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—
Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): It is Thursday, November 22, 2012. Welcome to the 61st meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are continuing our study on linguistic duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017.

With us today from the National Film Board of Canada, we have Claude Joli-Coeur and Michèle Bélanger.

[English]

We also have Mr. MacGibbon and Mr. Rodgers from the English Language Arts Network Quebec.

Before we begin with an opening statement from each of the two groups, I want to let the witnesses know that we're going to have an abbreviated meeting today, because we have bells at 11:15 for an 11:45 vote. The members know, as I discussed this with the various members on committee. We'll meet for 30 minutes. You'll have ample time to give your opening statements, and if possible, Mr. Godin can have a question for the witnesses. Then we're going to adjourn, and that will be it for today.

My apologies about this, but we're into the final third of the fall session, and much merry making is happening in the chamber.

We'll begin with an opening statement from the Office national du film du Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur (Assistant Commissioner, National Film Board of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the standing committee.

[Translation]

My name is Claude Joli-Coeur, and I am the assistant commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada. I am here this morning with Michèle Bélanger, our Francophonie project leader.

I wish to thank you for giving us this opportunity to contribute to your study on linguistic duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017.

With your permission, I would like to take a few moments to call your attention to some of the NFB's latest achievements in the area of Canadian linguistic duality.

[English]

We are now in the era of accessibility. As we all know, the digital era now affords us increased communication potential that makes it possible to be present and accessible throughout the country and enhance our ties with francophone and anglophone communities across Canada. As a federal cultural agency, the National Film Board of Canada is committed to maintaining these ties with the communities, and making its content available to all Canadians, in both official languages.

On its 70th anniversary in January 2009, the NFB launched its online screening room, in French and English, onf.ca and nfb.ca, and gives Canadians in all regions unlimited access 24 hours a day, seven days a week to a unique audiovisual heritage that celebrates the richness of Canada's cultural and linguistic diversity. The screening room's French and English content is equivalent but not identical as it reflects the breadth and diversity of the communities. Nearly 2,500 works can currently be viewed free of charge. Moreover, we have begun to produce versions of titles that are only available in one official language.

Today the screening room has resulted in over 36 million views of our works, including views via our apps, which are available on various mobile platforms, such as iPhone, iPad, Android, and the BlackBerry PlayBook, as well as those on our partner sites, such as YouTube and Vimeo. There have been nearly 10 million views in Canada in French and English on onf.ca and nfb.ca, and that number is constantly growing.

Canadian francophones and anglophones can also get involved and interact with us online about issues of concern to their communities, through a variety of virtual public spaces that are available to them. These include *Le blogue ONF.ca* and the NFB blog, and the *infolettre* and newsletter, overseen by community managers and separate francophone and anglophone editors. The NFB is also present on social networks—Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Vimeo—in both official languages.

In the education sector, the NFB introduced Campus in January 2012. This new online education platform, which is specifically designed for Canadian teachers, is an innovative resource that provides easy access to our 2,500 Canadian productions, including films, interactive works, study guides, and workshops in both official languages. The departments of education in five provinces—Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Quebec—have already licensed CAMPUS for English schools.

• (1105)

[Translation]

In addition to the tremendous access digital technology affords, it is essential to have a unique presence in the communities. Supporting linguistic duality and official language minority communities is a priority at the NFB. In 2006, the NFB became a partner of the Rendez-vous de la francophonie, an annual national event held in March that allows us to reach over 50 communities in 13 provinces and territories.

We are also active in the Canadian public library network, where we offer documentary and animated film programs in French and English twice a year. Last year, a total of 70 screenings were held throughout this network. We also organize the Animez-vous/Get Animated event, a cross-Canada animation celebration featuring screenings and workshops, available to official language minority communities.

In the fall of 2011, we put a selection of about 20 works geared to Canadian francophones online. Entitled Espace francophonie, the selection is presented by Franco-Ontarian songwriter Damien Robitaille and focuses on francophone identity and culture. Titles from coast to coast, from Acadia to western Canada, make up the selection. Some of the works can also be viewed by francophiles in the Showcase Francophonie section of NFB.ca.

There will be many opportunities to highlight Canada's linguistic duality between now and 2017, and major anniversaries will occur during the period leading up to the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation. Here are a few examples.

The year 2014 will mark the 100th anniversary of the Royal 22e Régiment. The creation of this regiment in 1914 played a decisive role in integrating French speakers into the Canadian armed forces. Production is currently under way to create a documentary celebrating this anniversary, which has special significance for francophones. We are working on the film in close collaboration with the Canadian Forces.

The year 2014 will also mark the 75th anniversary of the Second World War and the 100th anniversary of the First World War. The NFB collection contains an impressive number of documents dealing with both these major conflicts. The documents could be grouped together, enhanced and made accessible to Canadians in DVD format or online in both official languages.

The NFB will also be celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2014. This will provide yet another opportunity to organize special activities in official language minority communities across the country. The NFB is a privileged witness to Canadian history, and its unique audiovisual heritage is a source of pride for all Canadians.

The 50th anniversary of the Canadian flag in 2015 will be an occasion for us to showcase a unique film in our collection that recounts the flag's first raising, in 1965. This archival film will honour the anniversary in a very special way.

Lastly, the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation in 2017 will provide us with an unparalleled opportunity for celebration. We therefore plan to develop a participatory and inclusive nationwide project for all Canadians of all generations. The project will enable us to look to the future and imagine the Canada of tomorrow. This work could be launched during the official celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

As you can see, the commemorative events leading up to 2017 provide us with a wide array of opportunities to celebrate Canada's linguistic diversity and highlight its richness. All these major projects pay tribute to significant events in Canadian history. We will work on them in partnership with institutions that come under the Department of Canadian Heritage, as well as with our partners in official language minority communities and the organizations that represent them.

The ties we have forged over the years and continue to maintain—particularly as a result of the national tour we undertook in the fall to consult the communities—will enable us to expand the scope of our initiatives and increase their outreach to Canadian communities.

These events will also allow us to provide Canadians with works from our collection that bear witness to our history, while at the same time seizing these opportunities to create new works—the works of tomorrow that will bear witness to our present.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Now we will hear from English Language Arts Network Quebec.

Mr. Guy Rodgers (Executive Director, English Language Arts Network Quebec): Good morning, Mr. Chong, and members of the committee. It's a pleasure for ELAN to be here this morning.

Since the last time we were here, we have elected a new president, so I'd like to introduce Peter MacGibbon, who lives in Wakefield just across the river and the border.

We read the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage's report on Canada's 150th anniversary with great interest. An event of this importance certainly demands several years of planning and preparation. ELAN is particularly pleased that you are taking the time to consider how we can best celebrate both official language communities.

We applaud Minister Moore's observation that the 150th anniversary of Confederation "should be an occasion for reflecting on what we have achieved as a relatively young country, and it should be an opportunity to promote a strong sense of pride and belonging for all Canadians".

We also support the observation made by the Quebec Community Groups Network in their recent appearance before the committee:

A significant part of our history before, during, and since Confederation is rooted in the struggles, triumphs, and compromises of and between Canada's two official languages. Linguistic duality is not an add-on to our national story; it is the story.

ELAN, as you know, is the network that brings together English-speaking artists of Quebec. During the past 20 years there has been a cultural renaissance among Quebec's English-language artists. In 2011 the research team of PCH's, Patrimoine canadien-Canadian Heritage's official language support programs branch conducted a survey on the statistical profile of artists in the official language minority community, OLMC. The Canadian average for the percentage of active population engaged in the arts is 0.65%. That statistic is pretty close to true for anglophones in English Canada, francophones in Quebec, and francophones outside Quebec. The percentage of anglophones working in the arts in Quebec is significantly higher at 0.99%.

The study was released shortly after the 2011 occupy protests, which inspired one of ELAN's Facebook members to claim "We are the .99%!" I mention this because it confirms our anecdotal evidence about the size and significance of the cultural renaissance that is currently taking place in Quebec. There is a tremendous story here about linguistic duality and national identity. The artistic eruption is not happening in Quebec despite the fact that the majority population is French and that the only official language in Quebec is French, but because of those things. It is the mixing of two cultures and two languages that makes Quebec so stimulating. It is this complexity that draws English-speaking artists to Quebec and stirs their creativity.

Mr. Peter MacGibbon (President, English Language Arts Network Quebec): This is not to say there are no challenges involved with celebrating English-speaking culture in Quebec. Official interest at the provincial level in celebrating the 150th anniversary of Canada is likely to be muted. There will also be some opposition to any event that smacks of bilingualism or any initiative that overtly or covertly undermines the French language. We need to be sensitive to these concerns and seek ways to share stories of linguistic duality in a positive manner.

The English-speaking community in Quebec is unique within Canada, and the arts are our primary way of expressing this uniqueness. It's therefore likely that the English official linguistic minority arts community could be a significant generator and driver of ideas for celebrations. Moreover, it will be important to focus on specific communities and the institutions that represent them within education, arts and culture, and community vitality. These include the English school boards, museums, and performance venues that feature primarily English programming, and of course organizations such as ELAN, the Quebec Writers' Federation, the Quebec Drama Federation, the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network, and the QCGN.

ELAN has already done quite a bit of groundwork toward celebrating the achievements of Quebec's English-language community. In 2008-09 ELAN undertook the RAEV, the recognizing artists *enfin visibles* project, which created profiles of 150 prominent artists and 25 short videos that allowed artists to articulate the benefits as well as the costs of living in a minority-language context. In addition, the RAEV project created histories to document the contribution to Quebec culture of English-language artists from each artistic discipline over the past 100 years.

All of this material is available in English and in French online. The English-language texts were published by Guernica Editions as "Minority Report: An Alternative History of English-language Arts in Quebec".

• (1115)

Mr. Guy Rodgers: ELAN is currently working on a project that is funded by the linguistic duality sector of PCH. It is an online portal that collects news reports, interviews, and reviews about prominent anglo Québécois artists, and it provides an introductory text in French to put the artists and the news in context. The portal will also present quarterly reports of highlights and trends in each discipline so that francophone audiences can keep abreast of the most interesting stories.

One ideal partner for the 2017 celebrations is CBC-SRC radio and television. It has the technology, infrastructure, and mandate to record some of these very interesting stories and share them with Canadians from coast to coast to coast. It would be very interesting to see Radio Canada create a series of profiles about anglo Québécois artists. SRC had an intense flurry of interest in what anglos were thinking in the wake of the recent provincial election and the terrible shooting that followed. The 150th anniversary celebrations would be an ideal occasion to share some positive stories.

We also see an opportunity for the NFB to create packages of archival films on specific historic and regional themes. As QCGN noted in its brief, the English-speaking community of Quebec is also very interested in benefiting from legacy projects to digitize Canada's documentary heritage as part of Canada's 150th anniversary celebrations of Confederation. This is an excellent way to enhance a community's vitality.

Another ideal partner for ELAN would be FCCF. Our two minority linguistic communities have a great deal in common, and some kind of shared celebration or artistic showcase would be an excellent means of demonstrating the benefits of living in minority situations and being fully bilingual Canadians.

We endorse many of the ideas in the heritage study, such as collaborating with existing festivals. We have a number of very good festivals in Quebec which already provide excellent opportunities for English language artists, from Montreal's international jazz festival to the Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival, and let's not forget the fringe theatre festival and Pop Montréal. This programming could be enhanced in 2017.

We would also enjoy the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of artists from first nations communities such as Kahnawake, which are doing very interesting work in developing their local artists.

Mr. Peter MacGibbon: Other potential celebration activities could include anglo-initiated bilingual projects to increase visibility within the majority language community. Building from ELAN's ACCORD, arts and community culture on the road, project, there could also be many fruitful interregional arts exchanges, bringing cultural celebrations to the English-speaking communities outside Montreal. In the urban setting, there could be innovative cultural exchanges between anglos and ethnocultural immigrant communities that present the real stories of minority communities in Quebec over the last 50 years.

Tourism is an important economic activity and employer in many English-speaking communities outside Montreal, such as the village of Wakefield, where I am from. The regions of Quebec are historically important to the story of Confederation and could directly benefit from tourism marketing initiatives focused on the 150th anniversary.

The history of the English-speaking community of Quebec predates Confederation by more than a century. Our story is an important and integral part of Canadian history. We hope this committee's recommendations reflect this reality and lead to an anniversary that truly celebrates the heritage of both our official languages.

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have after the break.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The bells haven't started to ring yet, so we have at least 15 minutes to ask questions.

We'll begin with Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to our witnesses.

My question is for our NFB officials.

I listened closely to what you said about the various celebrations, but I didn't hear anything about the 260th anniversary of the deportation of the Acadians. I just wanted to point that out to you. The first and second world wars are tragic events, but so is the deportation of an entire population.

• (1120)

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: Absolutely. Thank you for mentioning it.

Mr. Yvon Godin: As you know, 2015 will mark the 260th anniversary of the Acadians having their butts kicked out, if I may speak as an Acadian.

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: Thank you for pointing it out, but our calendar is quite full, so what I covered was just an overview. I should have mentioned it. Either way, the event is on our list.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We are often forgotten. I just wanted to make sure it was a matter of public record.

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: We also plan to take part in events.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am going to share my time with my colleague, Mr. Benskin, but first I want to ask the following question.

The NFB cut nearly 70 jobs. The federal Conservative government reduced the organization's budget by \$6 million. That concerns us. Radio-Canada plans to eliminate 37 jobs. The CinéRothèque archive in Montreal has closed.

We are getting ready for the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, and that's all well and good, but what has the impact of those budgets cuts in Montreal and across the country been?

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: The cuts have been painful for some of our employees, but our leadership opted to eliminate activities that were not central to our operations. Our two theatres in Montreal and Toronto and our online viewing stations were a bit outdated technologically speaking. Making our films available on the Internet means we no longer have to maintain onerous and overly expensive infrastructure for viewing stations where people would sit and watch films.

We preferred to drop those kinds of activities in favour of core production activities. We even announced that we would be increasing our resources for French-language production in minority contexts, as well as creating executive producer positions in Toronto and Vancouver. About 20% of our resources goes to French-language production outside Quebec. Despite the cuts, we have increased our production resources, and we have done so without any negative impact on the distribution of our films across the country. Many of those 70 jobs were part-time and tied to more ancillary activities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Benskin, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): I'm happy to see both of your organizations here.

I'm going to direct my first question to English Language Arts Network Quebec. I don't remember you testifying at the heritage committee about the 150th anniversary. Am I correct?

Mr. Guy Rodgers: I'm not sure why that happened. I noticed that we weren't invited, or we didn't know about it.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: In the context of official languages for the 150th anniversary, from your perspective what should be the place of minority language communities?

Mr. Guy Rodgers: Within our own circles, there are a lot of people to be consulted who have ideas, and there are various mechanisms we've discussed.

In terms of the linguistic duality aspect of collaborating within the majority communities, some of the best practices and success stories from the past we'd like to look into are bilingual productions. There have been slam poetry translations and various events where the ability to be bilingual, to translate, were showcased. There have also been works in translation, whether that be plays or books. There are a number of ways of presenting English within Quebec in a positive, collaborative way that celebrates linguistic duality.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Following along the same lines, the FCCF made a proposal to Minister Moore about creating a new fund to enable the cultural community within the official language minority communities to create a road show that would allow them to travel more efficiently or more ably. Would you care to comment on that? I know that you support that.

Mr. Guy Rodgers: Absolutely, we endorse that project. In fact, Peter wrote a letter to Minister Moore supporting that. It's even more important for English-language artists in Quebec, because regular Canada Council funding for touring is interprovincial, and part of our most important funding is to communities around Quebec. As Peter mentioned in his part of the presentation, we have a project that is allowing us to tour English-language artists around Quebec to communities on the north shore, the Magdalen Islands, etc. To have that funding available to tour within Quebec and to make connections across Canada is extremely important to us also.

• (1125)

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: I've been a very strong proponent, probably ad nauseam, of the idea that linguistic duality goes far beyond language. Language is a representation of a culture. Most of the issues that linguistic minority communities are facing are from a fear of losing their culture. The expression of that culture is through language.

I'm just wondering, from both parties, in regard to preserving, recognizing, and promoting that culture in terms of the ONF, and in regard to the creation and perpetuation of that minority language culture specifically in Quebec but also outside Quebec, represented by the FCCF, what are your feelings on that?

The Chair: Very briefly.

Mr. Guy Rodgers: It's a hard question to answer very briefly, but to summarize it, there's a debate going on in Quebec and in Montreal about the survival of French on the island of Montreal. There are two ways of interpreting this situation. One is that the problem is there are too many people who don't have French as their mother tongue or the language used at home. This is an extremely divisive counterproductive argument.

If you look at someone like Jim Corcoran, who cares what language he speaks at home? He sings in French, and he works in French. The argument should be about public language, the shared language. We can all learn French. For social peace in linguistic duality in Quebec, emphasize French as a shared language and forget about the language people speak in the privacy of their bedrooms. I think Pierre Trudeau had something to say about that a few years ago.

Once that argument is clear, then a way forward is possible, but we're not quite through that debate yet.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be sharing my time with Ms. Bateman to give other committee members a chance to ask questions.

I want to thank our witnesses for being with us today. My first question is for the National Film Board officials.

I believe the NFB could play a major and decisive role in the 150th anniversary celebrations with its documentaries and films.

How will you go about promoting or showcasing the country's linguistic duality and its origins?

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: The NFB uses its distribution tools to ensure it has a presence across all levels of society; not only do we use the Internet and television, but we also have community-based screenings and relationships with schools. One of our offerings, Campus, which I referred to earlier, is truly a tool that can make our collection accessible to all Canadian students.

This web of distribution tools is the key to our success in terms of connecting with as many Canadians as possible.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Will the content of your films and documentaries reflect our history, the English-French duality and vice versa, our provinces and territories?

Will you use the anniversary celebrations to showcase our history?

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: It is important to know that the NFB has production centres across the country. We have locations in St. John, Halifax, Moncton, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, Saskatoon and Vancouver. We have producers all over the country. The films we produce around the country reflect the collective Canadian reality.

In short, the subject matter dealt with is really the key to making that happen. We won't set out specifically to make a film about history. What we do is focus on a variety of subjects in certain communities, enabling us to build that historical corpus. That is the beauty of our collection of 13,000 films. It gives us the ability to compile works by event. We have a tremendous number of productions with a historical dimension that allow us to achieve that objective. The key is through the variety of our production content.

Every year, we produce a hundred or so works on a range of subjects affecting Canadians, subjects not normally dealt with by the private sector.

One approach taken by the NFB, as a public producer, is to really target works that the private sector could not create. That means more challenging works with less commercial appeal that matter to Canadians nevertheless.

• (1130)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

I will now turn it over to my colleague.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Thank you to our witnesses.

[English]

Thank you all very much for being here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joli-Coeur, you said in your presentation that supporting linguistic duality and official language minority communities was a priority. You mentioned the Rendez-vous de la francophonie event.

Your colleague, Mr. Rodgers, talked about a specific project involving English-speaking artists in Quebec, a project I am very interested in.

How would Mr. Rodgers go about making a request to the NFB?

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: This year, as part of our bilateral meetings with minority group organizations, we met with Quebec's English-Language Arts Network, and we started examining ways we could work together.

The real way to get the ball rolling is to contact our producers. We have two English-language production centres in Montreal, with producers who focus solely on English-language content. Collaborating with them is the way to make those projects happen.

Those are things we discussed in general terms and could examine in greater detail. We have English-language producers in Montreal who could work on specific projects like that.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Because it is a Canadian story.

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: Precisely.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Usually, it's the opposite, so I find it fascinating.

Do I have time left?

The Chair: A minute.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I have a minute left.

The NFB's mandate covers the entire country. Do you have plans to take part in festivals, for example?

[*English*]

We have the Gimli Film Festival.

[*Translation*]

Are you planning to have a presence at such festivals?

[*English*]

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: The director of Gimli Film Festival is now on our board of trustees.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Joyce Bateman: How terrific. This is Canada.

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: Absolutely.

[*English*]

Our films are currently seen at a wide variety of festivals. As an example, last week was the FICFA, the festival in Moncton of the francophonie. We had 10 films there. That's something we do widely across the country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Joyce Bateman: As for the upcoming celebrations—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bateman. Your time is up.

[*English*]

Mr. Claude Joli-Coeur: Yes is what the answer would be.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We won't have enough time to continue the meeting after the vote, so we are going to end there.

Thank you to our witnesses for their remarks.

Meeting adjourned.

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