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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

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• (0845)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are here to study the economic situation of Canada's minority linguistic communities.

Today we welcome two representatives from the Association franco-yukonnaise who will be with us for one hour.

[English]

We have with us Madam Bernard and Madam Salesse.

[Translation]

Welcome.

Please proceed with your presentation.

Ms. Angélique Bernard (President, Association franco-yukonnaise): Good morning. Thank you for the invitation.

My name is Angélique Bernard, and I am the president of the Association franco-yukonnaise. I am accompanied by Isabelle Salesse, the executive director of the Association franco-yukonnaise.

The Association franco-yukonnaise is the official voice of francophones in the Yukon; we have been the pillar of community development for Franco-Yukoners since 1982.

Our mandate is to improve the quality of life in French for francophones in the Yukon. We provide services in a number of areas, including arts and culture, health, training, economic development and immigration.

We also stand as a unique model in the Canadian francophonie. Given the size of our community, our preference has been to bring together most services under the same roof rather than to create several different organizations. This model provides better integration and more efficient services using economies of scale. All the AFY's services use the same services for accounting, technology, communications, and reception. We are therefore able to make the most of the money we invest in projects that are of use to our community.

It is worth noting that, in terms of bilingualism, the Yukon ranks third among provinces and territories, with a rate of 13%, after Quebec and New Brunswick.

According to the 2006 census, public administration, education, health and social services are more than 35% francophone, and more than 10% work in the hospitality and restaurant industries.

Even more interestingly, the profile shows that more than 15% of francophones own their own businesses or are self-employed. This high percentage has an effect on the ability to work in French in the Yukon.

We have a contribution arrangement with the Yukon government that allows us to provide employment assistance services in French, as well as a co-operation agreement to provide courses in French as a second language. We also provide settlement services for French-speaking immigrants through an agreement with Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Our training service has moved in a new direction, allowing us to meet the needs of the workforce even better. We are also working in the area of essential skills. At the moment, we are conducting a study on what employers need from their employees in terms of skills and on the training needs that will get people into the workforce. We are also evaluating which are the best training models that we can establish.

In the Yukon, we have both highly educated people and people who do not have the essential skills that allow them to operate in the workforce. The Yukon has no post-secondary institution in French. However, the AFY has the mandate to provide training services that will improve the quality of life for francophones and to be with them through their training so that they can become full contributors to the economy of the Yukon.

We are also very active in tourism because a number of our French-speaking entrepreneurs specialize in the area. With the support of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CanNor, we have been able to adapt the promotional campaign called Canada's North into French. That was done jointly with the Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest and Carrefour Nunavut.

We have organized familiarization tours for the media and for travel agencies to promote the Yukon as the tourist destination of choice in francophone markets. We produce a tourist kit that lists francophone tourism businesses in the Yukon. In 2012, we also distributed 22,000 tourist brochures in French.

Last year, also with CanNor funding, we administered a fund designed to increase the available range of bilingual tourist products.

Finally, the AFY also receives funding from the Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, operated by Employment and Social Development Canada. That fund has allowed us to establish the services mentioned above and gives us great flexibility in the projects we have undertaken.

The best example is that CanNor projects have been managed by our tourism manager, whose salary is paid 100% from the enabling fund. So we used core funding from Employment and Social Development Canada to establish our projects and we went out and found the funding to do so.

We had to do that because CanNor does not pay for salaries in its contribution agreements. Up to now, we have been able to work that way, but it may cause us problems in the future. I will come back to that later.

• (0850)

We also work together with our anglophone partners. We are aware that community development cannot be done in isolation. We are helping to improve visibility and bilingualism at the job and volunteer fair in Whitehorse, together with Volunteer Bénévoles Yukon, YuWIN, the go-to resource in the Yukon for job postings, and the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. We are also presently determining how we can become involved in a proposal seeking to establish a Canada-Yukon business service office.

Despite all those successes, we are today facing some challenges in consolidating the range and the quality of our services. We want to improve our services and to provide direct support to our entrepreneurs. Up until now, we have not been able to do so, because the enabling fund has not permitted it. As of next April 1, we will be able to do so and we are very pleased about that.

We also want to consolidate our services in the regions. At the moment, our greatest presence is in Whitehorse, given that most of our clients live there. But we also want to respond to the needs of francophones in the regions, such as in Dawson or Haines Junction. However, our level of funding does not allow us to provide them with full support.

There are also other major issues, such as the new direction for the enabling fund in the Roadmap. Last week, we received the invitation to tender for the renewal of our contribution agreement. One of its objectives is to decrease the proportion of our operating funds to 58%. This concerns us for two reasons. First, we do not control the overall target, given that it represents the average of all the organizations involved. Achieving the objective is therefore only partially in our control. Second, we see a lack of coordination in government policies. We also know that Employment and Social Development Canada has warned other federal departments about this change in direction.

But the policies of the other departments have not been adjusted as a result. For example, CanNor still does not fund salaries and other operating costs that the agency approves, even though they are an integral part of the projects. We feel that we are in danger of being caught in a problematic situation that, in our opinion, the Government of Canada did not foresee when it renewed the Roadmap. It is also a question of fairness, in our opinion, because other regional economic development agencies have no difficulty in

reimbursing those costs. That is not the case in the north and it presents us with an additional challenge.

The Government of Canada has changed direction in social finance. This approach is a concern for official language communities because the population pool is limited. The concern is even greater in places like the Yukon, given that its economy is based on small businesses, self-employment, and the government. So the possibility of obtaining funding from the private sector is very limited. Our pool gets even smaller if you consider just the francophone community.

We have been informed by CIC that we should not be affected by the measure. But we have no assurances from other departments that they will consider our reality when the time comes to apply it. The fact is that we are at a double disadvantage compared to an organization in Vancouver, in Calgary, in Toronto or in Moncton, for example: the size of the Yukon and the situation of our official language minority community.

As mentioned, the AFY's contribution to the development of the Yukon is a tangible one. We hope that the government will take our reality into account and that it will continue to support us so that our community can continue to develop and to contribute to the Yukon's economy. It is also important for the government to ensure that federal transfers to the territory, or contribution agreements between the two levels of government, take into account the impact of their decisions on the people in our communities. The agreements on the workforce and workforce development are two examples.

The complex reality of francophone communities does not allow for one single pan-Canadian approach. A community's economic development may need different services such as training, entrepreneurship, employment assistance, welcome and integration. That implies many partners, including the government. We are proud of what we have accomplished to date and we thank the Government of Canada for its contribution.

Thank you once more for inviting us. We are ready to answer your questions.

• (0855)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bernard.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

I want to welcome Ms. Bernard and Mrs. Salesse. It is a great pleasure to see you here.

It is regrettable that, after our visit to Yellowknife and Whitehorse, the Standing Committee on Official Languages was not able to table a report in the House of Commons. Our committee held a cross-Canada tour, which ended in the north. But because of the elections, we were not able to prepare a report. We could have gone back and drafted a report, because we had the same clerks and analysts. It might have been of assistance to you and it could have shone some light on the situation in the north for Parliament and the government. I hope that our committee will be able to go back to it some day. It is a shame that \$100,000 was spent. That amount of money could have helped the francophone community. I wanted to say that for the record.

You mentioned a figure of 58%. If I am not mistaken, the government does not want to spend more than 58% for administration. You explained that things are different in other places. Does it just happen at CanNor? I would like to have a better explanation of that.

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé (Executive Director, Association franco-yukonnaise): The funding comes from Employment and Social Development Canada, through the Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities. In terms of the enabling fund, a call for tenders has just been issued for the next three years. The funding comes from the Roadmap and is designed to improve community access to networks and economic development projects for minority communities all across Canada.

Up to now, project submissions have included salaries and operating costs. In three years, all the organizations in the network have to reduce their operating costs so that they do not come to more than 58% of their total budgets. For example, if an organization receives \$200,000, its operating costs cannot be more than 58% of its total budget. That is not feasible in all cases. For some organizations, operating costs can go from 40% to 70%, perhaps as high as 80%. The government used an average to arrive at the figure of 58%.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What effect will that have on your operations?

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: If we have to reduce our salary costs and if other economic development agencies do not fund salaries, not having access to the funding we need will make it very difficult for us to pay all the salaries. I hope that is clear.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If you reduce your salary costs, your performance on the ground will decrease.

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: If we cannot pay the salaries for our human resources who are providing front-line services and setting up projects to meet community needs, we will not be able to achieve our objectives.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In your region, economic development in anglophone communities, which make up the majority, is funded by Industry Canada, by CanNor and so on. Larger organizations are paid for by the government, compared to the organizations that look after the francophone minority.

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: In the Yukon, economic development organizations probably have better access to funding than we do because of their higher numbers. They are better able to make their requests known to the territorial government, which organizations in the francophone community cannot always do.

● (0900)

Mr. Yvon Godin: For the purposes of our current study, we go to places where there are official language minority communities and we ask ourselves how they can contribute to economic development. You have accomplished wonderful things in arts, in culture, in immigration, in hospitality, in catering and in tourism.

The government prides itself on having invested \$1.2 billion in the Roadmap. It says that that money has not been affected, but in fact, it dipped into Immigration Canada's funds and put them into the Roadmap. But that's politics for you.

With its Roadmap, is the government becoming an obstacle to economic development? Is it taking away tools that would have let you perform better in the future?

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: There has been no reduction in funds so far. Actually, we know nothing about it, because the call for tenders has only just been issued. So we will be able to confirm that in the weeks ahead.

However, according to the vision that has been presented to us, we are going to have to find other ways of funding ourselves in three years. That does not necessarily mean that our funding will be cut, but part of our operating costs may well be reduced, and that will have a negative impact on us. In fact, we will not be able to hire the people we need, because we will not be able to use the funding to pay salaries in their entirety. At the moment, CanNor does not pay operating costs. The agency pays for fees, special projects and feasibility studies, but provides no core funding. So we could be in a difficult situation.

Today, we are asking the committee to watch out for that situation. At the moment, we are not yet in difficulty, but if things proceed as intended, it could become a problem. That is why we are sharing it with the committee today.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What do you recommend?

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: We recommend keeping programming funds as they are, with the enabling fund for official language minority communities, or for CanNor to change its policies so that it can fund operating costs, just like other economic development agencies elsewhere in the country, both in the east and west. They finance operating costs, which CanNor does not.

Mr. Yvon Godin: According to the Roadmap, funding for those involved in official languages issues comes mostly from the Roadmap. We have heard of delays in some programs. Can you talk to us about that?

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: Yes, I can explain it to you. I do that quite regularly at the moment.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is anyone listening?

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: I don't know. I think people are listening, but there does not always seem to be a simple answer.

The Roadmap was announced on March 27, 2013. Today is February 27, 2014, and we still do not know what is going to happen with some of the programs, including in regard to the amounts allocated for essential skills. It is supposed to help communities to support individuals who need training in essential skills. No criteria have been defined, no information has been given to service providers. We do not know what is going to happen with those funds.

In the first year, a lot of money went unspent. In culture and in health, a lot of the funding has not been spent to date. At the moment, we are being told that those funds will be transferred to next year, but the fact is that they have not been distributed for this year.

The Chair: Thank you.

Your turn, Mr. Gourde.

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

My thanks to Ms. Bernard and Mrs. Salesses for being here this morning.

Tell me about the challenges that the francophone community in the Yukon has to face in order to take its place economically. Is it more difficult for you than for the anglophone community? Is it similar? Do you have real challenges to face?

• (0905)

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: The challenges are always different, because francophone entrepreneurs have less access to resources in French.

That said, the challenges in the Yukon are less than in other regions. The fact that we are a small community and are together in one place, has advantages, not just disadvantages.

In our work, we essentially depend on funds from the federal government. As we explained in our presentation, it is difficult to access private money in the Yukon, because our community is so small. So it is quite difficult for us to look for private investment for the services we provide today.

We hear about social finance and we are told that we have to move towards private investment, but that is a problem for us. Even though the Yukon is ranked third in Canada in terms of bilingualism, there are still only between 3,000 and 4,000 French-speakers in the territory, which is not a lot. So the private sector is not really inclined to invest money in our community.

Other challenges have to do with the access entrepreneurs have to certain services in French. For example, it is harder for entrepreneurs to take some kinds of training in French because it is not always offered in French.

Up to now, we have been faced with another challenge, but we recognize that things are beginning to change. Until now, we have not been able to provide services directly to entrepreneurs. Our funding did not allow us, for example, to help a francophone entrepreneur who asked us for help in preparing a business plan or the like. The only thing we could do was to direct that entrepreneur to an anglophone agency. But they came to see us because we are a

francophone agency. It is crazy that we promote ourselves as being involved in economic development and in providing assistance to entrepreneurs, but we have to tell them that our funding does not really allow us to help them in a number of ways.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

You mentioned that 85% of the francophones in the Yukon come from other parts of Canada. What attracts people to go and live in the Yukon, in your opinion? Is it the work, the potential?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: There are a number of reasons. A lot of people, francophone or anglophone, come to the Yukon because they are attracted to the wide open spaces. They may also be attracted by employment possibilities in the Yukon, especially in mining, an industry that is picking up again.

As for francophones, some people have immigrated to the Yukon from Europe. Previously, the Association franco-yukonnaise participated in Destination Canada, a job fair held in France and other French-speaking countries to recruit immigrants. The AFY was able to participate because, at the time, it received joint territorial-federal funding. But that funding was eliminated. The fair let us recruit people who were really interested in leaving an overcrowded homeland and settling in the Yukon.

Before leaving, or even when they arrive, they do research on the lifestyle that the Yukon can offer. Families appreciate having access to French-speaking daycare and to other services in French. Francophones, especially those with families, settle in the Yukon because they can live a good part of their lives in French there.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: If the number of jobs available in the Yukon were to increase, would the francophone community go and get its fair share? For example, if francophones represent 15% of the population and there are 100 jobs available, could francophones expect to get 15 of those available jobs? Or a few more? Or could we be looking at a decrease?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: I would not like to mislead you, but I think that francophones have their fair share of jobs. Often, people settle in the Yukon because they have found a job there. The people who settle in the Yukon without having found a job are few and far between. Of course, there are young people who come to the Yukon in the summer, find that they love it, and stay. But they leave again if they do not find a job. So I would certainly say that things balance out.

The difference is in the number of bilingual jobs. Of the 4,000 jobs in the territorial government, about 5 positions are designated bilingual. Some francophones feel that it is hard for them to get into the system because of the language barrier.

• (0910)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In the next few years in the Yukon, which occupations will be most in demand, which skills will be most sought after? That could send a signal to people who might be interested in settling in the Yukon. They have to know that basic skills are needed in order to find a reasonable job there.

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: There are a lot of service sector jobs in the Yukon. So those are not always very well paid. There are some jobs in the mines. People say that there is no economic crisis in the Yukon, but we have to add a note of caution. In a number of areas, like surveying, for example, there was a lot of work previously. There were a lot of land claims. That is behind us now. We notice the decline.

So some specialized occupations are currently in decline. But there will be jobs for people in different areas. We can think of all the mining-related jobs, like heavy equipment operators or cooks. There is also work in tourism and administration.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Is housing developing in step with the jobs? Is it hard to find somewhere to live?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Thank you for pointing that out. Finding somewhere to live is a major problem in the Yukon. It is very difficult. Sometimes, young people arrive in town to look for a job, but they cannot find anywhere to live. So they end up leaving again because it is too expensive to live on their own. A room often costs \$800 or \$700. So it is not always easy.

At the AFY, we help our new employees when they arrive; we help them to find somewhere to live. Not all employers are always like that. It is not easy to find a place to live in Whitehorse.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Usually people come to see how things will go, men and women alike. If they like the experience, they invite the rest of the family to join them.

What welcome services are there for new families coming to the Yukon?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: The AFY provides a French-speaking daycare. We take children as young as six months. The school takes kids from the age of four, from kindergarten to grade 12. The Association franco-yukonnaise also provides an employment assistance service. If people arrive without jobs, or if a spouse does not have a job, for example, we provide employment assistance services. They can talk to counsellors who can help them in their job searches. At the same time, we send them to services that will help them get a health care card or find out how things work in Whitehorse, and so on.

For French-speaking immigrants who settle in the Yukon, the Association franco-yukonnaise has a welcome service that helps them with various things.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Ms. St-Denis, you have the floor.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Speaking of the school, you just said that the school takes children. The Yukon Court of Appeal handed down a decision on February 11. Can you tell us what the decision was about?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: In 2009, the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon brought a court case against the territorial government asking for full school management. The case lasted some time, then the territorial government appealed to the Court of Appeal for the Yukon, which declared a mistrial on the grounds that the judge was biased. Because of the apprehension of bias on the part of the judge, a new trial was ordered, to which the Commission

scolaire francophone du Yukon reacted by going to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Why did the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon sue the government in the first place?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: There were a number of reasons, including the request for full school management, meaning the ability to make the selections when hiring teachers, managing the buses, and so on. It was about having full management of the school.

There were also some difficulties in transfers with bilateral education agreements. Some sums of money that were supposed to be used for French as a first language had been transferred to French as a second language. There were a number of little things like that.

There was also the matter of giving the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon the right to decide who could be admitted to the school. There were a number of constitutional questions.

● (0915)

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Budgets set aside for first-language French had been transferred to immersion, given that it is very popular all over Canada, except in Quebec.

How did people react?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Some did not react, but most people are clearly shocked by that kind of practice. The territorial government was ordered to repay the amount immediately to the school board and it largely did so before the Court of Appeal's decision. Clearly, people were not happy. It meant less money. As well, in education, we know that additional money is needed to get to the same level of services; even more money, given that we have to play catch up and that we have a lot of francization to do. Francophone schools have challenges that anglophone schools know nothing about.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: What is your position on those who do not meet the criteria set out in section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? It deals with those who have the right to primary education in French as a first language. If you only have a francophone grandmother, for example, you do not meet the criteria.

What is your organization's position on that?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: In general, we support the decisions of the school board. They run the school. It is a funding issue, but it is also a values issue for some people. It is very complex. We can discuss it. It is done case by case. Not all those who are not guaranteed the right are accepted. Some of the people have a unique profile. They often speak French at home, or they are francophiles. In some cases, I think that admitting them to the French school is justified. The decision should be made by the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: As I listen to you, I get the impression that everything really is all sweetness and light.

What kind of relationship do francophones and anglophones have in the Yukon?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Everything is not all sweetness and light, but in the Yukon, it is still pretty good. That was not always the case, but at the moment, our relationship with the territorial government is excellent. We are working together to increase government services in French. The legislation comes from 25 years ago and, to this day, there has never been an implementation plan for it. The Association franco-yukonnaise asked for mediation with the territorial government and that paved the way to some openness and cooperation. So we are working together.

As for the anglophone community, some people certainly think that francophones receive too much money and make too many demands, but in general, there is good synergy between the francophone and anglophone communities. Our association does a lot of work with anglophone organizations. We even obtained funding from Canadian Heritage to support anglophone organizations in the goal of establishing bilingual products or services.

I am not going to tell you that things are going badly, just for the sake of saying so. However, everything that has been accomplished was accomplished only because we were financially supported by the government. If that financial support were to be reduced or eliminated, things would change completely. We would not be able to invest all this time, or maintain this one-stop shop that allows us to serve the community and design projects in cooperation with anglophones.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: On the subject of funding, was there any consultation about the 58%? I met yesterday with people from the RDEE. They mentioned a figure of 70%, meaning that applicants would get funding on condition that they find 30% of the funding in the private sector.

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Yes, it is about leverage. Exactly. That is what we have been told.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: They are going to appear before this committee too. I will ask them if they were consulted.

What will happen if you do not find 42% of the funding to add to the 58%? Are they going to take that part away?

• (0920)

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: At this time, I do not know.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Have you asked the questions?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: We have asked the questions, but we only get answers bit by bit. Getting that kind of answer is difficult. They tell us the goal is not to make us go away or reduce our funding, but to encourage private investment.

There are two different issues. First, the 58% that we mentioned affects operating costs. Second, we are being asked to obtain 30% of our funding from a source other than any level of government, territorial, federal or municipal. What will happen if we don't get there? We will have to reduce our services.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Daniel, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thank you, ladies, for being here.

Following on the same topic, I have a few questions about your funding as well. How much money do you get every year from all your sources?

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: On average, our association's total budget is \$2 million a year, including all sources of funding, and we have about 25 employees. As you have been able to see, we provide a number of services.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: That's very good.

What activities are your organizations undertaking, in particular for young francophones who would more than likely leave the area to find jobs, etc., in other locations? Given that your community is based on a number of small- to medium-sized businesses, there can't be a huge number of opportunities coming through for youth. Can you elaborate a little on that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Keeping young francophones in the Yukon is a challenge. We find it difficult to keep young francophones in our high school. They leave the francophone system for the anglophone system. Not only that, because there are no French-language post-secondary institutions in the Yukon, students leave to study in Ottawa, in Montreal or in other places. Some come back four years later, but others settle elsewhere. It really is a challenge.

We are doing some things to remedy the situation. But really, we are not doing much because we do not know how to solve the problem. Nor is there any funding for it. We have an employment assistance program and we go into the school, which works with us. The Association franco-yukonnaise has a youth service, but it tends to be focused on cultural identity or leadership.

We work together with the school to reach those students so that we can encourage them to be proud to be francophone. But once they have left the Yukon, it is very difficult to follow them wherever they may go. We still have a lot of work to do to find solutions.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: So most of them leave the territory before higher education?

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Most of them leave the territory to study outside. But some stay in the community. A first generation of true Franco-Yukoners is emerging, French-speaking Yukoners who were born in the Yukon. The first generations are now living their lives. We do not have a lot of statistical data on it because it is an ongoing process. It is certain that students coming out of high school, whether they have been in English or French immersion, are leaving the territory to study somewhere else. More and more of them are coming back, but I could not give you a percentage.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: We've heard from some of the other committees that the dropout rate from high school is very high in some of the remote areas and the territories, etc., particularly with indigenous people. Do you have a track record of what's happening in the francophone schools in Yukon?

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: There are not a lot of dropouts at the French-language school. However, according to recent statistics, 10% to 15% of students in regular schools have special needs. In the French-language school in the Yukon, it is 37%. Does that mean they will drop out? I don't know. That is one of the reasons why the school board is fighting so hard to get that funding, so that it can help those students.

There is another problem: those students do not have a very good command of French. Their parents may be francophone, or they may have come from an exogamous situation, but, for all sorts of reasons, they did not choose to speak to their children in French from the outset. As a result, the school has a lot of catching-up to do and a number of challenges to meet.

● (0925)

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Since most of these youth will end up going into anglophone higher education, what are you doing to prepare them for that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: At the school that offers a first-language French program, students study English as their first language. In fact, the francophone school prepares them to graduate in both languages. When they graduate from the francophone school, they graduate in both languages. That does not mean a bilingual diploma; their transcripts show English as the first language.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Given that you're spending some \$2 million a year, do you think it's possible to measure the economic impact of the francophone community in Yukon?

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: We want to be able to measure that impact. We have not yet managed to do it.

The Association franco-yukonnaise employs more than 25 people each year, even more when we have special projects. We have a lot of activities that bring people to our association. We do a lot of work with the tourism industry in promoting tourism.

There is certainly a way of evaluating the impact, but we have not done it for the moment.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Cornéliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for showing up today, a very snowy day.

I want to concentrate on the economic issues. What are the priorities of the francophone community in Yukon in the area of economic development? You also mentioned that from April 1 you will be able to help entrepreneurs to open and develop a business and so on.

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: As of April 1, we will not have the funds to help someone who wants to set up a business. That is a whole different area. Funds for it are being reduced in the Yukon because fewer and fewer people want to start businesses, given that there are jobs. When we started our employment assistance service, the unemployment rate in the Yukon was 13%. Now it is around 5% or 6%. That is a very considerable drop. Fewer and fewer people are interested in setting up businesses.

That said, a number of entrepreneurs are already in business and need some help. For example, say they have a product and they want some translation if English is not their first language. So they need support for translation. Today, we are not able to help them because we have no funds for that. They may need other resources. I do not have a specific example to give you. From now on, we will be able to help them. For example, if they need to do a feasibility study for a new product, we can be with them through that process, and we were not able to do that before.

[English]

Mr. Cornéliu Chisu: In which businesses is the francophone community mostly involved?

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: It is mostly in tourism.

[English]

Mr. Cornéliu Chisu: Tourism is a very important area of development. We have many free trade agreements all over the world so how can you contribute to attract tourists to Yukon from different francophone areas, for example, from Europe? A lot of people in Europe don't know too much about the beauties of Yukon and I know one thing: the French community in Canada, generally, is more prone to take risks outside Canada or the North American continent to do business.

● (0930)

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salessé: In terms of tourism promotion in French-speaking countries, in France, for example, we are working more and more collaboratively with the territorial government. Our employee in charge of tourism participates in some tourism fairs in the Yukon. We also welcome the media who come from Europe on familiarization tours in order to sell the Yukon in Europe. We use our networks for promotion. We worked with Nunavut and the Northwest Territories on a campaign for all the territories, creating a tourism campaign in French to be the equivalent of one that had been done for the territories in English. So basically, we are working to promote tourism in French in the Yukon.

In recent years, the number of French-speaking visitors to the Yukon has increased. I do not have that number at my fingertips, but I can get it to you if necessary. There has been an increase in recent years. Certainly, there is greater interest on the part of the territorial government in promoting tourism to the Yukon in French because they realize that there is potential. So they support us and get us involved in their promotion campaign.

[English]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: What are the successes, for example, of the francophone community in business? Can you give me some successes obtained by businesses in the francophone community?

If you can, give a couple of examples of achieving great success in the community, in business, and so on.

[Translation]

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Let me give you an example of how just two individuals, two French-speaking immigrants, have achieved a lot of success.

The two people met the Association franco-yukonnaise at a Destination Canada fair in Paris. They were entrepreneurs who really wanted to leave France. They sold their business in France and came here. Initially, they wanted to buy a tourist lodge that they had found on a visit to the Yukon. When they arrived in the Yukon, the Association franco-yukonnaise welcomed them and provided them with assistance because they found themselves in a tricky situation: the lodge was no longer for sale. That was quite a problem. The project was the reason they had emigrated from France. They had to turn on a dime, so to speak. The AFY was with them through a series of steps.

Finally, they decided to build their own lodge in the middle of nowhere. I encourage you to pay them a visit. It is called Takhini River Lodge and it is magnificent. They built a high-end product. It is quite expensive to stay there, but the service they provide is unique. They offer tours to see the northern lights, dogsled trips, and all kinds of different services. You can sit at your table and watch the northern lights.

They have a francophone clientele, specifically from France. They designed their own website. They are really successful today. We were with them right from when they started their business and through all the steps they took.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Nicholls.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned social finance and you talked about your concerns about this new way of funding. Could you describe this new concept in detail and tell us what it means for francophones in the Yukon?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: I will try to explain my understanding of social finance clearly and intelligently. I admit that I am still confused by it. I will give you an example. That will be the best way for me to explain it to you.

Let us take employee training in a company. Let us say that the Association franco-yukonnaise was in a position to train 100 people for a given job. The program could perhaps be funded by a private investor who might decide to accept the risk and to invest, say, \$200,000 in the program. If the Association franco-yukonnaise was able to prove that it had achieved the desired results, that is, it had trained those 100 people, if that was the objective, the government

would then put in some money. That is to say that they would reimburse the investor for part of the investment plus an additional percentage. In a nutshell, the investor assumes the risk, but he is supposed to get money back.

As far as I understand, there are different models, but essentially, the government would not be the only investor in some areas. The government would like private investors to take the lead in what would become a kind of collaborative venture. Then a third party would deliver the service.

What does that mean for Franco-Yukoners? It means that not a lot is going to actually happen, because there are not a lot of investors.

Anyway, the government is still talking about it, but they are not yet sure about how it will work. It is based on models developed in England and Australia, where, of course, there are no official language considerations. The government is quite well aware that it is not going to be as simple. So they are evaluating the possibilities. They are also talking to private investors to see what their interest might be.

Francophones aside, it will be very difficult for a system like that to operate in the Yukon territory. Private investors do not see why they would invest in a community of 4,000 people. What is in it for them? It is quite a concern. However, it is not yet in place.

Two pilot projects are underway with Employment and Social Development Canada. One is in Manitoba and I do not remember where the other one is. They basically have to do with adult skills. At the moment, the government is principally interested in adults acquiring skills and in training adults.

● (0935)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: What are your recommendations for improving the funding?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: We have already started discussions on employment and social development issues with a national group. We proposed a pilot project on official languages to see how things would work in a minority group, what possibilities would exist for co-operation with the government, and what the potential results might be.

Ideally, we would not like to move to social finance. But if the government decides that it is the way to go, they will absolutely have to consider the realities of minority situations and they will have to work with them to find solutions. It must be said that social finance does not do away with the government's responsibilities to official language communities. So solutions are going to have to be found. I do not think that the government has solutions at the moment, but I think that they are aware that they have to find solutions and that they understand the need to continue and deepen the discussion.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: How much time do I have left?

● (0940)

The Chair: Two minutes.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: You have a one-stop shop model too, as you mentioned. Can you talk about the advantages of that model?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: In my opinion, there is practically no downside to the model. We are all located in the same building. All the services come under the same organization. So we have an administrative manager, an information technology person, receptionists and a secretary, all full-time. That would not be possible if each of those organizations were independent. The operating costs would be much too high for each organization to be able to offer all the services. As I see it, there are nothing but advantages to being together.

There is also better synergy and co-operation, because we are not fighting for the same sources of funding. We consolidate our monies. If one sector is in a little more difficult financial situation, as is always the case for the cultural division, the overall image of the organization still remains positive, because we can help each other. Some services have more funding and can take on certain costs that another service cannot.

In my opinion, it is a win-win situation, especially for the community. The community has only one place to go and does not have to worry about turf wars, so to speak. Having a one-stop shop really gives us advantages all along the line.

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to you, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What is the situation with broadband and Internet networks? Is it working well? Could more be done? We have it all over the place here, but in the Yukon, it must be a major challenge.

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: It is better than it was; it is faster now. As I see it, the problem is still the costs for users, which are clearly higher than those in Vancouver and elsewhere. For example, no plan offers unlimited access to the Internet. Access is limited. The more bandwidth you want, the more megabits, I forget what it is called, the more it will cost you.

It could all be faster. A videoconference at peak times may or may not work well. The same goes for Skype. It really could be better.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: After work, what kind of social life do you have in the Yukon? That can be a determining factor in the decision to stay in a place or to leave. Of course, we all have to work in order to live, but what do you do for the rest of the day, the rest of the week and on weekends?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: In the Yukon, all we do is work.

Voices: Ha, ha!

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: No, no. Actually, the Yukon, and especially Whitehorse, has a very flourishing cultural life, strange as that may seem. For a small community of 25,000 or 26,000 people like ours, there are lots of cultural activities.

There are shows all the time in our arts centre, either local shows or by artists from outside. The francophone community puts on shows as well. We often collaborate with other anglophone organizations, given that we do not always have the means to bring people in from the outside. But we do collaborate to promote or recruit groups or shows from outside.

We also have cinemas. They are extremely uncomfortable, but we still have them.

There is lots to do outdoors. We have an incredible cross-country ski centre right downtown.

We have the Canada Games Centre, a legacy from the 2007 Canada Games. You can do every kind of sporting activity imaginable there. It really is a very beautiful centre and it is affordable.

We also have an Alpine ski centre. It is a small one, located 15 minutes from downtown.

We also have a lot of sports groups: soccer, football, all kinds of sports. There are a lot of cross-country ski clubs. A girl from the Yukon just competed in the recent Olympic Games in Sochi.

Certainly, there is less culture than elsewhere, but for a small community like ours, there is an awful lot.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What ties have you established with Yukon's aboriginal community?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Further ties still need to be established, but we are seeing a change on the part of aboriginal groups. In fact, they recently asked us to collaborate with them on a project to mark National Aboriginal Day, which will be held on June 21. It's a show that a Métis artist from Quebec would like to put on.

I think the way to develop closer ties with aboriginal groups is through culture and tourism products. Whitehorse has a wonderful aboriginal cultural centre. We actually just signed an agreement with the people there to fund, through CanNor, a French-language cultural tourism product for the cultural centre. More and more, we are establishing ties with aboriginal groups.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You mentioned first-generation francophones, meaning those who were born in Yukon, who decide to do their schooling outside the territory and return afterwards. No doubt, they feel a strong sense of belonging, but I am curious as to what draws them back to the place where they were born.

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: I would say the reasons are many and vary from person to person. But, clearly, a young person who has always lived and gone to school in Yukon and then leaves to attend the University of Ottawa, for instance, experiences quite a shock. There are more students on the University of Ottawa campus than in all of Yukon. It's a difficult adjustment for most of them. Their roots are in Yukon.

Why do people go back? There are always those who, at some point in their lives, choose to go back to where they are from to live, simply because it is home, whether you are talking about Yukon or somewhere else. I think young people go back because Yukon is home to them. The quality of life is pretty good. It's a nice place. If they decide to raise a family there, the living is easy; they don't have to spend an hour in the car just to take the kids to soccer. Skiing doesn't cost a fortune. There are many benefits to living in Yukon that would make someone want to start their family there.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Salesses and Ms. Bernard.

Ms. Perreault, do you have any quick questions?

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Yes.

In light of everything we've heard today, I was wondering if we could put forward a motion to have the committee take a trip to Yukon.

The Chair: That requires a notice of motion.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Do you need it in writing?

The Chair: No, but—

Ms. Manon Perreault: That's not necessary? Okay, then I am giving notice of a motion that the committee take a trip to Yukon. I think it would be very worthwhile.

The Chair: We can discuss it next week. Okay?

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Or we could vote on it now.

The Chair: No, not now. I need the notice of motion to deal with it.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

You said it requires a notice of motion, but since we're doing a study right now, it's not as though this is something new; it's part of the study.

The Chair: It's not part of the study. The motion on the study makes no mention of a trip.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, it says we are to study the economic situation. And as part of that study, we could travel to meet with people in the community. We have seen them before, but we didn't have the courtesy to report to Parliament on it. We could change that and propose a motion stating that we are going to report to Parliament. That is what I would like to see. I want the people of Yukon to be heard by Canada. It's beautiful there, it's not cold.

The Chair: But that really changes the motion. We don't have the budget for a trip now. I will have to ask the Liaison Committee for additional funds. In my view, asking for a notice of motion is appropriate. I have no objection to discussing the motion next week, but not now.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think our witnesses would be disappointed if we didn't go.

The Chair: Ms. Perreault, do you have any questions?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Yes.

The Chair: Please make it a quick one, then.

Ms. Manon Perreault: I would just like to know one thing. The Association franco-yukonnaise belongs to the economic development network. Do you serve the interests of the Government of Canada or the Government of Yukon? Is your economic development service tied to the Government of Canada or the Government of Yukon?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: Our organization belongs to the national economic development network Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité Canada. That funding comes from the federal government.

Ms. Manon Perreault: The \$2 million you mentioned came solely from the federal government? Do you have any other sources of funding?

Mrs. Isabelle Salesses: The \$2 million is not just for economic development. It also funds all of the services the association provides. As I said, we provide a variety of services relating to culture, immigration, employment and so on.

We have different sources of funding. The bulk of our budget comes from the federal government, and a smaller portion, from the territorial government. And a tiny amount comes from diversifying our funds by offering community classes at a cost such as French as a second language.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

I want to thank the witnesses. Their input will be very beneficial to our study of the economic situation.

[English]

Without further ado, this meeting is adjourned.

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