two aspects were also mentioned and have not been addressed to any great extent. They were mentioned in Mr. Murphy's question on court challenges.

Mr. Lemieux told you not to worry, because they support you, they are here, they recognize the overall issue.

In fact, Quebec has been recognized as a nation. And perhaps, one day, Yvon Godin will introduce a motion in the House of Commons asking that Acadians or francophones in Canada be recognized as a nation; you never know.

Nevertheless, there is concern, although they are telling you not to worry because they support you. In fact, Quebec, with its population

of six million, is better able to defend itself than we francophones outside Quebec are. This is a term that I don't like using, but we are francophones outside Quebec in Canada.

In fact Quebec has a bigger population. That said, we are concerned about losing the Court Challenges Program, thanks to which the Montfort Hospital and French schools in British Columbia were able to win their cases. You said it earlier. The same thing happened. Often, it's a matter of making the province recognize our rights. This is what it is about. We have been able to do this thanks to the Court Challenges Program.

They are telling you that they support you, but they are taking this tool away from you. This is hard. Where is the support? I also remember that the current government, when it was in the opposition, had said that we could copy the Belgian system: Quebec would take care of the francophones, and the federal government would take care of the rest of Canada. Those words are cause for concern. These are their words. We could refer to the archives and make them public. Now, this concerns me.

I would like to have your opinion on this.

Mr. Jean Johnson: With regard to the survival of the francophone community, we really see ourselves as an asset. We see ourselves as something special that reinforces the fabric of Canadian citizenship. We do not see ourselves as a minority community, but rather as a community that happens to be a minority.

Our francophone community in Alberta is spreading its wings. No matter where you go, to the shopping centre, downtown, you hear people talking French. Fifteen years ago, people spoke French in whispers. Today, Albertan society has a different mindset. Canadians have changed the way they think. Instead of obstructing this improvement, it should be encouraged and promoted.

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

In New Brunswick, there is an anglophone-francophone committee. Antonine Maillet was at one time the co-chair. She said something that I have often repeated. She said that we are not asking anglophones to become francophones and francophones to become anglophones. The only thing we want is to have services in both languages. We want to be served in our mother tongue on demand. That is all we are asking.

We are not forcing anglophones to speak French. That is not really what we want; we want to be served in our own language.

Also, how can we provide services in our communities to local residents in both of Canada's officially recognized languages?

• (0955)

Mr. Jean Johnson: This is a loaded question and a loaded comment, because there is no easy answer. In my opinion, the federal government is responsible for ensuring that it always talks with provincial and territorial governments about the francophonie.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): By this, you are clearly saying—I think we have heard this several times this morning—that you want to be part of this team. You are working with the federal, provincial and municipal governments and all stakeholders in order to be able to communicate. In passing, I want to say that I too voted to recognize the nation of Québécois; I do not belong to that nation, but I am in agreement. However, at the same time, we need to be able to take the concern about support into consideration. We must not lose the tools that will allow us to move forward.

On that note, I want to thank our witnesses. It was a pleasure to be with you today. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you once again and I wish you a good week. The meeting is suspended for five minutes.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Order please. I'd like to start by thanking you for appearing before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. As I've said to the other witnesses, it is a great pleasure for us to travel to all regions of Canada. The Standing Committee on Official Languages has been in existence for 25 years yet it had never travelled. We wanted to go out and meet people on the ground, because not everyone can make it to Ottawa. We also wanted a change and we wanted to show that we take our work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages seriously. So far people seem to have appreciated this.

My name is Yvon Godin and I'm the Member for Acadie—Bathurst, a riding in northeastern New Brunswick. Ms. Sylvie Boucher is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Francophonie and Official Languages, and Mr. Pierre Lemieux and Mr. Steven Blaney are Conservative government party members. Messrs. Raymond Simard and Brian Murphy are members of the Official Opposition. Ms. Paule Brunelle was travelling with us, but she had to return to Ottawa.

Before we begin, I would like to ask members of the committee whether they would agree to the following. The Greater North Central Francophone Regional Authority Number 2 and the school board trustees are running late. The witnesses that were supposed to make presentations are not here. I would suggest that once they arrive we interrupt, the question and answer session, give them a chance to make their presentation, and then proceed.

Now, I would like to start by turning over the floor to Mr. Collette, from the Saint-Thomas Community Health Centre. You'll have five minutes to make your presentations. You may find that that is not very long, but you'll see that we will have some questions for you which we will want to discuss. Members will then have a five-minute round for questions and answers.

Mr. Collette, you may begin.

- (1015)

Mr. Denis Collette (Project Coordinator, Centre de santé Saint-Thomas): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, my president, Mr. Maurice Gaudet, and myself are very grateful for this

opportunity to give you a brief overview of the Saint-Thomas Community Health Centre.

“I want to die in French!” It is as a reaction to this cry for help from aging francophones in Edmonton that the francophone community decided in 1997 to start a planning process with an aim to building a seniors residence for functionally dependent francophone seniors. Two years later, in light of survey results showing the urgent need for such a project, we obtained the necessary funding from the Alberta government in order to purchase a 2.3-acre lot located in the francophone quarter in Edmonton.

Following the presentation of numerous briefs and funding proposals to potential funders, as well as the launch of a fund-raising campaign, we were able to begin building our centre at the beginning of this year. The establishment of the Saint-Thomas Health Centre will contribute to the development of the francophone community in Alberta when it comes to health care, from a job creation as well as from a francophone care and services standpoint.

Once the centre opens, which should be in the fall of 2007, over 200 residents and an even larger number of external users will be able to access a wide range of services in French, from health care to training and cultural development, under one roof. For the first time in the province's history, health care specialists will be able to practice their profession in a francophone environment with French as the language of work. The centre will also be able to provide job placements for interns wishing to work in a francophone environment.

We believe that, just as was the case for francophone education and more specifically the establishment of francophone schools and school boards in Alberta, the implementation of francophone health care services in Edmonton will lead to other similar initiatives in other regions of the province and elsewhere in the country.

This project will lead to the creation of multiple partnerships in a variety of health care, housing, training and culture-related sectors. So far, this community initiative has already compelled the directors of Capital Health, the board of health that provides services to the greater Edmonton area, to seriously look into the primary health care needs of francophone clients and how to improve access to services in French.

Capital Health and the Alberta government's acknowledgment of francophone special needs in terms of health care will have long-term effects. The health care centre's success will open the door to obtaining health care services with other partners. Moreover, partners in the field of training and culture will also be able to broaden their experience and activities with a neglected and all-too-often forgotten segment of the population.

The Canadian government has invested heavily in francophone education and culture in this country. Funding should be maintained and even enhanced. But in order to ensure the evolution of our communities and the development of our members, it is important for French to be used outside of our schools and cultural centres. Indeed, French must become a living language, a language of service and a language of work.

To that end, we must be able to count on financial support from the federal government for special projects like the Saint-Thomas Community Health Centre. This support could involve the insertion of a language clause within federal provincial transfer agreements calling for greater intergovernmental cooperation in terms of minority language services.

• (1020)

It is under this type of collaborative agreement that we requested additional financial assistance of \$2.7 million from both governments last January, in order to help balance our construction budget of \$24 million. We got a positive response from the provincial government and are still waiting confirmation of the federal government's expected contribution. Based on wording under part VII of the Official Languages Act dealing with the promotion of French in minority communities, we are confident that we will be able to count on your help in our efforts to ensure the Government of Canada's support for our budget.

We thank you for the interest you have taken in our community.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Collette. We will now move to Mr. M'Pindou.

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou (Coordinator, Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society): Mr. Chairman, members of the Standing Committee, I was pleased to accept the invitation to appear before your standing committee and to present my brief as part of your study of the vitality of the official language minority communities. I thank you for your cordial gesture to me and to our agency, the Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society.

Mr. Chairman, the organization I represent, the Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society, is a non-profit francophone organization that provides assistance to immigrant youth and families in Alberta in the areas of education and crime prevention. Its ultimate goal is to enhance Canada's cultural diversity. The Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society fosters respect for Canada's linguistic duality and promotes its cultural diversity.

We are aware that we live in a context in which respect for linguistic duality often poses problems for us and threatens the vitality of our official language minority communities. Through the support for Official Language Communities Program, the survival of most of the community organizations is directly attributable to this program. I want to assure you that this program, the SOLCP, plays an essential role in the development and vitality of our communities.

Mr. Chairman, in March 2003, the federal government established the Action Plan for Official Languages, an action plan that includes section 17 of the accountability and coordination framework, which precisely describes the steps that each federal institution must take in its strategic planning and in the performance of its mandate as regards official languages. The current government has also expressed its commitment to this action plan. I think that this gesture is a positive measure with respect to our official language minority communities.

Another positive gesture was that the Government of Canada wanted to give more points for knowledge of one of the official languages in its selection of the best candidates in its new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Another cause for

congratulations is the amendments made to the Official Languages Act, to its Part VII, with Bill S-3, in which every federal institution will have a duty to take positive measures for the official language minority communities.

The Government of Canada's commitment to come to the aid of our official language minority communities takes many forms. We francophones see this commitment in areas such as education, health, justice, early childhood, immigration, arts, the economy, and I could go on. However, our communities received a surprise in September when the federal government announced budget cuts that threw a spotlight on the survival of our official language minority communities. I don't want to go into detail about these budget cuts, since the majority of our members across the country have already submitted many complaints about this.

Mr. Chairman, I am certain of and aware of the role that your committee plays in developing official language policies in our country. I would like to inform you that our organization, the Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society, through its programs and services, is a vibrant and valuable presence in the Albertan francophonie that manifests itself through the participation of our youth and women members on various consultative committees, as guests, delegates and active members. Indeed, our programs and services offer our members opportunities to be heard and to contribute to the vitality of the francophonie by giving them a chance to participate in various activities in partnership with community and government agencies at the local, regional, national and international level.

I can mention a few programs that our youth participate in, such as the Canada Youth Exchange Program, the Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages Program, the Alberta Youth Parliament, the Alberta Francophone Games, the Youth Mobility Program with the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie, and UNESCO's Youth Consultations. We feel that participation such as this contributes to the vitality of the francophonie and also helps integrate effectively into Canadian society.

• (1025)

In addition to these activities, we maintain very good relations with Quebec agencies such as the Fondation de la tolérance and the Chantier d'Afrique, with which we collaborate through the Community Financial Support Program administered by the Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes or SAIC.

Mr. Chairman, given that your committee plays a very important role in developing official languages policy, I would like to give you some recommendations.

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages ensure that the federal government's commitment to the official language minority communities respects the equality entrenched in the Canadian Charter.

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages ensure that the federal government take positive measures under Bill S-3 to benefit the official language minority communities while respecting the consultation process set out in the accountability framework in the Action Plan for Official Languages.

I hope that my presentation has given you a better understanding of our participation in the survival of the official language minority communities. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your study of the vitality of the official language minority communities. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address your committee. I am ready to take your questions.

Thank you.

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

We will now move to Mr. Étienne Alary, Director of *Le Franco*, an Edmonton weekly.

Mr. Étienne Alary (Director, Le Franco d'Edmonton): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

After having covered Parliament Hill and your committee for two years, I now find myself here on the other side of the fence. Today I am the one making the presentation rather than providing media coverage of it. It is very interesting. Thank you for the invitation.

Established in 1928, the *La Survivance* newspaper became the *Le Franco* newsweekly in 1967. The owners of the newspaper, the Oblates Fathers, transferred it several years later to the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. Although the paper is still owned by the association, it is not its own official mouthpiece. *Le Franco* is an independent newspaper from an administrative and editing standpoint.

The *Le Franco* newsweekly is a member of the Association de la presse francophone, and has a provincial and regional mandate. It publishes articles on Franco-Albertan news with a provincial and national focus, from the point of view of francophones, while meeting the needs of various francophone regions in the province. Like most provincial organizations, the newspaper is headquartered in Edmonton. It is distributed by mail to subscribers. The newspaper's team consists of three people and several regional correspondents.

Le Franco intends to take this opportunity before the Standing Committee on Official Languages to present its vision of the Action Plan for Official Languages, while also addressing other major issues with respect to francophone minority media.

The objective of your cross-Canada tour is to take note of communities' views on the Action Plan for Official Languages, a five year, \$750 million plan.

The former official languages commissioner, Ms. Dyane Adam, on several occasions in her annual reports stated that despite a slow start, the action plan had undeniably allowed for certain positive steps in the francophone media industry.

Some sectors emerged. In health care, there is for instance the Réseau santé albertain, which you heard from this morning, and in the field of justice, the Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta. These two examples from Alberta created indirect

positive spillover for our newspaper. The leadership taken on by these organizations helped diversify our content. We cannot lose sight of the advertising side of events related to these organizations.

That being said, when we look at the Action Plan for Official Languages, we note the absence of a key sector, communications. There is nothing provided under the action plan for francophone media industry actors, like *Le Franco* or community radio, like CKRP in Rivière-la-Paix. Yet they are critical. Indeed, what would the Franco-Albertan community be without a communication tool like a francophone newspaper? It is therefore essential to pay specific attention to the communications sector when renewing the Official Languages Action Plan.

There is no doubt that the action plan contributes to the development and enhanced vitality of minority francophone communities but it is also clearly not a panacea. Print media in a minority setting are not only absent from the action plan, they also face several challenges unique to francophone media. The first example I think of is the Publications Assistance Program.

As you know, Canada Post announced earlier this fall that it would no longer be participating in this program. Yet its share amounted to 25% of the overall envelope. Although the Department of Canadian Heritage has yet to confirm how this might affect its own contribution, this remains a source of concern for francophone papers outside Quebec, mainly francophone newspaper like *Le Franco*, which serve an entire province.

We should not forget that the Department of Canadian Heritage's support for this program comes to an end in 2008. The disappearance of the PAP would no doubt spell the end of several francophone minority weeklies, at least as we know them.

Through technological development, e-news has become an interesting option. *Le Franco* has in fact decided to innovate by offering its subscribers, since last October, an electronic subscription option. That is an alternative we offer, but it would be surprising for it to supplant good old-fashioned paper copies of the newspaper.

With respect to federal advertising, the advent of an advertising moratorium in 2004 in the wake of the sponsorship scandal had a direct impact on francophone minority newspapers. The moratorium dealt a hard blow to newspapers which, instead of continuing to grow, had to streamline in terms of human resources and content. We had to decrease the number of pages published per week. Yes, the moratorium has since come to an end, but federal advertising campaigns have not gone back to the level they were at before the moratorium.

● (1030)

On the one hand, the new management framework on federal advertising created after the moratorium was lifted effectively led to a greater administrative burden.

And on the other hand, the fact that there were two federal elections in two years, not to mention to chance of a third within the upcoming year—who knows—hampered the industry, because these various advertising campaigns stop during elections.

Respect for the Official Languages Act is another aspect of the work of *Le Franco* here in Alberta; we work in close cooperation with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. Indeed, it does happen that departments subject to the Act publish English or bilingual ads strictly in English language dailies. Generally, the Office of the Commissioner follows up and addresses the issue, which is often related to new officials stating that they were not aware of their department being subject to the Act.

Air Canada is the exception to this rule however; it has happened regularly over the last few years that the company has advertised major promotions in English dailies while having but a small generic announcement with very little additional information for francophone readers, urging them to go to the website in order to find out about various promotions.

Air Canada claims it is complying with the Official Languages Act in this way, but we disagree because francophone readers in a predominantly anglophone environment cannot access the same content as a person reading an English daily. The Commissioner of Official Languages received several complaints about it, and we are still awaiting a response and follow-up.

Thank you.

• (1035)

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

Representatives from the Greater North Central Francophone Regional Authority No. 2 are now here with us. I would now like to turn over the floor Ms. Devaney.

You will have five minutes to make your presentation, followed by a five-minute question and answer session for each member of the committee.

As I stated to other witnesses—you were not here to hear it—we are very pleased to be here with you in Edmonton for these hearings.

You may begin. Thank you.

Mrs. Josée Devaney (Trustee, Greater North Central Francophone Regional Authority no. 2): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your invitation and this opportunity to speak to you.

The Greater North Central, which now serves 2,323 students, was founded in 1994 following the Mahé decision, which handed over management of the school board to parents. Our mandate is two-fold. Our schools are located in the Edmonton area, and in Legal, Saint-Albert, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, Wainwright and Jasper.

Our mission is to turn things around and stop the assimilation of francophones. Our mandate is two-fold: we work to redress and to integrate. As such, we make efforts to reintegrate francophones who were neglected when there were no French-language schools nor French school boards. Our mandate is to also integrate. Today, the profile of francophones living in Alberta has changed significantly, and we owe it to ourselves to integrate everyone, including exogamous families. This is also a major challenge for us.

In spite of all the progress achieved, there's still a lot on our plate. There's still much to be done in terms of sensitizing the community. Many people still do not believe in the benefit of French-language education. Only 15% of eligible students are enrolled in our schools. Francization is also becoming a major issue for us. Many of our students are from exogamous families who speak very little French at home. Because of this, we try to provide quality francization programs and we go to great lengths to communicate with parents who do not speak French. Therefore, there is a need to integrate these parents.

In order to boost francization and fulfil our needs, we began providing full-time kindergarten programs, support to preschool services, and francophone child care services. We hope that these services will be institutionalized. Currently, preschool services are being offered by parent volunteers. Our fear is that some children will not be able to attend French-language preschool, and parents are worried that their child will not have the linguistic ability needed to register in the French-language program. Therefore, we need a lot of support on that level.

In addition, there still remains a lot of work to be done on cultural and identity issues. As I said earlier, many of our children are from different backgrounds. Therefore, in order for them to identify with francophone culture, there's a lot of work that must be done.

The arrival of francophone immigrants means that additional efforts must be made for recruitment and for conveying information on the programs we offer.

Another one of our major issues is keeping our students. Many of them live in small communities where our services are far from being equivalent to English-speaking services. We have since taken more interest in distance learning. This is a major challenge for us, but when it comes to deciding between a long-distance teacher and a classroom teacher, generally the second choice prevails. Therefore, when it comes time for parents to choose between long-distance French-language education and on-site English-language education, the choice is often difficult.

We also experience problems recruiting and teaching staff. In small communities, it is not always easy to find qualified French-speaking candidates.

In 2004, our school board took part in the national study on achieving full francophone educational administration in minority communities, a study on communities' needs commissioned by the National Federation of Francophone School Boards. The study highlighted the need to launch an awareness, identification and information campaign targeted at parents. Very often, we find that parents are simply unaware. There is a lot of confusion surrounding what is understood as a francophone school and an immersion school.

We wish to thank the federal government for the support it has provided us through the official languages program. The program is essential for us. It is through this funding that we are able to provide full-time kindergarten, with a lot of francization.

•(1040)

These funds also allow us to carry out promotional and recruitment campaigns. We also have cultural programs that were developed in partnership with the community. We have cultural liaison agents working in the schools, who also provide programs within the community. Therefore, this funding is essential for us.

Early childhood development is another crucial issue. This ties into what I was saying earlier about preschool services. Francization efforts must be made as soon as the child is born, so that when it comes time to begin school, parents do not have to worry about their child's linguistic abilities.

As a school authority, this funding does not come to us automatically, but we do need support from the federal government.

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

We will begin our round of questions. We will begin with Mr. Brian Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am from Moncton, New Brunswick, I am an anglophone, but since my riding is located in an Acadian region, there are obviously many people who speak French, many Acadians. I am familiar with the situation of francophone minority communities in New Brunswick, but here and in British Columbia, where we were yesterday, things are slightly different.

I would like to better understand the situation of francophone minorities here and wish to put a question directly to Mr. M'Pindou with respect to his comments.

You wrote and said that the budget cuts announced by the government in September threw the spotlight on the survival of our official language minority communities.

I am certain that no member of this committee nor any member of the government wishes to see government measures undermining the future and vitality of francophone minority communities here or anywhere else in Canada. Can you be more specific on how the budget cutbacks will affect the future and vitality of your community?

•(1045)

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: For example, recently cuts were made to the Court Challenges Program. That affects, even threatens our communities' vitality. Communities used that program considerably to claim our programs and services. That is one example of how our vitality is affected.

I can think of other programs which have been cut back, and we are not guaranteed of working in partnership with either of the province or the federal government. For example, there is the early childhood program. Another concrete example is our community health care centre which is still awaiting a follow-up on the federal government's promise. This is somewhat of a threat for us.

That is how I would answer your question.

Mr. Brian Murphy: There are two examples.

At the end of your presentation, you made two recommendations. I fully understood your first recommendation, but your second

recommendation seems a bit vague to me. Could you be more explicit about what it means? It will perhaps encourage the government to not cut back on the programs that you have just described. The wording is roundabout; I, for one, am rather direct, I apologize. What do the following words mean exactly: "...ensure that the federal government take positive measures under Bill S-3..."? What do these words mean in concrete terms?

We are but one committee, the members of the opposition, but perhaps we will be able to convince the members of the government that there are elements in your second recommendation that we must support. However, for this to happen, I must fully understand the meaning of that recommendation.

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: This is how I interpret Bill S-3. Part VII of the Official Languages Act sets out the government's obligations towards our communities, and this obligation must be met in partnership with our communities, through consultations as to whether or not changes must be made.

Therefore, we were surprised with the announcement made in September, because our communities were not consulted. That is why I said in relation to Bill S-3 that we would at least have felt we'd been considered had we been consulted, but we weren't. We were therefore taking a back by the cutbacks.

Therefore we are asking the government and your committee to make an effort so that the government fulfils the promise provided for under section 17 of the action plan, that stipulates that a community must be consulted.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Therefore, there is a connection between the cutbacks and the recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for welcoming us here.

This issue is of great importance to us, particularly for members of this government. We need to hear your proposals for solutions. We are here to listen to your messages and to take note of them.

As I was saying earlier to the others, I am an eternal optimist. I like to look far into the future. I understand some of the challenges that face all of our communities across this country.

My question is: in each of your fields, what has been your greatest achievement of all time? Among all of the proposed solutions you are recommending to government, which one would be your top priority?

I will begin with Mr. Collette.

Mr. Denis Collette: As I was saying in my presentation, in terms of education, we have evolved significantly in recent years, and it is certainly thanks to the federal government and the support of our provincial government.

In the area of communications—I worked at Radio-Canada for 25 years—we have also evolved greatly for some time. Nonetheless, in recent years, we have lost some steam in the field of communications because the industry is becoming increasingly centralized back East, particularly the national networks of Radio-Canada.

As for the future, we have already provided you with a few suggestions. We have spoken about them. We must continue to focus on education. However, other fields must be invested in, such as health, and the field that we represent here today around this table.

We say that it is important to invest in education. Nonetheless, it is even more important to invest in allowing our young people to work in a francophone setting. We must be able to motivate them to remain in the area and live to the fullest the experience of their language and culture. In our area, health care services are provided in our language. This service is a great need for the people of our community. In addition, they are able to grow in their language, and work in their language. Services are provided in the language, but they are also working in that very same language. These people are developing.

• (1050)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

Ms. Devaney.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: Firstly, our greatest achievement was the establishment of the francophone school board not too long ago. That was a major challenge, partly because we have to convince people to come to our area and work there. I wish to point out that francophones won control over their own school boards through the Court Challenges Program of Canada. That is how things started. We agree entirely with the concerns and comments made by our colleagues here, with respect to the abolition of the program.

Within the school board itself, our greatest achievement has been the establishment of full-time kindergarten. The provincial government funds half-day kindergarten. Through the funds earmarked for official languages, we are able to finance full-time kindergarten. This allows us to integrate our children, and make considerable francization efforts. So when the children begin grade one, they are linguistically ready to take on the task ahead of them.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Perhaps I can ask Mr. Blanchet that question, but unfortunately I can't quite see him.

Mr. Martin Blanchet (Trustee, Greater North Central Francophone Regional Authority no. 2): I would like to continue on the subject raised by Ms. Devaney.

When we, in Alberta, obtained the right to manage the school boards in 1994, we had between 940 and 950 students. Today, we have approximately 2,300 students; that is an increase of more than 100%.

During the last five years, we have received additional funding which has allowed us to establish a management system. However, it must be noted that management alone is not enough to retain our students. We need to provide our francophone students the equivalent of what is offered in the local anglophone school.

If equivalency does not exist, making the choice between French language and English language education becomes moot. Students will prefer enrol in the other system, where there are more and better programs.

That leads us to our current challenge. We need the same level of funding that we received in the beginning—which has since been considerably reduced—so that we can provide all of our students the equivalent of what all other students in the province are receiving.

• (1055)

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

We must now turn to the 2003 Action Plan. What had a positive impact on your communities? What do you believe must be done in the future?

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: As I indicated in my written submission, we want to see the action plan reflect these commitments in our communities.

For the very first time, one positive spinoff of the action plan is that there's now mention of the immigration sector. I also wish to answer Mrs. Boucher's question on what the community's best achievement is. I would say that the establishment of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada—Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee, working to encourage francophone immigration is a major achievement. It is something that never existed in the past. It is because of sections 41 and 42 that our communities have these settlement services for new immigrants arriving in our communities. We hope to see the action plan continue to emphasize that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): When I asked my question on health care, everyone froze. I know that it is cold outside, but this morning we have heard from witnesses who were telling us that progress has been made. Like it or not, we need more money, and we cannot be shy in saying so. In fact, Ms. Devaney, it is not our money, it is yours. It is money that belongs to taxpayers. Let us clarify one thing, this money belongs to you.

With respect to health care, the answer is that we have found what was missing, but currently there's not enough money for our community centres. During your presentation this morning, I heard you say that the province is ready to inject \$2.7 million. The province is saying yes, the federal government is saying no.

Do you believe that this should be part and parcel of the action plan?

Mr. Denis Collette: In a way, that is already a part of the action plan. When the plan was developed, we set aside funds to establish our health networks. We asked for funding for two networks, one in southern Alberta and the other in northern Alberta.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I don't want to interrupt you, Mr. Collette, but there are other needs.

Mr. Denis Collette: Secondly—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): This morning, a witness told us that there are programs. We do not want to begin something.

Mr. Denis Collette: In the very beginning, our networks served to sensitize health authorities, as needed, to provide more health care services, and to sensitize the public on the need to ask for these health care services. We have a lot of work to do on that front. The same goes for education: we said earlier that only 15% of those entitled to services actually use them.

During the second phase of the plan, we asked for significant amounts of money to help set up treatment centres, similar to the one that is being built here in Edmonton. That did not occur. We're still waiting for confirmation of the funding which will allow us to build these treatment centres and to maintain them for some time, until we were able to convince health care authorities to give us our fair share. That is why, in our presentation, we said that it would be important to include a language change when the provincial and federal governments negotiate health care transfers, so that within the budget envelope for health care, specific amounts will be earmarked for services provided to the francophone population. We've been asking for this for some time. I don't know. We hope that one day, this will be done, just as it has been done for education and employment. A few years ago, we established a francophone employment centre here in Edmonton, thanks to cooperation between the provincial and federal governments. We haven't reached that point in health care. It is part of the action plan, but it still has not been achieved.

• (1100)

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

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our guests.

I will begin with Mr. Collette. We talked about the Saint-Thomas Health Centre. I'm not very familiar with this concept that you touched upon in the beginning of your presentation. In my area, there is the Centre Taché, where 95% of the people are francophone. I can't even begin to imagine them speaking English; it would be incredibly stressful for them. So I understand why you want to build the centre.

Earlier, with our other witnesses, we talked about infrastructure. When people come to Saint-Boniface, they ask us how we have created such a dynamic community. Obviously, it's because of people like you, people who are involved, committed, and above and beyond that, we have significant infrastructure. This is important. We take out office space, and it is difficult to get us to leave. That is why it is so important to have a building where francophones can feel at home.

Earlier, one of the subjects discussed with the other witnesses was the possibility of building in a language provision in all health and education agreements entered into by the federal and provincial governments. This would allow for a certain degree of flexibility when managing funds earmarked for francophones and French-language projects. On top of that, I'm wondering if there shouldn't be an infrastructure fund for community infrastructure projects like the one that you have just mentioned. In fact, in many cases, the communities are lagging behind. In Manitoba, for example, there are no daycares in our francophone schools, but all English-language schools have daycare. We have some catching up to do. Before, if we are to talk about a language provision as a number one priority, it can

also apply to infrastructure projects spread over a 10-year period so that we can catch up with majority community.

Does that seem like a good idea to you?

Mr. Denis Collette: It is quite certain that this is what we have been asking for and waiting for for several years. We put in a request to the federal government last year, under the Canada-Alberta agreements a request for additional funds to balance our budget. Our budget is \$24 million; we are running a shortfall of \$1.2 million, 5% of the total amount. Nonetheless, we still progress. Earlier, I was asked whether or not we are going to build the centre. We are in the midst of building it. You will be visiting the construction site this afternoon. As I was saying, the centre will house 200 residents. Approximately 100 jobs will be created. People will be working in French. These are tangible results. These people will get paid, and their salaries will be secured through funds coming from Alberta. This falls under the health care sector. People will provide health care services, and these will certainly be paid for by the Alberta government, the provincial ministry of health. We asked the federal government for a little help in getting started. Afterwards, the centre will sustain itself financially. Obviously, we would like to receive federal funding through these agreements. So far, we have been refused, and we are apparently being told it would create a precedent. It is true that it would create a precedent. It is true that this is unprecedented, giving financial aid for health care infrastructure in Alberta and other western provinces is unprecedented.

Hon. Raymond Simard: It is not necessarily a bad precedent.

Mr. Denis Collette: Absolutely. The numerous good precedents set have contributed to the development of francophone communities. We have received 95% of our funding. We are missing 5%. It is not unreasonable. In the other provinces, if a similar project was presented by an organization similar to ours, I believe that it should be approved.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you.

I would like to talk to you about francophone immigration here in Alberta. In the Maritimes, some have pointed to the Lebanese community as being a pool of francophone immigrants. In Manitoba, we have identified French-speaking Africans. Eastern Europe is another example. It varies by region.

In Alberta, have you identified any francophone community in particular?

• (1105)

Mrs. Josée Devaney: According to my documents, I can tell you that this year in our schools, many of our immigrants came from Ontario and New Brunswick.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I'm talking about people from abroad.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: With respect to immigrants from abroad, the majority come from francophone Africa.

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: As a former Alberta community representative on the Steering Committee for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, I can tell you that Alberta has not reached the stage of recruiting from abroad, something that has become a primary objective. Demographic migration occurs interprovincially. Unlike Manitoba or the Maritime provinces, we have not reached the stage of recruiting from abroad.

The Centre d'accueil et d'établissement d'Edmonton at Saint-Jean Campus made two or three trips to Africa and Eastern Europe, but these were not very successful. For now, people are arriving in Alberta of their own initiative.

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

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Hello and thank you for your presentations.

I am a Franco-Ontarian member of parliament. I live close to Ottawa, in a region where there are 65,000 Franco-Ontarians. I am always sensitive to the needs of minority language communities.

We discussed budget cuts and government obligations under Bill S-3. I would like to point out some concrete and positive measures which show the government's support. In the field of education, we announced a \$1 billion agreement over four years. In Alberta, exactly \$53 million will be spent on education. In terms of community services, we are looking at \$64 million. That represents a 25% increase. In terms of direct support to communities, \$120 million will be granted, or an increase of 11%. We also just announced \$309 million for immigration, a significant source of concern for many. As the chairman mentioned, representatives from all four parties sitting on this committee came to meet with you to speak to you and hear what you had to say. It is also a way for us to show our support for you.

As I've already stated, the needs are always great, but funding and resources are limited. Sometimes, we try to reach specific goals and we manage to do so because our targets are clear. You represent the francophone community in Alberta. How do your groups and associations work together to identify needs, and more importantly, to set priorities? We need to make decisions. If priorities can be established for Alberta, that could contribute to the development of francophone communities.

Mr. Colette.

Mr. Denis Collette: The representatives of our provincial association, who did a presentation this morning, told you about our priorities for the next few years in terms of infrastructure. The top priority was definitely building the Saint-Thomas Health Centre. So the importance of that project was recognized. Then, there was the second stage, La Cité francophone, as well as a project on Saint-Jean Campus.

So we discuss our priorities at various forums and meetings, and we do manage to make decisions. Those priorities are then conveyed to our funders, including the federal government, the provincial government and, in some cases, our municipal governments. Our position is always the same, the one you heard this morning. We support all of those priorities.

That is more or less how we establish that, but there are certainly some good discussions in our community to try to set priorities. For a long time, it was education. That is still important. As for infrastructure, that may not be the priority of the francophone community these days, it's more about health, and not just in Edmonton. We are starting with a project in Edmonton, but we want to create others in the regions.

We do want to show that the partnership with a board of health can actually happen. We are starting with the largest board of health in the province, Capital Health. If we manage to convince these people to help us and to support our projects, we are sure that in Calgary and in northern Alberta, we can be even more successful with our claims. That's what happened with education.

● (1110)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I am going to pick up where Mr. Lemieux left off. We're talking about billions of dollars for education. Agreements were renewed.

There were complaints in some places, but in others, the issue didn't even come up, and, spontaneously, witnesses were saying that without the Court Challenges Program, they wouldn't have been there. It takes funding. There is a lot of talk about accountability and responsibility and all that, but without funding, you can refer to Part VII of the Official Languages Act, and section 41, which is clear and declaratory, all you want, but it's pointless if you can't afford a court challenge. Is it worth thinking about the millions of dollars? The current government insists on so much accountability and responsibility that people in the field can't come back with a tool to say that something isn't working.

For example, where I live, without the Court Challenges Program, the riding of Acadie-Bathurst would have been merged with the riding of Miramichi, which is 70% anglophone. That was the first time in Canada a case like that was won in Federal Court.

In terms of education, Ms. Devaney, do you have the funding you need to challenge the Federal Government in the Supreme Court and win?

Mrs. Josée Devaney: Definitely not.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): And you, Mr. Dumont?

Mr. Paul Dumont (Trustee, Greater North Central Francophone Regional Authority no. 2): No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: And you, Mr. Blanchet?

Mr. Martin Blanchet: No.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): So you wouldn't exist.

● (1115)

Mr. Martin Blanchet: We would have had a huge problem because every time we think about going to court to promote our cause, we have to think about the funding we would like to put towards our schools. If the Court Challenges Program is abolished, it would be impossible to do that, and we will make much slower progress.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): My next question is for Mr. Alary, who looks like he's getting bored, despite the fact that he was very happy to be with us.

As far as the magazine industry is concerned, we heard that Canada Post wanted to drop its contribution to a subsidy. Like it or not, Canada Post is attached to the federal Government of Canada, which controls that Crown corporation. However, when a member of Parliament asks a question about it in the House, the answer is that it's none of our business because it's not a federal government department. At the same time, we know that the dividends come back to the government.

You touched on this briefly, but I'd like to know how these cutbacks might affect the francophone community in this region? I don't think you have a lot of francophone newspapers in your region. You mentioned the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post* and other English-language newspapers.

Mr. Étienne Alary: Clearly, when Canada Post announced that 25% cut, which is perhaps relatively normal, we all thought the big magazines like *Maclean's* and *L'Actualité* could absorb it, because they have a certain number of subscribers and they can manage. However, the smaller French-language and English-language weeklies that normally have access to that funding will no longer have access to it.

If that program is not restored and not knowing how the Department of Canadian Heritage will allocate funding, that could mean a shortfall of \$10,000 for *Le Franco* this year. These figures are published on the Canadian Heritage website. If the Department drops out in 2008 and if the program is not renewed, that represents a shortfall of \$40,000. Can a newspaper survive under those circumstances? That's the question now being asked.

We are looking for alternatives, but that's a lot of money. That support is greatly appreciated and very important, but it will no longer be there starting March 31.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): It's true that there were problems with the Sponsorship Program, as you mentioned. The Auditor General said there may have been some administrative problems, but that didn't mean the programs had to be cancelled. She added that if there was an administrative problem, it had to be fixed, but it shouldn't be used as a pretext for cancelling all government programs.

Under a federal constitution, if the government doesn't play its role, do you think people should ask themselves why they belong to a federation, if they don't get any help from the government?

Mr. Étienne Alary: That's a fact.

You mentioned administrative problems. Processes have been established and may have fixed those problems, but it's now so cumbersome that in order to establish a campaign, you need six months to a year of lead time. And when you finally put everything in place with the departments, there's a general election. So the project gets put on ice.

Canadians have spoken and have elected minority governments, which may not be the best or the worst solution. But all the campaign projects have been put on ice, and there's a tendency not to want to start them up again.

For the sole French-language newspaper in the province, it's no secret, the money from the federal government is very important, essential even.

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

Mr. Murphy.

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

For once, we agree. Back home, *L'Acadie nouvelle* newspaper supports the Acadian cause. We agree that it's a very important tool for our community.

I'd like to know whether there's a way of mobilizing people who need health care in French? When I read this document, I learned that almost 80% of francophones in Alberta have very little or no access to health care in French, and almost the same percentage of francophones feel it's very important to have that.

Is there any way, apart from demonstrating, sending letters or raising awareness among politicians, to mobilize people? You might be able to do it through advertising. Has that already been done? Can you mobilize the 80% of francophones in Alberta around health care?

I'd like to hear Mr. Collette's and Mr. Alary's comments on this.

Mr. Denis Collette: It requires a sustained effort. What we're going through in health, we have already gone through in education.

First, you have to make people aware how important it is to demand service in French. The problem in Alberta is not like the problem in Manitoba. Since I'm a former Manitoban, I'm quite familiar with the situation. In Alberta, because we are very dispersed, we deal with nine different boards of health. So it's up to each community to stand up for its rights and needs with the regional board of health.

Earlier, I said that if these boards of health were funded to provide care and service, that would help us, particularly if that funding came from the Government of Canada. It would be important for part of that funding to be specifically earmarked to help the local population get more care and service in French.

It's not easy to mobilize people. As was mentioned earlier, there have been French-language schools in Alberta for around 20 years, and only 15% of eligible students attend those schools. We have some work to do to attract the remaining 85%.

So we need help to raise awareness, to get young people interested in working in the field of health and to create our treatment centres.

This afternoon, you will see a fledgling treatment centre. It's a temporary clinic set up with federal assistance. We have to admit we got \$700,000 to establish this clinic. That signal was important in our negotiations with the board of health. They suddenly realized there were francophones in Edmonton and that they had needs. The federal government was aware of that too. So they've started providing us with tools. They started to react. The board of health and the public reacted. We began to examine those services. That's how we managed to mobilize people.

It's the chicken and the egg. We think we have the egg, and with it, we will have several chickens. The chickens are the centres we are going to create across the province. We're starting with one centre. It's the same phenomenon as with the schools. We started with one school and now there are over 20. In 10 years, maybe the province will have four or five health centres, where francophone communities are strong enough to assert their needs and demand health care.

• (1120)

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

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning. I'm happy to be here with you today, in Alberta. I'd like to congratulate the volunteers who work in the fields of education and health.

I am a Quebecker, from Lévis. There are a lot of things we take for granted, whereas you have to decide every morning to speak, live and die in French. That's why I admire you so much for the work you do, both with the media and in the community.

I understand this is the first time the committee has travelled in 25 years. That shows how strongly the members of the committee and our government, it goes without saying, feel about supporting the communities. I think you can always rely on that. We are listening intently.

I was listening to what my colleague, Mr. Simard, said earlier. I wonder why it took him 13 years to realize that it might be a good idea for the committee to focus on the advisability of supporting infrastructure for francophone communities. As an engineer, infrastructure is a bit of a no-brainer to me. After this trip, that will be one of the recommendations we can make together. That will be a significant gain, particularly for schools.

Now for my question. According to the statistics you provided—perhaps Ms. Devaney could comment—only 15% of those eligible avail themselves of their right to send their children to French-language school. I'd like to hear what you have to say about this. I find that number somewhat intriguing. It seems quite low to me, given the structures you are creating. Is it a problem of quality of education, or a problem of demand?

Mr. Paul Dumont: Thank you for the question.

I believe we already gave a partial answer to that question. We did say that francophones in Alberta are dispersed. Clearly, it is easier to group people together in the Edmonton area and in other, similar centres. There are francophones all over the place. We are still looking for other schools. Even in the Edmonton area, we anticipate the need for a school in Sherwood Park. We may also need a school in southern Alberta and another one in the north.

There is also another thing: we have to get people to understand the difference between an education in immersion, which is basically designed for anglophones who have never known French, and a francophone education, which includes a whole cultural dimension. There are still francophones who don't understand that distinction. And for some students, whose parents or grand-parents were francophone, but who have lost their language to some extent, there is some francization to be done.

It is a bit of a shame that only 15% of eligible students use French-language schools. There is definitely some work to be done. That is also more or less included in the projects proposed by the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. We are considering the need to set up an identification, information and outreach campaign for parents. So, clearly, there is work to be done in that area.

• (1125)

Mr. Steven Blaney: Those schools are funded by the provincial network, I imagine.

Mr. Paul Dumont: They are largely funded by the Alberta Ministry of Education. However, we recognize also that in a minority setting, we do not just want to be a school; we want full control. That means junior kindergarten, kindergarten and all of the cultural programs surrounding a school. Hence the importance of the official languages program, to help us to complete the system, to fully manage the school system.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: Could I add a quick comment?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Yes, go ahead.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: It comes back a bit to what the honourable Raymond Simard was saying earlier.

In terms of infrastructure, we have a huge deficit as compared to English-language school boards. A number of our schools are in temporary facilities. We have portable classrooms. There is no comparison to a real school with a gym, science lab and the like.

Also, in terms of infrastructure, until we have the equivalent of what the English-language schools have, we will have a deficit to make up for when it comes time for parents to choose which school their children will go to. If infrastructure agreements were signed, that would definitely help us a lot.

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

There is one topic we have not dealt with much, but it occurs to me to raise it briefly, since there was some talk earlier about communications. Maybe it is because Mr. Colette said earlier that he had worked for Radio-Canada for 25 years. Nevertheless, it prompted a question.

Here, in Edmonton, Mr. Alary told us that *Le Franco*, which he heads, is the only French-language newspaper in the area. Maybe Mr. Rabinovitch will hear about what I am saying today and read it in the blues.

Why isn't Radio-Canada here today?

The Standing Committee on Official Languages hasn't travelled in its 25-year existence. This is the first time it has traveled, and French Canadian radio isn't here to cover the visit of the Standing Committee on Official Languages in your region. And yet you say that only 15% of francophones use your schools and that you have to try to communicate with those people, to talk to them.

So what is the mandate of our national public television in regions like this one?

Excuse me for saying so, but it's not just taxpayers in Quebec or in Montreal, where Radio-Canada has offices, who pay for Radio-Canada; it's all of Canada. Under its mandate, maybe Radio-Canada should have been here today to cover the visit of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, which, for the first time in 25 years, is travelling to meet with minority communities in Canada. I hate saying "minority communities" because we shouldn't define ourselves that way. Ms. Barbot said it quite well; we are a people recognized in the Official Languages Act.

Perhaps that will draw some comment.

Mr. Denis Collette: I don't want to defend my former colleagues, but I don't know whether they were invited to cover the event.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We sent them a press release inviting them to a public meeting.

Mr. Denis Collette: So there was a press release. It did happen, back when I was running the station, that we weren't invited or only found out about an event at the last minute. But I am not here to defend those people. One would have expected them to be here. I was surprised that they were not here today, because we are appearing before the Standing Committee on Official Languages to express our concerns and expectations. We are expressing them. I thought it will be important for our community to be aware of what is being said, and they are not. People won't find out. Maybe they will find out through *Le Franco* newspaper, because its director is here. I hope so, anyway. It's unfortunate, I fully agree with you. In recent years, there have been major budget cuts to Radio-Canada, and I went through a similar situation when I was there. These days, they no longer have the funding to serve the province as they did before.

• (1130)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Collette, where are Radio-Canada's offices located in Alberta?

Mr. Denis Collette: They are here, on the other side of the street.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): The funding has been cut so drastically that they can't make it here? I know you're not here to defend them, but we have tools, in the francophonie, that should be used. I say this—please excuse the way I'm saying it—because if the committee is here, if we have gone to the trouble of travelling, it seems to me our public broadcaster could do the same. In Atlantic Canada, when we had the television news program, *L'Atlantique en direct*, and a car ran over a cat on Sainte-Catherine Street in Montreal, they interrupted the Atlantic news to tell us. One day, a four-wheel drive plunged into the St. Lawrence River, and they interrupted the Atlantic news to talk about it. There was the Francophonie Summit in Moncton, with 52 French-speaking countries represented, and the television coverage was suspended to talk about a labour union woman who had stolen a pair of gloves and was acquitted.

Now that I've said what I had to say, let's talk about childcare. Did you have something to add, Mr. Dumont?

Mr. Paul Dumont: I'd just like to add a comment about television. I subscribe to a satellite channel that I use to access French stations because I don't have access to those stations with cable. The problem is that sure, there are a lot of French stations, but do we have CBXFT, in Alberta, for local news? No, because the network doesn't offer that station in its package. I find that disgraceful.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We're going to take note of that because these are things we're going to have to highlight. There's two seconds left, so we're going to go to the next speaker, and let the tension ease.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was going to talk about education; I'll come back to that.

In terms of communications, I think Mr. Godin's point is extremely important. In order for things to work in minority

communities, we often proceed one sector at a time, as Mr. Collette was saying earlier. We take one sector and develop it fully. Where I'm from, it was economic development. That's working well now, so we've moved on to something else. I think we're on communications now. What Mr. Alary does is essential, and Radio-Canada, indeed, is missing from this whole communications strategy. If we are to survive as a community, the people from Radio-Canada should be here. It makes no sense for them not to be here. They are part of the overall strategy. That was my first comment.

Second, I think we may have an opportunity, with the arrival of a new Commissioner of Official Languages, to expand the commissioner's mandate. It's up to the government to make sure that the commission staff aren't just there to receive complaints, but are also there to promote official languages. The commission has offices all across the country and a staff of 100 people. Why shouldn't they promote the importance of official languages? That's a comment for the new commissioner.

I'd like to come back to education. You say that 15% of people who could, actually do go to French-language school. That surprised me, but on the other hand, I see there the possibility of recruiting the 85% of people who don't attend. How can we help you to recruit those people? I think the early childhood program is a good start. All the experts who've spoken to us have said that when you reach young people in early childhood, they stay in the system. That program has disappeared, so we're starting over. I don't think the \$100 a month that the new government is giving parents is going to help you. It's important to get these initiatives right. When you introduce this kind of project, it's important to keep it up, that is what helps us. I don't know whether you have anything to say about that.

How can we help you to recruit the remaining 85% of people? There must be some funding in the Dion plan to help you do that.

• (1135)

Mrs. Josée Devaney: La Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires undertook an initiative in this sense. All the minority school boards in Canada got together to do a study. They tried to find out why they were missing the boat and to define their needs. They decided that they had to launch a national awareness raising campaign.

The plan for early childhood is crucial for us. I do not have the data from the study here with me, but it would be useful to read it. If you could help us to implement the recommendations of this study, we would appreciate it.

Hon. Raymond Simard: The Action Plan for Official Languages must surely provide for funds for francophone communities. An amount of \$360 million is provided for education.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: We receive a bit of money through the official languages program. We use these funds for promotion and for recruiting and retaining our students. In fact, it is difficult for us to keep our students. In many cases, they only stay until grade six. Quite a few families are mixed marriages. Once the child has finished grade six, the anglophone spouse wants to enrol the child in what he thinks is a real school. He thinks that it is enough for his child to have learned to understand the language. Now he must get on with serious things.

Hon. Raymond Simard: In Newfoundland, when they set up a childcare centre, kindergarten attendance went up from 5% to 15% in one year, I believe. When people settle in an area, they choose the school with the best services. If we are always behind, we have no way of attracting people to begin with.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: In some schools, we tried to set up childcare centres, but we did not have the necessary funds. Volunteer parents and other parents began the project, but it was too complicated, because among other things, the childcare centre was closed on professional development days and on certain holidays. This did not meet the parents' needs and moreover, it was not profitable.

We had relied on the Dryden plan for early childhood. Several community organizations had done a great deal of community development, especially to ensure that children be taken care of from birth. Now, we have to start everything all over again.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much.

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

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would like to come back to one point. Our government, through Ms. Finlay, will be creating 125,000 places in childcare centres. A sum of \$100 will be given to parents. In my community, this sum helps parents with low incomes. In my riding, I have heard only favourable comments about this. Let me just say that these are two entirely different things.

Now, I want you to tell me if there is any way in which we could help you to ensure that once people have studied away from home, they come back to get jobs in their small towns. We must find a way to prevent the young francophone population from getting scattered about.

Would this problem be due to distance? Is the population too widely scattered? In your opinion, how can we keep the people who work here in French, go to school in French, work in the health sector in French, and so forth?

Mr. Étienne Alary: To keep those people in our community, we must offer the necessary programs and services.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: How will we go about keeping them in the community?

Mr. Étienne Alary: We must implement programs and structures that will allow these young people to study in French in their own region rather than go to an anglophone college. First, we must convince them to do their post-secondary studies in French. Several organizations are working together on this objective, *Francophonie Jeunesse de l'Alberta* among others. Local francophone organizations are helping these youths to choose to continue their studies in French. It is not always easy.

• (1140)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: During this trip, we went to the East, and I was really surprised to hear that in certain minority francophone communities, people were not aware of the action plan.

Is there a lack of communication? Are all the organizations that are aware of this plan able to benefit from it?

Mr. Étienne Alary: We should ask them that question, but it is, nevertheless, a comment that I often hear. The plan is often severely lacking in communication.

You spoke of organizations, but there are actually individuals working together with these organizations. In the education sector, \$363 million was invested so that 50% of the young population become bilingual by 2011 or 2012. Are we going to reach this ambitious objective and, if so, how?

I mentioned that our legal experts had made some progress. However, they would certainly tell you, if they were here, that they need extra funds in order to continue.

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

Mr. Paul Dumont: Personally, I can speak French today because I took part in the activities of organizations such as *Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta* and *Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne française*. We wonder why there is such high turnover in these organizations. The funding has remained the same in spite of inflation. We must find a way to keep the employees. There is no hiding it: there are big problems. It is crucial for us to support these organizations which are essential to the vitality of the French-speaking community.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: At least, we must have the feeling that we belong.

Mr. Étienne Alary: Let me come back to the early childhood issue and the \$100 paid to families. In Quebec, people can not only access childcare at \$7 a day, but they can also get \$100 a month. Personally, I have two young children, one daughter goes to school, and I have to spend about \$1,000 a month for childcare. The \$100 is welcome, but I would rather have access to an adequate childcare program.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: How much does it cost you a month?

Mr. Étienne Alary: If one child is in full-time day care and the other has baby-sitting services, it costs about \$1,000 a month.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: I would like to make a comment.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I will come back to childcare later on, but first I would like to make a point about the CBC issue. I thought that the question that was put to Mr. Collette a moment ago was not very appropriate.

For the record and as a point of information, let me say that with regard to the CBC, all the media were advised. A message was sent out to everyone giving the time and the place. These people could very well have come.

Mr. Denis Collette: I am shocked to find out that they did not attend.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Alary, I appreciate that you raised the childcare issue.

Ms. Boucher said earlier that the people in her riding were glad to receive the \$100. This amounts to \$1200 a year. Let me tell you that in my riding as well, people are glad to get this money. On the other hand, it does not solve the childcare problem.

You mentioned the fact that anglophones are ahead of us, that they have childcare centres in their schools and that we are behind. In your opinion, how could we quickly catch up?

Mr. Simard raised the issue. In fact, everyone is discussing it. We agree that parents whose children go to a childcare centre in a francophone school will be more likely to enrol them in that school, because they are already there and they are used to the place. This is a gateway for the children, but it also spares the parents from having to send them to an English-speaking school.

Currently, when the child comes home, it spends an hour or two with parents who speak more English than French. This is how assimilation goes on. The \$1200 paid by their government is more than welcome. In fact, if the sum were \$4000, no one would complain, but that is not the point. The point is, we need childcare.

• (1145)

Mrs. Josée Devaney: I would like to say to Ms. Boucher that of course parents are happy to receive the money that they get. But the problem is the lack of infrastructure. Francophone daycare centres just don't exist. There is one in Edmonton, but I don't know if there are any elsewhere. We need help in setting up these centres, and this is what we used to get under the early childhood plan. We got money to build the necessary infrastructure.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I will give you an example. My daughter lives in Gatineau. She tells me her situation is ideal. She starts work at 8 a.m.; she takes her son to the school daycare centre, this way he doesn't have to get up and go elsewhere for school: everything is on site. When the day's over, she doesn't have to worry because when class comes out her son goes back to daycare until she picks him up at the end of the day. It is the most wonderful education system that could ever exist.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: I should also point out that junior kindergartens are located in the schools. So a child enrolled in junior kindergarten continues his or her education at that same school. But it would be ideal indeed to have the system you're referring to. However, our mandate isn't funded by the ministry of education in Alberta.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Mr. Blanchet wanted to make a comment.

Mr. Martin Blanchet: It is along the same lines as what Ms. Devaney said.

Junior kindergartens take up space in our schools. If we were able to set up daycare centres, we'd do so. However, the ministry of education takes into account the space used for classrooms, and junior kindergarten is naturally considered a class within a school and which looks after young children up until the age of 12. It's an infrastructure problem.

The money Ms. Devaney referred to would be used to subsidize this part of our school. The government would therefore not factor in the space used for junior kindergartens. The government, in its calculations, would only take into account the space used by K to 12 students.

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

Mr. Simard, you have two minutes.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Alary, how many subscribers does your newspaper have?

Mr. Étienne Alary: We have 3,000 weekly subscribers. Under an agreement with the Greater North Central school board, 2,000 additional copies are given each month to every student under its jurisdiction. So 5,000 copies are circulated monthly, but we have 3,000 subscribers.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is it a not-for-profit or for-profit business?

Mr. Étienne Alary: It is a for-profit company.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Collette, you said that your centre was currently being built?

Mr. Denis Collette: Yes, building has started.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Will it be a health care centre?

Mr. Denis Collette: The Saint-Thomas Health Centre is currently under construction. You'll be visiting the construction site this afternoon at 2 p.m.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Will the centre provide medical services and so on?

Mr. Denis Collette: Yes.

Last year, the federal government and Health Canada, through the Société santé en français, gave us a grant to set up our primary care centre. It's a health care model based on the Saint-Boniface Health Centre.

Hon. Raymond Simard: You said that francophones were quite dispersed. In my region, roaming health care centres are being considered, for example in Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes.

Is that something you would be in favour of for the next health care centre?

Mr. Denis Collette: I think we've discussed this for the Bonnyville region up north. A similar project has been put on the table. They're reviewing it to see if it's viable. But there will have to be negotiations with the regional board of health as well to ensure there is ongoing funding.

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

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

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Luketa M'Pindou, does your funding come from the Official Languages Support Program, the OLSP?

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: It comes from the Official Languages Support Program.

Mr. Steven Blaney: It's the core program with a total budget envelope of \$300 million a year, I think.

Are you located here, in Edmonton?

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: Yes.

Mr. Steven Blaney: How many employees do you have?

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: Currently, there are two of us. As of January, and thanks to Immigration Canada's Multiculturalism Program, we'll be hiring three new employees as part of the Caravan of Tolerance project, an anti-racism initiative which will be implemented throughout the province and which, among other things, involves organizing workshops in schools.

• (1150)

Mr. Steven Blaney: How many people have you managed to get involved in your activities over the course of the year? Are you more successful with young people?

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: We mainly work with francophone immigrant families. There is a youth section and a female francophone immigrant section.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Have you twinned up with *Le Franco*, for example, or with other such organizations?

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: Yes, the organization always encourages partnerships.

Mr. Étienne Alary: We're very interested in their new project and intend to work with them.

Mr. Steven Blaney: The Caravan of Tolerance?

Mr. Luketa M'Pindou: That's right.

I should add, in response to a question Mr. Murphy asked me about cutbacks made by the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development to programs to assist youth, those cutbacks did hurt us somewhat because youth crime continues to rise in Edmonton. When you make cutbacks to such programs, you only end up encouraging crime in the community. So, we still have our work cut out for us.

For your information, Edmonton is a city in western Canada where crime is on the rise. I think the government needs to try hard not to make cutbacks to programs that help out youth.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): There have also been cutbacks made to the international student exchange program. Are you familiar with this program which enables young people to study abroad?

Mrs. Josée Devaney: It may be a post-secondary program.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): That's right, it's a post-secondary program.

Mrs. Josée Devaney: Then that's not my area of expertise.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's not your area. I see.

I would really like to thank you. I think we are lucky. It's true that we don't always agree with the government, but it is there to govern. In any democracy, it is normal for there to be opposition. We raised a number of issues with you, this Canadians. We've discussed these issues and will make recommendations to the government.

On behalf of the members of this committee, I'd like to thank you sincerely for having raised the problems and challenges associated with improving the status of both official languages in Canada.

I'd ask members to check out by 1 p.m. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 1:15 p.m. We'll be making two site visits. First, the St. Thomas Community Health Centre, in—

A Voice: It is Saint-Thomas.

Mr. Denis Collette: That's right, it is Saint-Thomas. There's the temporary site and the permanent site, Mr. Chairman.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I see, the Saint-Thomas Community Health Centre. What did I say?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You pronounced it the English way, St. Thomas.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Funny, I thought I would have said it the French way. It's something I'm very familiar with, because my father's name was Thomas.

I apologize to my colleagues. As you can see, in a democracy, it doesn't take long for someone to disagree with you.

Then we'll visit the University of Alberta's Saint-Jean Campus. We'll leave Edmonton at 5 p.m. to go to Regina.

Once again, I'd like to thank the members of the public who attended our meetings. I'd also like to thank the representative of the Commissioner of Official Languages as well as the interpreters, technicians, clerks and researchers. Thanks to everybody and have a good day.

This meeting is adjourned.

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