



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 031 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 1, 2009

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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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•(0905)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Isabelle Dumas): Good morning.

[English]

Honourable members,

[Translation]

I see a quorum.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, cannot entertain points of order, nor participate in debate.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): I move that Mr. Blaney be chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[Translation]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Chong that Mr. Blaney be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

[Translation]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. Blaney to take the chair, if the committee wishes, we will now proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive motions for first vice-chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I nominate Ms. Zarac.

The Clerk: I has been moved by Mr. Rodriguez that Ms. Zarac be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other motions?

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

[Translation]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive motions.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I nominate Mr. Yvon Godin as second vice-chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Nadeau that Mr. Godin be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I now invite Mr. Blaney to take the chair.

The Chair: Good morning everyone and thank you for your confidence in me.

This morning, we have the opportunity to resume where we had left off at our last meeting. We were talking about the effect of delays in approvals and disbursements on organizations funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Somewhat by chance, we have with us here this morning representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, Ms. Marie-France Kenny and Ms. Suzanne Bossé.

So, if committee members so wish, we could invite them to tell us about the situation with the Department of Canadian Heritage regarding disbursements and their consequences for organizations.

Do all the committee members wish to so proceed?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: I would invite the witnesses to join us. At the end of this discussion, if there is any time remaining, we could talk in camera about committee business and adopt the agenda for the parliamentary session.

On behalf of the committee members, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly elected president of the FCFA, Ms. Marie-France Kenny. I want to assure you of the cooperation of all committee members.

I also want to welcome Ms. Bossé.

Ms. Guay.

• (0910)

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): I would like to add a comment, Mr. Chair. I have nothing against hearing the witnesses, but we had not been scheduled to hear from the witnesses and I have another meeting, in relation to the francophonie. I ask that we might finish by 10:30.

The Chair: You want to end at 10:30.

Ms. Monique Guay: We were not supposed to hear witnesses today. This puts me in a bit of an awkward position, because a group of eight Frenchmen are supposed to be at my office shortly.

The Chair: It all depends on how much time we give our witnesses. If I understand correctly, you also want to deal with the schedule for the session do you not? The schedule has been prepared and will be distributed.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: The witnesses are here, and we need to hear what they have to say.

The Chair: We will hear from the witnesses first, that is clear.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We could stop at 10:30 and talk about the schedule next week.

The Chair: We shall see.

Ms. Monique Guay: In the future, I would like to know in advance if anything special is happening. It would be useful.

The Chair: Duly noted.

Moving right along, you may begin, Ms. Kenny.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Good morning. I want to thank you for having invited us to appear this morning to give you a follow-up on funding to organizations serving francophone and Acadian communities in Canada. I am here today with Suzanne Bossé, who is our director general. We will be pleased to answer your questions at the end of our presentation.

When we first appeared before you last June—my predecessor Lise Routhier-Boudreau was here—it was to bring your attention to a situation we considered alarming. At that time, two months after the beginning of the fiscal year, 75% of the provincial and territorial umbrella organizations were still awaiting confirmation of how much funding they would get for programming for 2009-2010, and five of those organizations had not yet received the 25% advance that is usually paid out while waiting for funding confirmation.

You had taken the situation very seriously, as well as its impact on community development, and you called us here this morning to

give you an update on the situation three months after we first sounded the alarm.

We have come this morning with well-documented and enlightening data. In fact, over the past month, we have developed and administered a poll to our community organizations in order to find out more about the current situation regarding funding delays and their impact. This time, we expanded our study to the entire francophone and Acadian community network, which includes approximately 600 organizations.

In total, 81 organizations responded to our poll, which gave us a sampling of approximately 13.5%. Since this was an online survey, this is a good sampling and a good response rate, all the more so because among these national, provincial, territorial and local organizations, we find theatres, community newspapers, youth organizations, cultural centres, and umbrella organizations, to mention just a few.

Of the 81 respondents, 65 are funded primarily by Canadian Heritage, while the main source of federal funding for the others is Human Resources and Skills Development, Justice Canada or Health Canada.

That is the profile. Now, let's look at the situation. The first conclusion we can immediately draw: five months after the beginning of the financial year, 5% of all organizations have not received any confirmation of funding of any kind whatsoever, be it for programs or projects. Five per cent may seem small compared to the situation in June, but we should remember that this means that this 5% stands for services to which the public has no access due to a lack of resources.

The survey also taught us that most organizations received their contribution agreement in July and August. Of course, we are happy that these organizations have received funding, but we are much less happy with the impact of the months of waiting on their operations. You must understand that, in many instances, the impact continues to be felt even till now.

In total, 72% of respondents had to use a line of credit or a loan, and, since April, at least 14 of these organizations incurred \$500 in interest on those lines of credit. We are talking of at least \$7,000 going to banks and not to developing services in French for our communities. I want to stress that this \$7,000 amount is a minimum estimate. Some organizations have incurred over \$1,000 in interest charges.

I am also thinking about the long-term impact on human resources. In some cases, employees had to use their personal credit cards to pay for expenditures or give up their salary or their expense account. Furthermore, 37.5% of respondents were unable to renew an employee's contract, while 19% said that they had to let permanent staff go.

I want to share with you some of the responses. One organization told us the following:

We had to extend a project officer's temporary contract, because we hadn't yet received confirmation of Canadian Heritage's support for the project. We took that risk however because suspending the contract would have meant compromising the results. We were only told in June that Heritage Canada would no longer support the project. This project luckily had the support of provincial funding partners.

Another organization told us:

A permanent and priority position to ensure the proper operation of the association was not filled for four months after the employee's departure. Since September, another permanent position went from four days a week to three days a week.

Finally another one told us:

We encouraged some of our employees to take summer leave without pay, we reduced the hours of part-time employees and reduced the employer's contributions to permanent employee benefits.

● (0915)

You will agree with me that these are not the ideal conditions to improving the ability of our communities to live in French.

The poll taught us something else that's very important: a number of local organizations rely on financial support from their provincial or territorial umbrella organization while waiting for the confirmation of funding. This is a very enlightening and worrying piece of news. It is enlightening because it shows the important role that our provincial and territorial umbrella organizations play in supporting the development of services in French to people in the regions. However, it is worrying because if the umbrella organization experiences difficulties because of funding delays, the entire provincial or territorial community network is compromised.

A final element of the poll will no doubt be of interest to you: we asked respondents to tell us by what date in previous years they generally received their contribution agreement and their first payment. This allowed us to confirm on the one hand the fact that people are waiting longer this year, but also to determine that this is a systemic problem being experienced year after year. One thing is clear, our organizations do not want to experience next year what they went through this year and what they have been experiencing for years. The situation needs to change.

What is the solution? We would like to bring your attention to various considerations. First, in order to make the examination and application approval administration process easier, we should ask ourselves whether it is really necessary for all projects without exception to go through the minister's office. We know that the Department of Canadian Heritage is considering other options to resolve this issue. We have always said and we will say so again: we are not here just to talk about the problems, we want to be part of the solution and we are prepared to work with the government in order to do so.

However, we cannot ignore the problems that exist with regard to governance. In fact, the Official Languages Support Programs Branch and the regional branches of Canadian Heritage with which a number of our organizations deal are two separate entities that both come under two different assistant deputy ministers. This makes it difficult to consider, for example, creating a joint committee bringing together both the government and the FCFA to try to find solutions.

In conclusion, I want to repeat what my predecessor Lise Routhier-Boudreau said before this committee in June. At that time, she said that organizations and communities are in favour of a responsible use of public funds that produce results, but that approval delays and disbursement delays clearly hinder achieving results. I want to echo those comments and add the following information: new policy on transfer payments clearly states that risk

management must not become a way to avoid risk. Allow me to quote the following excerpt from the policy:

Supporting strengthened accountability for public monies and better results for Canadians, this policy requires that transfer payments be managed in a manner that is sensitive to risks, that strikes an appropriate balance between control and flexibility, and that establishes the right combination of good management practices, streamlined administration and clear requirements for performance.

However, the current delays and desire to avoid risks are having the quite ironic result of creating risk. We are creating risk in terms of projects' success. We are creating risk in terms of the survival of community infrastructure or creating risk with regard to social and economic vitality. As we indicated in June, it makes no sense, when you're trying to stimulate the Canadian economy, to adopt an approach that is leading to job losses and undermining our community structures.

Thank you very much. I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kenny.

We will now begin our first round with Mr. Pablo Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Kenny. First, I want to congratulate you on your election.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Thank you.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We are familiar with your lengthy résumé. You are a woman of experience and conviction. You have always been involved in issues that concern communities. It is our opinion that the FCFA is in good hands.

Ms. Bossé, good morning. It's always a pleasure to see you. We must also salute the work done by Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau, and everything she has done in the past.

The situation is serious. That is why you are here today. A few months ago, we began this conversation, and this has led to our discussion today. I think it's serious as well as sad. We must encourage and not discourage organizations working throughout the country.

I like the fact that, in your approach, you talk about the situation and propose some solutions too. I think that is important. We mustn't just criticize, we must also seek ways to move forward.

You say that a number of respondents had to use their lines of credit and that the organizations have to absorb the interest charges. Does the government then pay those charges?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Canadian Heritage does not pay the interest charges paid by associations.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: So, it is a net loss.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: It is a net loss. I must also say that we can use lines of credit only when we have a letter of confirmation from Canadian Heritage. Otherwise, a bank will not give a not-for-profit organization a line of credit if the funding has not been confirmed by someone.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I understand that the government is not taking very many risks. In fact, the organizations are the ones assuming all the risks, when they need to hire or retain an employee without any confirmation, and they are then the victims afterwards.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: True. I can give you a concrete example. Just before the Acadian World Congress this year, some organizations in Atlantic Canada had not yet received their funding for programming or projects allowing them to take part in that event. They were told that it would happen at their own risk because they had not yet received confirmation. They were still awaiting such confirmation and had not yet received it a few days before the congress.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: When I went to Newfoundland, that was the case with the person who was supposed to represent that province. Did that gentleman receive the money and did he go to the congress?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: His funding was confirmed just a few days before the Acadian World Congress.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Does he still occupy that position? I remember having a talk with him. He told me he had not received a confirmation, he did not have the money and he was going to have to fire himself because he was the only employee and he did not have a cent left.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: He still occupies the position and he did receive confirmation. As I said, without a confirmation, you cannot use a line of credit because that makes you incur net losses. Those losses are charged to us, not to Canadian Heritage.

Ironically, if you don't spend all the money given to you, you have to give it back to Canadian Heritage. We have no objection to that. However, if we don't do it within a certain timeframe, we have to pay interest to Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: And you must not be late.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I am talking about less than one month's delay. If you do not give the money back within a month, you have to pay interest.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Send them a cheque by fax.

You stated that there have been more delays this year. Do you know exactly why?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: It is a rather special year because official languages programs were renewed in 2008-2009. This was also a year where two-year applications are filed, which meant that all programming also had to be approved. That represents an increase in applications every two years.

• (0925)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We also got the impression that there are many more files that go all the way up to the minister's office. Is that the case? That means additional delays. Instead of decentralizing decision-making, it is being centralized and that necessarily leads to a bottleneck.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: To our knowledge, all contribution agreements have to go through the office of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, whether they are submitted by the OLSPB of that department or by regional offices in the provinces and territories,

who go directly to the minister's office without going through the OLSPB.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez. I am sure you will agree that five minutes go by very fast when you are in good company.

We will continue with Mr. Richard Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Congratulations, Ms. Kenny. I would not err in saying "long live the Fransaskoisie!".

Good morning, Ms. Bossé.

Last June, the committee did indeed decide to go ahead with this extremely important study. In my experience, this is a recurring problem. I get the impression that from the day the Official Languages Act was promulgated and organizations were given opportunities to combat the assimilation of francophones in Canada, they have had trouble obtaining the funds within reasonable timeframes for the creation of the programs demanded by the federal government. It was true regardless of whether Liberals or Conservatives were in power. It seems to be the administrative structure that is at fault. I cannot blame any particular government, but this has been going on for far too long. I have met members of the Quebec Community Group Network who are in the same situation. These are Quebec anglophones.

We know what the situation is like. We know how harmful it is. We know our history: you only receive crumbs to fight assimilation put forward by provincial governments for decades under the spiteful auspices of the federal government. Despite that, communities are being asked to take charge of their affairs, to be responsible, to be accountable and to assume all the responsibilities that the government is not taking on in this context. It is not a bad thing for you to be in charge, because you are far more aware of the situation on the ground.

We are looking for solutions. Could you tell us how you would feel if there were no longer a need to go through a minister to get the authorization to issue the cheque? Quite often, it is on somebody's desk and there are many other things to take care of first. The Department of Canadian Heritage is vast, it is very big. There were many, many files at the time. In what way would not having to always go through the minister improve the situation?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: First of all, most applications are submitted to the regions, in the case of the provinces and territories. The Department of Canadian Heritage staff who are there are familiar with the organizations in place and work with them.

There are indeed some organizations that present a greater risk. Most of these organizations have a significant history. Some improvements have been made when it comes to multi-year applications. When applications are approved, the funding is assured. This year, these applications became due, and further applications had to be submitted which had to be examined once again, thus leading to delays. We understand that these multi-year applications are only granted to organizations who have a good track record and are stable. We will ask for a streamlined process for those types of organizations.

There is a lot of red tape involved in submitting an application and having it evaluated. In fact, the application is often submitted to the Department of Canadian Heritage which then sends it to a management committee. That committee makes a recommendation to the Department of Canadian Heritage which approves it before sending it to Ottawa, where everything is sent to the minister's office. That kind of operating structure should be reviewed, including all the red tape involved in these binders — we are serious when we say binders for funding applications. The staff in the regions should be allowed to approve everything rather than sending it all here.

When a minister's office has to approve hundreds if not thousands of binders, the whole process becomes unduly lengthy.

• (0930)

Ms. Suzanne Bossé (Director General, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): It is also important to examine the whole issue of governance between regional offices that come under an assistant deputy minister who is different from the assistant deputy minister responsible for national files at the OLSPB, the Official Languages Support Programs Branch.

Moreover, with regard to the fact that everything has to be approved by the minister's office, we know full well that in the past, projects of over one million dollars had to be authorized by the minister, whereas those under one million dollars could be approved by the deputy minister. That is certainly an option that should be considered because it would surely accelerate the process.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: You're welcome.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Yvon Godin, our second deputy chair.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all I would like to congratulate you. I was there when you emerged victorious. The way all this took place was very interesting. Even your adversaries, who are now colleagues who work with you, really liked the process. It went very well.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Thank you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: My colleague Mr. Nadeau sent you his warmest greetings from Saskatchewan, but I am sending them from Sainte-Rose, New Brunswick.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Thank you very much.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We are aware of the problem: the money is not coming in. We have to find some solution. This did not start yesterday. It was already a problem when the previous government was in power, but we can see that things are getting worse. How can we solve this?

First, I would ask that you give the clerk a copy of the brief you read this morning.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I have already done so.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We would be able to obtain a copy later, if the text has not been translated.

I'm thinking in particular of organizations and programs that have been in existence for years. We know they're going to continue. I don't know when this was submitted to the government, but wouldn't it be possible to do so long enough in advance so that when budgets are tabled in the spring, they can't claim that it took until September to finish the work? Quite often, I hear that projects are submitted in November or December. It's as if these people were sitting down at a desk and said they didn't have to start working on this until May. Under the circumstances, it really is the government's fault because they didn't take a look at this file.

I'd like to know when you submit your applications.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: It varies from province to province, but you're right to say that in December, we already start submitting draft projects. The programming is done at the end of the calendar year and not at the end of the fiscal year, that is in November. You mustn't forget that there are two envelopes: programming and projects. Programming is what ensures the core funding that an organization receives which allows it to hire staff to offer minimum service. Projects are above and beyond the programming. If you can't even ensure an employee's basic salary, you have a problem.

Applications are submitted in November.

• (0935)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Ms. Kenny, that doesn't make sense. It's not as if this problem had come up yesterday and that only one party was guilty. I've been a member of Parliament for years and I've always heard about this problem. We've toured regions of the country and everywhere people told us about this problem. How can an organization function if nobody is working on this? It's completely ridiculous. In Newfoundland, people have to phone us. According to what Pablo was saying, he's also gotten phone calls. I've gotten some too. A week before the Acadian World Congress, these people were still looking for money in order to send a delegate. That shows you to what extent the situation has become ridiculous. We're aware of the problem: they're not interested in giving money. It's as simple as that. If they were, the money would be available and they would find a solution. This is something that we can discuss with the department a little later.

If your application is submitted in December and examined immediately, it seems to me that a cheque could be cut in March.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I agree with you entirely. I'd like to point out that an application fills a binder. Canadian Heritage has to examine the content of the binder and approve it. Personally, if I go to the bank to get a loan, I'm not asked to provide enough information to fill a binder. I'll spend the money as I see fit once I have it in my pocket.

I want to point out that we have nothing against accountability. We have demonstrated a responsible attitude toward public funds, and as far as most organizations go, we have a good track record. Some organizations are just emerging. We want to make sure that we don't have to fill up a binder. That operation slows down the process, not to mention that there's an entire internal approval process.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Let me give you an example. Canadian Heritage has an office in Moncton with reliable people, as far as I can see. Otherwise, they should not be there. Regional organizations take their projects to Moncton. The staff in Moncton already knows the organizations. They can go through the binder rather quickly and tell the department what their recommendations are, that the follow-up is the same as in previous years, that that is what they recommend, that they have good notes on the organization, that it is serious and that it is doing good work. There is no need to go and get someone from Ottawa who will not understand anything in the binder and who will ask questions for six months. That is one of the problems. The decisions should be more local, and the recommendations too.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I agree with you about decentralization, but there again, current governance raises a problem with respect to how to decentralize.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

We will now go to Mrs. Shelly Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Good morning and congratulations, Ms. Kenny. It is nice to see your enthusiasm. Please pass on my congratulations to Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau, who did a very good job.

Since my election, I am gaining a better understanding of what I was hearing in my riding, since I have lived in a minority community for a long time. As Mr. Nadeau said, the situation has existed for years; it recurs. Receiving funding takes a long time.

So we are here to help you, and you are here to help us understand how to proceed. I greatly appreciated you mentioning solutions, and I thank you for them.

Personally, I was very happy to learn that the government had provided an unprecedented amount as part of the Road map for communities. That is a step forward, but how do you access the funding? I know that this year, as you pointed out, was very different, because the Treasury Board had to renew and examine all files for April 1, 2009, which meant a complete renewal cycle. So I understand that that was a huge challenge this year.

Now, with the support of Minister Moore, we expect multi-year agreements, as requested. We are working on that. Moreover, Minister Moore has already done so in the area of culture, among others, but there was also new funding, like for Music Showcases, translation, and so on. That is fine, but we must have a serious discussion with officials and departments in order to come up with some solutions, as you said.

I would like an update on the situation in your organizations and to know what your relations with people working in the region are. Are they good?

• (0940)

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Generally, yes. The contribution agreement allows for some flexibility in our operations. There are regions where that poses a problem. It is not that the relations are bad, but certain things are imposed on us that are not imposed in another region. So when we get together, we realize that things are not done the same way everywhere, which is fine, in some ways, because it gives us some flexibility.

However, we realize that in certain regions, officials impose restrictions that others do not have and which are not justified. So we discussed that with Canadian Heritage, and we are now going to work on agreeing on a broader framework.

Relations are generally good. The problem is not with not the relations, interpersonal or other.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Can you tell me about the regional differences you alluded to? Ms. Bossé said there was a lot of paperwork. What are the differences you talked about?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: In Saskatchewan, for example, there is a management committee which studies funding requests that have already been analyzed once by Canadian Heritage. The management committee is comprised of members from the community, including members of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise. It is a subcommittee which meets and makes recommendations to Heritage Canada.

In Newfoundland, until this year, there was a committee comprised of bilingual and francophone people who were not active within the community and who did not have the right to be members of another organization or committee, and which decided on behalf of the community how to invest the money or funding. Further, this committee did not ask any questions of the community; it simply received the requests.

When I was a member of the ACF, I evaluated funding applications, and I can tell you that we had questions with regard to every application. We therefore held public meetings.

It is rather difficult to accept that a group of people, who are not active in the community and who don't really know the community, make decisions without even putting questions to those proposing projects in order to obtain clarification, and then recommend to Canadian Heritage who should obtain funding.

In Newfoundland, people said that there was no other process in place and that it was the same everywhere, when that is not the case. We had discussions with Canadian Heritage, of course, and we were told that they would give us that flexibility.

The Chair: Very well.

Thank you very much, Ms. Glover.

We will now move on to Ms. Zarac.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Good morning.

Thank you for being here today. I would also like to thank you for conducting the survey. Congratulations. You have provided us with a recent snapshot of the situation, which gives us even more latitude. Again, congratulations.

You said that 72% of organizations have to take out a loan or a line of credit, which forces them to pay interest. Further, you also said that if people were late in providing a report on a project, they might be subject to penalties.

I have the impression that, in some situations, the project is more expensive than whatever funding may have been received. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: That's correct. Since we often receive the funding late, we will decide not to go ahead with a project, especially when we have not received confirmation and when we are told that if we spend the money, we will be assuming all the risks.

Take the example of a one-year project. If we receive funding in October, it is clear and obvious that we will not spend our own money to hire someone to see the project through from April to October. We don't have the money, the nerves or the resources to do that. Therefore, we have to work twice as hard. Of course, we need to hire two people, we will have to spend more money to get things more quickly. Clearly, projects often end up costing us more than we had banked on.

• (0945)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: How long does it normally take to get the funding for a project after you have received confirmation?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: It always depends on the province, territory or organization. It also depends on whether people have questions. Sometimes, Canadian Heritage will ask questions. But from the moment you receive confirmation, it usually takes several months before a cheque is sent.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Sometimes, when people have questions, this delays things, doesn't it?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: That's not the case when funding has been confirmed.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: What kinds of questions are asked?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Sometimes the rationale behind a project is questioned. Questions will be asked about the project itself.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: There will be questions despite the big black binder.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: That's right.

Several communities, for example in Saskatchewan, have a management committee. This committee asks many questions and makes sure that the applications are prepared correctly before sending them out with recommendations. However, sometimes there are additional questions regarding an organization, a program or part of a program.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: In your view, if the big black binder which you are obliged to provide was smaller, do you think that Canadian Heritage would still have enough information to decide whether a project is good or not?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Yes, absolutely, and we hope to work with Canadian Heritage to make the binder smaller. Of course, we still wish to remain accountable. We also want Canadian Heritage, the government, to be accountable as well. We want to make sure that the money is well spent.

However, we are convinced that there is no need for the big binder. I always laugh when I talk about the big binder. There was a report on Radio-Canada which showed a big binder with teeth! The report was on funding and funding applications by communities.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You mentioned that you were willing to sit down with Canadian Heritage to work on that.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Absolutely. Then again, the federal government would have to have a system of good governance which would provide for an effective committee.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I imagine that you have already made that suggestion to Canadian Heritage.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Absolutely. Several times.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: What was the reaction?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: We were told that they were working on that issue. I have to say that they recently asked us to sit down with them. However, we have asked them several times already to invite us when they... They are also looking at reducing the paperwork and I have to admit that there has been some progress. We asked them to consult with us so that we could help them streamline the process. However, the invitation never came.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You are still waiting for an invitation.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Indeed.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you. We will see what the committee can do in that regard.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Zarac.

We will now give the floor to the member of the Bloc québécois, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Earlier, Ms. Bossé added a few words to what was said by Ms. Kenny with regard to the way the funding is distributed. Would you also like to add something?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: I simply wanted to mention two things. First, concerning the structure, I would say that the fact there is both programming and projects can be problematic, because it has been years since there was an increase in what is usually called program spending, that is spending which basically helps an organization to provide services. Instead of increasing that type of funding, it was decided that more money would be spent on projects, which forced organizations to develop projects to get a meagre 15%, at most, of funding to cover their basic administration costs and to implement a project. This is a problem because it is precisely the projects that take so long to get approved, which means that there is even less time to complete the project. Once again, this is a matter of risk management.

This is important for certain organizations, such as umbrella or national organizations which have been around for a long time, to manage risk. For the government, it is important to collaborate with these organizations. That would be the first step. Perhaps then it would not be necessary to fill out all of the paperwork, the same number of forms, as new applicants.

When I refer to investment, the Roadmap is a good example, because the Government of Canada has invested in it to a degree which is without precedent. This is true. Unfortunately, this does not help community organizations which deliver services to Canadians, except for the amount of \$400,000. This also affects our organizations.

● (0950)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Do you still encounter situations where you have to produce reports on a regular basis, such as several within one year, for certain projects? I remember a situation relating to the workers' cooperatives of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française. We had to hire someone to manage the project and to write a report every three months for a two-year project. It was a lot of work and took away energy which otherwise would have been directed at the regions—it was a pan-Canadian project—but we had to do it to make progress.

Do you still face this kind of constraint?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Of course, we have to produce reports for the department, but I am very pleased to say that under the 2009-2011 contribution arrangement, we have to submit one less report in the course of the year. This has already made a huge difference in terms of reducing our paperwork. So, certainly, our message was heard.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: But we agree that it is important to produce reports because people have to be accountable for the money they spend.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The problem lay with the frequency of the reports which had to be filed for projects which were very specific and which were already heavy on paperwork. It was a lot to manage.

If there was one thing we could do right away to improve the situation, what would it be?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: To be honest, it would be to send us the cheque as quickly as possible, or the letter of confirmation to those organizations which would not have received it yet. There has to be a way to get the money out more quickly. The first funding instalment only gets sent out at the end of April. And apart from the financial burden, there is the issue of staff turnover. Employees are not stupid: they know that their contract may not be renewed on April 1st. They already start looking for a new job in January. We have an incredibly high turnover rate; in our communities, people leave after less than two years on the job.

We really need to sit down together and figure out how to get the funding out more quickly while respecting the Auditor General's guidelines. As Ms. Bossé said, some organizations are a much less risky proposition. Let's make a list of the organizations which have to fill out the paperwork and go ahead with those who present the lowest risk.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Nadeau.

We will now move on to Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, ladies, and welcome to the Official Languages Committee. I am not an official member of this committee; I am substituting for another member. That being said, I am always interested in hearing what minority language communities have to say.

Ms. Kenny, you talked about expert panels in Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. Should these groups still exist or are they just another administrative layer? Do you have any other solutions?

You said that some groups always applied for this or that. Is it too complicated to have these groups make applications instead of the organizations?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: No. Some provinces and territories have their own system. In Saskatchewan, for example, there is a committee comprised of members of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise. That model works very well. In Newfoundland, there was a problem because people said that the committees did not know who they were, yet the committees set the priorities and decided where the money should be invested in a given year.

In other provinces, such as Ontario, Canadian Heritage reviews the applications. There is no committee of experts, which is a good thing because there are so many applications. Communities know what their priorities are. There is a lot of discussion with regard to priorities within the umbrella organization. The organization has a lot of leeway, which is something Canadian Heritage agreed to. This year, that discussion took place and communities were given the flexibility they need in how they managed their priorities and funding.

Usually, the organization was designated... It varied from one province to the next. In certain cases, it was even designated by Canadian Heritage. In Saskatchewan, it was designated by the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, and in Ontario, Canadian Heritage simply looked after the situation.

● (0955)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So it depends on the province where the groups are located. That's my understanding.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Yes. Previously, the decision was taken by the Department of Canadian Heritage. But now, they have told us they want to work with us to find the best way of managing the funding. We are very pleased to be given more leeway.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Organizations operating in a minority situation are in the best position to know what their needs are because they operate on the ground. At one point, there was a lot of paperwork. Do you feel that the Department of Canadian Heritage is listening to you now?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: We have always found that the department was open-minded. We understand that certain programs need to be worked on, except that some of them need to be reviewed.

Certainly, the Department of Canadian Heritage listens to us. We have a good working relationship with Heritage officials. They also have to deal with paperwork; we are not the only ones to do so. Red tape is costly to everyone: government and communities. They understand that we need to work together, but nothing has been done in that regard until now. The officials have listened to us, and we have made some suggestions, but we really want to work in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage to find solutions.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much, ladies.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Boucher.

Ms. Boucher also happens to be the parliamentary secretary for the Status of Women. You are always welcome here, Ms. Boucher.

We will now move on to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to hear more about the unfortunate fact that the funding does not reach communities when they need it. For example, an organization might be forced to lay off people or use a line of credit, or even credit cards, which is something I would not do. Maybe that's what they need to do. Perhaps if every organization said that if they did not get the support they need, they would stop their operations, that might put pressure on the government. I know that would not be easy, but something has to change.

Let's take the case of an ongoing project. We are not talking about a new organization which sprung up overnight with a project for July or August. It is clear that the application would be reviewed. I'm thinking long term. You put in an application in December. If we are to be efficient and if the money is to be spent wisely, it does not make sense for a project slated to begin in July or August to receive funding in October. So you have to hurry up and spend the money before the start of your next budget. How much money has to be invested and how much work needs to be done to see the project through? To what extent does this hurt communities? I would like to know.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: It hurts a lot. I have to admit that there are several negative consequences, including a high staff turnover. Indeed, doubling our efforts means working twice as hard with the same amount of money. You don't get more money because you waited six months for it, you don't get back the interest you've had to pay, either. There are consequences in terms of finances and human resources, and in terms of the success of the project.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am more interested in the success of the project. It's all very well and good to talk about all of these consequences, but what happens when you do a project, and then simply say that it worked because you got some funding, but that because it was done in October it made no difference? That's what I'm afraid of.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: A little earlier, Suzanne talked at length about projects. Our organizations submit projects to compensate for the lack of basic program funding; programs are the way we deliver services to our communities. I will be very direct and frank with you this morning. We carry out projects in our communities. We apply for funding for a project one year and maybe the next, but at some point we are told that the application is not for a project. If a project involves creating a website for an organization, but in the three subsequent years we don't get any funding to update the website, and if we don't have the resources to do it ourselves, the website will remain unchanged for three years. So what impact does the lack of subsequent funding, or an increase in funding, have on the organization?

• (1000)

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's not worth having a very lengthy document. We will have to ask the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Ms. Bossé, earlier on you said that there were two groups. Do you have any suggestions? Should the government appoint someone? Should there be a coordinator to oversee the whole thing? If one operates in eastern Canada and the other in western Canada, I'm sorry, but they won't talk to each other. Shouldn't there be one person to bring all of these things together and indicate what the needs are in each community?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: As far as governance is concerned, the FCFA is very open to the idea of meeting with Heritage officials. Better yet, why wouldn't the Privy Council not coordinate all the programs which are delivered to minority official language communities? This certainly calls for an overall perspective. It would be very important to understand why there is this dichotomy within the Department of Canadian Heritage. Why are projects and programs reviewed by two different departments and two assistant deputy ministers? If we looked at that and at risk management, I think we could make a lot of progress.

There has also been staff turnover in regional offices. It is not only happening in our communities. I believe the Department of Canadian Heritage is looking at this situation right now, because it could have serious consequences. However, there is a potential number of specific solutions which would be easy to identify, and which could easily be discussed around one table. We have approached the OLSPB, and we have asked for the creation of a joint committee comprised of representatives of the FCFA and government. The door is open to discussions, and we are very pleased about that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

We will now begin our third round with Mr. D'Amours.

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

Thanks you, Ms. Bossé and Ms. Kenny. Ms. Kenny, congratulations on your appointment.

You said that the Department of Canadian Heritage seems to be listening to you. It's one thing to be listening, but it's another to get results. It's all very well and good for departmental officials to say that they also have to deal with red tape, but it was not members of Parliament who created the ton of paperwork you have to fill out. Officials from the department have to show leadership and reduce the paper burden. They complain that the process is complicated, but they are the ones who have to streamline the process.

You have to fill out several forms, and often it is volunteers who do the work. Some organizations may have several employees, but others do not. Therefore, volunteers are found to fill out the ton of paperwork, and the situation is made much worse because there is no guarantee that the funding will come through.

I talked about achieving results. You said that some organizations are not able to deliver services to Canadians. Three problems were mentioned. First, the time an organization has to wait to receive confirmation of funding. Second, the loss of employees because of this wait. Third, services could naturally not be delivered if organizations don't hear from the government in six months or longer.

On top of all of these problems, when an organization has not received confirmation, especially when the wait exceeds six months and there remain only five or six months before year-end, when the organization receives confirmation, followed by the funding, it might have to hire people to compensate for the previous loss of employees, and it might not be able to provide the service or the program to Canadians.

The government sends you money and then reminds you that it's December 31, so don't forget to pay it back. It's as if it was asking you, since you finally got the money, not to "bug" it anymore, but not to forget to pay it back. It looks good on paper when funding has been given, but it would be interesting to look at the government's books and see how much funding had to be returned by organizations because they received their confirmation much too late, or because the funding still had not been approved six months later. There are several other factors, including the fact that the files are still sitting on the minister's desk. I can't believe that the minister reviews each application.

I worked for the Business Development Bank of Canada where I was responsible for evaluating funding applications, which I then passed on to my boss for final authorization. The applications were not sent to the president of the Business Development Bank of Canada. Under the organization's hierarchy, decisions were taken at a lower lever for greater efficiency.

If the minister, who has other responsibilities, has to review the applications, he will never get the job done. He might be able to review a couple of applications, but don't believe for a moment that the minister of Canadian Heritage, while on a plane between Ottawa and Vancouver, will pull out his binder of applications and decide to approve one of them this week because it seems to make sense. What about the other applications, then?

I'm not giving you time to respond, but I would like to come back to what I said. The fact of the matter is that organizations can't deliver services to Canadians because they have to wait too long for confirmation of funding; they are losing employees and are not getting approval even after six months. This means that even if they wanted to, they cannot fulfill their mandate. Is that correct?

• (1005)

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Yes, and as a consequence, the Government of Canada is not able to fulfill its obligations to francophone citizens.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I am not asking you to comment on this matter, but the fact that it takes so much time may be intentional. Perhaps we should be asking how much money goes back to the Government of Canada compared to what is paid out. We may be in for a surprise. Five per cent of your organizations have not received an answer in six months, regardless of the amount of money requested, whether it be 2, 3, 10, 15 or 20 million dollars. This means that this money will at one point be sent to them and all of it will have to be returned. You are not able to provide the services, even with the best will in the world, because someone, somewhere, is putting obstacles in your way.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. D'Amours.

[English]

We'll now turn to Madame Tilly O'Neill-Gordon.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations.

As you know, it's my first term on the language committee, and being an MP from the riding of Miramichi, New Brunswick, which has many francophone constituents, I look forward to sitting on this committee and learning more about the francophone issues and

helping in any way I can. I also want to congratulate you, Madame Kenny, and welcome Suzanne Bossé.

When I listened to you speaking, I heard you mention the fine that, if you don't repay the money, is left over. Am I correct? I'm wondering how long this was in effect. Was this idea in effect under the former Liberal government? Is it something new that just came about, or how has it come about?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: It's not something new; it has been in effect for a long time. In addition to that, I'd like to add that we are required by *nos bailleurs de fonds*....

I'm sorry, my English is usually very good—I'm a translator—but for some reason this morning, it's not coming on.

• (1010)

[Translation]

The finance people are asking us to manage this money very well, and that is what we are doing. We have balanced budgets. At times we may have a small surplus of \$100 or \$200, that we are asked to return even if we have incurred expenditures of \$1,000, throughout the year, because of late payments.

To answer your question very simply, these problems have been around for a long time.

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Okay, thank you.

I attended many of the francophone celebrations, and I wonder whether the communities were relying on just sources from Heritage Canada or whether there are other fundings in your operations for these activities.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Usually the organizations will get funding from different sources. Heritage Canada is our main source of financing; however, we have contributions as well from the provincial government. Some of them are municipal. In the case of the Congrès mondial acadien, which was absolutely wonderful—I was there for it as well—there was funding at very different levels for different organizations.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Also, when you say the groups need more funding for the programming of day-to-day operations, is this the goal towards...? Exactly what would the money be spent on: more staff, different salaries, different outreach, or what?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Right now, we have employees in different areas. We have a community manager in an area who might be paid \$18,000 with no benefits, and who has been there for years. That happens quite a bit in our community. We need funding not to give humongous raises. We consider ourselves to be public servants for the francophone community and to be offering services that the government is legally obligated to provide. We are looking at equitable salary for our employees.

I have to say that the francophone sector is not the only sector that's suffering like that. The entire volunteer sector is, across Canada. We need more resources. We're so efficient.... Actually, we're inefficient. We're doing extraordinary work; we're being inefficient because of our lack of resources. We could be even more organized. We don't have time to organize ourselves. We're looking at making sure we have adequate funding just to provide the basic services, adequate funding to provide decent salaries for our employees. We're not looking at humongous salaries. Just decent salaries would be nice, and benefits to our employees, which we can't provide. And we're looking to organize and really be more efficient.

We're doing extraordinary work, and as I said, not just the francophones but the entire volunteer sector. But the under-financing is quite big.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: As I go around my constituency, I find that more and more communities are benefiting from these projects. Do you find that these projects are reaching out now into more communities?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I'm sorry. I couldn't hear you.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Do you find that these projects are now reaching out into more communities? It seems that more and more communities in my constituency are taking advantage of these projects.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Yes. If you're talking about the projects that are funded by.... Well, more people are participating in our activities, which doesn't mean that the funding is getting bigger; it just means that we're getting more outreach.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Madame O'Neill-Gordon.

So we will finish this third round.

[*Translation*]

We will now turn the floor over to Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay: Thank you very much.

I would like to thank you, ladies, for coming here today.

You did in fact talk about a salary of \$18,000 without any benefits, right?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I am not saying that it is the same situation everywhere, but this is the case in certain locations.

Ms. Monique Guay: According to what you have said, these people have been there for a long time. This is quite an abnormal situation and these people are at a disadvantage.

Some people have worked in groups, associations or other organizations for a long time and have acquired experience that is essential for the smooth running of their organization. Obviously, when these people see that the money is not coming in, they leave. You are then forced to completely retrain new staff. You lose money, time and energy. Things must not work very well, under such conditions. With Canada Summer Jobs, students receive on-the-job training, often in their field of study. This is really a very educational experience. In many cases, they then go on to volunteer in certain organizations because they have truly enjoyed their experience.

Do you find it very difficult to recruit people, whether they be salaried staff or volunteers, because of this situation?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I must say that our staff, even the volunteers, suffer from burnout. The turnover rate in our communities is horrendous. In 2008, in some communities, the turnover rate was approximately 68% for a period of less than two years. It must not be forgotten that the community development cycle is from five to ten years. If we have to renew our staff every two years, we will get to the point where we will no longer really be able to make any headway. You are talking about an individual who is working for a salary of \$18,000. However, small centres employ only one person, and this individual, in addition to doing community development, must look after accounting, promotion, volunteer coordination, social activities and, in many cases, cleaning the bathrooms of the community centre. Because of all these tasks, there is very little time left to do community development.

Some small centres have only one employee because they do not have the means to pay for any more. Indeed, they do not even have the means to pay the person they have hired a suitable salary. The individual who has to perform all of these tasks cannot do so in 40 hours. Our employees put in a lot of unpaid overtime. They are offered time off as compensation, but they wind up either not being available to provide service to the public or volunteering for their organization. And I am not counting the volunteer hours that they do for other organizations in their community.

Ms. Monique Guay: Ms. Bossé.

• (1015)

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We work with various departments and it is very important for them and for our communities, needless to say, that we work jointly and in optimum fashion when there is a staff turnover of 60%, 65% or 68%.

Ms. Monique Guay: That does not make any sense.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Indeed, it is very difficult.

Ms. Monique Guay: It is not functional.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Indeed. Some of our member organizations submitted computer-related projects to provide services to the public. Among other things, there was a project to renew the websites and make them more interactive. Unfortunately, it took so long to confirm the funding and the budgets were slashed so drastically that we were forced to simply turn the requests down. We talk about the accountability of the government and the various departments. I think it would be important to have an accountability framework for communities, but one that would be just as important for governments, as far as results were concerned.

Ms. Monique Guay: You are re-submitting the same application. In fact, you are always filing the same application, as a community centre. As you said, you have one employee. In fact, you are filing the same application. Are you required to fill a binder and send it in each time you apply? This rule needs to be loosened; it's ridiculous. It is nonsensical since they know that you are applying for the same thing over again. It is recurrent, the same person will be employed. Furthermore, we are not talking about astronomical salaries. We need to find a different formula for these kinds of applications.

The Chair: Perhaps an update needs to be added, and only the dates would need to be changed.

We will now conclude our third round of questions. Mr. Petit would like to question the witnesses.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Do I have five minutes?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Good morning, Ms. Kenny and Bossé.

Ms. Bossé, we have already met on numerous occasions. You are one of our favourite witnesses.

A little earlier, Mr. D'Amours described three things. You had talked about them during the previous session. In fact, they are the reason for your request today. You said that something was not working. Naturally, we are trying to find a solution. Earlier, Ms. Kenny said that it was not all bad, that some things were good. We understand that you are between a rock and a hard place. You do not want to overly criticize us or say we are too nice, we understand that.

I want to ask about the machine. As Mr. D'Amours said, the minister cannot read these binders every day. When you talked about how thick the binders were, you indicated with your hands that they were about a foot high, perhaps even higher. To say that the minister would be responsible is completely irresponsible. He cannot read them all by himself, he needs help. We are talking about deputy ministers. Even if there are many deputy ministers, given the number of binders received, they cannot read them all. So we need to keep going down the line.

I want to know what kind of contact you have with those people down the line, the people with whom you have been talking for the past few years and with whom you are on a first-name basis. Are you telling them that the machine is broken? It is easy for a public servant to say that it is the boss's fault. That is what we hear most often. Once you have filed your application—and God knows that it is thick—it winds up in the hands of some public servant. Does it get stuck at the first level? I am trying to understand. I want to know to whom I need to speak. Do you understand what I mean? That is the problem.

• (1020)

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: In fact, as was mentioned earlier, Canadian Heritage listens closely to us. With regard to results, once the department receives the application, we have no clue because we are not part of the machine. How many people need to go over it, how many people need to sign it between the office of the officer and that of the minister? I cannot say. I have never heard anyone from the department say that it was the fault of the minister's office. I think that question is best put to Canadian Heritage. They would be in a better position to explain it to you. Honestly, I do not know. Perhaps cuts need to be made, to reduce the number of signatures needed before it goes to the minister's office. Does it all need to go to his office? I cannot really answer your question.

Mr. Daniel Petit: You have answered it very well. I have already tabled applications for community organizations, in my own province and elsewhere. We had a timetable that showed us what step we were at. We were able to follow its progress. Do you have a structure in hand? You send it all out to the machine, to the bureaucracy, but you do not know who will—

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: The departments are not allowed to disclose the status of a file.

Mr. Daniel Petit: You say that a directive was sent to you?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: It is information that we were given.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Is this verbal or written information that you received?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: Verbal.

Mr. Daniel Petit: This is verbal information to the effect that they did not want to inform you.

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: They are no longer allowed to tell us the stage the application has reached in the process.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Therefore, they can no longer tell you.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Allow me to give you an answer, because I went through that assessment exercise in Saskatchewan, when I was president. As soon as the community association makes its recommendations—usually in February—it is sent to the Department of Canadian Heritage, and that is where we lose track of it. Our local officials will give us some feedback on the substance of the questions and so on, but following that we lose track of it.

However, I can state that in Saskatchewan, the recommendations are made as of February.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, I tabled a motion that is directly related to the subject we are studying today. Even though I do not require unanimous consent, I hope to obtain the support of all members of the committee. I will read it to you, it is quite straightforward:

That the Committee ask the Chair to write to Canadian Heritage requesting the total amount of funding that had to be repaid to the Department by organizations that did not use the funding for various reasons, including the Department's delays in approving the funding, for the years ending on March 31, 2008 and on March 31, 2009.

• (1025)

The Chair: I thank you, Mr. D'Amours. Your motion is in order as it deals with the subject we are studying.

Also, as soon as we have finished with our witnesses, we will be able to let them go so that we can hear comments on this motion. First of all, I would like to finish hearing from the witnesses.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Do you object to our dealing with it?

The Chair: No, but if there are other questions for our witnesses, I would like to proceed with that immediately. If not, I will thank them for their appearance.

Are there any further questions for the witnesses?

Ms. Zarac.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: On a point of order. Could we get a copy of the survey that was done?

The Chair: We will check with Ms. Kenny.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Yes, absolutely.

Other studies had been tabled on this issue by various organizations, the provincial and territorial critics. They dealt with working conditions, but they also contained information on interests and on the cumbersome administration, that is to say the cost of managing the agreement.

The Chair: You could send it to the attention of the clerk, who will have it translated and distributed to the members of the committee.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: That's wonderful.

The Chair: Are there any other points related to the presence of our witnesses?

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I want to ensure that what Ms. Zarac has just asked for is material that might be useful for the report.

The Chair: Yes.

I would like to thank you. This was most enlightening. This meeting has made us aware not only of various problems, but also various solutions that you have proposed. We will continue our work in this regard over the next weeks, particularly with people from the Department of Canadian Heritage. I thank you for having come this morning, which allows us to focus our work and the report that we will eventually draft on this issue.

We now come back to Mr. D'Amours's motion.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, the motion that I tabled deals directly with what we are studying. You have a copy in English and in French.

The Chair: I will reread it, and following that I will hear your observations.

That the Committee ask the Chair to write to Canadian Heritage requesting the total amount of funding that had to be repaid to the Department by organizations that did not use the funding for various reasons, including the Department's delays in approving the funding, for the years ending on March 31, 2008, and on March 31, 2009.

We shall now proceed with questions and comments on Mr. D'Amours's motion.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I am fine, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: I would just like some clarification from the mover of the motion.

Does the motion as tabled cover one year? In any case, in truth, we understand why we are trying to work on this. Does it cover one year or two?

The Chair: It concerns two fiscal years.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. D'Amours, did the repayment of contributions exist before or does it only apply to those years?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, this is the first time I have heard about repayment of contributions. This does not necessarily mean that it was not done in the past. I do not know.

However, it is the first time that I have heard this personally, among all of the times that witnesses appeared before the committee.

It is surprising, but what is even more surprising is the deadline of one month to reimburse, before having to pay interest. I do not want to get into that; I just want to know the amounts that were paid out and what was to be repaid to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The Chair: Mr. Paré wants to emphasize one point, for your information.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): In the report on community organizations that we passed at the end of May or June, 2008, we did some math. We compared the overall envelope that was allocated to this program to the real sums paid out, according to the information we were able to obtain. Eighty-five per cent of the total envelope was spent, according to the performance report that followed.

Therefore, 15% of the total envelope allocated to funding was not spent. The project was not able to use all of the funds, for all of the reasons that the witnesses were able to give us, and possibly because 15% corresponds to the funds that organizations had to send back.

As far as the 85% is concerned, generally speaking the calculations were done for the 2006-2007 fiscal year.

• (1030)

Mr. Daniel Petit: May I ask a question?

The Chair: Therefore, some of the answers are in the report that we passed.

Ms. Glover.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

I'm going to ask in English so I can use both of these wonderful official languages here in our wonderful country.

I just want to make note that I too am interested in what Mr. D'Amours has suggested. However, I find it somewhat hypocritical to be so critical of such a commitment or requirement when it was clear that the witnesses have said that this existed under the Liberal government as well. So I would like to see us go back seven years so we can see the totals and compare appropriately on both sides.

The Chair: Ms. Glover, would you make this a formal amendment to the proposal that is on the table?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Absolutely.

The Chair: So you would recommend that we go back seven years?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Now we will discuss the amendment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We can go back as far as 15 or 20 years. That does not bother me.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Mr. Petit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Petit, do you have any questions or comments?

Mr. Daniel Petit: Yes. My question is for our analyst.

You have the report that you just delivered to us. I do not want to get into a debate. I simply want to know if it is only us or if this has always existed. That is what I wish to know. I will support the decision, but I want to know if it is only us. Did what you described exist in the past?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Since the Standing Committee on Official Languages has existed, this issue has come back regularly.

Mr. Daniel Petit: You did not answer the question. Did the 15% exist or not?

The Chair: I think he pretty well answered the question, Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: All right.

The Chair: Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I move that we go back seven years, if that might solve the problem.

It is not an issue of putting the blame on one person or another, it is an issue of trying to help francophone and anglophone communities. We can see that there is a problem. Money is not well spent because these communities do not receive it in time. They

are unable to launch their projects. We are not helping the communities.

I suggest that we vote on the motion and that we look for a solution. I am not seeking to blame anyone but to find a solution.

The Chair: In line with Mr. Godin's suggestion, if it is the wish of the members of the committee, we can now vote on the amendment

—
Ms. Monique Guay: Perfect.

The Chair: —dealing with the seven years.

(The amendment is agreed to.)

The Chair: We are now voting on the motion as amended, which constitutes a request for the funding that had to be repaid by the organizations to the Department of Canadian Heritage over the course of the last seven years.

(The motion as amended is agreed to.)

The Chair: Before you leave, please be aware that we will be hearing from a witness next Tuesday. It will be the other side of the coin, the anglophone groups. Also, we are going to distribute the proposed schedule that we will discuss in camera during the next meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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