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•(0835)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)): Order, please.

My name is Yvon Godin and I am a member of Parliament for the northeast of New Brunswick. I am vice-chairman of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Other committee members will be joining us this morning. We will have Ms. Sylvie Boucher, parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for the Francophonie and Official Languages, and Mr. Steven Blaney, a member of Parliament with the party in power. I'd like to introduce the Honourable Raymond Simard, a Liberal Party MP—they are the official opposition—and Mr. Brian Murphy, also a member of the Liberal Party.

We are pleased to be here this morning in Regina and to have this opportunity to meet you and discuss the 2003 action plan and official languages en general. As I said at the previous meetings, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has never travelled before. It has existed for 25 years, since the Official Languages Act came into effect. Pursuant to sections 41, 42 and 43 of part VII of this act, our mandate is to monitor the application of the official languages, to ensure compliance with the act, and to make recommendations to Parliament.

In 2003, an action plan was implemented to assist communities. If I'm not mistaken, it is a \$750 million plan intended to help communities and to facilitate a working relationship with them when it comes to immigration, the health care network in French, and other areas which are important to community development. We asked Parliament for permission to go on a national tour in order to consult people in their communities, as other parliamentary committees do. We considered meeting people in their communities to be crucial. Previously, people always had to come to Ottawa. Not everybody had the opportunity to do so. We also wanted to see the work going on in communities. We wanted to see the institutions and the centres you have set up. Thus far, things have gone well. I won't spend any more time on the introduction.

So here is how this meeting will work. You'll each have five minutes to make your presentations. I understand that isn't much, but as parliamentarians, we have questions we'd like to ask you. We're familiar with the program and you'll have the opportunity to make your presentations. There will be a lot of questions. We're going to spend two hours asking you questions and if you were not able to say everything you wanted to say in your five-minute presentations, you'll have the opportunity to elaborate when it comes time to answer questions. After your five-minute presentation, every

member will have five minutes to ask you questions. I'd ask you to stick to the five minutes because we have quite a large number of witnesses and we only have two hours.

I'd now like to hand the floor over to the representative from the University of Saskatchewan, Mr. Wilfrid Denis.

Mr. Wilfrid Denis (Professor of Sociology, St-Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan): Mr. Chairman, I thought I would be last.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I had the impression you wanted to either be first or last. It does not matter to me. If you want to be last, you can be, it is as simple as that.

Mr. Wilfrid Denis: I would prefer that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): All right, so we will start with Mr. Michel Dubé, President of l'Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise.

Mr. Michel Dubé (President, Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Michel Dubé and I have been President of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise since November 1.

First of, I would like to thank you for having taken the initiative to come and visit us in here in Saskatchewan. Your visit certainly is appreciated. We have a document which we will leave here in the room so that you may refer to it if you like. Unfortunately, we had neither the time nor the means to have it translated into English. From what I have been told, we cannot present it to you officially if it is not in both official languages. Our apologies, but we really did not have the time to have it translated into English.

For those who do not know how the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise works, I would say that in our community, we are a—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I am sorry. If you have a document in French, you can give it to the clerk and you can have it translated in Ottawa to reduce costs.

Mr. Michel Dubé: We can get back to the issue of costs.

The Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise is a community-level governing entity. It is composed of 15 members, elected from each one of the communities, and a president elected by universal suffrage. I think we are the only community-based structure in a minority setting to operate this way. We are leading this movement or this way of operating outside Quebec, among francophones.

I am here with Mr. Denis Desgagné, Director General of the ACF. We will both be available to answer your questions.

Following the adoption of the Dion Plan, the Franco-Saskatchewanian community made great progress. We took on many projects which were successful. We work on a whole range of issues in several sectors, with target groups, to ensure community development in the global sense of the word. For instance, we work with the sectors of health care and immigration which are growing increasingly more important, early childhood, on the creation of bilingual companies and government services and at the provincial and federal levels. We also work on enhancing our community's image, marketing it and raising awareness of it with government and the anglophone community. Those are the sectors we are working on and within which we had success over the last few years.

We have also focused a great deal on new approaches to reach our goals. I am referring to the merging of services as well as to our work within community organizations in order to make them as effective as possible, reduce costs and make better use of very limited resources. The Coalition pour la promotion de la langue française et de la culture francophone en Saskatchewan, mainly, works on outreach.

Increasingly we work in partnerships. We have gone beyond simply asserting our rights and we are now attempting to establish partnerships with all community partners and those that affect our community, in order to be as effective as possible.

We find ourselves in a difficult position in all of these areas. We need to take action in new areas of interest and sometimes it can be difficult for us to take action in some areas because of a lack of capacity. Obviously, we have recently had to deal with some budget cuts. I am referring for instance to the Innovation Fund and to the Dion Plan.

These cuts and our increasing work load have put a serious strain on financial and human resources, and this is of great concern to us. We wonder about our capacity to respond to meet the needs and to establish partnerships with those who have the greatest impact on our community's development.

I wanted to mention this because it is something we all have to address over the coming years. There is still a great deal to be done, and a great deal of resources will be needed to do this.

We have also focused much of our energy on establishing community service centres. In the past, we worked to establish cultural centres in Saskatchewan and have moved towards community school centres. I was discussing the matter with Mr. Murphy from New Brunswick a moment ago. We have community school centres in Saskatchewan, but given the increase in our workload and the request for services from Franco-Saskatchewanians we have had to move towards what we refer to as service centres, which bring together government, community and association partners to do two things: first, meet the increased need for services; and second, meet the service delivery needs.

• (0840)

It goes both ways.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Your time is up.

Mr. Michel Dubé: That is essentially what I wanted to say.

Finally, if you allow me, I would like to take a moment to introduce Maria Lepage to you. She is the President of the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises and she also has heard about federal government cuts to women's programs. Ms. Lepage represents Franco-Saskatchewanian women.

I realize that I took up more time than I had, I thank you for that. If you have any questions, we would be pleased to answer them.

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

We will now be hearing from Mr. Dominique Sarny, Director of the Institut français at the University of Regina .

Mr. Dominique Sarny (Director, Institut français, University of Regina): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for having invited me to make a five-minute presentation on the Institut français of the University of Regina.

I would have liked to have an opportunity to explain to you how this new university institution enhances the vitality of the Franco-Saskatchewanian community and I hope we will be able to discuss that over the next two hours. But I will essentially focus on our achievements in this area since the inception of our institute in 2003.

A community's vitality is measured by its ability to innovate, to create and to provoke change. There are risks involved in doing that. We welcome this risk and it was part of the creation of our institute from the start. We cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that a large majority of our students, or 80% of them, do not have French as their mother tongue. They are considered francophiles. Our challenge is to be able to confront uncertainty. We cannot count on historical progress, etc. We have to manage this uncertainty in a way, which I will get to momentarily.

What do we do and who are we? Our institute was created by the Franco-Saskatchewanian community in partnership with the University of Regina and both levels of government. It was created in 2003 within the University of Regina. It has faculty status. The director of the institute has the status of dean and sits on the council of deans. We are a full-fledged entity within the University of Regina. Our mandate is francophone community development through education, research and university services. We are the only university institution to have a provincial mandate in Saskatchewan.

How does all this work? We received five-year funding which began in 2003 and will end in 2008. We have benefited from and will continue to greatly benefit from the Dion Plan, its philosophy and its concrete actions. We participate in language training for public servants, a growing sector within the University of Regina. I referred to managing uncertainty. You have to understand that we exist within a majority that has a lot of difficulty understanding why we are here. We have a vision of education which is different from that of the anglophone majority.

To us, education is first and foremost a community development tool. You know that in other universities in a majority context, education is a commercial product competing with that of other universities. That is not our case. We are an actual community development tool and we need the support of the community and of our partners. We are partners with the Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne, as is the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, the Faculté de Saint-Jean, the Université d'Ottawa, the Université de Moncton and others.

We have six French education BA programs as well as a BA in francophone studies. We are currently setting up—and this is an innovation here in Canada—a professional community development program. We are a leader in the field of intercultural research in western Canada. In addition, and you may have heard of this—we contributed to re-establishing a dialogue between francophones and Metis, a dialogue which had been brought to a halt 120 years ago at the time of Louis Riel's hanging. Since then, many community initiatives with the university and the Metis were established, including a francophone-Metis discussion group and several research projects with the Metis.

● (0845)

As I said earlier, our funding will end in 2008. Obviously we have progressed very quickly over the last four years. We are counting on upcoming funding which we need for several reasons. First, we need funding to continue the programs which we have created. There are not many of them. They are targeted and they really meet the needs of our community. We also need funding for research and for our premises.

Within the University of Regina, we are located in a building that is shared with other tenants. Despite initial reluctance from the university, we managed to get one francophone unit back, by cooperating closely with the university. There are three French units on campus—including a BA program in our building—and we wanted to add another French unit, the French department. We are looking to integrate these three units within one, the Institut français.

Obviously you must realize that five years is very little time to do all of this. We have managed quite a bit and cannot stop here. We need the support of our various partners, such as the federal government.

I would like to close by saying that the work we do at the institute not only serves francophones, but it extends to the national and international levels, because we now work with various international partners.

● (0850)

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

We will now be hearing from Mr. Denis Ferré from the Conseil scolaire fransaskois.

Mr. Denis Ferré (Director of Education, Division scolaire francophone no. 310, Conseil scolaire fransaskois): Good morning, and thank you for having invited us here this morning. I'll be giving you the *Reader's Digest* version because I know that everyone wants an opportunity to speak. So I will get straight to the heart of the matter.

I'd like to introduce you to my colleague Bernard Roy, who is replacing the President this morning. He will be starting. We will give you a brief overview of our history, the current situation, the measures we have taken, our challenges, and of course our recommendations. We would not be here if we did not have recommendations to make to those in power.

Bernard.

Mr. Bernard Roy (Superintendant of Education, Conseil scolaire fransaskois): Good morning.

With respect to the history of school board management, you know that those involved in French-language education in Saskatchewan had to deal with several obstacles from the start. There were several political decisions which led, in 1931, to the complete abolition of French as a language of instruction for francophones in Saskatchewan. That was followed by a lengthy struggle to have our language rights recognized and 36 years later we finally managed to see some changes. In 1967, the Saskatchewan Education Act was amended to allow for French to be taught in schools and later, designated schools were established.

We know that in 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guaranteed official language minority education rights, but it wasn't until 1993 or 1994, in other words 12 years later—in the meantime, assimilation continued—that we were allowed to have our own schools and manage them.

Each time we wanted to claim our rights, we had to take legal action, for instance to correct the underfunding for our school facilities. We always had to fight in order to have our rights upheld.

I would now like to discuss the current situation. The Conseil scolaire fransaskois, which governs the Division scolaire francophone n° 310 or DSF, includes some 1,132 students in 12 schools, from kindergarten to grade 12. They are spread out throughout the province. The schools that are most remote are six or seven hours away: that is a long trip. We also manage junior kindergarten classes. There are currently 131 JK students. Our JK students are 3 and 4 years old.

The DSF has a triple mandate: devising school curricula, cultural identity programming and fastening community involvement.

These are the measures we've taken. There is programming support. "Francisation" is something we focus on a great deal. It involves managing early childhood programs, language teaching assistants and socio-cultural facilitation programs in our schools.

Furthermore, we promote student exchange programs through various provincial activities. We are also working on developing a distance learning system. We were also involved in court cases, with grants from the Court Challenges Program, for the Ducharme school, which we just opened in Moose Jaw. We just announced the ECF, École canadienne-française, in Saskatoon. The Notre-Dame-des-Vertus school in Zenon Park required us having to go before the court to have our rights respected. We also had to go before the court to correct DSF underfunding.

Let us now move to the issue of identity and cultural development. We have a marketing budget of approximately \$225,000 per year, and we work in partnership with the community. There is also three- and four-year-old junior kindergarten. Full-time kindergarten is not 100% funded.

It is our view that community partnerships are essential to the development of our community.

• (0855)

Mr. Denis Ferré: It is now up to me to tell you about our challenges. I will try to do that relatively quickly.

First of, political will is fragile and it has always been that way in Saskatchewan. Under the current government, we have experienced some success. But we know full well that there could soon be a change in government. What would that mean for our community and our schools? We don't know.

Second, there has been a decline in the francophone population. It has to do with a decrease in the birth rate, francophones are not having enough children. The survival of francophone culture and of our schools is at risk because of this. Love is not something we can control, but we can look to other options like immigration.

Third, we rely very much on technological infrastructure. In the past, the federal government offered a number of programs. Industry Canada, for one, set up very nice networks for us. However, networks get set up and all of a sudden funding dries up. By this we mean funding for networks, technology, and distance learning.

Fourth, let's address the issue of marketing and telecommunications. Currently, 80% of families whose children go to our schools are exogamous. How can we reach out to families that are still entitled to French-language education? In 80% of households the language that is spoken is probably English.

Fifth, there is the issue of funding. Thirteen per cent of our budget comes as a result of a federal-provincial agreement. If ever there were to be a change to that percentage, it would cause major problems.

Sixth, there is the issue of integrated services in the schools. By this we mean health care, justice, social services and the recruitment of specialists. In Saskatchewan, our schools are probably the only recognized institutions not flowing from an associations which receive serious funding. We are points of service for justice, health care and social services.

What do we have to recommend and what are we asking for? First off, we absolutely must reconsider the issue of the national child care strategy. This program must matter to all, including all parliamentarians. I do not want to play political games, but I would say that it is an important and essential program. Why is that? Because our culture is at risk. Our youth are not necessarily hungry, but our culture is at risk.

Second, we ask for support in the field of immigration. One hundred years ago, my family came here from Europe. Everybody in Canada comes from somewhere else. We absolutely must encourage francophone immigration to western Canada, specifically Saskatchewan, because we need that.

Third, with respect to technology, we need programs to support the implementation and maintenance of technological networks and infrastructure.

Our fourth recommendation has to do with a national marketing campaign. This is something we've discussed at the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. I would like to ask you please to carefully consider this matter. It is important.

Fifth, we would call for the reinstatement of the Court Challenges Program. Our network would not exist today had we not received money under this program. As I've said: political will is fragile.

Thank you.

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

I'd now like to turn the floor over to Ms. Soraya Côté, Director of the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan.

• (0900)

Mrs. Soraya Côté (Director, Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan): I would like to start by thanking you for having invited the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan to make a presentation on the reality we face here in Saskatchewan. Our presentation will be brief and I will be sharing my time with Roger Gauthier, an elected member. We will try to address French-language primary health care issues in Saskatchewan as well as the future of the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan.

Mr. Roger Gauthier (Elected Member and Treasurer, Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan): Our network has been in existence for a little over three years. So it is quite young. We are members of the Société Santé en français, our national counterpart. This provincial organization is an action network active in the field of well-being, service organization, training and French-language health care research. Our partners are political decision-makers, research and training institutions, regional authorities, professional associations, health care delivery institutions and Franco-Saskatchewan community representatives. We bring together the five pillars recognized by the World Health Organization, as do all the networks under the Société Santé en français.

At first, our network had identified few French-language health care services provided to Franco-Saskatchewanians and little consistency between health care services provided by the various providers. We have come a long way in three years' time.

First off, we identified health care professionals who could offer French-language services. Our research was fruitful because our repertory now includes—and you can see this in your handouts—close to 150 names. Having checked, I can tell you that we now have 180 names on this list.

Mrs. Soraya Côté: Also, we've just completed a provincial consultative report entitled "Préparer le terrain". This national initiative of the Société Santé en français was funded by Health Canada under the Health Transition Fund. The goal was to draw up a primary health care services plan which would provide health care decision-makers with a set of relevant data to make informed decisions as to the best ways to provide primary health care services to francophones in all regions of Canada.

The project enabled us to set out possible avenues with respect to primary health care services. We are currently working on implementing part of the measures identified in this process. Given the success of this initiative, we believe it is essential for the province to continue this work with all other Franco-Saskatchewanian communities and their respective regional health authorities.

Mr. Roger Gauthier: In addition, we set up an innovative primary health care community intervention process for vulnerable groups in our community, seniors and children. With one common point of coordination managed by the Réseau santé en français, four partners worked together to develop health care promotion services. There is the ACF, which created health care kiosks, the Association des parents fransaskois, which worked to set up child and family service centres, the Division scolaire francophone, which worked on the implementation of integrated services in schools and the Fédération des aînés fransaskois, which focused on senior support centres. In your handouts, you will find the acronyms CAFE, CASA, SIMS and the term Coin santé, with a definition of what these programs are.

The approach we've taken focuses on all health determinants and Saskatchewan's priority in terms of primary health care. This project has had great success and positive results. The work done with children and seniors led to capacity building the likes of which had never before existed in French-speaking Saskatchewan. It led to significant positive effects, namely integrated service initiatives for early childhood, which involve the Division scolaire francophone and Franco-Saskatchewanian parents, supported by all early childhood stakeholders. There were several other positive effects, for instance, the holding of a first-ever children's screening clinic in northern Saskatchewan, in May 2006. Over the next year, there will be two more clinics for children and seniors in northern and southern Saskatchewan. We have come a long way. The most positive effect of this project is certainly that francophones and the province are now speaking in terms of francophone health care, and that the province is now more sensitive to the needs and expectations of francophones.

• (0905)

Mrs. Soraya Côté: These results were achieved thanks to the Réseau santé en français, but much work remains to be done. We would like to share with you some of the conditions we feel are essential to allow Franco-Saskatchewanians fair access to primary health care services in their own language: the reinforcement of the capacity of Franco-Saskatchewanian communities to plan primary health care services, and local, regional and provincial well-being; partnerships for well-being between governments and the community, along with a strategy on all health determinants; a substantial increase in collaborative agreements between various regional health authorities so as to consolidate and organize services intended for the Franco-Saskatchewanian community; conclusive data on the health of Franco-Saskatchewanians; stable and recurring funding from federal and provincial governments to fund consensus building and networking activities among the partners of the French health care system.

I would like to reiterate that our objective is to foster the conditions needed to ensure that health care users have access to good services and are served at the right time by the right care provider in the language of their choice. In order to do this, we need

continued support from our main partner, the Société Santé en français, which cannot act without the cooperation and support of the Government of Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the standing committee, thank you very much.

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

We will now hear from Mr. Denis from the University of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wilfrid Denis: Thank you. It might be useful for the committee members if I gave a demographic and historical overview of the Franco-Saskatchewanian community; however, I would suggest a different kind of overview; over the next few minutes, I would like to give a broader historical context for the action plan.

Social change generally occurs over 20 years. I want to go back to 1947 to better show you where we started in order to better plan our future. You will see why I want to do this.

The first period runs from 1947 to 1967. In 1947, Canada passed the Canadian Citizenship Act, which defined for the very first time who was a Canadian citizen. Prior to 1947, we were British subjects. During the 1960s, we had the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and the adoption in 1964 of the Canadian flag, an essential symbol of the Canadian identity. Also during the 1960s, the first nations won the right to vote. During the period between 1947 and 1967, we laid the foundation for citizenship today, from the recognition of the rights of first nations, to linguistic duality and multiculturalism.

In the period between 1968 and 1988, the Official Languages Act, the Multiculturalism Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms were enacted.

During the period from 1989 to the present day, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was implemented with, in particular, school governance, the Dion Plan and the development of the Réseau santé en français.

During this 60-year period, the institutional basis of the notion of citizenship defined in the 1940s by people such as Popper, Tawney and Marshall was developed. You will no doubt recall that T. H. Marshall, in his fundamental article on citizenship and the social classes, had defined citizenship as having civil, political and social dimensions. But the fundamental rights associated with the notion of citizenship are constantly evolving. Increasingly, they are defined not in terms of legislation or actions which are discriminatory in their intent or in their impact, but rather through inaction or non-intervention, by way of legislation, programs and actions that failed to prevent negative and discriminatory effects, or by the absence of essential legislation or initiatives.

Furthermore, philosophers such as John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, introduce a number of principles of social justice underlying the notion of citizenship. Among other things, John Rawls says that social and economic inequalities should be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.

For francophone minority communities, this principle will translate, for example, into programs that, instead of trying to ensure pro-rata uniformity, will take into consideration the risks, degree of institutional atrophy, the costs of social and geographic dispersion and historical costs. In other words, there should be a kind of linguistic equalization formula to take into consideration variations, risk factors and the scope of the challenges faced by these communities.

In conclusion, we—and I'm including the individuals around this table, the federal government, provincial governments and the communities—are outlining and defining the substance of the notion of citizenship for the coming decades. This notion will be much more complex, variable and flexible than in 1947. The rights conferred by citizenship will force the various levels of government to address their inability, their hesitation and refusal to intervene when they should have. They will be more responsible for what they do not do than for what they do do.

It may be time to review various studies, including that done by Senator Simard, *Bridging the Gap*, published in 1999, in which we can find various subtitles such as these: “The Federal Government—Architect of weakening Communities”, “Decommitment and off-loading by the Government of Canada”, and “Project-Funding Policy”, to name just a few.

● (0910)

We should remember that, just like the effects of Indian residential schools established from the 1840 to the 1960 will be judged not on good intentions from 1860 but rather on today's moral and legal standards, the Dion Plan will be judged not on the good intentions of governments from 2003 to 2008, but rather on the impact of the plan in 2023, 2033 and 2043. I would ask you to reflect on the principles of social justice that should guide both governments' and communities' actions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you. We will begin our round of questions with Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome our guests.

Mr. Denis, you raised a very interesting point. One of the things the committee has been discussing for a several days in various provinces is that each time the federal government signs an agreement with the provinces, this agreement should include a language clause under which an envelope would be devoted solely to francophones. Is this what you are talking about? In many cases, there is some catching up to do.

Mr. Wilfrid Denis: This is the kind of initiative that should be implemented. We need to realize that, since the 1960s, action has been taken mainly in areas of federal jurisdiction. However, we realize that people live in areas under provincial jurisdiction and above all in the day-to-day. We need to find a way to ensure that French is not only an official language, but also a national language. In order to do this, communities and the federal government need to make a concerted effort to increase the visibility of the French language across Canada, particularly in regions where this language is weaker.

Hon. Raymond Simard: We note that where there is good provincial cooperation, francophone communities are much more

successful. But this shouldn't necessarily be solely left to the provinces.

My next question is for Mr. Dubé. When we talk about Saskatchewan we often think that francophones are scattered here and there and that this is a challenge. Yesterday, we were in Edmonton: a French neighbourhood is beginning to take root there. There is an area, with the Faculté Saint-Jean and the Centre Saint-Thomas, where there is a critical mass of physical infrastructure that is important to the francophonie. Once established, this can no longer be taken away. Does this exist in Regina or Saskatoon? What challenge does this pose for health care, when clinics have to be set up throughout the province?

● (0915)

Mr. Michel Dubé: This is increasingly true. There is a certain amount of migration from rural areas to larger communities such as Regina or Saskatoon, and to a certain extent to Prince Albert. We are trying to create a dynamic centre in the various communities. One of the best ways to do this is to have service centres, school community centres, that, in partnership, can provide more and more services that meet the needs of individuals living in communities who come not only from rural areas but also from other countries and other Canadian provinces. I think that it is absolutely essential to create this centre, this atmosphere so that people feel properly welcomed and properly served.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is there a neighbourhood in Regina that is considered as the French neighbourhood, or are francophones scattered throughout the city?

Mr. Denis Desgagné (Executive Director, Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise): No. Given the size and scattered nature of this population, this is a challenge. We are working to develop these communities as a whole, be they rural or urban. In a rural setting, it is often more difficult to bring people together. In an urban setting, we take a number of different approaches. For example, in Saskatoon, there is an urban village. It is unfortunate, but often people take a one-size-fits-all approach and Saskatchewan is asked to do what everyone else is doing. For example, in Saskatoon or in Regina, we're trying to create a community space. This is probably why much more time was needed to implement school community centres in Saskatoon. There are two school community centres there. This is a different challenge. With regard to the health care, we need to think differently; we need to find different and planned solutions for Saskatchewan. That is why the asymmetrical approach is absolutely essential in this case.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Ferré, please.

Mr. Denis Ferré: I am probably the one at this table who complains the most, but I take pleasure in this.

In 2003, our provincial government had approved the creation of a school in Saskatoon, but we had to wait at least three more years before the federal government supported us with a community envelope. There were three elections, and I accept this, but our community had to spend numerous hours and travel a number of times to Ottawa to push forward this essential project. It is almost unforgivable to ask an extremely fragile community to wait three years. Furthermore, we are talking about 2003 dollars and not 2006 dollars.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Manitoba has been working for 15 years to get a school community centre. I know exactly what you are talking about.

Mr. Denis Ferré: This caused a great deal of frustration; however, we have four school community centres within the school board. This is nothing to sneeze at.

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

Mr. Blaney.

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

First, I want to thank you for welcoming us here. I am pleased to be here with you. I am from Quebec. The anglophone minority in Quebec has its own institutions and schools. This trip is an eye opener for me. This is our third city in three days. Tonight, we will be in Winnipeg. The battles you are waging, particularly to have your own schools, are the key to your development. I am inspired by this, and I'm also pleased that your school will be expanded, even if the announcement was late in coming.

Now, I want to ask you a question. Mr. Denis, I really liked your comment on the difference between an official language and a national language. If I understand your comment correctly, there need to be institutions throughout the country, and the federal government must consider its responsibility toward linguistic minorities as something that goes beyond its own area of jurisdiction. It must not interfere in areas under provincial jurisdiction, but it must accompany the provinces in their efforts.

I want to ask Mr. Sarny a question about post-secondary education. You explained that you had to justify your presence at the University of Regina. Could you tell me more about this?

• (0920)

Mr. Dominique Sarny: First, I should explain that the University of Regina has existed since the end of the 1960s or the early 1970s, and that since that time, the campus has had a francophone presence.

The problem—and this is the challenge we are facing—is that for over 30 years now, the campus has had no francophone roots, because the heads of the university, who are mainly anglophones, have not been made aware or are not sensitive to the importance of developing French.

Why then does this work? Because it has to work. This time, the community is the one who built the institute. In the past, the university imposed or, at the very least, modeled an institutional framework within the university. This was a university institution with departments and programs. This time, a completely different approach has been taken. The community said that this wasn't working to its benefit, that it had worked to create an educational institution and that it now needed to have access to post-secondary education. So, the community proposed an approach to the university, and following negotiations, this was successful.

Mr. Steven Blaney: What opportunities exist for your graduates, and what are the spinoffs for the francophone community within the province and for the public in general?

Mr. Dominique Sarny: First, with regard to the students, we face the following challenge: we don't have a choice or a selection of

programs. Essentially, our students are in education. They complete a professional program with close ties to the school community. The program has a good reputation in western Canada for attracting students from throughout the western provinces. So this is a professional program.

However, because French is not the mother tongue of the majority of our students and because we have seen an increase in enrolment in immersion programs, we are not able to meet the needs of these students. Parents and students come to see us, but we don't have enough programs to meet the needs.

Also, we are trying to create programs that meet both the needs of students and their parents and the needs of the francophone community. We have identified two types of more general programs: a francophone studies program—which is more classical and provided within the university, offered along with partners, particularly Quebec—and a community development studies program that we are currently implementing and that meets these needs.

Because the population is scattered, and we talked about this earlier, we have been forced to innovate. We are not different. We have been forced to innovate from within. All the bridges we build, all the work and the research that we have implemented with various partners from coast to coast contribute to community development. Each researcher who works within the French institute, whether from Moncton, Ottawa or British Columbia, must conduct research that establishes a comparative basis with one of the realities facing our francophonie.

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

Mr. Wilfrid Denis: I want to speak to the matter of institutional atrophy.

It is important to understand that, in Saskatchewan, the Franco-Saskatchewanian community has no control over any post-secondary training institution. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to have an institution such as the Institut français in Regina.

We must also recognize that the universities jealously protect their autonomy. The only thing we have at the University of Regina is a community advisory committee, which has no control over the institute as such; it belongs to the University of Regina.

The next step will be to try to find ways of increasing the community's control over the institution within the university structure.

The University of Saskatchewan is limiting itself to a small modern languages department and is not offering anything else to the Franco-Saskatchewanian community.

• (0925)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Now I want to speak. Usually, I would be sitting next to Mr. Murphy and I would have already spoken.

Mr. Denis, you said that there were no post-secondary schools.

Mr. Wilfrid Denis: We have programs, but we don't have any schools. We do not control any universities or colleges, such as the Faculté Saint-Jean or the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. The only thing we have is the Institut français. We are really happy to have it, but we have less control over the institute than francophones have over the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface in Manitoba.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): What is the francophone population in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Wilfrid Denis: Saskatchewan has 19,000 people with French as their mother tongue, but 54,000 who speak French. As Dominique said, a vast majority of their students are bilingual anglophones, somewhat like at the Faculté Saint-Jean in Edmonton. So it is a matter of considering the common interests of those who speak French, including those whose mother tongue is French and those who speak French as a second language.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Earlier, we talked about early childhood education. Could you give us more details?

Mr. Roger Gauthier: We feel that all the representations we have made over the past few years on early childhood education have been exceptional with regard to progress.

In our opinion, early childhood not only marks the starting point for language learning, but also the starting point for a child's learning and development. The Franco-Saskatchewanian community has invested heavily in schools, in the Franco-Saskatchewanian parent association and workers to ensure the integration of all early childhood services.

Clearly, the federal government's decision to abolish the federal-provincial childcare agreement has had a significant impact. I am the Director of the Franco-Saskatchewanian Parent Association and I am involved in the network. As parents belonging to the association, we feel that it is important for parents to be involved in their children's education.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Could you expand on what the government is saying about this? Perhaps you will hear it later. Dialogue leads to understanding. This is written in the report. The government said that, although this is the way it is, it was going to create a number of additional childcare spots.

Based on what you are saying, these cuts to childcare are affecting you.

What stage were you at and what impact will these cuts have?

Mr. Roger Gauthier: With the provincial government, we had positioned ourselves as a childcare development model in terms of the integration of services such as the development of educational centres or day care, preschools, play groups, resource centres and family and child support centres. This is what we were working on.

The province said that it was open to our model for intervention: it would even like to implement it throughout the province. We believe that learning and childcare go hand in hand.

Things came to a halt for us, but the province did not say that it was going to abandon this approach; it said that it would proceed progressively.

We feel that a progressive implementation is difficult, because there are only a limited number of years—the years of early childhood—to support children in their development. The community supports the parents with regard to development. The families do the work, but we also need to do the work.

We will certainly not stop promoting our early childhood development strategy, but if we had the federal government contribution that was promised in the agreement, we would be able to move forward much more quickly and we would be able to ensure a much more institutional and organized approach.

● (0930)

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

As vice-chair, I will not abuse my time, even if I am in charge of keeping it. I am fair. However, I will come back to this later.

Mr. Murphy.

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

Good morning everyone.

I am from Moncton, New Brunswick. I am an anglophone, but I am very aware of the circumstances faced by minorities, such as the Acadians.

I am also the deputy justice critic for the Liberal Party and a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

After Christmas, that committee will hear, as a witness, from the Minister of Justice, Mr. Toews, on the abolition of the Court Challenges Program.

A few witnesses today, as well as some yesterday in Edmonton and in British Columbia on Monday, said frankly and directly that they opposed this decision to cut this program. I think, after having heard from several witnesses here, that everyone agrees that this was not a good decision.

However, to help our Conservative friends, could I ask Mr. Dubé, Mr. Gauthier or perhaps Mr. Ferré if there is another solution to meet this need? We know that this program is an extremely important tool to maintain your linguistic rights.

For example, there is a process for complaints relating to human rights: the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and various ombudsmen.

With regard to potential and likely solutions—any and all solutions are welcome—to help our Conservative friends, could you tell us whether there are good ways to replace this program?

Mr. Michel Dubé: That is a good question. I don't know whether I can suggest a solution. Perhaps my colleagues around the table can suggest something.

Cancelling this program has certainly sent a very negative message to the community. In our presentations, we alluded to the fact that we have often had to go through the courts here, in Saskatchewan, not only to establish our schools, but to do other things as well.

In Saskatchewan, a practical solution would be to ensure the support and cooperation of the provincial government to ensure that we would not always have to rely on such a program or use it.

We are working hard in this area. We have a fairly good relationship with the provincial government in certain areas. We also have a law association here, that is also working hard on this. However, we need to identify ways to ensure that there won't be any gaps in this area in the future.

My colleague wants to respond.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: To bring about social change, our governments must work together. Ideally, if all went well in the political area, we would not need the legislative branch. But who can ever say that everything is going smoothly in the political area?

Therefore, I think that the solution consists in bringing back the Court Challenges Program. There is no other solution. It does not consist in funding, for instance, the Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française, on a national scale, or funding any other program whatsoever. I think that this is a matter of democracy and respect. The message that can—

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

Mr. Denis Ferré: I would like to make a comment on that topic. Thank you.

Very often, the obstacle comes from the public servants, even before reaching the political level. Therefore, I think that it is essential that we raise the awareness of our public servants. As I am a public servant myself, I do not think that I am insulting anyone.

The first signs of reluctance come from the public servants, and this can even go further than mere reluctance. By applying the necessary pressure—as we have always had to—we have to press further on. At a certain point, we must refer to case law and jurisprudence. We must use those tools.

We must do more than just raise awareness. We must demand that our public servants understand the situation, and for those who have a hard time understanding, we must put the emphasis in the right place. We must do this, because up to now, not much has been done.

● (0935)

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

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, everyone. My name is Sylvie Boucher and I am parliamentary secretary for Josée Verner, Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages. I am a government member. This is my second trip with this committee. We started in the east and we went westward. This week, we heard complaints and we took note of them. You can be sure that we will pass them on. Personally, I am an eternal optimist because I deeply believe in the francophone cause.

My question is for you, Mr. Ferré. I see that you are restless in your chair and I think that you have many things to say. If you had any solutions, short and long term, to propose to our government—that has two representatives here today—to promote the vitality of francophone communities, what would they be? I want to take note of them.

Mr. Denis Ferré: This is a good question: it is a political issue.

Once again, let me say that the transmission of francophone culture depends on early childhood intervention. That is where culture is transmitted. We have no way of dealing with the low birth rate in our francophone communities, but we can, nevertheless, develop a welcoming society that our dear friends, the immigrants, are happy to live in. Yes, we must create structures to welcome them. If we do not do this, in another generation and a half, the battle will have been lost.

Early childhood—Immigration—Yes, we must always watch over public funds, but when there are so many obstacles between us and the results—The bureaucratic machinery is enormous. Responsibility is an important issue, I do not contest that, but please, take a look at the current government structures that force us to spend unreasonable amounts of energy just to get a tiny 13% of our budget.

Now we have early childhood, immigration, the issue of funding—I put this to you in 30 seconds, without much reflection.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, Mr. Sarny.

Mr. Dominique Sarny: Yes, inasmuch as it is done in a spirit of innovation. We must stay within a framework and we must always observe many criteria and performance indicators, especially from Heritage Canada. One of the performance indicators should encourage the institutions that are innovative. We have been innovative in Saskatchewan, and this should be mentioned. As the Franco-Saskatchewanian community director just said, the things we do here are not necessarily applicable elsewhere. We do things differently; we have been innovating in the sectors of immigration and early childhood, among others, and this must be taken into account.

I take this opportunity to add a comment about the French language. On the ground, especially at Regina University, which is mainly anglophone and has not had much of a tradition for welcoming francophones, French is not considered as a national or Canadian language.

We must convince our partners—because they are our partners and they are open-minded—that French is not Spanish or German; true, it is an international language, but it is first and foremost a Canadian language, a national language.

This is why, we ask our personnel, that must work in a very structured environment, to be highly committed to this Canadian language, this national language. We have a long way to go, and the match is not over. But I am very optimistic and positive, as you are. I think that it will work, inasmuch as we get support and there is a very clear understanding of what this means concretely to a person from the east or from Ottawa.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: And also from Quebec.

• (0940)

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Our governments must show leadership. No one seemed to notice, but the Official Languages Innovation Program was cut. Fourteen million dollars had been provided for federal councils to promote leadership pursuant to part IV, that deals with public communication and service delivery, and part VII, which deals with promoting French and English, and the Official Languages Act.

The Saskatchewan Regional Federal Council is the only council that still has a structure for coordinating official languages. People took up a collection to maintain this structure because they believe in it. However, we do not have the leadership and the resources that we need to implement the Action Plan for Official Languages and to ensure that the governments work together on this. It is really unfortunate.

We have often heard that the action plan was not cut. There was a sum of \$14 million and last year, about \$2 million were spent. We think that about \$7 million or \$8 million remain that have not been spent. We must take a leadership role for the future of our early childhood programs or other programs.

The cement for building this country is in the francophone communities in every region of Canada. If we are not allowed to act, we will continue a never-ending debate between nations, without really knowing where we are going. I think that this is where the government must take a leadership role.

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

I do not necessarily want to defend public servants, but let me simply say that it is up to the government, elected by the people, to assume leadership.

I find it rather difficult to go back nine months in time and blame the public servants. The government has responsibilities because it was elected by the people. It has a vision and it should know how to build a country. We gave it this mandate for four years, although, these days, mandates only last a year and a half.

The government should assume leadership, and work together with francophone communities in every part of the country, be it with La Société des Acadiens du Nouveau-Brunswick, ACFO or l'Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, which is your association.

In Timmins, the people told us that the funding had not been adjusted for the cost of living or for inflation. Organizations need money to do their work.

We mentioned the Court Challenges Program and early childhood, among other things. What role does your association play? How is it perceived? Do you feel that you need more tools?

Mr. Michel Dubé: You can be sure that we are short of tools.

• (0945)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Tell us about it.

Mr. Michel Dubé: I invite you to read our document, because I cannot present it to you in five minutes. Our funding was cut. We received a very contradictory message when the Court Challenges Program was abolished. We often feel—and perhaps this is the case in other provinces as well—that some kind of territorial bilingualism

is being established, that bilingualism will only exist elsewhere, that it will only exist in Quebec, and that the francophonie will be limited to Quebec.

This is a very bad message for several reasons. Budgets were cut and moreover, a very direct message was sent to the Saskatchewan government, that has been somewhat reluctant in the past and with which we are now working to improve our relations. Our provincial government is wondering why it should act, given that we are not even supported by the federal government. As far as we are concerned, we want to work together with the provincial government to bring back these programs, because they meet the needs of the citizens of Saskatchewan.

L'Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise is an entity that coordinates all activities, by implementing an overall community development plan in collaboration with the associations' network. The associations that lost their funding also lost their means to do their work. Instead of making progress, we are stagnating or falling behind.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Let's make the effort of saying that there are two peoples and two official languages. You spoke of a national language. We have an action plan backed with funds amounting to \$750 million. Now the government seems to contest any advancement made by the francophone community. Let us take for instance the Caron affair, the case of a lady in New Brunswick involving the RCMP, and which is now before the Supreme Court. They also tried to amalgamate my riding with a riding that was 70% anglophone; there is also the food inspectors' issue. All these things have been challenged.

The government is telling us that it wants us to develop and to find our place, but each time that we make a step ahead, it strikes us down and tells us that we are wrong.

Do you feel the same thing here?

Mr. Wilfrid Denis: Denis spoke about the leadership issue. Leadership is as important as funding for communities so that they can promote and defend their rights. We fail to understand why, when we go to court, the government is absent or it is with those who are challenging our presence.

Let us take, for example, the Northwest Territories. When we have the resources to hire one lawyer to defend the rights of the Franco-People of the North and we have to face a bevy of lawyers representing the Northwest Territories and federal government agencies and so forth, I find this unjust. There's something basically wrong with this vision of Canada that they are trying to build.

As Denis said, the cement with which tomorrow's Canada will be built is made of respect for the rights of minority francophones, of first nations peoples and multiculturalism. Without leadership, it will be difficult to maintain the momentum and commitment of the communities. Each time that we stand up for our rights, the federal government—the very government that is responsible for ensuring linguistic duality in the entire country—instead of unequivocally supporting us, is challenging our rights.

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

Mr. Michel Dubé: Without visible federal leadership, our communities will have a difficult time in dealing with the provincial government.

Let us take, for instance, school governance. The Saskatchewan government did not want to hear about the school governance program, but we implemented it nonetheless. The Saskatchewan government was more or less forced to do it and now it thinks that it is a good thing and useful for the community. It took funds to implement the school governance project.

When we are able to implement permanent programs and the ordinary citizens of Saskatchewan realize that these programs are not a threat to them, and on the contrary, that they are a contribution to the community's well-being, they accept them. However, before gaining the acceptance of social changes that might take 20 years, we need resources. I think that we must also show leadership.

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

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

Mr. Sarny, you made a very interesting comment when you said that French is not a national language or a Canadian language. This might be at the root of the problem. Programs like the Action Plan for Official Languages give communities tools for building a national language, but it is up to the Parliament to ensure the results. I find this very interesting. Our committee could recommend that we make Canadians more aware of this language. This has given me food for thought and I appreciate this comment very much.

That being said, the Action Plan for Official Languages allocated \$360 million to education. We realized that the health sector was working well and we invested very little in it, but it was an amazing success. Of course, we must invest more in immigration; we have only set up basic structures so far.

In spite of all that, I still find it very difficult to see whether the plan succeeded in the education sector. Did we get our 360 million dollars' worth? Was this money well spent? Do you know? Can you answer this question?

• (0950)

Mr. Denis Ferré: I can say right away that the contribution we get through the bilateral agreements has always amounted to 13 or 20% of our budget. Was this a great help to us? Yes, absolutely, but this money is used for operations; it is not an added value. This is a problem.

Because of our demographics, our scattered population, etc., operational costs are above average. Now this money helped us to survive, and, I believe, to provide first rate education to our youth. We could not have implemented all the enhancements in our schools, for early childhood, for instance, without these programs. There would have been no junior kindergartens for three- and four-year-olds but now there is one in every school.

Hon. Raymond Simard: If I understand correctly, a large part of the investment was made for schools and for young students in immersion and for French as a second language, for instance. Is it yielding any results? Perhaps you are not able to answer this question.

Mr. Denis Ferré: I can give you a general answer. After all, I spent 14 years of my life in an immersion school. The results that it yields are understanding, acceptance and cultural enrichment. We are not alone, we also have—

Hon. Raymond Simard: It develops a certain kind of awareness.

Mr. Bernard Roy: Let me add that when the federal government agreed to implement immersion courses, there was a great deal of publicity. There was publicity to promote immersion, etc. When Franco-Saskatchewanian or francophone schools were created all over Canada, not much Canadian publicity was done to stress the fact that this was the road that francophones should take if they want to remain bilingual.

Our people were given the perception that immersion was sufficient for francophones. We must destroy this myth. Unfortunately, we were made to believe all kinds of things in the past, we were deprived of our rights and we were prevented from standing up for them. We were victims of oppression maintained by political decisions at times. We feel oppressed. How can the oppressed stand up for their rights? We could stand up and fight, but sometimes the partly assimilated francophones stand up and argue against us. Unfortunately, we are divided by this.

There is a historical background to all this. We have learned a lot since obtaining French education, but we must go further. We need post-secondary education programs to develop our population, because when people leave, they do not necessarily return.

Hon. Raymond Simard: In Edmonton, the people told us that only 15% of eligible students had enrolled in their schools. What is the percentage in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Denis Ferré: I would say that it is about 20%, but that might be optimistic. Perhaps it is 18%.

Hon. Raymond Simard: So we could say that there is some potential.

Mr. Bernard Roy: We still have to do a great deal of publicity and develop a great deal of potential.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Are we talking about the results of the Action Plan for Official Languages in education or in the communities? I feel that we are being given this fine gift called the Action Plan for Official Languages and that then we are left with the burden of providing the results. Let me tell you frankly that I wonder if one of you could build a two-story house with \$20,000. This is the kind of results that are expected from us. For \$20,000, we want a two-story house with six bedrooms etc. Currently, to provide funds for the development of the Franco-Saskatchewanian community, to work with Canadian Parents for French, to increase the number of eligible students in our schools or in their schools, we must turn to the private sector for marketing, promotion and recruiting because we have no tools for this.

The people who work in communities or schools often do not have the proper training. The people working in the regions on the overall development of the economy, education, communications and health, are fortunate if they earn \$30,000 or \$35,000 a year for working on this overall development.

Therefore, it is somewhat ridiculous to ask whether we have enough resources and if we are getting results. Moreover, this has to be written in a brief, in a document, under appendix F, etc. in order to demonstrate—

Hon. Raymond Simard: If we invest in a project, we must be able to measure the potential results. If it is not viable, we will not invest in it. With regard to the \$360 million, the solution would perhaps consist in giving a bigger share to francophone schools rather than immersion schools. We must look carefully at such options. Mr. Gauthier, do you have any comments?

• (0955)

Mr. Roger Gauthier: I think that the Dion plan for official languages was really something new and interesting and substantial when it was implemented. It is a good plan, but it had some problems along the way. We cannot blame the francophone official language communities.

When we have resources, I guarantee that we spend them well. In some cases, it took some time before the funds arrived. With regard to some aspects of the Action Plan for Official Languages, there had not been enough preliminary research. We were handed certain tools that did not exactly meet our needs.

Personally, I would not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. No matter which party is in power, we must quickly resume the preparation of a plan for official languages. We must evaluate what we have done. As far as we are concerned, we did not succeed in everything. On the other hand, with regard to education, I can tell you that we have made headway because the province of Saskatchewan really supported us in this field. The Réseau santé en français made progress because the provincial government supported us. When we work together, things go well. In my opinion, our essential orientation should consist in carrying out a new study to determine how federal departments, with their mandates and with their experience with the first plan, could send out funds for a second time in 2008. If they want to do it, they must not wait until 2008 and then ask that we wait for two more years before telling us how the money will be spent.

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

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning.

There is much talk about difficulties, but I would like to remind us of some initiatives that were recently announced by Minister Verner. She announced that there would be a billion dollars for education. This involves a four-year agreement until 2009, and it is a 44.6% increase over the previous agreement. With regard to services, she announced a four-year agreement for \$64 million until 2009. This is a 24.7% increase. For communities, she announced \$120 million, with a four-year agreement until 2009, which is an 11% increase. Recently, in Saskatoon, Ms. Verner came to tell us that the Canadian government had granted more than \$3 million for rebuilding and refurbishing community school centres in Saskatoon. We must not forget that, either.

That being said, I would like to ask the Réseau santé en français if it is still difficult here, in Saskatchewan, to get services in French. Is

it easier now than it was three years ago, or is there still much work to be done?

Mrs. Soraya Côté: It is still a problem. I think that this will be a long-term challenge.

For instance, during a trip to the region, a lady came to see me. She showed me how she would use the card prepared by the nurse which is in charge of her because she speaks only French. She was eight months pregnant, did not speak a word of English and lived in a rural environment. This lady had to carry the card around with her, in case she might have to call 911 and say the right things over the telephone, because the emergency services are not bilingual. This gives you some idea of the scope of the problem. In some parts of certain regions, this problem is still omnipresent.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Is it difficult for you to find francophone nurses and physicians who could offer these services?

• (1000)

Mrs. Soraya Côté: It remains a challenge, even if things are easier today. There has been an improvement in the sense that we were able to identify the problem, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

At the Saskatoon and Regina health authority office, I am a part of the team in charge of recruiting medical specialists. We try to find medical specialists who speak French. Last year, we were unable to hire one single French-speaking specialist when we travelled to Quebec. It gives you an idea of the problem.

Mr. Roger Gauthier: As for us, we began at the very bottom of the scale in terms of the number of services offered. We have developed primary health care services. It's the foundation.

With respect to clinical care, and other hospital services, everything must be reorganized. We do not intend to create exclusively francophone hospitals or fully francophone surgical units. We simply want to make sure that people can be welcomed in their language when they first arrive. For people who are sick, this is a matter of survival.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: When one is sick, one is sick in one's own language, and it is in that language that one wishes to be understood.

Mr. Roger Gauthier: It is our belief that promoting health is a fundamental issue. Both the federal and provincial governments have an important role to play in this regard. We believe the partnership must also include the networks. We maintain our relations with the community, health care professionals, and training institutions. It is only together that we will be able to succeed, and there's still a lot to be done. In three years—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It has been three years?

Mr. Roger Gauthier: Yes, only three years. In Saskatchewan, at the time, we didn't even talk about health care as a separate issue.

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

Mr. Dominique Sarny: I simply wish to come back to the figures cited earlier by Ms. Boucher. I cannot let it slip by. It's not the first time we hear this. It was the case 15 years ago, and it will remain the case in 15 years to come.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It was signed.

Mr. Dominique Sarny: In and of itself, it is a very positive thing, but if there is no follow-up, what will these figures mean in two years? Unless there's evidence to the contrary, there has been no follow-up. On the ground, those for whom these funds were allocated cannot work because for all intents and purposes, the money is simply not accessible. It is not accessible because there are intermediaries. We work mainly with majority institutions. In most cases, the money passes through these institutions. Without any monitoring mechanism, we cannot work.

These are great announcements, but what good do they do if they do not allow us to work? Do not kid yourselves: these funds do not always reach those working on the ground.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Are you telling me that you do not have access to this money?

Mr. Dominique Sarny: We must absolutely sensitize those who are working in our institutions. I, for one, work in the university. If my university is not aware that this money is to be used to advance francophone issues through education, I could go on arguing relentlessly, all for naught. I could even lose this money.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It was earmarked for official languages.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): That reminds me of the plan to build Highway 30 in Montreal, which was announced three times. It takes time and I think that is the message we are hearing. It's all very well and good to announce funding, but then the funding has to come through. It's all very well and good to have a plan of action, but even the Official Languages Commissioner herself was forced to intervene to ask where the money was. Communities are waiting. This has to be said and people have to know. That is exactly what happened. That is one of the reasons why we wanted to visit you in your environment to see how you perceive this plan. We appreciate your comments. The Standing Committee on Official Languages has the responsibility to report to Parliament. Based on what you said, it is not a bad plan, but it must be implemented and you need the money which was announced. If funding has been approved, the plan must be put in action, and that is not our responsibility if the necessary infrastructure is not in place yet. We must be ready to implement the plan and not intervene three years from now to say that millions of dollars were announced, but since communities did not know what to do with it, they lost the money. That represents a great danger.

You are partners on the ground, you see what is happening every day and you have ideas. It's a bit like the attitude a company might have. In the past, people worked for a company and they parked their brains at the factory door. They had to listen to their boss tell them what to do all day long and they were not allowed to say what they thought. There was one boss and people had to do what he said. But companies have changed. They realized that it was to their advantage to put the brains and the intelligence of their employees to good use. The same thing applies to this situation. You are the francophones on the ground.

In summary, would you say that the action plan represents the right direction and that since we have now made some progress, we must evaluate the future direction of the plan and ask the government what it is willing to invest to ensure continuity in the interest of French becoming a national language which is respected and in which francophone communities can function in a united Canada?

●(1005)

Mr. Michel Dubé: Thank you for that summary. I would like you to give the floor to Ms. Lepage so she can briefly address the issue of the status of women. May I ask for the indulgence of the committee?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): I can only give you permission if I receive the unanimous consent of the committee. Is there unanimous consent?

Some members: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We will therefore give her the opportunity to speak. I would like you to tell us who you are and tell us about your association.

Mrs. Maria Lepage (President, Fédération provinciale des francsaskois): My name is Maria Lepage. I am the President of the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises. Our organization works to maintain and improve the well-being of francophone women in Saskatchewan. Our organization is part of the network of the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie du Canada.

We want to underscore the significance of the closing of Status of Women Canada's offices, because they helped us do our work on the front lines, and say just how disappointed we are.

It's not that we received a lot of money, but at least we had a voice. Women are especially affected by the lack of education. When we talk about the education of women, we talk about literacy, early childhood education, entrepreneurship and the social economy in Saskatchewan.

Training is provided by the Service francsaskois de formation aux adultes, or SEFFA, and the corporation of the Collège Mathieu. Ninety per cent of the people who take French literacy training are women. And it is only women who take French training for teaching assistants in the area of early childhood education and day care. On the French side, the same holds true for college level courses in entrepreneurship and as far as Saskatchewan's social economy is concerned.

We need a bigger envelope for literacy and education to help the community and women who for the most part work in these sectors. The decision must be reviewed. Something has to be done so that there is money for front-line workers, so that women can receive training, which will lead to greater economic independence, and which in turn will help us progress. This will also help uphold women's rights because in the last two months we have had the impression of going back 50 years. I therefore want this committee to make a real effort to tell the federal government about the needs of francophone women in Saskatchewan, and that the government take further measures to help them.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Ms. Lepage. We will now move on to Mr. Murphy.

●(1010)

Mr. Brian Murphy: I agree with you completely, but I have one brief question to ask you. The government has often said that it is only making cuts to advocacy rights funds. The government does not want to inject funds into advocacy. Is this the truth?

Mrs. Maria Lepage: It is partly true. But we need certain criteria, and this is what is needed by all Canadian women. Despite what the minister for the Status of Women has said, we have not achieved equality. Let us be realistic in Canada. Let us stop inventing stories about women and their place in society.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I understand.

May I go on, Mr. Chairman?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): You have four minutes remaining.

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

Mr. Ferré, you did not have enough time to tell us everything you wished to say about your recommendation. Why do you want to launch a national marketing campaign? What would you do? What are your goals and what kind of audience are you trying to target?

Mr. Denis Ferré: Allow me to give you a brief overview. I'm also a member of the Regroupement national des directions générales de l'éducation, which works in concert with the national federation of francophones school boards.

Publicizing our French-language schools is one of the major components of our work. We want this to be visible across the country.

Here, we have referred to a regional francophonie, or a regional bilingualism. We know that we want to make sure that the language is spoken properly, and can be understood from sea to sea. But we need money for this. If we have to do this ourselves, we would have to take it from the money that has been set aside for our children. In other words, if we decide to invest in marketing, we will be taking it out of the budget allocated for our children.

Why do we have to do this? Eighty per cent of families in Saskatchewan are exogamous. The language spoken at home is English. Where are they going to see the advertising and announcements? They will be finding it in the anglophone media, television, and on posters. If we take money from the school boards' budgets to buy posters and billboard space along the number 11 highway between Regina and Saskatoon, I believe I will soon have to start selling shoes.

In other words, if we truly believe in linguistic duality in this country, we must make investments. Today, we live in an era of visual technology and we can use all sorts of methods such as flash, and so on and so forth. Dear colleagues, I believe that we must start investing in a pan-Canadian project because all school boards are pointing in this direction.

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

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

Mr. Steven Blaney: I would like to come back to a comment made by Ms. Lepage, whom, I wish to thank for coming here to share her concerns with us.

Of course, I may be going beyond our appointed subject, but I believe that there is a link, because half of all francophones are women. I don't know if you have submitted your document, but if you wish, I can forward it to the appropriate authority. I believe that it is Heritage Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): We would appreciate having the document sent to the clerk. He will have it translated and then sent out to all members of the committee.

You can continue, Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Steven Blaney: I very much appreciated your comments.

I want to come back to a key sentence: "We must find the way to make French not only an official language, but a national language". To this end, minorities have a leadership role to play. Leadership is often being discussed these days.

My colleagues sitting across from me took part in a leadership contest last week. As well, our own leader has shown leadership by ensuring national unity in his famous motion. Yesterday, we had a sense of the need to reinforce the importance of linguistic minorities in Canada.

Is it your impression that the government has shown leadership in this respect in recent years? At this point in time, do you feel that there's a need to reaffirm leadership? If so, in what way?

I would like to hear your comments on this.

•(1015)

Mr. Bernard Roy: Mr. Harper's most recent statements regarding the Quebec nation give us pause. We want to be involved in that thought process. This motion got us thinking because the following morning, the media were calling us to ask us what we thought of it, what we were going to do about it as Franco-Saskatchewanians and how the community was going to react.

First off, it is clear that the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise recognizes that the people of Quebec have the right to identify themselves as they choose and as they already do, in fact. I think that this issue allows francophones outside of Quebec an opportunity to start a debate and get involved in the definition of this nation, for the benefit of all of government working on the building of this nation, which we alluded to earlier on. We are very interested in the matter and have had an opportunity to say so today.

I personally would like the government to consult us on the ways in which to build a francophone nation outside Quebec. As you know, outside of Quebec, there are more than 1 million of us, plus another 1 million people who speak French. So, it is important for us to be included in this consultation process.

We also have work to do with the Government of Quebec and the work that it is doing to support francophone communities outside Quebec.

I'd also like to mention that the ACF and the Franco-Saskatchewanian community as a whole want to move from a notion of minorities towards a notion of full-fledged citizens. I know that Mr. Denis alluded to this earlier on. That is how we want to contribute to the definition of the French-Canadian nation and of Quebec.

We are of the view that there are three founding peoples in Canada: anglophones, francophones and first nations. There are two official languages in Canada, and they are both national languages. To really get that message out throughout the country and help francophones outside Quebec, the government, regardless of who is in power in the coming months and years, will have to show leadership.

Some francophones were born here and in other francophone communities outside Quebec. We should avoid using the word "minority". All francophones, be they from Quebec, Acadie, Ontario, France or Africa, are part of the francophone Canadian diaspora. These people need to feel like they are part of the Canadian francophonie.

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

Mr. Simard, you have two minutes.

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

I'm fascinated by all that the communities have managed to do with so little. It is incredible. We have come a long way in the field of education since gaining control over our school divisions.

Mr. Gauthier, you discussed the field of health care. When you look at the infrastructure which has been established over the last three years in this area, it is unbelievable. For instance, in Manitoba, people have to work on one sector at a time because they do not have the resources to do it all at the same time.

Where I come from, economic development happened over a ten-year period. Now, we can say that it is solid. It is unshakable. We have 30 employees and one permanent staff member.

We've heard that in the next plan we need to focus on the communications sector, which has always been somewhat neglected, and the cultural sector. We take culture for granted in a way and seem to think that it will never die. However, people in the cultural sector have told us they felt they had been somewhat brushed aside by the plan.

Would you agree that communications and culture are the next two sectors we should focus on? And could you tell us how economic development in Saskatchewan is fairing? Do you have a structure in place for community economic development, for instance?

• (1020)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): [Editor's Note: Inaudible]

Mr. Michel Dubé: We have a structure, the Conseil de la coopération de la Saskatchewan. This organization targets economic development, but it needs constant support because it involves political lobbying and other things. So, there is a structure in place, but we do have to support it.

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

Mr. Denis Desgagné: My answer is yes for communications and yes for culture. With respect to early childhood, we discussed the matter but it has not yet been included in our work.

With respect to communications, it has to be done asymmetrically. We could look at community radio. This is not New Brunswick. You

can't set up community radio here like you would in the Acadian peninsula.

Hon. Raymond Simard: It requires some flexibility.

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

Your two minutes are up.

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I see that there are several challenges to take up and note that you are the elite in your respective fields and that you have managed to build something quite impressive so far.

Mr. Desgagné, I would like to know what your biggest achievement has been to date. And could we build on that formula and apply it to another field to get things to work just as well?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: That is a rather difficult question. The greatest achievement is to be able to live life in French in western Canada and to continue to do so. That is what comes to my mind. The achievements are those of the community, and they are the result of the synergy that exists between people who share the same passion and desire.

If I had to focus on one thing it would be to change the culture surrounding all of this development and do so at all levels of government. In that way, we would not be receiving the gift of an 11% increase, but rather an investment, and we would benefit from the partnerships between government and the community for the development of this wonderful country of ours called Canada.

That's how I see things.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Partnerships. All right.

Does anyone have anything to add?

Mr. Denis Ferré: If we can say that we've achieved some success to date, it is certainly because of the human resources we have. If we decide to target anything at all, we cannot forget the main participants involved, those who sit on associations, boards, etc. In other words, human resources.

To promote development, you need to invest. Thirty thousand dollars per year is not enough to guarantee that we will be able to keep the leaders that we now have.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Funding.

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

Mr. Bernard Roy: I'd like to add that some day we're going to have to say that French is a national language and start educating people, instead of pitting people against one another on the issue of language.

The people of Canada have two languages, and that sets us apart from the American people. The beauty of Canada is this ability to work together, to respect one another and build something for the future not by pitting people against one another, but by building something positive.

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

On that note, I would like to thank you all most sincerely. It was an honour for us to meet with you here, in Regina, to have this dialogue with you and to ask you the questions we needed to ask in preparation for our report to Parliament.

We hope that you also appreciated having this meeting held in your region. The committee has been in existence for 25 years yet it had never travelled until now. There is a reason for this trip, and we certainly hope that we will be able to take other trips in the future, to see how we are doing, because it is by following up and engaging in a dialogue that we will be able to know if we are moving forward.

I would like to ask everyone to remain seated. We get to be movie stars for just a moment, if you don't mind. Once I've called for the adjournment, I would like you to stay seated because Radio-Canada wants to take a few shots of our group.

And now, a few announcements. At 10:45, the committee must leave the hotel to go to the Regina community school centre. We will be there until 12:30. Then we will go to the airport to fly to Winnipeg. You'll get additional information on the bus heading for the airport.

Once again, I want to sincerely thank you on behalf of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. It was a pleasure for us to be here with you in Regina. We certainly hope that once the report is introduced in Parliament, the Government of Canada will react very quickly for the good of the French language, recognized in Canada as being equal to the English language, and to our aboriginal peoples. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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