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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg





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• (1645)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 11 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

The committee is meeting on its study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the government's ability to deliver information in both official languages.

[Translation]

Unfortunately, because of the deferred recorded divisions in the House of Commons this afternoon, only one group of witnesses will appear. I'd like to ask right away for the committee's consent to extend this meeting until 5:50 p.m., since the technical team is available.

Are there any objections to continuing our work until 5:50 p.m.?

Thank you very much.

Madam Clerk, are there any replacements and are there any members in the room with you?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Josée Harrison):** There are no replacements and there are no members in the room today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

For those participating virtually, members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. At the bottom of your screen, you may choose either Floor, English or French.

[English]

Before speaking, click on the microphone icon to activate your own mike. When you are done speaking, please put your mike on mute to minimize any interference.

I will give a reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. Should members need to request the floor outside of the designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order.

[Translation]

Members who wish to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member should use the "Raise hand" function. This will signal to the chair that a member wishes to speak and his or her name will be added to the list. To raise a hand, click on "Participants" on the bottom of your screen. When the list appears, click on the "Raise hand" button beside your name.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the use of headsets with a microphone is mandatory for everyone participating remotely.

Please advise me of any technical difficulties. Please note that we may need to suspend for a few minutes, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

With regard to the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best, as always, to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating in person or virtually.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses to today's committee meeting and I thank them for sending us their presentations.

I would also like to invite you to send a brief directly to the clerk for the important study we are conducting. You'll have seven and a half minutes to deliver your presentation. In order to manage time, I will indicate to you when you have one minute left, and when I hold up the red card, it means your time is up. That is one of the tough parts of my job.

Without further delay, committee members, first we have Carol Jolin and Peter Hominuk from the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, as well as Padminee Chundunsing, the chairperson of the board for the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

• (1650)

[English]

From the Quebec Community Groups Network, we have Marlene Jennings, president, and Sylvia Martin-Laforge, director general.

[Translation]

From the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick, we have its president, Alexandre Cédric Doucet, and its executive director, Ali Chaisson.

Let's begin right away with the representatives of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. You have seven and a half minutes, and I assume Mr. Jolin wants to begin.

**Mr. Carol Jolin (President, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

To begin, I wish to thank you for your invitation to address the committee examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the government's ability to provide information in both official languages.

As you know, 2020 has been a very eventful year because of the COVID-19 crisis. First, we want to acknowledge the Government of Canada's efforts to maintain continuous and efficient communications with our network since the onset of the pandemic.

Throughout the crisis, we have worked to identify the problems faced by the Franco-Ontarian community. Alone or in partnership with other organizations, the AFO has conducted three surveys on the situations that Franco-Ontarian organizations are facing during the pandemic. We have also been monitoring the French-language services provided by both the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

As a result of this work, today we submit to you, in both official languages, a report containing our observations during the crisis, as well as nine recommendations. This report discusses federal services only. We are currently preparing a similar report on provincial services in Ontario.

Regarding federal services, our observations concern the following areas: travellers returning to Canada; government press briefings; labelling of consumer products; funding levels for Franco-Ontarian organizations; and translation and social media presence. Before I briefly discuss each of these points individually, I would like to state the general conclusion, namely that the pandemic has heightened the urgency of modernizing the Official Languages Act. In fact, the first recommendation in our report invites the government to modernize the act and, in doing so, to take the AFO's recommendations into account.

Both the AFO and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages have noted that designated airports, as well as the Public Health Agency of Canada, have not fulfilled their language obligations when serving travellers returning to Canada. Airports designated to provide bilingual services failed to serve their customers in both official languages, and the Public Health Agency of Canada did not provide active offer and truly equal service in its telephone monitoring of travellers in self-isolation.

Our report also notes that the AFO supports recommendation 2 contained in the report of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages on government services in times of crisis, which asks the Treasury Board to implement a crisis preparedness strategy including communications plans and procedures for every federal institution.

In our monitoring of government services, we have also observed that the Government of Canada's press briefings, especially in the early days of the pandemic, were largely limited to English, while

the chief public health officer's press briefings were totally in English. In the context of a pandemic, francophones rely on the government's press briefings to stay informed about the restrictions and the best practices to follow. Those breaches could be catastrophic and a life and death situation. To ensure the equality of communications in both languages, we recommend that the Government of Canada designate the position of chief public health officer of Canada as bilingual.

Regarding press briefings, we also noted that Radio-Canada was not living up to its mandate, because the Government of Ontario's press briefings were rarely provided with simultaneous translation. Some Franco-Ontarians have told me that they are relying on Quebec government press briefings or English CBC channels to obtain information on COVID-19. Radio-Canada has rebuffed our recommendations concerning its television broadcasts, despite the fact that the service we demanded is part of the corporation's mandate. Our report therefore reiterates two recommendations drawn from our brief to the CRTC regarding the renewal of the CBC's broadcasting licence.

During the pandemic, we also observed that bilingual labelling standards were not being met. It is easy for the government to avoid its language obligations in this area, as Health Canada demonstrated on March 19 and April 27 with its directives to rescind bilingual labelling rules for certain products used to lower health risks, such as disinfectants and antiseptics. It is therefore vital that the government set out its labelling requirements within the Official Languages Act. Flouting language rights is too easy when all you have to do is to suspend part of a regulation.

The last in-depth update of the Official Languages Act goes back to pre-digital times. This means that the act is silent on concerns relating to social media.

● (1655)

We were taken aback when Professor Stéphanie Chouinard stated on November 26 that 80% of the Government of Canada's social media communications during the pandemic were in English. This is far from true equality of service. The Government of Canada should seize the opportunity that modernizing the Official Languages Act would provide to ensure true equality of French and English in social media communications.

There are also problems in the area of translation. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has received a number of complaints regarding the lack of communications or services in both official languages, as well as language-of-work rights. We wish to express our support for the Commissioner's first recommendation on this issue, which includes creating an express translation service, among other measures.

I will conclude with this final observation about problems that predate the pandemic, but have greatly impacted our organizations in recent months. Franco-Ontarian organizations are chronically underfunded compared to similar organizations across the country, and this has greatly weakened our network during the pandemic. Ontario is home to 55% of Canada's francophone population and one-third of francophone non-profit organizations outside of Quebec. Yet Ontario's share of the federal funding provided to francophone community organizations outside of Quebec is only 23%. The pandemic has amplified the impact of this underfunding. Our studies show that approximately 10% of our Franco-Ontarian organizations are confronting a critical situation that could force them to close down in the near future.

Like many others, our network has been shaken and weakened by COVID-19. However, we were already weakened by years of underfunding, and that has become all the more obvious during the pandemic. It is important that the federal government move to correct immediately the inequality of funding between provinces, without penalizing other province's communities in any way.

I thank you, members of the committee, for your attention and consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Jolin.

Now let's go to the chairperson of the board of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

Go ahead, Ms. Chundusing.

**Ms. Padminée Chundusing (Chairperson of the Board, Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique):** Mr. Chair, members of the official languages committee, good afternoon.

Former committee members who came to meet with us in Vancouver already know me, so hello again to those members. To introduce myself to the new members of the committee, my name is Padminée Chundusing, and I am the chairperson of the board of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

Thank you for the invitation to share some lived experiences in terms of what's happening on the ground in our province.

Let's begin with the Department of Canadian Heritage. Last March, as soon as the lockdown measures were introduced and the consequences of those measures became apparent, especially within our cultural and social organizations, Minister Joly and Canadian Heritage officials stepped up very quickly to explain that funding would not be interrupted and that events could be postponed to later dates without the risk of penalties. This gave our member organizations some temporary breathing room. That said, the closure of child care centres and other services that allowed our associations to free up funds to complement the grants left our members in a fragile state in the long term.

I'd like to discuss federal government communications. The health care situation in British Columbia was quickly turned upside down. The government that has neither legislative nor linguistic obligations, in other words the British Columbia government, com-

municated more information in French than the federal government, which is bound by the Official Languages Act.

However, we are under no illusions about that advantage, since it's more a reflection of the fact that our Minister of Health is also our Minister of Francophone Affairs. We would like to commend Adrian Dix's work and determination in both roles. There has been no indication that the rest of the provincial government and the administrative apparatus are at all inclined to significantly and permanently improve the use of French in their communications.

The lack of information from the federal government had considerable repercussions for francophone organizations and citizens, particularly those in precarious situations, as it was difficult to access information and services that were not directly related to health.

As for information on federal government assistance programs, it was available in French, but very inconsistently. Some people got everything they needed, while others were told that those services were not available in French. On that point, some Service Canada users told us that services in French in central Vancouver, a designated bilingual area, were no longer available.

After investigating and contacting the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, which supported us in our efforts, we learned that officials did not think it was important to reopen services in French. We therefore wrote to Minister Qualtrough, along with Ms. Joly and Mr. Duclos, informing them of the situation and requesting that French services be restored. We know how important Service Canada is in applying for the Canada emergency response benefit and EI. Our complaint has gone unanswered to this day, and we continue to receive conflicting information on the availability of services in French.

For example, we heard from one of our members that roughly 40% of francophone women in lockdown with an abusive partner who took part in a survey had not used the support services, not knowing that they were available.

Francophone immigrants appear to have been more affected than the rest of the population. We've heard of people going to the Centre of Integration for African Immigrants for assistance in completing their EI applications, because they could not get help in French from Service Canada.

Many French-speaking African families with low incomes in normal times found themselves unemployed when COVID-19 struck. As schools closed and classes moved online, kids from those families couldn't attend classes properly because they didn't have computers or an adequate Internet connection to keep up with all online classes. Francophone schools couldn't afford to provide a computer to every student or a high-speed Internet connection to the families.

• (1700)

Francophone immigrant families often use interpretation services for medical consultations. With the lockdown, consultations were held online and interpretation became difficult. Many francophones couldn't consult their doctors because of this.

At the community level, there was confusion about who does what. This translated into absurd situations where provincial civil servants and agency staff on the ground refused to engage with francophones, explaining that the federal government subsidized all our needs.

The shortcomings related specifically to the pandemic and its aftermath combine with other more common shortcomings in British Columbia: the lack of bilingual communication at airports. The lack of bilingual security and border services officers and the minimum number of bilingual employees mean that service is interrupted any time those employees are not on duty.

We must also add the general misunderstanding at best, and hostility at worst, of local federal public servants regarding language obligations.

The pandemic has created a particularly difficult situation for francophone immigrants in transition between two immigration statuses. Just at our federation for example, we had to lay off two employees who had reached the end of their work permits and were waiting for their francophone mobility status or permanent residence. Our coordinator was supposed to receive permanent residence on June 15, 2020, and finally got it at the end of September. During those long months, it was very difficult to get up-to-date and relevant information in French. It was even harder to reach an agent. On top of those two specific cases, we heard many stories of people losing their jobs as a result of losing their status. Given the cost of living in the Vancouver urban area, they were forced to leave the country.

The pool of francophone candidates in our province is pretty small, so it is crucial that our organizations be able count on the skills of people already in those positions and not risk losing them because of delays in processing their immigration files.

To wrap up, although the Department of Canadian Heritage moved very quickly to support the community and ease its concerns, communication and assistance from other federal departments were chaotic and sporadic. Our federation shares the FCFA's view that linguistic management during the pandemic proves once again that in order to ensure that francophones are treated as second-class citizens, the Official Languages Act must be modernized and given more teeth, otherwise we will be faced with inconsistent, potentially humiliating and certainly dangerous situations regarding public health and safety.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Chundensing.

Thank you for your presentation.

[English]

We'll now go to the Quebec Community Groups Network.

Ms. Jennings, you have the floor.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (President, Quebec Community Groups Network):** Thank you, and good afternoon, members of the committee.

My name is Marlene Jennings, and I am the newly elected president of the QCGN. I am here with our director general, Sylvia Martin-Laforge.

For those new to the committee, the Quebec Community Groups Network, QCGN, is a not-for-profit organization linking many organizations and stakeholders across Quebec. We identify, explore, and address strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec.

On March 16, Quebec imposed a first lockdown as the pandemic was spreading across the province. As time passed and the situation worsened, Quebecers were being reassured by daily briefings from the Prime Minister and the premier. We would like to especially applaud Premier Legault's example of delivering messages and responding to media questions in English during each of his press briefings.

The Commissioner of Official Languages conducted a survey about official languages and emergency situations. The results of his questionnaire noted that 89% of English-speaking Quebecers indicated that it was important to hear and see their political leaders speak in their preferred official language during emergency situations. The decision by the leadership of both levels of government to provide news and reassurances in both official languages was very helpful.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge (Director General, Quebec Community Groups Network):** We commend members of the federal bureaucracy for their work dealing with the many organizations in our network, which suddenly had to change deliverables and had many questions about funding and their futures. Federal civil servants bent over backwards to provide support and information to our community sector, allowing us to continue operations and provide sorely needed direct services to English-speaking Quebecers.

Early in the pandemic, the QCGN reached out to members and community stakeholders to identify immediate needs and learn how best to support our community during this unprecedented public health emergency. We heard loud and clear that it was essential to members of our linguistic minority community that they have access to quality information in their language.

• (1710)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Understandably, not everything went well.

The commissioner's questionnaire noted that 38% of English-speaking Quebecers had difficulty obtaining public health information or safety information from federal institutions in the language of their choice during the pandemic. This is higher than the 25% of francophones outside Quebec who reported the same issue.

While the federal and provincial governments were working together at the highest levels, we think their individual program announcements and rollouts were being done separately. Honestly, you know as well as we do that most Canadians and Quebecers don't understand the complexity surrounding the distribution of federal and provincial areas of responsibility.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** The pandemic also exposed the continued need for multiple-channel message distribution. The Internet is a great tool, but the digital divide is real. High-speed Internet is not universally available and is rare outside of urban centres, and even where it is available, it is not economically feasible or is beyond the technical ability of the most vulnerable. Community sector organizations hand-delivered COVID-related material to the technologically isolated. They literally drove to people's homes to deliver pamphlets.

This highlights again the essential service provided by community newspapers, which reach people the Internet does not. All levels of government must include community newspapers in their emergency response communication plans, and of course these newspapers require ongoing support to protect the valuable service they provide.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** During the week of March 30, a French version of a 24-page printed COVID "Self-care Guide" began to arrive in Quebec mailboxes. On page 2 of this document, there was a message stating that an English copy of the document could be accessed at a specific website. The only problem was that the message was in French. Over the next several weeks, the availability of this English online guide was communicated...online.

Although we are a highly bilingual community, seniors and other vulnerable English-speaking Quebecers are the least likely to be able to speak French or have access or ability to access the Internet.

[*Translation*]

Where is Charlie?

[*English*]

Through the QCGN's advocacy efforts, the Government of Quebec did mail out 800,000 English versions of the guide to Quebec taxpayers who had previously requested to receive their Revenu Québec documents in English. These guides began arriving in English households in June. Inserts of the guide also went into major English newspapers, along with ads explaining how to access online information. However, by the time this was happening, we were coming off the first peak of COVID. For many, this information was too late.

Critical information during a public health emergency must be distributed through multiple channels in as many languages as possible—including and especially in a widely used language like English—at the beginning of an emergency to ensure the widest possible penetration across the population. This is especially true during a pandemic. You know as well as we do that viruses aren't interested in the language of their victims. There is a public interest in making sure everyone receives timely information.

When issues related to health and safety are at risk, the Charter of the French Language does not restrict public communications in a language other than French. The Government of Quebec is obli-

gated to communicate in both languages when the health and safety of Quebecers is in peril. Not doing so threatens the health and welfare of Quebecers, and in terms of the pandemic exacerbated the virus spreading.

The interpretation and dissemination of safety information during a national emergency like the pandemic must be an area of co-operation between the federal and provincial governments. There must be common messaging, and this messaging—

● (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Madam Jennings. We have to stop right there. I'm so sorry.

[*Translation*]

We will now hear from the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick, and more specifically from its president, Cédric Doucet.

Mr. Doucet, please turn on your microphone and begin your presentation.

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet (President, Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick):** Can you hear me, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** I hear you just fine.

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** Mr. Dubourg, committee members, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

My name is Alexandre Cédric Doucet. I am the president of the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick, the organization that represents Acadians and francophones in the province of New Brunswick. Here with me today is Mr. Ali Chaisson, the executive director of the SANB.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to speak to you today as a representative of the 20,000 members of my organization and, by extension, approximately 235,000 francophones living in the only officially bilingual province in the country, or the ROC for short.

I want to express my sincere thanks for your invitation to appear before your committee as it examines the modernization of the Official Languages Act in the midst of a pandemic. This is important, because the last time the act was revised in 1988, parliamentarians seemed to have forgotten New Brunswick. The SANB is here to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

I will not begin my speech today by talking about the Expulsion of the Acadians, although the Royal Proclamation of 2003, signed by Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada and her Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson, recognized the harm done to Acadians in 1755, a tragic milestone in the building of Canada. However, it is with the weight of my nation's entire history that I would like to begin my presentation by drawing a very clear line in the sand:

I am Acadian; I am Canadian to the extent that Canada helps me remain Acadian.

Those are not my words; they belong to one of Acadia's greatest nation builders, the late Father Léger Comeau, a former president of the Société nationale de l'Acadie. That quotation very succinctly and accurately summarizes the SANB's perspective on the underlying nature of the special, sometimes colourful, relationship that exists between the Acadian nation and the Canadian government in relation to the social contract represented by all official languages laws, policies and regulations.

Committee members, I am 26 years old. In preparation for my presentation here today, I read several documents published by the SANB over the years, including briefs written by eminent Acadians who have worked for the SANB or served as its president before me, some of whose names are probably familiar to you, such as Michel Bastarache and Michel Doucet.

My predecessors went the distance in terms of exploring the legal complexities, the political calculations, the analyses of the causes and effects of this or that decision, of this or that amendment to the act, the choice of words, even the weight of omissions. Putting myself in their shoes, I am overcome with weariness and disappointment. What is all this for? So much work over the past 50 years, only to come to such a troubling conclusion: We are still asking for the same thing. The Official Languages Act lacks teeth, and Canada's elected officials have failed in their duty to official language minorities.

Here is what one of my predecessors had to say in the SANB brief presented in September 1975 to the working group on French-language minorities:

Had it not been for the programs developed by the federal government to ensure the recognition of French, New Brunswick would never have become bilingual. However, bilingualism is not an end in and of itself. It is merely a necessary evil. What is important to remember is that Canada has francophone communities of various sizes, and they want to remain what they have always been; in other words, they want to stay francophone. These communities will remain francophone with or without Canada. If it is with Canada, it will be within a bilingual Canada, where the two official linguistic elements of the country enjoy real, complete and absolute rights.

In today's context, in this era of rhetoric and sparse, wait-and-see actions, I can't help but notice that these statements still resonate today, 45 years later, and express how determined the Acadian people are to persevere in their existence and their specificity.

That said, at the rate things are going, I truly have to wonder whether my future grandchildren will be forced to come back here before this same committee in 50 years' time to make the same demands.

Will they finally see a modernized Official Languages Act that lives up to the aspirations of our great country? Will they still be Canadians? Worse still, will they be assimilated into the majority language?

As Acadian writer Rino Morin Rossignol put it:

While all the beautiful people in the Parliament of Canada and the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick are racking their brains to come up with ways to give the impression that they care about the rights of Canada's francophone population, assimilation will continue merrily on its way, as usual.

Ladies and gentlemen, I almost forgot that we are here to talk about official languages in the context of COVID-19.

• (1720)

Here is an example that speaks volumes. At the beginning of the pandemic, the minister responsible for official languages in New Brunswick, none other than Premier Blaine Higgs, whose command of French is limited to say the least, refused to appoint a francophone or bilingual spokesperson to address Acadians in their language at his daily press conferences. He even demanded that a Radio-Canada journalist ask her question in English, which was vaguely criticized by New Brunswick's Commissioner of Official Languages, who prefers a minimalist, even lax, interpretation of the government's official language obligations. Unfortunately, French remains a translated language, a language of accommodation.

Despite all the laws and political institutions in place, the tragic reality is that our government couldn't speak to us in our language, an official language, even during the worst health crisis of the last 100 years. Many Acadians changed stations to listen to François Legault's press briefings to get information in French. The others had no choice but to practice their English.

Is that the best way to fight assimilation in Canada? Has the very notion of fighting assimilation become so taboo, suppressed by the shame felt by the Canadian government given its poor record of defending and promoting French? Will denial be the saving grace of our public policies on official languages, by inoculating them against the outrage of this all-time low?

I appeal to your courage and your duty as elected officials. The future is taking shape right now. We are truly at a crossroads, and it's up to you to decide what direction this great Canadian project will take.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Doucet.

Thank you to all the witnesses. Your presentations were really fascinating. Your cooperation and support are extremely important to us.

Let's go straight to questions. Mr. Dalton has the next six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** I want to thank all the witnesses.

Your remarks and your accounts illustrate the reality facing minorities, especially during this pandemic.

As an MP from British Columbia, I want to thank Padminée Chundransingh for her efforts and the work done by the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique. I am very grateful to them.

You said several things, and we heard your frustration. You referred to the federal government's response as shocking, sporadic, humiliating and dangerous. Here, the Vancouver area is supposed to be a bilingual area.

It's easy to say, but during this pandemic, it became very clear that that is merely symbolic. Francophone immigrants were put in a very difficult situation. They got the short end of the stick.



Do you think modernizing the Official Languages Act could have helped us during this pandemic?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Chundunsing.

**Ms. Padminée Chundunsing:** I think modernizing the Official Languages Act is very important. It would help us a lot.

At the moment, there are no linguistic obligations in British Columbia. The act is not mandatory. I think modernizing it would help us. I think it would mean that all services in French would have to be available.

• (1725)

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Thank you.

Can you tell us about the situation at Service Canada? What happened to services for francophones?

**Ms. Padminée Chundunsing:** When immigrants requested services in French, the Service Canada office said that it was under no obligation to offer services in French. It was unfortunate that newcomers, francophone immigrants, could not be served in French.

The response that was given was that they weren't obligated to provide services in French.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I am sharing my time with Mr. Blaney. If he's ready, I will pass the floor to him.

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Dalton, from British Columbia.

My first question to the witnesses is this: Were they consulted in preparation for the white paper the government plans to release?

Let's go in the order in which the witnesses spoke, and I believe Mr. Jolin was first.

Mr. Jolin, were you consulted regarding the white paper?

**Mr. Carol Jolin:** We were not consulted on the white paper itself.

However, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne released a document quite some time ago indicating the changes we'd like to see.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Yes, we have done several studies on this, and the FCFA was also not consulted.

I will now put the same question to Ms. Martin-Laforge of the QCGN.

Were you consulted regarding the white paper?

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** I'd like Ms. Jennings to answer that question.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Okay.

Ms. Jennings, was the QCGN consulted regarding the white paper?

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** The answer is simple: no.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Okay.

Was that also the case in New Brunswick? Were the Acadians consulted?

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** No, but we submitted a brief to the Senate—

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Yes, we know what that takes, as you said.

The word “modernization” is weak. What the Official Languages Act needs is a revolution, a bit like the one Brian Mulroney did in 1988, to give it some teeth in order to adapt it to our new reality.

We still have to hear from British Columbia. Ms. Chundunsing, were you consulted on the white paper?

**Ms. Padminée Chundunsing:** Categorically, no.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** That's fine.

I know I'm sharing my time with Mr. Dalton, but I would like to thank you. Your testimony suggests that the pandemic is a catalyst for and exacerbates the problems that already exist.

Mr. Jolin, what happened with the CBC? A national broadcaster is expected to play its role in a pandemic.

I'd like to know what happened. It sounds like you were given the run-around.

**Mr. Carol Jolin:** We worked with the Government of Ontario to get simultaneous translation for the media briefings. We then approached the CBC about broadcasting these briefings. Of course, the press briefings were held at the same time as the ones in Quebec, but they could be broadcast later in the day or at a later time.

We wrote a letter to the president of the CBC. It took over three months to get a response, and ironically, we were turned down just before the public consultations.

We found that entirely unacceptable. We're going to be part of the CRTC's public hearings for the renewal CBC's licence very soon, and we'll bring it up again at that time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Blaney, you have 10 seconds left.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Dalton, could you please send us the content of your request and the letter from the CBC? I think the committee members would like to know what happened.

In closing, I'd like to add that national languages are a health and safety issue, as the QCGN representatives said.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Blaney, vice-chair of the committee.

Let's now go to Mrs. Lalonde for the next six minutes.

Go ahead.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, Mr. Arseneault.

I'd like to thank our guests for agreeing to appear before this committee.

In the early days of the pandemic, it became apparent how vital it was to disseminate information through the Prime Minister's daily press briefings to get relevant information out to Canadians. You've all referred to this in various ways.

Some of you, including Mr. Jolin for example, talked about the challenges we faced here in Ontario. Ontario has the largest pool of francophones outside Quebec. I was very disappointed because, as a federal MP, I received many complaints about the lack of availability. It took more than a month before we got press briefings in French. In terms of health and safety, it was up to the provinces to provide that information.

I congratulate Mr. Legault. As some of you pointed out, he respected the anglophone minority in Quebec by ending his press briefings in English.

My question is for you, Mr. Jolin.

The pandemic has taught us to work with other tools, like the ones we're using this evening to meet virtually. I know not everyone has access to these technologies. I'd like to hear your point of view. How could we use today's technology to improve the delivery of services in French, at the federal level, but also at the provincial level? I would like to hear your recommendations, which I strongly support.

• (1730)

**Mr. Carol Jolin:** Thank you for the question.

The report from the Commissioner of Official Languages suggests creating an express translation service. It's important to note that with today's technology, you can have three or four people working together on the same document, as we sometimes do at the AFO, for example. I don't see why, with the knowledge we have and with what's available, someone couldn't translate a text while someone else is composing it. I'm thinking of press releases, for example.

A good reason for this is the urgency involved. We want to produce documents as quickly as possible. I saw a presentation by the federal Translation Bureau indicating that, these days, with the technology and the quality of translation tools available, it is not necessarily translators that we need, but people who simply proof-read. It's also much faster.

It's time for us to get with the program and produce documents in both official languages, in emergency and normal situations, so that we can receive communications simultaneously. As you mentioned, this is a matter of respect and public safety. We have to go that route, we have no choice, and technology allows us to do that.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you very much, Mr. Jolin.

**Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

I don't have much time to ask my question and hear the answer.

I'd like to take an impartial and objective look at Acadia and New Brunswick, and specifically the youth, the next generation. Mr. Doucet, you gave an excellent speech earlier.

In 2015, when I first joined the Standing Committee on Official Languages, at the same time as Bernard Généreux, we heard exactly the same thing. In fact, the pandemic has served to accentuate the gaps and weaknesses. All the examples heard this evening speak volumes.

If modernizing the Official Languages Act could change only one thing to improve and ensure these communications in a pandemic or emergency situation, such as forest fires or flooding, for example, what would you change and why?

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** If it were up to me, of course I would like to see the specificity of New Brunswick recognized in the Official Languages Act.

We made several requests to that effect in 2018 when we submitted our brief to the Senate. Without going into detail, there is also the urgent request regarding Part IV, and there is also immigration. Of course, there are several aspects, but in our case, recognizing the specificity of New Brunswick remains our priority in terms of modernizing the Official Languages Act.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** You talked about the specificity of New Brunswick. I often talk about that, too. Perhaps you could draw a parallel between official languages legislation [*Technical difficulty*].

**The Chair:** Mr. Arseneault, you might have to turn off your video, because we can no longer hear you.

I'll therefore ask Mr. Doucet to try to answer.

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** I would say in response that subsection 16(1) of the Charter and Part VII of the federal Official Languages Act are national in scope.

I would even go as far as saying that these are constitutional and legislative provisions that are of national interest, and they must be given priority for the sake of national unity.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for keeping the ball rolling.

We'll now hear from Mr. Beaulieu for the next six minutes.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the speakers; it was very interesting. I was stunned when I heard the report from British Columbia.

My question is for Mr. Doucet from the Société nationale de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick.

You talked about the specificity of New Brunswick. The Official Languages Act was established on a kind of symmetry. In the 1988 version, while New Brunswick was given special status in the Charter, that was not reflected in the Official Languages Act.

Do you think the recognition of New Brunswick's specificity is realistic? You say the principle of “where numbers warrant” is a hindrance to Acadians. You've managed to obtain services in French in all municipalities, but you can't get them at the federal level.

Could you talk about that?

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Beaulieu. If you don't mind, I'll let our executive director answer that question.

**Mr. Ali Chaisson (Executive Director, Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick):** In terms of incongruity, there are different levels of scope. It might seem odd that a Canadian province, in this case New Brunswick, has official language provisions that far exceed the federal government's obligations in the same territory. That's what is meant by incongruity. It can be measured in Part IV of the Official Languages Act, the part that pertains to the delivery of services to the public. It says “where numbers warrant”. That's at the federal level. This limit does not exist in New Brunswick.

Thus, any amendment or modernization of the act should also confirm for New Brunswickers that services in both official languages should be equally accessible at the federal and provincial levels. This is just one example among many.

Taking that even further, if we talk about asymmetry, we would never be so pretentious or greedy as to use the specificity of one province's number against that of another province, knowing that the second province might have more limited language rights and not have access to the same services.

What do we think of that?

Any amendment or modernization of the federal legislation should allow all of Canada, but particularly New Brunswick because of the specificity of its provincial official languages legislation, to expedite services so that they are much more prevalent where census questions indicate that a given region is more likely to need a service, without being hindered by that very provision.

● (1740)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you, Mr. Chaisson.

I'll go to Mr. Doucet, and I'd like to address another point.

In your speech, you cited a comment that defined you as an Acadian, but also as a Canadian, to the extent that Canada helps you be Acadian. Acadians have the lowest assimilation rate, even though it's rising.

Do you think Acadians were right to choose Canada and Confederation?

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** That's an excellent question, and I'm going to give it a politician's answer.

I think we'll obviously have no choice but to consider other options if the New Brunswick government can't guarantee New Brunswick's Acadians a defence of the French language, and if the federal government can't put on his pants and defend French for minorities such as the Acadian nation in New Brunswick.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In that case, I have a question for the QCGN.

I'm quite surprised at the survey finding that 38% of anglophones in Quebec couldn't obtain satisfactory services in English from the federal government. And yet the commissioner didn't tell us that he hadn't received a lot of complaints from Quebec during the pandemic.

How do you explain that?

**The Chair:** Pardon me, but your time is up, Mr. Beaulieu.

Perhaps you can come back and ask your question again in another round.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their testimony today. I'll begin with questions for Ms. Chundensing from British Columbia.

Ms. Chundensing, your testimony was really powerful and important. I'd like you to tell us more.

Can you describe for us the typical profile of new francophone Canadians arriving in Vancouver and British Columbia?

Can you tell us why access to French-language services is so important for them?

**Ms. Padminée Chundensing:** As regards French-language services, I think that all francophone newcomers want to be served in the language they're accustomed to using. Providing French-language services is one way for us to retain those francophones in British Columbia. It's very hard to retain them right now. If we don't offer services to francophones here, they'll go elsewhere. It's very important for us that these French-language services be offered to newcomers.

I'd also like to emphasize that not all francophones who arrive here are bilingual. Once again, it's very important to have services in French so we can retain them. We have to help them; we have to integrate them. I myself am an immigrant, and I think that being served in the language in which I am used to living is very important.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you for your answer. I have one more question for you.

You mentioned access to domestic violence response services. We know that domestic violence and violence against women have increased during the pandemic. It's really very disturbing.

You discussed the almost dismissive attitude that public servants had toward the idea of offering French-language services. So there's a cultural problem preventing them from understanding how important it is to provide those services. Initiatives should be introduced for officials to adopt new skills and particularly to learn French.

What do you think is lacking for public servants to develop those skills and provide services in French?

**Ms. Padminée Chundensing:** Once again, we come back to the idea of modernizing the act. I think it's now necessary for public servants to be bilingual. We won't be able to provide those services if we don't have bilingual public servants.

It's true, as I said in my report, that the number of domestic violence cases has increased because women don't know where to turn for help.

I think we've reached a point where modernization has become urgently necessary.

• (1745)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Absolutely. I very much appreciate the fact that you've stressed this very serious problem affecting women and, as you said in your testimony, francophone women in British Columbia.

Let's talk about public services and the public servants who will have to be bilingual and speak French.

Do you think a financial incentive would help people understand why they should learn French and serve francophones in British Columbia?

Do you think an enhanced bilingualism bonus might be useful?

**Ms. Padminée Chundensing:** I would add that British Columbia is the only province that doesn't have a French-language services policy.

It's true. Having worked in the federal government, I know that bilingual employees receive the bonus. I don't know whether it's still in effect, but I think a minor financial aid would help us.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I want to thank you for your testimony and for the work you're doing.

I'd like to ask Mr. Doucet a question.

First of all, I want to thank you for your impassioned comments about the Acadians you represent. As a member who used to be younger than I am now, I want to acknowledge that your argument that the Official Languages Act has not been modernized since before you were born shows how appalling this is and how urgent it is that the act be modernized.

You clearly said you wanted the Official Languages Act to be modernized as soon as possible. We fully support that request. You emphasized that the act should be amended as soon as possible.

Mr. Doucet, you also said that Acadians had been left to their own devices from the very start. The minister's white paper is an admission of the government's failure.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on the proposed white paper, which will replace the bill to modernize the act. What do you think about that replacement?

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** Looking at the historical timeline, you can see that, in 1988, for example, Brian Mulroney and Lucien Bouchard did an excellent job of publicly promoting its modernization. Mr. Mulroney and his provincial counterparts worked hard to provide a clear explanation of the changes that should be made to the Official Languages Act.

I don't believe that members of the government today have had these discussions with their counterparts. If we look, for example, at part VII of the act...

**The Chair:** I apologize for interrupting you, Mr. Doucet.

We will have a final round of questions.

The time is flying by. That's what happens when you're in good company.

Mr. Blaney and Ms. Lattanzio will have five minutes to ask questions. Mr. Beaulieu and Ms. Ashton will have two and a half.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to give Mr. Doucet a chance to finish his thought.

**The Chair:** We are listening, Mr. Doucet.

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** In 1988, a popularization and discussion exercise was conducted with the provinces, something the present government hasn't done.

Preparing a white paper may be precisely what the government wants to do. If that's the case, we aren't opposed to the white paper if it leads to the quick passage of a bill. If we want to improve part VII of the act, which strengthens the federal government's spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction, Mr. Trudeau will have to talk to his provincial counterparts.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Doucet.

I'd also like to go back to a statement that Ms. Chundensing made.

She said that the fact that British Columbia's health minister is bilingual facilitated matters. However, a country can't rely solely on the language skills of individuals; it must have mechanisms. Surely that's one of the factors that will have to be considered as part of the modernization.

I'd like to turn back to Mr. Jolin.

With regard to the pandemic study, you mentioned the inequality of funding. You say there's a large francophone population in Ontario. You also emphasized that the federal government's near chronic underfunding was causing problems and that those problems have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

I'd like you to discuss that at greater length.

• (1750)

**Mr. Carol Jolin:** Some of our organizations were in trouble even before the pandemic, and others couldn't qualify for funding. The pie is only so big. As I mentioned, we represent 54% of francophones outside Quebec and 23% of non-profit organizations across the country. Other non-profits are being created, but they aren't eligible for funding. For existing non-profits, the pie is so thinly spread out that there isn't enough funding for organizations to survive.

The pandemic made that even clearer when it hit. We estimate that 10% of our organizations may shut down. Since we represent approximately 300 francophone organizations, that means that 30 to 40 organizations could disappear. Every time an organization folds, the surrounding community is weakened.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** I take your point, Mr. Jolin.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to share my speaking time with my colleague John Williamson.

**The Chair:** Mr. Williamson, go ahead for exactly two minutes.

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being with us this evening.

Mr. Doucet, you cited a very good example of a failure by the New Brunswick government. Generally speaking, have things gone well? We've been told that Quebec has done things right, which surprises me, but that the federal government hasn't.

Did Dr. Russell speak French or have interpretation services in New Brunswick during the pandemic?

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** Dr. Russell, the chief medical officer of health, is bilingual. She communicated in both official languages. However, the premier of New Brunswick didn't; he only had simultaneous interpretation.

I'm interested in this question because I'm a law student. Beaulac, one of the leading language law cases, states that what's important in official languages is equal treatment, not accommodations such as simultaneous interpretation.

That's why I said it was important to have a francophone or a bilingual speaker instead of Mr. Higgs because he was unable to communicate effectively in French and thus to comply with the Official Languages Act or to respect the Acadian nation in New Brunswick.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Williamson. That's all the time we have.

I now go to Patricia Lattanzio for five minutes.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair

It's my turn to thank all the witnesses for being here with us this evening. Thank you very much for being involved.

[English]

Thank you for taking part in our study on a very important issue. My questions are going to be addressed to the two ladies of QCGN whom I've known in my function as a school board commissioner in my past life.

We heard this week the testimony of REISA and CHSSN, clearly indicating to us that the community health network, the community groups, have become a lifeline.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** The interpretation isn't working, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Pardon me, Ms. Lattanzio, we have an interpretation problem. I'll stop the clock.

Can we check that, Madam Clerk?

Are you on the English channel, Ms. Lattanzio?

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** I'm using the new system, where everything should work, regardless of the channel selected. It should work automatically, Mr. Chair.

• (1755)

**The Chair:** All right.

You've done your update.

**The Clerk:** Ms. Lattanzio, I'm told your microphone isn't connected.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** My microphone is connected to the computer. I spoke with the technicians earlier, and everything was working. So I don't know what to tell you.

Do you want me to take off my headset?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I think we can hear you better. The interpreter was saying that she couldn't hear you very clearly and that the volume wasn't up. I can hear you clearly, at any event.

**The Chair:** I can too.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** May I continue?

**The Clerk:** Could you suspend for a moment, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** All right, Madam Clerk. We will suspend for a few seconds, please.

• (1755)

(Pause)

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**The Chair:** We will resume.

I suggest that two members ask our two speakers their questions while we wait for a technician to go and see Ms. Lattanzio.

I invite Mr. Beaulieu to ask the witnesses his question.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** First, Mr. Doucet, you said in your speech that so much work has been done over the past 50 years only to achieve a disturbing result and that you're still making the same demands. In the meantime, however, the assimilation rate among francophones has been rising increasingly quickly.

My question is also for the other speakers.

Do you think we can actually alter the situation and reverse that trend by modernizing the act?

**Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet:** I think the question was intended for me, so I'll answer it.

I think that it's like anything else and that the act will be modernized in two phases, the modernization itself, by the tabling of a bill, but that the crucial part after that will be its implementation, the political will actually to enforce the new provisions.

You can have the best statutory provisions in world, but they serve no purpose if you don't have the political will to enforce them. It's the political will that will prevail in this case.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'd like to hear from the QCGN representatives on this.

In the last session, Ms. Jennings, your predecessor said, with regard to education measures, that there had been good reasons to restrict access to English-language schools in the 1960s but that it became less and less appropriate to do so. She felt that the French language was in good shape and that such restrictions would ultimately disappear because they constituted a violation of civil rights.

Do you share that opinion? Do you agree that French is currently declining in Quebec?

• (1800)

**The Chair:** If you could answer in 40 seconds, please.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Here's what the QCGN and I, its president, think.

[*English*]

We believe that, yes, French needs to be protected, and we have always believed that, but we also believe that the English-speaking communities of Quebec are Quebeckers and that we also have rights. Our vitality is in danger not because we cannot speak English, but because our educational institutions' population is going down.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Ms. Jennings.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Jolin and Ms. Jennings, from the Quebec Community Groups Network.

I want to ask a question about local media in the minority language communities. Linda Lauzon, from the Association de la presse francophone, made an emotional appeal to the government,

which abandoned local media during the pandemic. Its local media advertising purchases have failed to offset their advertising revenue losses.

I'd like to know if that's what local media have experienced in the communities you represent. What kinds of financial problems have they experienced?

[*English*]

Mr. Jolin and Madam Jennings, would you like to speak to this?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Carol Jolin:** I'll start.

Local media were already in dire straits because both levels of government had placed their advertising with social media. Revenues have been declining for some time, and that has put francophone media everywhere in an extremely tough position. They've been forced to cut positions and reduce the size of the documents they normally publish.

It was clear at the start of the pandemic that the federal government was placing its advertising with the English-language media. We intervened and took action in the matter, and advertising contracts returned to our francophone media, which was a very positive step toward reaching our people and helping the media survive the pandemic.

But the problem remains intact: there's a dramatic shortage of funding for francophone media, and they're suffering from it.

[*English*]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** In terms of the English-speaking Quebeckers, the fact that the provincial government did not publish its 24-page guide in English and deliver it at the same time as, or almost immediately after, the delivery of the French version meant that over one million Quebeckers did not have access to this urgent information for health and safety in their language, their mother tongue, until more than two months later.

However, I commend the government, because when we did reach out to Mr. Legault's government and point that out, we worked together to see that it would be translated and delivered to the homes. That's one.

Second, our community newspapers were essential. The federal government and the provincial governments need to include them in the messaging and provide support for their ongoing vitality.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Jennings.

We will now try to turn the floor over to Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have four and a half minutes left.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** I'll put my rollerskates on.

[English]

The testimony that we heard this past Tuesday from REISA and CHSSN indicated to us that the community health network and community groups have become a lifeline for the English-speaking populations in terms of finding and getting the information that they needed during the pandemic, playing the middleman between the governments and communities.

First, can both of you ladies speak to the [Inaudible—Editor] outreach and operation in the context of the pandemic?

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** There's no interpretation.

[English]

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Second, how have you had to adapt to English [Inaudible—Editor] during these difficult times?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Pardon me. We seem to be having more interpretation problems. The question is for the QCGN representatives.

Please start, and I'll see if the interpretation is working.

• (1805)

[English]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Yes.

I'm going to ask Sylvia, our director general, to answer that question.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** Both federal and provincial coordination, as we said earlier, is important in situations of pandemics and health crises. The funding that is available to us from Health Canada is important in terms of promotion and is important for our networks.

Increasingly, we find ourselves having to supplement the work that the province should be doing for our English-speaking Quebecers. For example, when the guide didn't come out, many of the groups used money to translate it and distribute it. That's a very good initiative, but it's not what we should expect from our government.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Would other...? Oh, sorry.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** We are listening.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** I'll speak in French. I think both ladies will understand my question.

What gaps do you have to fill as a result of this communication problem?

Since we're short of time, perhaps you can supplement your answers with a written brief on this topic, or any other topic that we were unable to discuss with you today as a result of the technical problems that have prevented us from following up.

**Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge:** I'll respond in French out of respect for Mr. Beaulieu.

We received the guide about two months after it was released in French.

It was good, although there are no established standards, and, if other documents have to be distributed again to English-speaking Quebecers, we aren't sure that will get done.

However, that's the way it is despite the fact that Quebec's Act respecting health services and social services provides for situations in which translation must be done and documents must be available in several languages, including English. It's not just in English, but in many languages. This is a crisis. It's important. People are dying. There have to be standards.

We don't have that guarantee. We can't expect associations to do the work for the government. That's not acceptable. It's absolutely necessary that a reasonable and generous government provide these services to the English-speaking community in times of crisis.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

That is all the time we have for the period of questions.

Thanks to all the witnesses for participating and cooperating because we have gone beyond 5:30 p.m.

I would therefore like to thank Carol Jolin, president, and Peter Hominuk, executive director, of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario; Padminee Chundensing, chairperson of the board of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique; Marlene Jennings, president, and Sylvia Marint-Laforge, director general, of QCGN; and, lastly, Alexandre Cédric Doucet, president, and Ali Chaisson, executive director, of the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Once again, thank you very much. Please do not hesitate to send us any other information you think may be useful.

I also take this opportunity to thank the entire technical team, analysts, the clerk and everyone at this meeting.

I wish everyone a safe trip home and good evening to you all.

Thank you for attending our meeting. Goodbye.







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