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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)) Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages today, Thursday, November 29, 2012.

We are here pursuant to Standing Order 108 for a study on linguistic duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017.

We have three groups before us today: Ms. Perkins and Mr. Rothon, from Canadian Parents for French; Mr. Cooke et Ms. Lafrance, from French for the Future; and Mr. Chartier and Mr. Fleury, from the Metis National Council.

We will start with Canadian Parents for French.

[English]

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins (President, National Office, Canadian Parents for French): Good morning, Mr. Chair, and to all of you respected committee members. Thank you for inviting Canadian Parents for French to attend these hearings on linguistic duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017. On behalf of my board, which represents members from coast to coast to coast, I am honoured to have been provided this opportunity to speak to you.

I would like to start with the following quotation from official languages Commissioner Fraser:

Despite the fact that the Official Languages Act is now into its fifth decade, it is still a challenge for some to recognize linguistic duality as a Canadian value and as a key element in Canada's identity. For that understanding to be broadened, it is important that the government do a better job of stressing the importance of Canada's official languages, increasing the opportunities for second-language learning and strengthening the presence of both languages....

[Translation]

I believe these words illustrate why there is a real and urgent need to use the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation as an opportunity to promote the value of official languages to all Canadians. As a Canada-wide network of volunteer parents with decades of experience organizing socio-cultural events celebrating our linguistic duality, CPF is pleased to be here today to share its best practices. Canadian Parents for French hopes that it can help in planning the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation.

[English]

I will now speak about Canadian Parents for French and pan-Canadian events supporting linguistic duality.

[Translation]

Each year, CPF organizes hundreds of activities in schools and communities across Canada. In the interest of brevity, I will describe just a few of these activities led by our national office or CFP offices, although many others of no less importance are led by parent volunteers, school boards and schools.

• (1105)

[English]

Our *Concours d'art oratoire* is a decades-old competition in which FSL students from across the country write and deliver a speech in French. Approximately 80,000 children take part in our concours from individual classrooms all over this country. Many francophones also compete in the concours, in the French first language category of the competition.

Allons en France is another CPF pan-Canadian competition. Organized in partnership with the Embassy of France, this writing competition requires students to incorporate words from a list of 10 pre-selected words. The contest originally required students to write a 300-word text in French on a specific theme. This year, we have modernized the competition by replacing the 300-word text with four tweets, which must incorporate at least two words from the list.

The CPF's B.C. and Yukon branch, later joined by CPF Alberta, ran two projects called Bilingualism Rocks and Bilingualism Rocks Two; a very innovative name, I guess. For two years, francophone performers from Quebec, Yukon, and Alberta toured two provinces and the one territory visiting dozens of communities and playing to thousands of children. The aim of Bilingualism Rocks was to bring young Canadians together in cultural celebration, establishing and extending relationships between young francophones and young francophiles.

As an aside, CPF national, in partnership with a number of CPF branches and Canadian Youth for French, has applied for funding for a project called O Canada, which is Bilingualism Rocks writ large. If approved, O Canada would engage students in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario by focusing on the historical, cultural, and artistic legitimacy of the francophone presence throughout Canada and its impact on francophiles.

Two more projects I wish to bring to your attention come from our Nova Scotia branch. *Speak for Yourself/Parle, c'est l'idéal* is a bilingual play developed by the Resource Centre for the Arts in Newfoundland and Canadian Parents for French. The play has a strong interactive component that invites audience members to come on stage and represent themselves. In other words, they become "spect-actors" rather than merely spectators.

The Action Media project made junior high students aware of francophone culture and the value of linguistic duality. Students researched a francophone musician, a genre of French music, or a francophone historical figure in Nova Scotia. With the aid of Radio Halifax Métro, more than 100 students prepared scripts and recorded three-minute audio presentations that were broadcast throughout March and April.

[Translation]

All these activities reflect a deep desire across the country to see the French language form part of the content, even in regions, and perhaps especially in these regions, where French is not part of the day-to-day reality. Addressing this need is what makes CPF one of the most important promoters of francophone and bilingual artists.

[English]

Let me turn to CPF's ideas on the 150th anniversary celebration of Confederation.

[Translation]

In its report "Canada's 150th Anniversary in 2017", the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage split its recommendations into four categories. We will give our opinion on three: planning, legacies, and participation.

In organizing its activities, CPF was able to adopt certain practices that have helped us develop our programs. Our success as one of the largest promoters of francophone and bilingual artists can be explained through the following five points.

[English]

In terms of what we would give you under those three categories, from our perspective we think many of the details the committee should consider are among those.

In conclusion I would like to sum up our view on what a central part bilingualism plays in our country's heritage, in who we are and who we will become, and to say how this fits into the 150th anniversary celebration.

A strong national identity is something to celebrate, and a key part of who we are as Canadians is official bilingualism. As such, Canadian Parents for French believes that linguistic duality during the celebrations of 2017 should be strongly represented.

With the integration of new technologies to attract younger generations, new linguistic legacies can be created. The lessons we have learned in order to be successful proponents of linguistic duality through our events are, we believe, universal. Our vision of these celebrations is that both French and English speakers be able to access all the events funded by the Canadian government without difficulty.

Canada's 150th anniversary is about our country, what makes us proud and what makes us unique. At Canadian Parents for French, we think one of those key pieces again is bilingualism, official languages bilingualism, to be specific. French is part of all Canadians' heritage. In the part of the country I come from, I think sometimes that is forgotten, or not even recognized. We need to take the opportunity to remind people of it.

French immersion students and core French students—and there are 2.8 million students across the country studying French as a second language right now—often talk about learning their country's history through another set of eyes when they learn their other official language. It's like learning about that other part of your family. It helps them understand who they are and realize their dreams and the dreams of their nation.

We could not be Canadians if we did not embrace both of our official languages. Maybe through the 150th anniversary celebration it's a gift we need to give back, showcasing official languages in all events across Canada.

It's also a gift to pay forward, by creating opportunities for our young to become the next prime minister, a great athlete, a great community builder, a trailblazer. It's a gift to open up and celebrate over that year by recognizing our bilingual graduates and singing all together a bilingual national anthem.

Thank you. *Merci*.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Perkins.

We will now move on to French for the Future.

Mr. Max Cooke (Vice-President, French for the Future): Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I would first like to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting French for the Future to take part in the study on linguistic duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017. This is the first time our organization has been asked to take part in such a process. Therefore, I would like to begin by introducing French for the Future so as to provide a context for the recommendations we will offer the committee.

French for the Future was founded in 1997. It was born out of an idea by John Ralston Saul that Canada's official languages are a richness that should unite us rather than divide us, and that all Canadian youth should have a chance to understand the positive impact that being bilingual can have on their lives. Based on this notion, a two-day forum for 250 high school students was organized in Toronto, focusing on the advantages of speaking French as a second language.

Since then, French for the Future has grown considerably. Our goal is best illustrated by our official mission statement: to promote Canada's official bilingualism and the immediate and lifelong benefits of learning and communicating in French to students from grades 7 to 12 across Canada. We do so by offering four main programs every year, to both French-first-language students of minority linguistic environments and French-second-language students.

First of all, we have a national essay contest which offers winners more than \$200,000 in scholarships to francophone and bilingual colleges and universities.

We also have Francoconnexion Sessions, our newest program, which consists of a ready-mate event toolkit and planning guide for the promotion of French within a classroom environment.

There are also Local Forums, which are held in over a dozen cities across the country every year, and allow for students to connect with successful bilingual role models — such as Olympian Kara Grant, and Juno Award winner Andrea Lindsay, to name a few — all the while attending educational and fun activities on the advantages of bilingualism.

Finally, we have a National Ambassador Youth Forum, which is in its ninth year, where 30 young leaders from across Canada gather in one city for five days. This a forum where, for example, a French immersion student from Lethbridge, Alberta, learns about minority language life from a student from Bathurst, New Brunswick and vice versa. They get a real, first-hand look at the current reality of Canadian bilingualism and its issues, and work together to create a conversation and find solutions that resonate with them. At the end of the National Ambassador Youth Forum, the students return to their respective communities as “ambassadors“, who will promote the French language and bilingualism amongst their peers and in their communities.

The goal of both the Local Forums and the National Ambassador Youth Forum is to bring students together. In doing so, we hope to give students the opportunity to experience French-Canadian language and culture outside of the classroom, so that they may develop their own understanding and appreciation of our country's linguistic duality.

•(1115)

Last year alone, our programs reached 25,000 high school students. Our next strategic goal is to reach 50,000 students. As we speak, French for the Future is an ever-growing leader in the promotion of official bilingualism in Canada, and that is because we have adapted our programs to the ever-changing reality of Canadian youth. Yet we have done so without ever losing sight of the organization's purpose: to contribute to the vision of a Canada in which all young people value our French heritage, appreciate francophone cultures and endeavour to excel in the French language.

[English]

It is clear from previous testimony in this study that French for the Future is not alone in recognizing the value of bilingualism. As numerous other witnesses have made abundantly clear before this committee, bilingualism is a defining characteristic of our country's history and identity and should not only be included in Confeder-

ation's 150th anniversary celebrations, but should be intrinsic to all elements of its preparation.

The same spirit that allowed two languages to survive and flourish side-by-side since the beginning of Confederation has continued to draw in the citizens of the world as we become an increasingly multinational and heterogeneous people. We believe bilingualism is a practical manifestation of this spirit of inclusion and openness, offering other avenues through which future generations are able to forge social and emotional bonds in our country.

At its core, our work strives to promote the message of acceptance and collective pride. The celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada should go beyond simply integrating both of our official languages. It should use our linguistic duality to reach out to our youth, to help ignite a sense of national pride, and to revive students' desire to learn and continue speaking both French and English in Canada. We can often see the moment when the eyes light up among students participating in our programs when they themselves realize the value of their emerging bilingualism. We can see they will carry on this lifelong passion for languages and culture. It's absolutely magical. A similar connection is made among our francophone students too, who perhaps had taken their own language and culture for granted.

We fully understand that the 150th anniversary of Confederation is not the anniversary of the Official Languages Act; however, we firmly believe that the celebrations should be used as a platform to reinforce the status of bilingualism as one of our nation's defining characteristics. French for the Future believes this can be done by promoting and investing in organizations that already work in this vein, but most importantly, it must be done through our youth.

I will now provide you with our recommendations.

One, we firmly believe that face-to-face exchange and personal interactions are most conducive to forging the idea of a collective we. In large part, our program is dedicated to offering an opportunity for students to further both their own experiences with bilingualism and their personal relationship with *la francophonie*. They are opportunities to celebrate regional differences and recognize common challenges. Perhaps most importantly, we strive to promote interaction in French beyond the classroom by underscoring the notion that learning French is not limited to grammar lessons and verb conjugations. It really isn't. We strongly support an initiative that would increase opportunities for cultural and linguistic exchanges leading up to and during the 150th anniversary of Confederation, as outlined in the 2011-12 annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. We believe that youth thrive when given the opportunity to experience the other official language beyond their curricula.

Two, while opportunities for French language instruction are increasing at the secondary level, students wishing to pursue post-secondary education in French continue to face many obstacles. One of these is basic availability, but in our experience a larger issue is that students simply aren't well acquainted with the options that do exist. Part of our programming seeks to make clear to students that they can continue to build on the momentum they have gained in their language education. We hope to convince them that their efforts can, and indeed should, lead to something beyond a designation adorning their high school diploma. We encourage developing more post-secondary French language opportunities so that young Canadians can realize linguistic duality is a lifelong gift and something they can carry with them into adulthood. Too often this isn't the case. This push should be tied in with the 150th anniversary of Confederation to cement the historical import of our bilingual heritage. However, it would continue to impact students well beyond 2017.

● (1120)

Three, French for the Future relies on the great diversity of the official language minority communities that exist throughout Canada to enrich our programming. We create local committees for our various events in cities to ensure various constituents with a vested interest in and passion for the success of French language education are properly represented. This allows our events to be infused with a local flavour, all the while showing students that their participation is part of something greater.

We believe the preparations for the 150th anniversary of Confederation should be conducted in a similar way. However, our experience is that youth are the key vehicle in spreading a message that endures beyond an event's celebrations. We support the formation and active involvement of a youth council consisting of representatives from different provinces and territories in the planning and execution of the anniversary commemoration in 2017. The council's work could be complemented by that of a high-profile bilingual youth spokesperson, whose role would be twofold. First, they would use their visibility to give voice to youth interests and concerns on a wider stage. Second, they would work to ensure that parts of the celebrations are oriented toward engaging our youth.

[Translation]

We hope that our testimony will help the Standing Committee on Official Languages in ensuring the presence of our official languages in the 2017 celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Confederation.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooke.

We will now have the Métis National Council.

Mr. Clément Chartier (President, Métis National Council): Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

With me is Elder Norman Fleury from Manitoba, an expert on the Michif language.

First, let me provide a brief overview of the Métis National Council, the representative body of the Métis nation. As I said, we are the national government of the Métis nation in that part of our historic homeland encompassing the prairie provinces, and extending into Ontario and British Columbia. Our homeland also extends into the Northwest Territories and the northwestern United States, historically known as the Old Northwest. We represent approximately 400,000 people, about one-third of the total aboriginal population of Canada.

Your study of Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017 and the role of the two official languages, English and French, affords Canadians the opportunity to reflect on how they wish to relate to Confederation. It has particular significance to the Métis nation, the founders of Canada's first post-Confederation province, Manitoba.

Our ancestors for the most part were not directly affected by the events in 1867 because they did not reside in the four confederating provinces. They lived in Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory, both of which were controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company.

Originally the mixed offspring of indigenous women and European fur traders, they evolved into a distinct people with their own culture, language, and political consciousness. In particular, the Michif language was influenced by the French voyageurs from Quebec, with the nouns being French and the remainder primarily being Cree. This is basically a fusion of two languages, forming the language of that newly evolved aboriginal people, the Métis nation.

While we were not part of the negotiations leading to the Constitution Act, 1867, our ancestors were nevertheless greatly impacted by its enactment. A major impetus behind political union was desired expansion to push westward to reach and unite with the colony of British Columbia.

Little attention was paid to those occupying the vast expanse of territory between the confederating provinces and the Pacific. By 1869 the population of the Red River settlement, one of the largest settlements on the plains of North America west of the Mississippi and north of the Missouri, consisted of 9,800 Métis and 1,600 white people. This was the community that lay in the path of the new Dominion of Canada as it began its march from sea to sea.

In 1869 the Hudson's Bay Company sold Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada for £300,000 and one-twentieth of the territory's fertile land. During the negotiation of the sale, no provision was made for the rights of the Métis majority in the Red River settlement that was expected to become part of a territory governed directly by Ottawa.

The response of our ancestors in 1869 was to establish the first Métis provisional government under Louis Riel and take control of the Red River settlement. It drafted a list of rights demanding no less than provincehood and sent emissaries to Ottawa to negotiate the terms of admission into Confederation of Manitoba as a province through the Manitoba Act, 1870, which among others, provided for French language rights in the new western province.

Unlike the confederating provinces, Manitoba would not have control over public lands. As compensation, section 31 of the Manitoba Act, 1870, provided for a grant of 1.4 million acres of land to the children of the Métis heads of families. A process for distributing these lands to the Métis, envisaged by the lieutenant-governor of the province to take one to two years, took more than a decade for the federal government to administer.

● (1125)

Amid a rapid influx of hostile settlers from Ontario moving on to their traditional lands, the vast majority of the Métis moved on. Their proportion of Manitoba's population dropped from 83% in 1870 to 7% in 1886. Our leader, Louis Riel, was elected to the House of Commons three times, but denied his seat. The continuing failure of the federal government to address Métis land claims led to the formation of the second Métis provisional government in the Saskatchewan Valley in 1884-85, again under Riel's leadership.

The federal response was an armed invasion, leading to the North-West Resistance of 1885, the defeat of the Métis nation at the Battle of Batoche, and the execution of Louis Riel on November 16, 1885. To this day, a significant number of French-speaking Métis remain in our traditional homeland.

I believe Canada's 150th anniversary provides an opportunity for Canadians and their governments to reflect on what happened in the wake of Confederation. Confederation and the federal system of government were a means of accommodating regions and cultures within a state. Through Riel's provisional government and the Manitoba Act, the Métis established themselves as one of Canada's founding peoples or nations. Despite this historic fact, we, the Métis nation, must struggle to have our existence recognized and our aspirations realized.

While recognition has been slow in coming, there has been some progress. In 1992, Parliament unanimously passed a resolution recognizing the unique and historic role of Louis Riel as a founder of Manitoba. In 2010, Parliament and a number of provincial legislatures declared the Year of the Métis to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the North-West Resistance of 1885, the Battle of Batoche, and the execution of Louis Riel. The Métis nation itself declared 2010 the year of the Métis nation, and subsequently declared 2011 to 2020 the decade of the Métis nation, with the year 2012 designated as celebrating our Métis nation culture and language.

I believe this committee should recommend that Confederation commemorations recognize the historic contributions of the Métis nation as a founding people who had to rise in resistance to enter Confederation. Furthermore, I encourage this committee to start giving serious thought to the 150th anniversary of Manitoba in 2020 with particular focus on the historic and contemporary role of the Métis nation in its development, including the constitutional guarantee of French language rights today benefiting Franco-Manitobans.

Given this committee's mandate to deal with official languages, one of the greatest contributions this committee can make is to encourage Canadian Heritage and national cultural institutions to support the development and expansion of the Métis nation's efforts to preserve and enhance the Michif language.

A number of years ago, I encouraged the federal government to put in place a French language training program so that our Métis youth could study that language in Quebec, which I believed would help us in the preservation of Michif. This proposal was not acted on.

An important contribution your committee can make in this regard is to encourage Canadian Heritage to support the expansion plans of the Métis nation's cultural and educational institutions. Prime examples are the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatoon, the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg, the Rupertsland Institute in Edmonton, and their efforts to revive the Michif language.

Another concrete measure that could be taken by your committee is to recommend to the federal government that fiscal resources be provided to our governments and institutions so we can save our Michif language, and that as part of the preparations for the 150th anniversary, Canada take into account that the Métis nation flag will be 200 years old in 2015. This should also include funding for our Métis nation governments so that materials and publications can be translated and published in French.

● (1130)

On that note, after hearing from Elder Fleury, we'll be happy to answer your questions.

The Chair: Elder Fleury, you have about a minute or so before we need to go to questions and comments from members.

Mr. Norman Fleury (Elder, Métis National Council): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Good morning. My name is Norman Fleury. I am very pleased to be with you today to talk about the importance of our language, Michif. For our nation, the Michifs of Canada, it is important to preserve our language, to keep it and to document all of our stories in Canada. It is an important part of Canada's heritage.

The Michif language came about in this country when first nations and French people from France met. I have ancestors who are still in France, in Quebec and in the Canadian Prairies. I am happy to be able to speak all of these languages, but especially my first language, which is Michif.

I am Michif. There are Métis people, Métis and half-breeds. I am Michif. My language and my nation are associated; I am Michif. That is why the Michif language bears that name, just like someone who speaks French is French and someone who speaks the Dakota language is Dakota, and so on for other languages. It is a question of association.

I don't have much time to talk today. I apologize. We could talk about many things, for example camps for young people that would allow them to keep their language.

The Michif language is made up of two languages: the nouns and the grammar come from French, while the verbs come from the Cree language.

Michif was my mother's first language. She passed away two years ago at the age of 108. I was born in 1949, and my first language is Michif. My maternal grandparents were born in 1877 and 1880, and it was also their first language. My great-grandparents also spoke Michif. This language was not created yesterday.

It is above all an oral language. We started writing our language about 20 years ago in Canada. Linguists have studied our language. In North America, in the United States, in Belcourt, in North Dakota, our people are still present. Our language is spoken and taught in institutions.

In Canada, we don't have institutions; it's sad. The Michif language is taught in communities that are specifically Michif. In 2013, I will start to teach at the University of Brandon. It will be the first time that our language will be known. It is mainly French, but we still borrow words from English, for example the truck, the computer, the telephone, and so on.

A voice: We do too.

Mr. Norman Fleury: Our language is mainly associated with French. There are voyageurs songs, songs by Pierre Falcon, music and dance. It is all associated with dances from Europe, from Canada, and with the language. French has never been forgotten and it needs to be preserved. Michifs speak all of these languages, but mainly French and Michif.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fleury.

Mr. Norman Fleury: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We now have one hour and 20 minutes for questions and comments.

We will start with Mr. Benskin.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Thank you for being with us today.

[English]

I rushed in, so I missed a little bit of your presentation, Ms. Perkins, but I managed to catch up from your document. Thank you for providing that.

There are a couple of common themes that have occurred throughout this study, and the almost year-long study in the heritage committee. Mr. Chartier I believe you were present at the heritage committee. One of those themes was exchange and how we get this celebration across Canada, as opposed to having a hodge-podge of different events happening across the country. One of the huge obstacles is the cost of travelling across the country.

How would you see the organization that will eventually be at the head of this tackling this issue? What methodology do you see being used to make this happen?

The question is for Mr. Cooke and Ms. Perkins in particular.

• (1140)

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: We're very lucky to work very closely with our colleagues in organizations like French for the Future and Canadian Youth for French, who do a lot of work and exchanges, along with programs like Encounters with Canada.

In our brief, we point out two things that are very interesting. We, as individual organizations, do a lot of work to bring together youth across this country, in things such as our signature event, national *Concours d'art oratoire*. That could potentially be elevated to be something very significant during Canada's celebrations in 2017. We talk a lot about social media and connecting with students in a virtual environment. Sometimes exchange is the exchange of ideas, the exchange of communication, and that can be done very effectively in an online environment, as well as in person. I think we have to challenge ourselves to look for those opportunities. It's an environment that our youth are increasingly very comfortable and familiar with, which we don't necessarily leverage for that purpose.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Okay.

Mr. Cooke, earlier you touched on the idea, and I believe this very strongly, that language isn't simply language. One also needs to be able to immerse oneself in the culture itself. It's harder to do that virtually as opposed to going to Quebec City or going to areas within the Métis nation to learn about that history in a more tangible way.

Would you care to address that?

Mr. Max Cooke: In a lot of ways, I think back to my own experience and my first exchange in Lac Saint-Jean. I always go back to this. It changed my life, being in a family for a couple of weeks and having that recognition that French wasn't just something I was being asked to learn or something to take, like a vitamin. Essentially, the connection was made, and that's the point. How do we build this connection, not only between French and English, but to culture, too? How do we build this connection to the history of Canada?

We can't look at it as a given that many of our students have a good knowledge of our history and Confederation. You're never going to bring every student into Lac Saint-Jean for that discovery. However, I support the idea of social media. I think if it was driven by a theme, led by youth, to engage youth in an inquiry-based model, assuming that they don't know what Confederation is, and they could discover everything themselves along the way—and that goes for all of our cultures—then there's a lot of learning that could be done.

As a communications person, I honestly think it would take some pretty good marketing to make it cool and to engage the youth to want to be part of this. I think that takes a lot of shrewd planning, but I think it's possible if it's done correctly. As an organization, we do have experience in connecting with youth as do Canadian Parents for French and many other organizations.

It's a collective effort, but it should be based on a common theme, one that is youth-led, youth-voiced, youth-driven, to let the youth discover the importance of this for themselves along the way.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Thank you.

The other thing that has been quite recurrent is the concept of recognition of the true history of Canada. I think there are only two or three provinces right now that require history to graduate, and that's a sad, sad thing. Kids aren't learning about the true nature of how this country came together. Whether we agree with it or not, it is part of our history. I think history is a wonderful thing, warts and all.

To our Métis friends, with regard to the 150th anniversary of Confederation, you've set out quite succinctly the history of the Métis people. How would you want your participation in this commemoration and celebration of our Confederation to be recognized?

• (1145)

Mr. Norman Fleury: First of all, I'd like to express myself in my language and give you an actual example to answer your question.

[*Witness speaks in his native language*]

I've answered you in my language. Historically that's how we used to speak. Our language was used in various ways, and it was a family language. It was a language of commerce, of trade. It was also a ceremonial language.

When you're talking about the history of Canada and how Canada has learned to appreciate who we are as a people—and Heritage Canada has taken part in the development and the preservation of our language—it has come to a point where we're just getting started. We've barely started. We're trying to bridge the gap between the cultures in Canada so we can bring ourselves together and have a better foundation in this country and a better place for everybody.

I have children and grandchildren. I have a son who's 15 going on 16. He's in high school. When he was seven years old, he did a presentation and a display. He was just a young boy. In one way, we're saying we're lost, and in another way we're saying we've gained. When a seven-year-old child goes out in the public and showcases who we are as a people and a nation within this country, that means we've come a long way.

My grandmother, who was born in 1880, never had a chance to use her language publicly. She never had a chance to showcase her language. When she went shopping, the business of commerce was English, and that's how she learned a little bit of English and she learned French. My grandparents knew many languages. They were the languages of trade. During the buffalo hunts, when you went through certain territories you had to speak the languages of the people of those territories. That's how we became very diverse. Today I'm one of those people who can happily say that I'm very well versed in Dakota, in Ojibway, which is Saulteaux, Cree, Michif, and French. We're very well assimilated with our languages and our culture. Some 90% of our Métis people are assimilated in the English culture.

Because of the colonization and whatever else, residential schools, we have had no choice but to be immersed, and because of that we've lost a lot of our culture. If it wasn't for our Métis organizations that celebrate Back to Batoche every year, where we display who we are, we wouldn't get many chances. When I hear what we're talking about here, I see us at Back to Batoche, where we can display ourselves as people of this country. That's not to forget—and that's why we're here—that the Michif, the Métis people are involved.

We have to have things like cultural camps, language input, our stories, our songs, our history. We have to have it all. We have to showcase it, regardless of whether it's in Saint-Jean sur Richelieu, Quebec, or it's in St. Lazare, Manitoba, where I was born and raised, as long as the people have an opportunity, especially our youth, to gather with our elders, because the elders are the teachers.

Merci. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Gourde.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for coming this morning. It is very interesting.

My question is for the representatives of the three organizations.

How would you like to participate in planning the celebrations for Canada's 150th anniversary, in 2017, and what contribution would you like to make to the planning?

• (1150)

Ms. Lisa Marie Perkins: In my presentation on Canadian Parents for French, I indicated that

[*English*]

we have a lot of experience in organizing pan-Canadian events for our youth across the country and in working with families.

You must recognize that French is not the first language of most of the parents we deal with, but it is something they value. Therefore, not only do we, along with our colleagues, have an opportunity to be that connection for you to youth, we have an opportunity to bridge with and engage the families in those communities all across the country. For any planning you do, we have a lot of expertise and doors we can open.

We offer our own events, such as *Concours d'art oratoire* and *Allons en France*, as two themes for the 150th anniversary we could showcase and build to be national celebrations that all Canadians and the Government of Canada could be very proud of.

There is an opportunity for this committee to make recommendations that not only create new things but also leverage much of the good work that organizations such as my colleagues across this table offer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Max Cooke: For our part, French for the Future, our expertise mainly involves engaging teenagers. They are at an age when it is pretty difficult to get them to participate in anything.

For our Local Forums, we have a national network of coordination committees. That infrastructure allows us to plan events. For example, for our National Ambassador Youth Forum, we have a different theme every year. Certainly, in 2017 or even in 2016, the significance of the anniversary of Confederation would be a perfect discussion theme.

We also have a sort of database with the spokespeople for youth, throughout Canada. These are people who work in the public and private sectors. They could help spread the message about this anniversary and highlight the importance of Confederation.

[English]

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you for the question.

We have a protocol with the federal government, the Métis Nation Protocol signed in 2008. Under that, this whole issue could potentially be one of the agendas that we deal with bilaterally with the federal government. One of the things I may propose to the minister is that we set up an interdepartmental or multi-departmental committee of senior officials and our Métis nation representatives to discuss the potential for Métis nation engagement.

I know we won't resolve it today. I appeared in front of the heritage committee, but I didn't see anything in the recommendations that was Métis specific. In any event, we keep coming to these tables.

One of the things I would reiterate is that as we move to the 150th anniversary in 2017, we should not lose track that three years later there is Manitoba's anniversary. The two should be linked. We're dealing with not just a snapshot in history; we should be dealing with Canada's history as a total to determine how we have evolved as a people, as Canadians, since Confederation, but also with the steps that took place after that, particularly the important ones such as the negotiation of entry into Confederation of the Métis nation through the province of Manitoba. That transaction involved something like three-quarters of the current land mass of Canada in that negotiation process. The Métis were very instrumental in ensuring French language rights and school rights were entrenched in the Constitution of Canada. That is significant, so I would think the Métis nation has a very crucial role to play in all of this. A process that engages us directly would be something that we would benefit from.

The specifics we can speak about there, but picking up on what Elder Fleury said, we could have a simple thing like youth camps at Batoche and at Lachine, Quebec where, rather than having separate camps we could have camps together to discuss the history and also to learn the respective languages. French-speaking youth should also learn the Michif language. That would help us. I think our youth must learn the French language, because it's a very important part of our heritage as well.

•(1155)

[Translation]

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

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to each and every one of you for being here. Thank you for all of your efforts for the French language and the Michif language. Bravo!

I would like to ask you the same question I asked all of our witnesses. We have to produce a report. It will not be the report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, but rather the report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Therefore, we won't cover the whole issue of celebrations for the anniversary of Confederation. We must focus on two subjects.

First of all, we must ensure that both official languages will be fully respected during the celebrations and that there won't be

unfortunate incidents, such as some others that are still fresh in our minds.

Second of all, we must ensure that the themes that are celebrated will honour Canada's linguistic duality. We have to get it right, both in terms of delivery and what we choose to celebrate. That is why we need your experience, your expertise and your suggestions.

Mr. Cooke, tell me if I miss something, but I'm going to summarize your three suggestions.

First, you suggest increasing opportunities for cultural and linguistic exchanges. I imagine you have a goal to propose to us. That would mean that we start now to build up to 2017.

Second, you suggest increasing access to post-secondary studies in French as a second language. As you know, that falls under provincial jurisdiction. What can we do to convince the provinces to correct things? In fact, west of Ontario, there are no requirements regarding French.

Third, regarding the celebrations, you propose creating a youth council, in both official languages I imagine, that would allow young people to celebrate Confederation according to the criteria and goals of their generation.

Mr. Chartier and Mr. Fleury, I think you are asking for three things. Let me know if I missed something.

First, you want us to increase our efforts to protect your language.

Second, you would like us to strengthen exchanges between young people or people of all ages with Quebec.

Third, you hope we will celebrate your flag in 2015.

Ms. Perkins, I didn't understand what you want us to do. I know that what Canadian Parents for French does is terrific.

[English]

I would like to ask you to clarify exactly what you think we should put in our report as a recommendation to the government for this opportunity we have to celebrate Confederation in 2017.

[Translation]

You can answer first, Ms. Perkins.

Ms. Lisa Marie Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Dion.

[English]

There are a few recommendations in our brief.

Number one, we would like every celebration across the country to be bilingual, and not rely on the fact that certain communities.... I'll speak from Red Deer's perspective, and when we have Canada Day

[Translation]

or a celebration like that.

[English]

If you were to ask the people in the organizing committee how much French should there be, they wouldn't necessarily recognize that 10% of the school population is in immersion or core French. They wouldn't know the history of Fort Normandeau or that our community was founded by people like Guy Lacombe. They wouldn't know that.

We recommend, first of all, that there be a stronger emphasis and it be much clearer what the language requirements are for all celebrations across this country.

Again, for those students who are learning French as their second language, and this speaks to Mr. Cooke's point, this means showing that French is a living language. It's a language we speak outside the classroom. It's more than math. It's more than social studies. It's who we are. It's part of our history, and part of where all Canadians live.

Number two, we would like official recognition of people like myself who are bilingual, who took time to learn *les deux langues officielles* to try to live, work and play in both languages and consider it so essential to our identity.

We've been working really hard at trying to work on the DELF program, *Diplôme d'études en langue française*, so that bilingualism is officially recognized across this country as a skill and an asset. Bilingualism is something you can bring with you and showcase and celebrate.

One of our other recommendations was to look at creating a bilingual national anthem. I can tell you from living in the part of the country I live in, I was at the Calgary Stampede this year, and I'm sure you all heard about the bit of controversy there. The English-only version was played at the grandstand show. What was really interesting was Calgarians said that this was not acceptable, that they want a French and English version. I can also tell you that people don't know what that means.

What is the real version of *O Canada*?

[Translation]

Is it the version sung in English and in French,

[English]

Is it a bilingual version that is shared across the country? Every Canadian should have an opportunity to learn that even if it's just

[Translation]

four sentences in French

[English]

that they learn, it's our national anthem and should be represented in both languages.

[Translation]

Thank you.

I don't know if what I said was clear.

● (1200)

[English]

Mr. Max Cooke: More briefly I will say number one is cultural and linguistic exchanges for French second language learners. I always say they have to make the French connection on their own. They have to have intrinsic motivation that comes from them, not because someone's telling them to do it, and exchanges are a great way for that motivation to happen.

Our second recommendation is post-secondary learning opportunities. We don't want our students to just go through the system that's been afforded to them in Canada, become functionally bilingual or better, and then to drop it. This is happening every year.

The 150th anniversary celebration could be this opportunity to leave a legacy. If we can build the knowledge that these programs, bilingual programs, French post-secondary programs, exist across Canada, this will leave a legacy on the bigger picture of our founding languages.

I would also say beyond my recommendations from what I've heard today we have to include our first nation languages, not to mention the hundreds of languages that are spoken in Canada every day, which has been a lasting legacy for—I'm not going to say how many years; I'm not an historian—a very long time. It goes way beyond the two founding languages. I think we have to find ways to incorporate that.

Third, there's the youth council, youth voice dialogue.

[Translation]

We have to move past the two solitudes. Youngsters must be the spokesperson for all of that and see for themselves. That is the third recommendation.

[English]

Let them lead the way.

In terms of ceremonies, all ceremonies in some aspect or another, no matter if they're in Red Deer, Bathurst, or wherever, should be bilingual. It's who we are.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chartier or Mr. Fleury, do you have something to add?

[English]

Mr. Clément Chartier: I think you captured one of the points we made. That in itself would be positive.

I want to say taking an example from the Olympic Games, the engagement of aboriginal youth in the opening ceremonies and in the month prior to the games was very successful. If nothing else, if there can be some way to ensure the youth are engaged in some major event during that year, it would be quite engaging and quite helpful as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

We are going to have a short break of about five minutes.

I invite the witnesses to eat with us.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: We are resuming the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Trottier, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, thank you to our guests for being here this morning.

All three of this morning's groups value youth highly. However, school was not necessarily central to your presentations. You placed greater emphasis on the importance of creating opportunities for young people to meet outside of school, to be able to get to know each other, to express themselves, and to truly cultivate a sense of pride and belonging.

It's somewhat among those lines that we are attempting to plan the 150th anniversary celebration of Canada's Confederation. It must also be said that this anniversary is not just for young people. It's for all Canadians.

If we think of the youth aspect, which key elements would ensure young people's participation? When we create these opportunities for young people, there's always a risk that they won't come because they're not interested. So, what would be the key elements for youth?

I would like to hear from the representatives of all three groups, please. We could start with Canadian Parents for French.

• (1215)

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: As a parent — my son is 15 years old —,

[English]

I will answer that directly from my own experience. We would say not only do they have to have chances to meet, they have to have the opportunity to learn their other official language. First and foremost, if we don't have that

[Translation]

base in the educational system throughout Canada to allow Canadians to have the opportunity to learn the other official language,

[English]

we can't have that rapprochement you are looking for.

First, our experience is it needs to be accessible to the youth, in their second language in our case. Sometimes when francophone artists come, you are dealing with a different language style, a different *niveau de langue* than a core francophone speaker versus a francophile. Make sure the artists can speak to them where they are.

Second, give them examples of themselves. I appreciated Mr. Cooke's idea of having a *jeune ambassadeur* who is bilingual. Nothing excites youth more than having someone similar to who they are and not someone like me telling them this is what they should do.

Third, we would agree with our colleagues at French for the Future. Let the youth organize that. They know what they like, what they want, what's appealing. We're just guessing.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Very well, thank you.

Mr. Cooke, would you like to add something?

Mr. Max Cooke: Briefly, it has to be cool.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: And what does that mean?

Mr. Max Cooke: I'm really too old to answer that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Max Cooke: However, I can ask young people. Really, quite simply, I would answer that young people have to be asked. There are two organizations here that can ask them, well in advance, what they want to learn about Confederation and our history.

Furthermore, prior to that, I think an approach based on surveys is needed. We could have projects, maybe in schools, based on the fact that they know nothing of our history and have to start from scratch. Young people have to make personal discoveries that are their own. It's part of their history, whether or not it comes from them. Do you understand?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Yes, yes.

Mr. Max Cooke: All of that has to be personalized. As I said, it has to be

[English]

led by youth, young boys.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chartier and Mr. Fleury,

[English]

what is important for Métis youth when it comes to participating in these kinds of celebrations? What encourages them to move away from whatever their current distractions are and to participate?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you, Mr. Trottier.

I gave a couple of examples earlier. One of the things for youth is to enable them to meet among themselves and to come up with their own ideas.

We used to have what was called the Métis National Youth Advisory Council, but unfortunately funding was curtailed about four years ago, so they've not had the capacity to meet nationally. Some of our provincial governing members do have youth councils. They continue to meet and come up with ideas.

I would go back to social engagement and exchanges, primarily in our case, with the Métis youth and the youth of Quebec to have social engagement at some kinds of camps. Batoche would be an ideal place in the west. I'm not sure where in Quebec. Lachine, Quebec would be good because that's where the voyageurs heading west left from. There is that historic connection.

I would think that combined with language instruction there would also be other activities that get their attention, whatever they may be. It could be sports, drama, theatre. It could be different themes at different times. Along with that of course there would be language and history, to learn about the various cultures.

That would be of significance to us. Our youth have asked for that for a long time.

•(1220)

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I would like to know one thing, quickly. What do you think of the differences between Canada's 150th anniversary and its centennial? What changed in Canada over the last 50 years? What could we do differently? I don't know if you are all old enough to know what happened in 1967. At the time, there were many projects. So, what could be, or rather, what should be different, this time around, with the 150th anniversary?

Mr. Cooke, do you have any ideas about that?

Mr. Max Cooke: You are asking me what is the difference between the 100th and the 150th anniversary, is that right?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Exactly. What should be different in terms of the format, the mechanisms, or the way we celebrate the anniversary of Confederation?

Mr. Max Cooke: First of all, I was born in 1973.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Max Cooke: No, I am serious.

I would say that immigration has changed. Young people's origins and families have changed. The situation continues to change, and it is certainly different from that of 1967.

I think that, among youth, social media is a game-changer. Even we don't understand how it happened, but it has completely changed everything.

[*English*]

If you don't take advantage of that part and engage the young people, you're missing a great opportunity to hear their voice and have their participation.

[*Translation*]

So, I would simply point to those two factors.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here this afternoon.

We have two good examples of young anglophones who made the decision, when they were young, to learn the other official language. Is that not so, Ms. Perkins and Mr. Cooke? I'm sure that you made

that decision when you were young. They are both good examples of what we are trying to do here, in our country.

Do you have any ideas about what we could do, during the 150th anniversary celebrations, to encourage young people to decide, as you did in the past, to learn the other official language? Be it French or English, there is no difference. Is there something that we could do during the celebrations to encourage young people to learn the other official language, to make them understand that it's cool, as you say?

We will start with Ms. Perkins.

Ms. Lisa Marie Perkins: Thank you.

[*English*]

Yes, that is accurate, although I'm going to say it was *grâce à mes parents*, thanks to my parents, that I am bilingual. Education decisions are made by parents, although the reason they continue to embrace their other official language or their bilingualism as adults is left to themselves. For someone like me, I decided when I started university. Parents make those decisions for their children *à la maternelle, en première année*, or even when we're lucky enough to have *immersion tardive*, late immersion, in some of our communities across the country.

I'm not going to say it's not important to be engaging youth, but it starts when people are little, before they are youth. It's about putting information into the hands of parents as to why being bilingual is such an asset, how it builds character in an individual, how it helps build a community, and helps build a country. It's a choice every parent should be able to make and have access to in their communities. That's critical. We would say to start there.

•(1225)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you.

Mr. Cooke.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Max Cooke: I am thankful to my mother. In 1978 in Brantford, Ontario, the first French immersion class was instituted. In Brantford, you can't...

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What can we do during the celebrations to encourage other young people to do what you did?

Mr. Max Cooke: As I said earlier, young people really have to realize that they can speak French outside the classroom and to people other than their teachers. Again, this is a question of communication.

Also, I want to hear fewer and fewer young people in schools ask why they need to learn French. In this case too, we have to make a connection...

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I would like to ask you a second question to which I would like to get a quick answer.

I believe you both said that the celebrations should be held in both official languages. Do you think they should be completely bilingual, whether they are in Quebec or in Alberta?

[English]

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: I would say, why not? True. Coming from my province, it's go big or go home.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: That's fine.

Mr. Max Cooke: In my opinion, as I said to Mr. Dion, this represents who we are. It should be part of the celebrations all across Canada, absolutely.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Thank you.

Actually, Ms. Perkins, I will continue in the same vein. I personally really appreciated that you insisted on the importance of having bilingual celebrations, as Mr. Cooke did.

I quickly looked at the document you provided. You mention the show *Bilingualism Rocks*, which was performed even in remote areas in Canada. It garnered a lot of interest and was successful.

Could you give us concrete examples of ways to include francophone elements in small rural communities in Alberta, for example, or in other regions in Canada?

[English]

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: I can speak

[Translation]

for the city of Red Deer. In the city of Red Deer, we have a francophone carnival with lumberjacks

[English]

who seem to be everywhere in Alberta

[Translation]

to make toffee

[English]

and things like that.

In terms of CPF, I'm going to ask my executive director to give you a very brief example of, let's say, *Bilingualism Rocks*, and some of the success stories we've had.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Rothon (Executive Director, National Office, Canadian Parents for French): Thank you.

Bilingualism Rocks was presented in a number of communities in British Columbia and Yukon, and during its second year, in Alberta. Thousands of school children in a number of communities saw the show.

One of the elements that made this project a success was the fact that the facilitators and artists were able to adapt to their audiences' level of language skills. When they had a francophone audience, they included more content and used references shared by the students. They were able to adapt their show when, at other times,

they had a mainly anglophone audience, for example of grade 3 students learning basic French for the first time.

The key is to always present content in a way that the audience can easily understand and absorb. What's even better, during the second year we asked them to find content related to the local geography and culture.

When you think about it, we have a rich French language heritage across Canada. I am speaking as someone from British Columbia, and I can assure you that there is a lot of francophone history in British Columbia. It is not well or widely known, but it is there. These stories provide many opportunities to discover our linguistic heritage, which is really a shared heritage.

As my last point, I want to say that we always highlight the fact that heritage does not belong exclusively to one group of Canadians. Heritage can be shared by everyone and, with some nuances, enriches everyone's lives. That's what I have to say.

Ms. Éline Michaud: So this is really an integral part, an essential part of our identity. It should be included, in one form or another, in all the celebrations.

Mr. Robert Rothon: I agree with you.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Cooke, do you have any suggestions?

Mr. Max Cooke: I would again say that we have to ask the young people. We also have to present real activities, creative activities that are innovative.

I had a bit of an experience in Thunder Bay. I was with a group of bilingual boys in grade 8. They did not want to go to high school. I did a little exercise with them in slang so that they could speak the language differently and learn Quebec's language and culture. It was a huge success. This may not be something we can do in schools, of course, but we have to think about how to provide young people with real experiences because students in French immersion do not speak French with each other.

Also, students in French immersion have to be able to speak to francophone students. It completely changes the atmosphere and the environment.

● (1230)

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you.

Regarding young people and your youth council, if I remember correctly, you would like them to have real decision-making authority in planning and delivering the 150th anniversary celebrations.

Mr. Max Cooke: Absolutely, because they are our future.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you.

Since I don't have a lot of time left, I will ask you a brief question.

Mr. Chartier and Mr. Fleury, how do you envision the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in small remote communities where people of Métis origin live?

Mr. Norman Fleury: Let me take a step back in time to tell you my story. I've never had the opportunity to talk about my people's place in Canada's history. We certainly didn't talk about it in classes at school.

My children live in an anglophone community so they don't have this opportunity either. There is no mention of the Michif language in the curriculum. There was no Michif in my day either when I was in Saint-Lazare, in Manitoba. Today everything is in French in Saint-Lazare, but when I was in school, we only had half an hour of French class and half an hour of catechism class. At the time, we were not afforded this opportunity, and my children won't be either.

We don't have the control. The government, the village, the city or major cities have control, but as for us, we are still not recognized and it is time for us to be given this recognition.

Our president, Mr. Chartier, mentioned that there used to be youth organizations at one point. When they got together, they would celebrate amongst themselves. We're talking about young people between the ages of 12 and 29, some of whom already had their own children. They did not have the chance to express themselves either. We tried hard to give them this opportunity by organizing celebrations with the Manitoba Métis Federation. Now they no longer have this opportunity because there is no more money to meet their needs, and that's that. It's a different story in the schools.

I would like to visit Batoche where there are special camps for Métis children that teach them the Michif language and French. There are only two languages. In Saint-Lazare and in Saint-Laurent, Manitoba, everything is in French. However, the other Métis communities don't have schools that teach the Michif language, the songs, the music, the legends, the mysteries and everything else that surrounds this language. It doesn't exist, so they can't learn it.

• (1235)

The Chair: All right, thank you Mr. Fleury.

Mr. Chisu, you have the floor.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

I will continue in English.

[English]

The 150th anniversary of Confederation is an important milestone in the history of our country. Our country is unique in the world, with many people of different origins contributing to make Canada the best place to live in the world today.

The importance of history and our linguistic duality is paramount, in my opinion. It is important for Canada to remain one of the leading countries in creativity in the world.

I can sympathize with Mr. Norm Fleury from the Métis nation, because my mother tongue is neither French nor English, and I speak several other languages.

How can your organization contribute to involve not only the federal government, but also the provincial and municipal governments, which I think should be part of this great celebration that we will have? The 150th anniversary is a milestone. It shows the beginnings of what we are today, a great country.

What can you contribute and how can you involve other levels of government? What do you recommend to us for this milestone in

history to be successful and useful, and reflect our linguistic duality entirely? What themes would your organization or you like to propose and highlight during this celebration of our country?

I would like all of you to answer.

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: Canadian Parents for French is uniquely positioned to help work with all orders of government and, indeed, with folks right on the ground. As I said earlier on, we're a collection of parents from coast to coast to coast, primarily anglophone parents who have made a decision to put their children in French immersion or core French.

We have chapters across this country in almost every community in Canada. We work with municipalities in offering French camps. We have good relationships with our municipal governments. We have good relationships with school boards, francophone, public and private, depending on the jurisdiction. We have a branch in every province. Their mission and mandate is

[Translation]

to work closely with the provincial government.

[English]

They work a lot with education ministries and ensure that we're linked in there. Our job as a national board is to play the quarterback role and work with the federal government and our partners at a national level.

If I were to give a theme, I'd say that French is alive and well, and French is something we are to be very proud of.

Again, what's different from the 100th anniversary celebration, which I was not around for, is that it was a bricks-and-mortar legacy. I think this is an opportunity for us to have a people legacy in this 150th anniversary and build on the strengths of the people we have.

Again, we have an increasing number of Canadians who identify as being bilingual. If we were to give you a stretch goal, French language education across the country should be a right for every child.

Mr. Max Cooke: I think this is an opportunity for an awakening, not just among our youth but among Canadians in general, that there are two founding languages but there are also multiple languages from first nations communities. It is an awakening that francophone minority communities exist, not just in Quebec. It is an awakening that our first nations communities are alive and vibrant throughout the country. It is having average Canadians go beyond their own provincial milieu and think on a national level. I think there's a tremendous amount of work to do, which is why I call it an awakening.

With something like this, it's an opportunity to gather together all the people you have been speaking to, beyond our organizations, collectively. Too often it's the Canadian way to do the opposite. I think this could really be an opportunity.

• (1240)

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): I'd like to thank you all for being with us today.

I am pleased with what I heard today. Since the beginning of our consultations on this subject, we met with many representatives from institutions such as museums, the NFB and others. Today we are meeting with two groups of people who love French and who like sharing their love of the language with young people. You are doing excellent work and I think it's wonderful that you are here.

When Statistics Canada published its recent data on bilingualism in Canada, I must admit that several of us were worried, particularly with respect to bilingualism among youth which fell from 15% to 11%. This is your target age group.

I personally think that the 150th anniversary of Confederation will be a great opportunity to renew young people's interest in learning languages. It's unfortunate that you didn't participate in the hearings for the 150th anniversary. After all, the future of this linguistic duality relies heavily on your organizations. The institutional sector can play a role, but there needs to be action taken at the grassroots level.

To date, I haven't heard about projects involving youth that would act as a game-changer and turn the tide. I think that the 150th anniversary should give 150,000 young people the opportunity to travel all around Canada. I'd like to hear your comments. What are your projects that would inspire people to participate in these kinds of activities?

The Chair: Mr. Chartier, Mr. Fleury or Mr. Cooke, would you like to answer the question?

Mr. Max Cooke: Are we talking about a blue-sky idea?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Yes, if that's possible. I am looking for ideas that will inspire people.

Mr. Max Cooke: Our National Ambassador Youth Forum is made up of 50% francophones and 50% anglophones. These kinds of exchanges are magic. How can we boost this from 30 students to hundreds or thousands of students? I think you're talking about something along those lines. We have to find a way to make these kinds of connections.

I've thought of trying virtual exchanges, but I'm not convinced that this would be as valuable as direct communication between youth. I don't have all the answers as to how we're going to accomplish this, but if we can leverage these kinds of connections, then things are really going to flourish.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Indeed, this is a great opportunity, however we've been told that there aren't any funds for the time being. The future is uncertain and we still don't have a planning committee. It's now or never. We have to come up with projects that will get people excited so that in 25 or 30 years, linguistic duality will not be an intellectual or theoretical concept, but rather an everyday reality. This is the challenge we're faced with.

Take young allophones for example. Let's say I am Chinese and I arrive in British Columbia. My mother tongue is Mandarin and I will attend English school. What would motivate me to learn French?

The Chair: Go ahead Mr. Cooke.

Mr. Max Cooke: In my experience, if family members arrive here and see that in Canada their children can learn French, English and their mother tongue, they think: "Why not?". It's a major plus. This is a trend that we're seeing more and more. A number of young allophones have registered in immersion programs.

[English]

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: I'd like to reassure you that, from our perspective, French immersion and core French programming, and the demand for them, are alive and well across this country. There are lineups. There are caps on programs that parents are very frustrated with. School districts would love to have more classrooms and more qualified teachers to offer more of it.

In terms of the allophone population, CPF did commission a research study two years ago, headed by Callie Mady, who worked very specifically with the allophone population. One of the things we were very happy to learn, one of the statistics we received, was that 80% of allophone parents, if they were told their child could be in an immersion setting, would have signed them up to learn both official languages.

● (1245)

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Wilks.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank those who are here today.

My question is directed to the Métis National Council and specifically Elder Fleury.

I am a retired member of the RCMP. I am fascinated by the history, especially because of how our western history started with the North-West Mounted Police, specifically in Manitoba. There are some sad stories with regard to the Métis and the North-West Mounted Police.

To go beyond that and try to intertwine what we're speaking of here today, I wonder if you could speak to a couple of things. It seems to me the Métis have such a great story to tell because, in my opinion, they affected Confederation. The reason I say that is that the North-West Mounted Police were forged to ensure that all members at the time could speak both official languages. It wasn't because of what was occurring in eastern Canada. It was because of the recognition that they would need both languages in the west. As a result of that, when the North-West Mounted Police arrived in Dufferin, they recognized that they would need to be able to converse with the Métis. The Métis had their own language, Michif. They recognized they would be able to dialogue to some degree.

I think it is really important that we tell this story in both official languages, because that's really how it all started in western Canada. It's so important.

I wonder if you could expound on that. You talked about camps. I think it's a great idea. It seems to me we have a whole lead-up to this, and then we have a whole year in which the Métis can tell their story because it goes beyond 1867 until now. When I tell people that the Dominion of Canada purchased Rupert's Land for £300,000 pounds—you can't buy a house in Vancouver for £300,000. It's amazing. I'm just fascinated by it.

Mr. Norman Fleury: Thank you.

When I'm asked questions that are very open, my mind expands. When you're talking about the North-West Mounted Police, "*simâkanis*" is "police" in Cree. My great-grandfather, Edward "Maakun" Fleury, was in the North-West Mounted Police. It stayed in our family until my grandfather passed on, so we have a connection with that.

You were talking about our people being major interpreters, and the mediators and mediums in the making of this country. First and foremost, we are mixed heritage, so we had all the languages, all the diversity. We were needed in the opening of this country. When the Dakota people came to Cypress Hills, it was our people who took Sitting Bull back to his territory because they knew Lakota.

Even pre-Canada, we were involved in the opening of the country through the fur trade. We actually flew our first flag in this country prior to the country having a flag. When we're talking about the distinctness of our people as a Michif people, we had our language, our stories, our songs, our music, and we had all that together.

In order to identify what our youth need, we have to empower them by including them. We have to ask them what they want. They can ask me questions as an elder and I have to come up with an answer. It's the same as when I was about 13 years old and I asked my grandmother questions. I used to have breakfast at my grandmother's place. We had porridge every morning, and for one reason, I don't why—it was God who said to me that I should ask my grandma what Michif is and where it comes from. I asked her, and I said in my language:

[Witness speaks in his native language]

"Grandma, where did we get this language? Where does it come from?"

She looked at me with great awe, and she asked me why I was asking her this question, because nobody had ever asked that question before, where is this language from. She said that she couldn't think about it right then because I had caught her off guard, but that she should think about it. She said I should go there to eat every day anyway and that I'd probably go there again the next day for breakfast. I did go, and she said she had thought about it. For a lady who never went to school a day in her life, she was very much an academic in her culture, and in who she was as a Michif person.

She said that God created this world and the people overseas. She said that the French have the French language, the German have the German language. She said that everybody has a language, and in this country, the first nations have a language. She said that the Dakota have the Dakota language, that the Cree have the Cree language, and then it was our turn. She explained that our language is a God-given language, that it's a language of the land, that it's a spiritual language.

That's the answer my grandmother gave me. How else can you explain it? The linguists do all the research—and they're still doing research—and they want to know where this Michif is.

When our youth get themselves organized, they talk about the effects of Confederation. They talk about the effects of losing their history. They talk about empowerment and about healing. Those are the kinds of things that are important. I'm talking about the Métis specifically, because I'm at this table to speak on behalf of a particular nation, my nation. That's what we have to do. We have to sanction people to adjust our history. We have to follow protocols.

• (1250)

We have all the chance in the world. In Saskatchewan, there's a francophone community at the university. We've had round table discussions there, talking about the evolution of the language and how it's become the Michif language. We also have English, which I'm using today and which we use every day, but we don't use the Michif language every day, so we have to make sure that's included.

Thank you.

Merci.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fleury.

Ms. Perreault, you have the floor.

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My questions are for Mr. Chartier and Mr. Fleury.

That fact that you are here shows that you care about your culture and your language. I have two small questions which I will put one after the other, after which you can answer.

A little earlier, you shared with us certain things with regard to your language. You talked about stories, you talked about songs. Today, within your community, are there any concrete measures to encourage your young people to learn your language, so that they can pass it on to other generations?

Do you have any suggestions as to how the Government of Canada can include your language as it plans the celebrations of the 150th anniversary?

[English]

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you for the question.

Before I get to that specifically, I wanted to say earlier that since 1967, we've had the patriation of the Constitution. We have the Constitution Act, 1982 and the recognition of the inherent right of the aboriginal peoples to self-government. That is a tremendous change. As we move forward, we must engage on a government-to-government, nation-to-nation basis, particularly in our case with the Métis nation. We do have things to contribute.

With regard to the specific questions, we have some support from the federal government for a pre-school. For example, in my home community, our Métis nation flag flies, so kids from three and four years old see the flag. The Michif language is being taught there and also in the grade school. We have a friendship centre, of course, where we engage and it's spread throughout. I travel throughout our Métis nation homeland and I see our flag flying a lot, so it's there. The people themselves want to get more engaged, but the capacity is not sufficient. I mentioned that earlier.

How we can be involved is, we need to move forward. This table is a good place, but we have two organizations and you have a Métis nation government. We should be talking on a government-to-government basis. We're one of the three orders of government in this country.

There is mention in the heritage report, and probably this one, of engaging the provincial government. We need to do that. The Métis nation has a tripartite mechanism that can engage both levels of government and ourselves at the table. We do have a lot to offer. We just need to be there. Our engagement is there, we have a lot to contribute, and we are willing to contribute.

•(1255)

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Would you like to add anything?

Mr. Norman Fleury: In fact, Canada's two official languages, the English language and the French language, are spoken in the communities where we teach them. Ninety-nine per cent of the time, my children speak English, which means that they speak French 1% of the time. It is because of assimilation that they speak the languages of our country.

My son and my daughter called their grandmother *mémère*; they did not call her *koohkoum*. I encouraged them to speak French at home, but because my wife is an anglophone, we speak English more than anything else at home.

When we celebrate, we encourage our young Canadians. I'm thinking of the Métis Federation and an event called Back to Batoche. Their music, their stories, their dances, their songs, everything is in English. There is also some French, but there is nothing in our tongue, Michif. Nevertheless, we are beginning to encourage our young people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bateman, you have the floor.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here.

I'm from Manitoba, as well, and I am a member of your organization. I have two children. A few years ago, my son started in late immersion at the age of 12. He is doing extremely well today, as always, because he is my baby. However, my daughter followed the example of her older brother, and started classes in French from the outset.

In my riding, many parents, such as myself, care about French. Even though there are not a lot of francophones, we have a lot of francophiles. Many people who live in our community care about Canada's linguistic duality.

I am one of your members, but I would be very curious to know what your strategy is to get the attention of young people.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bateman.

Could you please answer briefly, Ms. Perkins.

Ms. Lisa Marie Perkins: All right, I will respond briefly.

[English]

To bring them in, again, it's in making it a living language, whether that be through exchanges, through bringing cultural groups in or through modelling the behaviour, such as the people who graduate from immersion coming back and saying, "Look at me now. Please stay in. Please continue."

•(1300)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chartier, could you please respond briefly.

[English]

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just wanted to say that we have some material we will be leaving with the clerk that gives examples of Michif so that you have a grounding in it. The other thing, in terms of 2017, is translation. I mentioned that we have a book. It would be great if we could get it translated into French, as well as our websites and other things leading up to and beyond 2017. Translation would be a big thing.

The Chair: Thank you for those materials, Mr. Chartier. We will make sure they are distributed to members of the committee.

[Translation]

Thank you for your testimony.

The meeting is adjourned.

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