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Mr. Steven Blaney

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•(0910)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning and welcome to this 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We would like to thank the committee clerk, the translators, the committee members and witnesses for coming here this morning. We are flexible, right?

This morning, pursuant to Standing Order 108, we will be holding our second meeting on the study of the impact of approval and disbursement delays on organizations receiving funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

[English]

This morning's meeting is oriented toward English-speaking communities in a minority position.

We have the pleasure to receive the president of the Quebec Community Groups Network, Mr. Robert Donnelly. He is accompanied by the director general, Madame Sylvia Martin-Laforge. Welcome to our committee again. We met last spring, and you're back again.

Also, we have Mr. Lawrence dePoe, executive director of Canadian Parents for French—Québec. As well, for the first time at our committee, we have the executive director of the Regional Association of West Quebecers, Madam Heather Stronach.

Welcome to you. Let's begin with Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Robert Donnelly (President, Quebec Community Groups Network): Thank you, Chairman Blaney. Ladies and gentlemen, *mesdames et messieurs*,

[Translation]

—I would like to inform you, if you have a copy of the statement in French—

An honourable member: They have the English version.

Mr. Robert Donnelly: We made some changes to the French version of the statement. We will be sending the official version today or tomorrow morning. The English version includes all of the changes that we have made over the past two days.

[English]

The Quebec Community Groups Network is obviously pleased to have this opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Official Languages again. We are especially pleased that the committee has

been so generous with its time this morning, with a fabulous turnout. This is the first time the network has been provided the opportunity to participate by itself in the committee's business, and we look forward to evolving our mutual understanding and relationship.

The QCGN would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Pierre Lemieux, Mr. Richard Nadeau, Mr. Yvon Godin, and his wife, Madame Lyna Mainville, for helping the network celebrate the launch of its 15th anniversary in Gatineau just two weeks ago.

As you know, the Quebec Community Groups Network is a not-for-profit organization that brings together 32 Quebec-based organizations that support the English-speaking communities of Quebec. English-speaking Quebecers are one of the two national linguistic minorities recognized in Canada. English-speaking Quebecers are the largest linguistic minority within a linguistic minority in the country, about 994,000 compared to the 997,000 francophones in the rest of Canada.

These English-speaking Quebecers possess strong relationships and ties with both Quebec's francophone majority and Canada's English-speaking majority. The challenges they face to preserve and promote their linguistic space and character, while being supportive of other linguistic minorities and majorities, allows them to understand the need for innovative approaches to sustain and to improve official languages policy in Canada.

People sometimes still say that the English-speaking communities of Quebec are the "best-treated" linguistic minority in Canada. Allow me to offer a few statistics that might contradict this.

Quebec's official language minority retention rate was 69% in 1971, dropping to nearly 50% in 2001. That poses a significant leadership succession problem that has led to an increasing absence of community member leadership of important organizations.

Canadians living in Quebec whose first official language spoken is English are the most bilingual in the country—66% in 2001—but many youth in particular feel disenfranchised from their home province. Anglophones, who constitute 8.2% of the population of Quebec, represent only 0.8% of the province's civil service. In fact, in a 2007 report by the Greater Montreal Community Development Initiative, GMCDI, it was reported that anglophones have a chronically low level of representation in the public service industry in the greater Montreal region. Of the 65,000 people employed in such positions in 2001, anglophones accounted for only 9%, despite the fact that they represent 25% of the labour force. Our young people, 85% of whom are bilingual, are much more likely to be unemployed than their francophone peers. Our seniors, the least likely to have second language skills, maybe just over 30%, are experiencing a severe shortage of assisted living and long-term care facilities in their own first language.

We feel it important to stress the diversity of our communities in terms of ethnic origin, place of birth, religion, and visible minority status. This diversity is most clearly realized in the greater Montreal region, where more than three-quarters of Canada's English minority reside.

Finally, there is an evolving sense of identification within the communities, from English to English-speaking to communities that speak English, reflecting more toward inclusiveness and recognition of generational, ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, and even artistic diversity.

The preamble of the Official Languages Act, 1985, speaks of two official language communities in Canada, one French and the other English. The QCGN is considered by many federal departments as the official representative of the English linguistic minority communities and it's specifically defined as the "official interlocutor" by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

- (0915)

In terms of structure and representation, some parallels can be drawn between the QCGN and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, the national representatives of the francophone linguistic minority communities. The FCFA, for example, counts as members the 12 francophone provincial and territorial organizations, including the L'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, or AFO, and the 10 francophone national sectoral organizations, such as the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, or FJCF, and the Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française de common law, FCFA. The latter ensures "political representation, promotion and development support" for the francophone linguistic minority communities.

The QCGN, on the other hand, works in two spheres. One, it interacts with the Government of Canada at the national level on policy and strategic matters; and two, it interacts with the Government of Canada at the regional level and the Government of Quebec on service and program delivery and regional policy. Obviously we are talking about two different spheres, the national sphere and the regional sphere. The regional sphere includes the regional PCH, but also Quebec. We'd be happy to talk about that later in the question period, if you so choose.

This is a complex environment in which we work daily with numerous stakeholders and sometimes with competing agendas. The success of the English-speaking community is very dependent on the influence we can bring to bear on policy, programs, and initiatives.

In 2008 the QCGN presented a submission to Bernard Lord in the context of the Government of Canada's consultation on linguistic duality and official languages, in which we proposed that the Department of Canadian Heritage re-evaluate its approach to treating the QCGN and, by extension, English-speaking Quebeckers as a regional minority when the latter are one of Canada's two national official language minority communities. We recognize that we are not here today to discuss this point at length, but we'd like to have the opportunity to come back at another time to talk about this matter specifically.

The title for today's business, "Impacts of the Delays in Providing Funding to Beneficiary Organizations from the Department of Canadian Heritage", was found by some of our members, to be honest, to have perhaps a negative connotation. When you start with the impacts and delays, it's hard to think of it always in a positive sense. But as Mr. Blaney reminded us when we were here about four months ago, we had a clear sense by the end of that meeting of what delays and impacts were on the table. As a result, we may have experienced hesitation from some, including some of our member organizations, when we were collecting data on the question. Organizations large and small can sometimes become a little reticent when asked to comment on the performance of their principal and sometimes only source of funding.

From the outset, we must emphasize how pleased and proud the QCGN and its members are to work with the men and women of the Department of Canadian Heritage. We continue to deeply appreciate the hard work the department does to help Canada's English linguistic communities. It is also our contention, however, that funding delays are a result of apolitical or non-political systemic design. These rational problems can be worked on in a spirit of multi-partisanship, with one clear goal in mind: the vitality of Canada's linguistic minority communities.

To gather information to present to you today, the QCGN surveyed its members—as I understand the FCFA did, and came to tell you about it last week—and received 21 responses, with a participation rate of 65%. Just remember that not all 32 of our member organizations are funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The following information is derived from that survey. Of the 86% of the respondents who received the 25% advance on core funding from Canadian Heritage in the 2009-10 fiscal year, 80% received the advance in May 2009, one month late; 10% received it in June 2009, two months late; and 10% had not yet received any funding by July. This is the famous advance funding that one would normally hope to see coming in the first week of April. As a result, respondents reported the effects of financial stress; for example, reliance on credit and difficulty paying bills. This stress, however, is very personal. It is difficult not to feel frustrated when reading one response: "I used my personal Visa for expenses while waiting for funding."

●(0920)

It was also difficult to read how delays directly damaged important community priorities. The Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network reported:

On account of the dire cash-flow situation caused by the delayed advance payment, the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) had no choice but to refuse offers from the Young Canada Works (YCW) program that would have allowed QAHN to hire two students this summer. This will be the first summer in four years that QAHN has not participated in the YCW program.

As of the end of July, no members had received approval of their 2009-10 applications and they had therefore not signed contribution agreements. As a result, respondents did not receive their second payments. Organizations reported severe financial stress, reliance on credit, and non-payment to creditors. Programs were suspended, salaries were not paid, people were laid off, or hours were reduced. At least one executive director was using a personal credit card to cover expenses. Partners and creditors were openly resentful and distrustful. One respondent said that staff were currently working without pay.

On project funding, one out of six respondents still reported their project was unapproved at the time of our survey, meaning last week. Here is one organization's story.

We have submitted many 10- to 12-month projects that were supposed to take place between April or June 2009 to March 2010. We are almost in August, four months after the beginning of the fiscal year and nine months after we submitted some of these projects, and we still haven't got any answer. In addition to that, they are doing second and third calls for projects when they still haven't given us answers about the first call for projects, which is total nonsense.

To know whether you should apply for a second one, you obviously have to know if your first one was approved or not.

The general question asking for comments about the impact of late funding generated messages of frustration. One respondent's response is worth repeating in its entirety:

The impact of late funding:

- (1) It causes partners to raise questions about the integrity and reliability of our organization, and jeopardizes our ability to carry out our action plan and achieve our objectives.
- (2) It creates economic hardship for our staff members and builds up resentment, fear and demoralization. This impedes productivity.
- (3) It concerns our board of directors and executive director - far too much time and energy are spent on twisting and turning to deal with the shortage of funds, detracting from efforts to achieve results.
- (4) It results in poor stewardship of public funds. It is difficult to spend wisely when decisions must be made and actions carried out in a short timeframe. We're on a 6-month cycle of famine and feast. This surely cannot be results-based management.
- (5) It reflects very badly on the Government of Canada. This kind of management gives the strong impression that what the government says and what it does are two different things. Does the government really mean to invest in the vitality of its official-language minorities? Or does it just want to sound as if it is important? Judging by its actions, I would say that, frankly, it doesn't give a damn. If it did, the elected officials would put into place an effective public service and let it do its work.

These are strong points. It would be unfair to say that this is the message we got from everyone, but many organizations felt this strongly about the problems being caused.

As I approach my last page, you are probably asking about the answers and suggestions. We do have a few things to put on the table.

The QCGN supports the aim of the government action plan to reform the administration of grants and contribution programs, and it notes that Canadian Heritage is one of six vanguard departments. The network has noticed with pleasure a reduced administration and reporting burden and looks forward to the full development of the Canadian heritage department's action plan, which will include service standards.

●(0925)

Service standards that are arrived at in conjunction with the networks and other key stakeholders will go a long way in alleviating the frustration and pain experienced by members. These standards will allow organizations to effectively business plan and will provide service and program deliverers a clearer picture of when they will receive funding and who will be able to account if they do not. The accountability is rightly placed at the level of deputy minister, as far as we can see.

Effective risk management is also a key component of the government's action plan. Stable, well-governed institutions with long-standing relationships with the government need not, indeed might I say should not, be subjected to the same application rigour for annual core funding as a more inexperienced or first-time entity. Both, however, of course must be subject to the same audit and accountability regime, but an organization that for fifteen years has been getting pretty well the same funding with very little ups and downs, has always been doing its regular reporting all the time, still has to begin every year like it's all new again and it is being looked at as if it's all new again.

The QCGN wishes to reiterate that some members expressed satisfaction with their funding. Moreover, we believe that delays are neither politically motivated nor attributable to a lack of effort or professionalism by the public servants of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Government is a complicated business, we understand, with billions of dollars entering and leaving thousands of programs for the benefit of Canadians. The systems that carry out this monumental task must be designated to be effective and accountable, especially when they have a reputation to show it. The QCGN and its members are cognizant of this reality and are confident that the Government of Canada is committed to removing the structural impediments that cause funding delays.

Thank you very much. We look forward to trying to answer whatever questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly, for this exhaustive report.

We'll now move to Mr. Lawrence dePoe.

Mr. Lawrence dePoe (Executive Director of Canadian Parents for French - Québec, Quebec Community Groups Network): Good morning. *Bonjour*. Thank you for the invitation this morning. It's a pleasure to be here.

I have a few comments to add to Mr. Donnelly's report.

Canadian Parents for French, as you know, is an organization that has been around since 1977 and since 2004 in Quebec. We have a mission of supporting French as a second language activity in the minority communities in Quebec. We have developed a number of initiatives and projects over the years. For example, there are school exchanges between English and French schools, and our public speaking contest, the *Concours d'art oratoire*, is very popular with the anglophone community. With a committee we organize French for the Future, a day of culture in French for the anglophone community in the Montreal area, and we have several other projects.

Structurally, we think there are some specific improvements that can be made in the funding mechanisms for minority community groups. We have an obligation to spend all of our money by March 31, within the fiscal year, which we obviously do our best to do under the circumstances. However, that means that by the time we receive our next instalment of funding—which this year was May 15—there's no money in the bank. What that means for us is that we went without salary for the month of May, for example. As Robert suggested, it does have a personal impact.

It seems to me that there's something wrong with that picture, particularly when you have community groups that have a history, have been around for many years, with consistent reporting and so on. It seems to me that it should be somewhat automatic to say, for those kind of groups, these guys have a history with us. So the suggestion that we need to improve our way of dealing with community groups is well received on our part as well.

There are too many steps in order to get a report approved right now. It goes to your agent, it comes back with questions, it goes up the ladder, it comes back with questions, and so on. Those steps can take weeks and weeks before we receive final approval of our report. Then it goes to finance and we get more questions. All of those questions are legitimate, and we're not suggesting that we shouldn't answer them or that we should not be accountable. We should be, and we appreciate that, but there's a significant time lapse involved in that process. In the meantime, we run out of money.

For example, the 25% that we received this year is long gone. It means that, as suggested earlier, we've lost some credibility with our landlord; we've lost credibility with partners who are waiting for our activities to begin, but they can't begin because we haven't received the funding for them. I'm getting weekly phone calls asking when we're starting, because others need to schedule their fall activity and they have to decide if they're going to work with CPF or not. I can't answer them, unfortunately, until we actually have the funds in the bank to proceed. So it's definitely a credibility issue for us.

We made a request for project funding for a 12-month project. Now that the approval has come through, we haven't received the funding yet. When we get the funding, we have to spend it in what is left of this fiscal year. So the amount that we requested for perhaps a 10-month project now becomes money that has to be spent in five

months. All of the organization that has to take place in order to spend that funding by March 31, in order to account for it, is compressed into this time span. Those are issues for organizations such as ours because we are small organizations. In Quebec we have one and a half staff, so we have to do a lot of work in order to accomplish those projects.

● (0930)

Also, in prior years we were used to receiving 50% of our funding in the April to May period. When we only received 25% this year, it was obviously a cause for hardship. It seems to me that you're going to have to go back to the point where we get that 50% up front, which would allow you to carry on your activity. We're expected to report on 50% of our activity at the end of September. We do an interim report. We have to report that with only 25% of our funding we didn't achieve 50% of our objectives. Clearly, that's something that can reflect negatively on us as an organization. If it's performance indicators that we're attempting to meet, we can't achieve that 50% of performance indicators with 25% of our funding.

On the other issue about lack of funding expenses for our line of credit—we have a small line of credit with the bank—those expenses aren't covered in any agreements we have anyone. Those expenses come out of operational costs.

Also, our board limits its capacity to meet—because governance is an issue for our organizations—and not having the funding for our board to meet face to face is a limitation on our organization.

Thank you.

● (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. dePoe.

We'll now hear from the Regional Association of West Quebecers. Madame Stronach.

Ms. Heather Stronach (Executive Director of the Regional Association of West Quebecers, Quebec Community Groups Network): Good morning.

The Regional Association of West Quebecers is situated in Gatineau-Aylmer. It's an organization that supports the English-speaking community, providing information and helping to find services in English. I have been with this association for just over a year as the executive director. Much of what is taking place is a new experience for me. It has in some cases been financially challenging.

The Association of West Quebecers, in supporting the English-speaking community, provides what we call a hub of information for this minority community in Quebec, particularly in our region. We do this through our website, which has been enhanced considerably since I arrived a year ago, and also through a quarterly newsletter and biweekly electronic bulletins. These go out to all our members within the whole of the Outaouais. They are also available to the public. By these means, people can find out about activities taking place in the sphere of culture, heritage, education, and opportunities for youth. We also present activities and opportunities originating in the city of Gatineau itself.

We receive our core funding from Canadian Heritage. The relationship we have with Canadian Heritage and its representatives has been immensely positive. I am fairly new to this whole program, and they've been very helpful, very informative, and have had great patience in explaining to me what's required, why it's required, and when it's required. This we appreciate tremendously.

We occasionally run into difficulties. Usually it's in the same areas as Lawrence dePoe indicated. We are a small organization. We are only two people. We are in the position of trying to take on new projects to serve the community, while keeping on top of our reporting responsibilities, ensuring that we do what we say we're going to do and sending in proposals for our core funding for the following year. To balance all that makes for a challenge in time and effectiveness. For me, the executive director, the months of September, October, and November are very much taken up in reporting and applying for funding for next year's core funding program. Because of this, we don't always have the opportunity to look further afield and seek out funding for other projects.

This year we found ourselves in two crunch situations: one at the beginning of our fiscal year, which is the first of April, and another at present, at the beginning of the second six-month period. These are the times when we generally receive our funding. If they are delayed, we have to hold off on projects. Some people might have to dip into their pockets to help us out.

Being a not-for-profit organization, we aren't able to receive a line of credit; we have tried that. The best we've been able to do is receive a credit card from our bank, and the total amount on the credit card is \$5,000. That doesn't take us very far between funding cheques, if they are delayed.

• (0940)

What that does for us also is help us to be very creative and think of ways in which we can do things differently in the future so that we have a bit of a cushion and we're not operating in this panic stress mode as we come to the end of one particular funding amount.

One thing that's arisen for us, and the reason we're not able to receive a line of credit, is that we need to provide the bank with collateral. As a not-for-profit organization, we don't have financial collateral. We don't own a building; we rent space.

Again, that puts us in a position of thinking of other avenues to be able to satisfy the bank, or to do something on our own and set up some sort of collateral each year by showing ingenuity and being effective and efficient in what we do. In order to do that, we need to acquire other funds. I don't mean other funds from government

groups; we need to do a fundraising campaign on our own. Again, it requires more time and more people power, individual power, to do that.

We also had a problem with bills not paid, which meant our creditors too were sitting there. We're looking less than competent because we're not able to pay our bills, and we lose some credibility.

The only reason we did not at this time find ourselves in exactly the same position as CPF did is that we had a small amount of funding for another project we applied for. That funding came in. While it's reported separately, it does go into the same bank account. It's only because of this that we managed to navigate through the funding issues. To be absolutely precise, if our cheque had been one day later, we would have been in a position where we were not able to cover paycheques for staff.

Again, these are some of the situations we find ourselves in. At the same time, I would like to be very clear that we have been very well supported by Canadian Heritage and the consultants with whom we work. This seems to be a situation that certainly is beyond their individual control.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Stronach.

We'll go now to Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all of you. Thanks for being here.

Madam Stronach, what's the interest rate on your credit card?

• (0945)

Ms. Heather Stronach: I actually don't know that. It's a brand new card.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: All right.

If you don't get the money quickly enough from the government, you'll put it on the credit card, which means you'll be paying 18% or 20%—

Ms. Heather Stronach: There is an interest element to it, yes.

We've actually had to do that. We've had to—

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You'll be paying 18% or 20% waiting for the money. That will not be reimbursed by the government, as I understand it; you'll never get the interest back.

Ms. Heather Stronach: No. That's quite true.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay.

I have the impression from all of you that you are spending a lot of time on reports. You seem to be reporting on the reports, or something like that.

Is that possible, Madam Martin-Laforge?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge (Director General, Quebec Community Groups Network): This issue is absolutely essential. The perverse effect of these applications for the Department of Canadian Heritage or other departments is that we do not have the time to diversify elsewhere.

[English]

While we're writing reports and writing applications...and I think the reports are tough, but the applications are even tougher. For example, some people haven't received their funding for this year. They haven't signed a contribution agreement and haven't received a cheque yet for their core funding for this year. The deadline for applications for project funding this year is mid-October and November 16. So we're already trying to write the application for next year.

At one point, you're into reporting and writing applications for the next year. It uses up all the time and energy that a small organization, or even a larger organization like ours, would have to do other work—i.e., to build a foundation or to figure out how to diversify the funding.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I agree. From what we've heard from FCFA, which is the francophone counterpart, they say sometimes they have to fill stuff like this, *un cartable comme ça*. They were asking if you have the same type of agreements as the FCFA, the same type of reporting, because they seem to have a lot of problems across the country. I met some of them. I visited seven provinces on this file and on the heritage file too and I've seen problems everywhere. So you have the same types of agreements and ways of dealing with the government and challenges also, in a way.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Absolutely, and I think what's important for the English-speaking community is that our efforts to diversify have not been as successful in some organizations as in others.

In the English-speaking community, some of the organizations have not been able to tap into provincial funding so there's no diversification from the Province of Quebec. We're working on it, but not everybody has. Other departments also do not see the English-speaking community as a place where they put a lot of priorities.

I would say to you that if there was an evaluation of the English-speaking community organizations, there is more of a difficulty in terms of diversification to other departments and to the provincial government.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You may have another challenge, this one related to human resources, because it has to be tough for your people, not knowing if the money is going to come, if it's going to be approved, and if so, when the money is going to come. Are they going to get the paycheques? I saw that situation in Newfoundland. I saw it in other provinces also, and that's one of your challenges, because you want to keep those people. It's important for you to keep your people, and for them to be that insecure and spending so much time preparing reports and this and that should be one of your most important problems.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I can only speak right now for myself in terms of salaries. The QCGN organization itself has seven in good times, seven full-time equivalents, people working full-time, and I have to tell you that I'm not unlike Mrs. Stronach in this area. Two weeks ago if we hadn't had the cheque, I wasn't going to make payroll. I got the cheque on Tuesday. My payroll rhythm is Tuesday-Wednesday. I wasn't going to make payroll.

• (0950)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: What were they saying? “The cheque is in the mail.”

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: No. In our case there were lots of different reasons, but I understand very well how it is complicated to get big cheques out. I understand that, but I have to say that small organizations and big organizations all over sometimes close. I think it's important to say that it's almost as if the funders in this case prepare you for a lower level of expectation. When we submit a project in October—and we're going to be putting them in again in October—what the funder says to us is that we shouldn't even expect to get the money before August. So you don't prepare a project in the summer, because they say we're not going to get our money anyway, so the money won't get out. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy, in a way, because you know you're not going to get the money, and then you lay people off during the summer because you know there's not going to be an activity.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Martin.

We will continue with Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Ms. Martin-Laforge, I believe that you had something else you wanted to tell us. If you wish to continue, go ahead.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I simply wanted to point out that we are getting prepared to be less prepared, if I can put it that way. We know that there will be no money available before the middle of the summer, because that has been the tradition and, this year, it has been even worse. It is a good time to lay people off or reduce the number of work hours. Unfortunately, this is not how you go about keeping good employees either. We know that we will not have money for our projects before September or October, at any rate. We're getting used to the idea that this is the way life is.

[English]

It creates and fosters a culture of dependence on one department. And if other departments are doing the same thing, it just fosters the wrong culture.

It cuts your entrepreneurial spirit, because you're trying. So I think the impact is way beyond the logistics of paying the bills; it's the strategic planning that any organization like ours, small or big, wants to do in fulfilling the objectives of the Government of Canada on official languages. But we have this small way of doing things only until September, and then in September we have to start preparing for next year.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chairman, in June 2008 the committee adopted the report entitled "The Collaboration Accords between Canadian Heritage and the Community Organization—an evolving partnership". This report already contained some recommendations covering the sensitive aspects of the situation, namely that Canadian Heritage must provide the funding when announced, and that if there were any delays in sending the funding, it would be up to the department to pay the interest. Here I refer to recommendation numbers 6 and 7. With respect to recommendation number 4, it was designed to reduce the accountability measures so as not to impede the ability of organizations to carry out their mandate. However, we can see that this is not yet the case, which is extremely disappointing.

If the process were made easier, if it were not the minister who had to sign off on all of the agreements for minority francophone and anglophone organizations, would that help resolve the problem?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: That would be the minimum required, because that is the primary reason why there are delays.

Heather talked about a line of credit. Some organizations do have one, but they are in the minority. In summer, we visit the bank in order to obtain a line of credit—and for the time being, we are not talking about interest charges. The bank tells us that our organization has been around for 10 years and receives funding every year, and that even if we had a few problems with our cheques, the bank can give us a line of credit providing that we provide it with a letter confirming our funding for the forthcoming year. We then ask the bank when it needs this letter and we are told that it is required before we can be given a line of credit.

The letter confirming the funding must be approved by the minister, which takes several months. A year goes by, and the following year, the exercise starts over. The system operates on the basis of multi-financing, namely, the financing is spread over several years.

We know what is on the table, but that should be the norm for all of the organizations, without exception. We need to know what we are going to be getting for the next two or three years. That would resolve many problems. Nevertheless, the funding has to be received on a timely basis, during the first year. Otherwise, it will not work.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Nadeau, for your intervention.

We will now continue with Mr. Godin.

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

First of all, I would like to thank you for coming here this morning and for your presentations. We will be meeting with government officials on this matter. I think that it is good that we meet with you beforehand, even though some may perhaps believe that we should not be meeting with you or members of the communities. In my opinion, having you give us an overall picture is a good thing. It would not be right to say that we did not know. We have spoken with you and we have been speaking of this issue for a long time.

Whether we are talking about the private sector or public and parapublic sectors, if you do not have the money required to manage an operation, it will not work. Try selling your car and getting the money only two years later on! It is the same thing. You cannot run an organization if you do not have the money.

We are not talking about private companies. Non-profit organizations have to turn to lines of credit and access personal credit cards. This is a disgrace. Section 43 and Part VII of the Official Languages Act talk about promoting minorities and communities. If we were to eliminate all of your organizations, do you think that the government could do everything by itself, and deal directly with each and every citizen?

An honourable member: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We therefore need organizations, and we must accept the fact that there are organizations. If we paralyze organizations such as yours and prevent them from doing their job, we might as well tell them that the government will deal directly with the people. Nothing is happening. How can you promote your community in the regions if you are not able to operate? If you submit an application in October or November... Government budgets are usually tabled in March. When the budgets are tabled, the money should be available. Would you agree with me?

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I think that we need to rethink the cycle based on solutions, so that we can act more strategically. Even the smallest of organizations in Quebec has to work in a complicated environment. The organization is serving the community, whether it be in the Outaouais or in Rouyn-Noranda. We have to demonstrate the potential,

[English]

like a staying power, like a presence, a traditional presence, that they're there all the time, that people can rely on them, that they're not going to be gone next month or next year. So the cycle has to help organizations, big or small, be the most strategic they can be. Stable funding is an ingredient of that. Their stable funding is one ingredient. So, yes.

• (1000)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Should it be money put right away for the administration to make sure the employees get paid? First of all, if you don't have any employees, you cannot do your job. Shouldn't there be a different way of funding, saying, okay, here you have your organization and you understand there are seven employees. Well, for sure, money has to come in there to make sure the employees are put in place, that they get their money, that they get paid. I mean, everybody wants their pay. I don't believe there's one member of Parliament here who doesn't want pay at the end of the month.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Oh really?

Mr. Yvon Godin: There isn't one judge in our country who doesn't want to get paid. If we recognize that you're an organization and you depend on some money from the federal government to help the people, there should be funding there, saying here is a certain amount of money that has to come.

The other one is organization, the program that you put together. You have put a program together and you say that's what we need for 2010. You're giving the program to the government in November. I mean, they have all those months; they could ask all the questions they want. But for Christ's sake, in March they should have the answer and give the money. It's still generous, talking about 50%; you should be getting the money.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will now give the floor to Mr. Royal Galipeau.

[English]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): *Merci, monsieur le président.*

I want to thank you all for being here today.

I didn't like what I heard, but I suppose you didn't like saying what you did. It would have been better not to have to live with what you did.

I'd like to address my first comments to Mr. Donnelly. By the way, I'm sorry I missed this. You've been in business for 15 years. Has this kind of problem been going on for 15 years? Is it getting worse? Is it getting better?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: When we say "systemic problems", it's year in and year out, for sure. It's the delays.

Mr. Godin will remember when we were here four months ago. At one point I said a cash advance that's normally due to organizations on April 1, at 25%, is not a cash advance when it comes in June or July.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I'm just trying to understand. Has this been going on for 15 years, or is this just a hiccup?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: In the six years that I've been involved, it has been every year.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Of course there are requirements you have to meet, because it is taxpayers' money. If they advance the deadlines, would that help?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Well, we've already talked about—

Mr. Royal Galipeau: With respect to the turnarounds, Treasury Board has policies. The federal government pays its bills within 30 days of the presentation of an invoice. If the federal government waits 45 days—a creditor is happy if he gets a cheque after 44 days, although he's supposed to get it after 30 days—the government is on the hook for interest as of day 30. It seems to me that when these guys make their reports, meet their deadlines, we should impose some deadlines on ourselves.

Mr. Robert Donnelly: To answer your question, I would say no, because the deadlines in the last three or four years have moved from January to December, and now we're told it's November.

[Translation]

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Multi-year funding would improve the situation?

[English]

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Multi-year, yes.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: With respect to the requirements for lines of credit, the requirements can be different depending on how solid your organization is. There are requirements for getting credit cards too. Are these corporate credit cards? Corporate credit cards need some backing too.

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: These are personal credit cards.

[Translation]

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I have spent my entire adult life defending the concept of linguistic minorities, particularly those living in French, in Ontario. This is very important to me, as is the defence of the French language. However, I feel that the defence of the English language in Canada is just as important as that of the French language. If we cannot defend the English language, it is going to become more and more difficult to defend the French language.

I would like to invite you to turn to page 35 of this beautiful document. You use American English. I'm going to try to become your advocate, but if I do manage to do this, I would like you to promise me that next year, if you provide us with another beautiful document of this type, you will use Canadian English and not American English. Do you understand?

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Galipeau.

We will now begin our second round.

Mr. D'Amours.

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

I certainly would not say "do you understand?" to you. I would take care not to use these words.

Ms. Martin-Laforge, you said a little bit earlier that the applications had to be submitted sometime around October 15, for certain aspects of certain programs.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Projects must be submitted in October. As for programming, it's November 16.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We are now in October. The deadline is therefore in a few days. You said that you did not expect to receive any money before August. Previously, when you submitted an application in October, was it possible to receive confirmation before August?

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I cannot say it happened on a regular basis in the last 10 years, but in the last 2, 3 or 4 years, I don't remember people having received funding for projects before August or September. They did, however, receive confirmation. I believe that Mr.dePoe received his confirmation in—

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: —June.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: However, he still has not received the funding for his project.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Lastly, it seems that the Government of Canada needs three or four months to write a cheque. If your project was approved, it means that, in principle, there is no problem. Nothing is missing, everything has been done well, the rules of government have been respected and so on. However, it takes three to four months to write a single cheque. It seems that perhaps it is the signing of the cheque which takes so much time.

[English]

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: That's why there is the service standard issue, and I go back to Mr. Galipeau's comment. You're supposed to, within 30 days or within 60 days.... I think the service standard issue is important. If you get confirmation of a project in June, then within 30 days you should be able to count on getting a cheque. There might be a delay, but you write back and say that this is the delay or there's a problem.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: In any case, if you have any money left at the end of March 31, regardless of the year, you only have 30 days to send your cheque back. Otherwise, the Government of Canada will charge you interest.

[English]

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: We never have money on the 31st.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: But we know that is the case with regard to minority language programs. It's a reality. In that case, you have 30 days to return the funding, otherwise you are charged interest; and the government does so without blinking.

[English]

Mr. dePoe, I think you mentioned that in the past your organization was receiving 50% of the money. Is that right?

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: That's right.

I've only been in the organization for two and a half years. In previous years you received 50%. Once you've spent the 50% you submit your interim report. That's followed by a 40%, and there's a 10% holdback for the final report. That's standard.

•(1010)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: And for this year, you received—

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: Twenty-five per cent.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: So it's worse than it was in the past and you still have to present your interim report for September showing that you have spent 50% of what you—

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: That would be—

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Or, not spend, but you have done 50% of what you mentioned in your application of October or November 2008?

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: Yes.

This year was a bit of a unique situation for our organization in that we just finished a two-year funding agreement. We have a one-year extension with basically the same money and the same agreement. We are submitting a multi-year application next year to Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You said the same money and the same application, but last year you received 50%, and the year before 50%?

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: Yes. That's right.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: And this year 25%? So it's the same money, the same program, the same application, but you have been cut by 50% of the initial money you received usually?

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: Yes, that's true.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: And at the end,

[Translation]

when you look at what really happens, if you do not receive your funding, it means that you will have to lay off employees. Whether it is Mr. dePoe or anyone else of the four people, there will be lay-offs.

When the time comes to put in an application in October or November, that's when things become difficult. The perverse effect of all of this is that at some point, you will not be able to even make an application anymore. Consequently, you will not receive any funding. The organization might simply disappear. Is that possible?

Mr. Lawrence dePoe: That is possible. I have to say that this affects hiring. We can afford to hire a part-time employee. The person who held that position left because there were times we had trouble obtaining funding. So the person left to find a more stable job. So when we are hiring someone, we have to say that we are offering a part-time job and that sometimes we run into financial difficulty.

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

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Mr. Blaney, I would like to make a clarification regarding Mr. D'Amours's question.

The deadline for submitting a project is October. As for basic funding, that is in November and December. We do not look at project applications before reviewing all basic funding applications, that is, applications for a regular budget. That goes on until June. Normally, a project can be approved in June or July. However, project funding is not available until September or October.

The Chair: Therefore, if a project is to be approved, its regular budget must have been approved first. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Before reviewing projects, we have to settle the matter of regular budgets.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: But they do the opposite. It does not make sense.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, you have the floor.

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

When we met with representatives from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne last week, they raised three major problems: approval delays, lay-offs due to those delays, and the fact that certain members had to wait up to six months before receiving a response from the federal government. You said that you encounter similar situations, with all of the attendant problems.

If we had to wipe the slate clean and rebuild the entire accountability machine—everybody wants accountability—how should we go about it? Whether it is the Regional Association of West Quebecers, the Quebec Community Groups Network or Mr. dePoe's organization, Canadian Parents for French, which focuses on learning French as a second language, I would like to know whether it is possible to create a new system based on the way things really work.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: That's a big question.

[*English*]

We think, from studying the report on the old blue-ribbon panel and the Government of Canada's action plan to reform the administration of grants and contributions programs, that a lot of thinking has been done on making the system more responsive. I think what might be missing still in this ingredient is that even with vanguard departments, there hasn't been a lot of consultation with the community. Personally, I don't think any of the groups in my network have heard about the work that is going on currently on grants and contributions at Canadian Heritage.

We feel some effects. There have been some changes this year. We know that some groups have received more money at the outset than other groups. We're seeing some changes, but there hasn't been training or consultation—I don't know if you want to call it dialogue—to help the groups be full participants in making this happen. If we were to start all over, or if we were to integrate some of the ideas on the action plan to reform the administration of grants and contributions, I think the place of the organization should be better understood in the whole cycle. For example, are we clients, beneficiaries, or people who want to spend the government's money? What are we? Are we doing good work? Are we doing work the government wants to have done? In that way, the organizations would be treated in a way that would allow the government to do its business.

The only practical logistical solution I could give would be that within the context of this action plan to reform the grants and contributions program I would like to see better dialogue, with us directly, and understanding of what the department is doing on changes to its application process and on changes to the way they manage risk. It feels as if it's being done to us rather than with us, if I might be so bold.

We feel good things coming out, but we also feel the bad things, right? We know that some of our organizations got, all of a sudden this year, almost the entirety of their funding and said, "Good work, keep going." But we can't figure out quite why, unless you figure out that you're Canadian Heritage as a vanguard department. If we could get a better handle on working together.... Are we a partner? It's hard to be a partner with government, right? It's hard to be. Are you a client? Are you a beneficiary? What is our place, and how do we evaluate our own place, and how do they evaluate our place within the context?

•(1015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Donnelly: People are always asking us how long the delays are, but ultimately it always the minister who decides and who has to sign off on an application. However, if an organization

has received approval from the minister for a three-year project, why does that organization have to wait every year for the funding to come in?

We don't understand. Mr. Galipeau said earlier that we could set clear timelines and respect them. That's what should happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Nadeau.

We will now move on to Mr. Chong.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for appearing in front of our committee today.

I empathize with your challenges. I actually understand your challenges. Twelve years ago, I was one of a group of three people who, without any money or resources, much like many of the groups that you and your umbrella organizations represent, started a not-for-profit now called the Historica-Dominion Institute. At the time, we literally had no resources. I remember borrowing somebody's computer. I think in our first year we received a grant of about \$60,000. We were on a complete shoestring budget. I empathize with the challenges your organizations face. We faced the same challenges.

While it may not be applicable in your case, what we quickly discovered was that we needed to diversify our funding sources. Also, cashflow management was one of the huge issues. As was mentioned by Madame Stronach, we couldn't get credit in our first couple of years. We had no line of credit, no credit cards, no nothing, for the very reasons you've outlined. It was difficult to get credit and to manage that cashflow.

It wasn't until we were established for about four years or so that we managed to negotiate a line of credit with the bank. That was one thing that happened. The other thing that happened was that we sought two other sources of funding. One was from the corporate and private sector. It was difficult, there's no doubt about it. It's difficult to secure that funding.

But we used those contributions to manage cashflow. The private sector doesn't have the same onerous kinds of contribution agreements as the Government of Canada does, because it's not public money, so we used the private sector funding that we received as a way to help smooth out that spikiness in the cashflow.

The other thing we did, which we were not as successful in doing—but you may find better opportunities—was to go to our membership as a not-for-profit to seek their support in a greater way.

Those are just some suggestions.

I think one of the challenges the government faces in this regard with your problem is that Treasury Board sets out and approves terms and conditions for every single program across the Government of Canada. In light of the last number of years, those terms and conditions are very strict, and the public service follows them by the book, for obvious reasons. I don't think this is unique to this program. I don't think it's unique to Canadian Heritage. I think it's a government-wide issue. I don't think there are any games being played with respect to how the money gets approved.

I think it's good that you're highlighting this as a problem. Perhaps solutions can be found.

I know that one of the things the government has tried to do through its program funding, through contributions to your member organizations, is that for those programs that are ongoing and for those organizations that are considered low-risk, they've advanced cash at the start of the fiscal year before the application has been formally approved. It's a way to get you through the first quarter, the first three months. It doesn't help if you don't get that 75%, the rest, until September, but at least there are three months of funding upfront. Then there are two months where you presently have to figure out how to manage that cashflow.

Those are just some ideas I had.

Another idea I had is that the umbrella group might be able to facilitate a line of credit for some of your member organizations. That's just an idea.

Whatever helpful suggestions you have for the government, I think we're open to considering.

• (1020)

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We are now at the last member from the second round.

Monsieur Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: *Merci, monsieur le président.*

I don't know if you like what Mr. Chong said, but is it not scary? It's almost saying the government is not ready to approve money going to *communautés*, and then go and get the private sector to do it for you. We had all the problems in the world when we started, so why don't you take the same route as we did?

I'm kind of worried about that statement coming from the government side, not that I want to pick on the government this morning, but it comes from government side. I hope he's not speaking for the government, that he's speaking about himself or the suggestion that he wants to give. But is it not scary? The government has a responsibility with the *communauté*. The government is there to pick up the tax of the taxpayer and is there to distribute the tax. It doesn't belong to a political party; it belongs to Canadians, and they're there to distribute, to have good *collectivité* and a good country. I personally believe they have the responsibility to do it. It's not acceptable—and I think that's what I hear from you this morning, from all of you—that we only get 25%, and then we have to make those reports, we have to make applications, and we don't have the staff to do it.

How can we be productive if all that's going on at the same time?

• (1025)

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I will interpret, for myself, Mr. Chong's comments. We believe the Government of Canada has an obligation, a commitment to official language minority communities in Canada, whether they be francophones outside Quebec or anglophones in Quebec. There are priorities and it's a core common value, and we believe that the government understands, as do their employees, that we are there to further the Government of Canada's reflection and contribution to official language minority communities in Quebec.

I think the question was put earlier to my president, Mr. Donnelly, about whether it has become more difficult. Yes, technically it has become more difficult over the last few years—technically.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But if you come to a point where it's so difficult that you're not productive anymore, it doesn't make sense.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: That is the consideration. I think that any government in power would applaud some of the work that at least I know is being done in the English-speaking community about diversifying the funding to try to include the corporate and para-public sector. For example, many of you have the document in front of you that we prepared for the fifteenth anniversary. We were successful at getting a \$5,000 contribution from Hydro-Québec to make that piece of work, and from para-public, from QPAT, the teacher's association. We are out there trying to do that. And I think that, you know—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but an example you were giving is that this summer you couldn't even hire some students.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: That is in smaller organizations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is that not negative?

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: That's absolutely true. So I think we have to separate this whole thing out into the philosophical idea that the Government of Canada has an obligation, and find logistical, practical ways of helping us deliver. I'm hoping that Mr. Chong understood our plea—and all of you this morning—about being able to be more strategic. All we ask—all of us, small, medium or big—in the English-speaking community is to be able to have the time to devote to the more strategic pieces of getting services and policy done for the English-speaking community.

So logistically we have a huge problem, which I think you people have taken on, and we hope that we will have a cheque in the mail by April 1, and not May. If it can be earlier, fine. And if there service standards, we want to also know about them. We want to be able, like any good Treasury Board business, to know what to expect.

Mr. Robert Donnelly: It's ironic, Mr. Godin and Mr. Chong, that the 25% that comes on April 1 does not mean guaranteed funding for the year. It's 25% about which maybe three months later they would decide, sorry, you weren't supposed to get that. We don't know what it is 25% of, but we get the 25%. Then after three months we run out of that.

As for credit line possibilities within our smaller organizations, they just don't have the collateral, as Heather was explaining. When they come to ask us for the guarantee of continued funding, we can't say we got 25% because in the eyes of the government that is not official funding for the year. It's just an advance, and so we have to wait that extra two or three months.

We have four categories in our PCH funding. There are salaries; honoraria; travel, which is the smallest; and administration and office expenses. In administration and office expenses there is no category for interest on credit lines and credit cards, obviously, and so there is the other problem. Even if it's small numbers, how are you going to justify it?

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We are at the end of our second round. We have some committee business to do. One member has expressed a wish to talk to the witness, and then we can move on with committee business.

[Translation]

Do any other committee members have questions?

Ms. Zarac?

We will have another round of questions, which will leave us about 15 minutes of deliberations.

Ms. Zarac.

[English]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): *Merci*, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Stronach, you mentioned that this causes you lots of stress because you're not getting the funding fast enough. You also mentioned that you have a good relationship with Heritage Canada, so being stressed with this situation, you must have asked the ministry questions. I am curious to know what the answer was. Why do they have these delays?

Ms. Heather Stronach: I think part of it is workload, just trying to process so many applications. I get the impression there is nobody idle in Canadian Heritage. They work longer hours. I can reach them at almost any time. So it's not a function of the individuals, I don't think. I think it's the process that's required in order to do their due diligence.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Is the process too long, too heavy?

Ms. Heather Stronach: It is too long or too heavy, or maybe has too many parts to it. For example, this year they've been revising their process and there is a new process that was just introduced. I didn't know it was coming until it actually arrived, so this meant I needed to deal with that piece in order to be able to complete my report, in order to bring our organization to the next stage. That's one piece of it at this time.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Those are your feelings, but did you ask them directly what was holding back the financing?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: It's simply process. The response I get is that it's process.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

I have a quick question for Mr. Donnelly. You said that you represent 32 associations. What is the health of those associations? Do you have a feeling? What are you getting back from these associations? Are they in a healthy situation? Is there cause that because they're not getting the financing they might go down completely, that they won't be able to fulfill their mission?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: There is stress, which you just talked about earlier. That's always a problem. There is the ability to produce, as Mr. Godin was saying before, and although I wouldn't go as far as to say "unable" to produce, it vastly diminishes their ability, because you work very hard in putting together a one-year plan and then you get funding for six months, or it comes six months late, so you readjust and you start to cut things. In the organization I was with, we started doing our plan in November. We made three plans. This was four years ago. If the late funding comes as it usually does, we'll go to our board and back up and say, instead of one, two, three, four, five, we're going to do numbers one, two, and three. That is what happens.

Yes, the impact is there. People are creative. It's not only a question of bank accounts or credit cards. In one organization all the people agreed to take two months off without pay in the summer. That allows them to be better able to work in the other 10 months. That saves money. People find ways to make it work.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I don't question the ability of the people. I used to work a long time with these associations.

How do they feel? Do they feel like they're not completing their mission in a way, even if they're good at cutting back and rearranging? What's the feeling out there? Are they feeling that they are accomplishing their mission?

Mr. Robert Donnelly: No, there's a strong feeling of frustration. You're talking about people on a volunteer board who are told that while last year we had them buy into these 10 points, now, because of the bureaucracies and the delays and so forth, we're only going to be doing five of them. That leads to frustration for the staff, and it leads to frustration for the volunteers who get involved with these organizations, expecting results, only to be told that they're only going to be able to do half, or that the money came so late that it was cut in half.

• (1035)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes, Ms. Martin-Laforge.

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: I would like to stress one point.

The English-speaking community in Quebec is still coming out of many years of demobilization. Any delay in keeping up the momentum has a huge impact on the overall momentum of the English-speaking community. Each one of the 32 organizations—and others that are not part of our organization—feels the consistent need to keep up the momentum.

[Translation]

We can't go at top speed all the time. When you speed up, slow down, speed up, and slow down again, and so on, you lose your impetus and momentum. This is something I learned from my grandfather.

[English]

For English-speaking Quebec, it is incredibly important for that to happen and momentum to continue.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarac.

We got a very good response rate to the questionnaire we sent out for our study. Indeed, 65 per cent of your organizations responded.

We will now move to Ms. Shelley Glover.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): *Merci bien.*

Welcome back to those of you who have been here before. It's nice to see you again.

I want to concentrate on what Mr. Donnelly has said repeatedly, and that's the word "frustration". I can assure you that each and every one of us here, regardless of party or ideology, believes that it is frustrating, and we empathize with that. As a new member of Parliament—and I've been here almost a year now—I'm seeing frustration too. I am quite surprised at the way things progress or don't progress within this large organization and Parliament itself.

I was very hopeful when we began to look at this that we would be able to spend a lot of time trying to come up with answers to alleviate this problem. Unfortunately, we haven't met with the people who are going to be able to change that as of yet. We hope to do that at some of our next meetings.

I think some of the things are recurrent, and I must emphasize that we've heard this for years and years and years. I was part of many non-profit organizations in a minority community that expressed frustration for 10 to 15 years. I'm very saddened to see that we haven't made too much progress, but I want to emphasize that I believe that some band-aid solutions have gone on for many years and that we need to fix them. Although it's wonderful to see you again, I want to get down to the meat and potatoes. I want to make sure that the messages we've heard for years and years, which you've repeated today, are correct. So please indulge me.

You've said that they're recurrent or repeated year after year and that you don't believe it's political. Although our parties here try to make it political, I appreciate that you've said you don't believe it is political and you don't believe the public service is trying to sit by and not do the work. So thank you for those comments.

You've also said that the report and application process is time-consuming. So we are specifically going to ask how we streamline that. I'm hearing that correctly from you again today.

Also, the delays in confirming whether or not your program is going to be approved hinder your ability to get credit. Again, we're heard that.

And there's your point that the delay in receiving your cheque after confirmation affects your credibility with people like your landlord, as Mr. dePoe and other stakeholders said. Moreover, the interest payments aren't covered.

And once you receive your confirmation and then your cheque, your spending time is reduced. That makes it a challenge to make the March deadline before you have to pay it back. We're heard that.

I've also heard that you think some of the suggestions are good, such as the multi-year agreements. That's great.

I've heard the suggestions you've made as well, Mr. Donnelly, in your report, and I appreciate them. Thank you very much.

But what I don't want to see is anyone leaving this arena and disregarding what you've said very clearly, that we have to work together and that it's not a political problem, but in the system. So I would hope that you will follow what we are going to do with the people who are going to be intricately involved in making the decisions to change this; and if you have further suggestions, please feel free to contact us at any point. I'm pleased to hear that you feel you have the ability to contact Canadian Heritage and that you have great relationships with them. We hope that continues.

I'm hoping we will have some witnesses at the next meeting. I'm also hoping that if we need more time, we will be allotted that time, because what's ultimately very, very important is getting down to figuring out how we can become more efficient.

I believe things like the sponsorship scandal and the Gomery inquiry recommendations led us to have to be more accountable, more transparent, and gave us this machine. But we have to find a way to be more effective, so thank you for bringing your suggestions.

• (1040)

I am not going to ask any further questions, because as I've said, I've heard this for more than 15 years. I just want to get to the bottom of it, and that's why I'm anxious to speak with the people who are in the system, to make sure we get this right so we can help you. So please bear with us. We're all in this together, and we all want to help you.

Mr. Robert Donnelly: Mr. Blaney, could I ask a question? When these meetings take place with the representatives of the government, would that be an open meeting like today's meeting?

The Chair: Yes, and actually, Mr. Donnelly, I was just about to mention that we are to adopt the schedule right after we finish this witness session, and it is expected that on October 20 we'll meet with Canadian Heritage for that standing order.

Oui, monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

I don't believe that is a political issue. In English, you would say:

[English]

it went from bad to worse and how do we fix it? That's all.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: This shows us that it is not only the fact that the cheque arrives late which causes problems, but that this also has repercussions on communities and on how dynamic they are.

We will conclude our third round with Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We all know that money makes the world go around. If the funding is not there, the paper programming takes on another dimension. All the difficulties with regard to community development, be it for anglophone Quebecers, francophone Canadians, groups in Quebec and majority anglophones too...

We want to identify solutions, but unfortunately, the cycle is broken. The communities have to provide more reports than big corporations receiving major federal subsidies to save a town, an industry or a company. It is not bad in and of itself, but I can tell you that the reporting requirements are not the same. It comes down to the social and human fabric of an entire country. Whether we are talking about Quebec or Canada, it is huge problem of unparalleled complexity.

I have heard that there are too many steps in the process. One solution would be to regionalize it. The process by which you provide the required information is extremely slow. Information goes back and forth internally until a solution is identified, so that it takes six months to get \$15,000, and a regional summer program for youth or adults gets cancelled.

How can we decentralize and simplify this process?

Mrs. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: In Quebec, we are between a rock and a hard place with regard to such decentralization. For most of our groups, including our own organization, the envelope for Quebec flows through the Quebec regional office. If you invite us back, we will tell you about our ability to take action as a minority community with Canada and what the regional envelope means for us.

I think that it is not decentralized in that way, but it might be a solution.

● (1045)

[*English*]

The standard has to be national—I mean, amongst all of the provinces and all of the associations. So if there is a standard to have an application in and for an approval letter to be out within—pick a time—three months, it should be the same for everybody. So I think there's a national standard and maybe a regional application, but there has to be some thinking about how that works.

The Chair: It's time for me to thank our witness for appearing before us this morning with very pertinent comments.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for coming.

We will suspend for a few minutes because we need to adopt our budget and work schedule.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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