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• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

We're still having some technical difficulties for those participating in the meeting remotely.

One of our witnesses, Mr. Nadeau, is trying to join the meeting online, but he's having technical problems. We'll do the required sound tests once he manages to connect.

I just want to let you know that everyone participating in the meeting online has done the sound tests, and everything is in order.

Welcome to meeting number 88 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 20, 2023, the committee is meeting to resume its study on the economic development of official language minority communities.

Here's a short version of the mike use instructions: Speak through the chair and mute your mike when you're not speaking. We're used to working on Zoom by now.

In accordance with our routine motions, as I said at the beginning, connection tests have been done and everything is working properly.

I would like to welcome Mr. Nadeau from the Haut-Madawaska Chamber of Commerce, whom we are expecting shortly by videoconference; Marie-Eve Michon, from the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick, or RDEE, who's here in the room; and Mylène Letellier, from the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique, who is joining us by videoconference.

Good afternoon, Ms. Letellier. You're kind of far away, but we can see you up close here. Hurray for technology.

As usual, I'll give each witness five minutes for their presentation, and then we'll move on to six minutes of questions for each party, and so on.

I am very strict about speaking time. That's part of my job. The stricter I am, the more questions people can ask, and that's better for everyone.

I see that Mr. Nadeau is logging in.

Can you hear us, Mr. Nadeau?

Mr. Reginald Nadeau (President, Haut Madawaska Chamber of Commerce): Yes, I can hear you very well, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, I'll let you do your sound check.

Ms. Michon just arrived in person.

Ms. Michon, I'll have you start. You have five minutes.

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon (Director, Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to testify and contribute to your study, which I feel is very important.

My name is Marie-Eve Michon. I am the director of the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick, the New Brunswick RDEE, which was founded in 2000. You've met with a number of our counterparts over the course of your study, so I won't try to reinvent the wheel. We create and support strategies and initiatives that meet the economic development needs of francophone and Acadian communities in order to contribute to New Brunswick's economy, among other things.

The New Brunswick RDEE has 19 employees and two offices, one in Paquetville, a rural community in northern New Brunswick, and another in Moncton, an urban setting.

We focus on economic development, which includes entrepreneurship, business takeovers by women and sustainable development; and employability, which includes economic immigration and skills development.

I would like to share an overview of some of the New Brunswick RDEE's flagship projects to give you an idea of what we do, the scope of our projects and how we connect with communities in all the ways I just mentioned.

The New Brunswick RDEE spearheads Impact, a program that helps francophone businesses in all four Atlantic provinces take steps toward sustainable development. We're all working together to help these businesses adopt greener, more sustainable practices.

Innover par l'amélioration des processus is another project designed to support businesses by helping them become more productive and competitive. We provide non-repayable financial assistance of up to \$50,000 per business to help boost productivity and ensure longevity. The program is ending on March 31. We've helped 31 francophone businesses benefit from this program, and 77% of them are in the manufacturing sector.

Solution Repreneuriat is a program that helps women who want to buy an existing business. We do a lot to support start-ups, but we also wanted to provide support for takeovers. We know that women who want to buy a business don't face the same challenges as men. This program was set up with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada under the leadership of the New Brunswick RDEE. It includes the four Atlantic provinces and Saskatchewan. It has been running in New Brunswick for three years and has helped 200 women, 97 of whom have received personalized coaching to help them through the process of buying a company from start to finish.

Our Mode d'emploi program is designed to support newcomers and permanent residents by helping them learn about the characteristics of Canada's labour market generally and New Brunswick's in particular. So far this year, our small team has supported 280 clients and delivered 400 employability services, including webinars, workshops and training.

In closing, I should say that we're funded by the Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, which is crucial to delivering francophone services and initiatives in New Brunswick. This funding provides tremendous leverage because it enables us to secure other opportunities and funds. For example, over the past five years, the New Brunswick RDEE has worked with 2,800 partners. We've used our own funding to leverage \$12 million in cash and \$4 million in kind, benefiting over 70,000 recipients in New Brunswick with 255 projects.

We're very excited about the new \$208-million fund for employment assistance services. I look forward to seeing what happens next. We are very much looking forward to working together, as this will enable us to accomplish even more with our projects.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Michon.

Ms. Letellier, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Mylène Letellier (Executive Director, Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique): Mr. Chair and members of Parliament, on behalf of the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique, the SDECB, thank you for your invitation.

My name is Mylène Letellier. I am the executive director of the SDECB, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

As part of its mission to promote the economic development of the francophone community throughout British Columbia, the SDECB operates in three main areas: entrepreneurship, particularly women entrepreneurs; employability among young people, immigrants and employers; and community economic development, specifically in the fields of tourism and sustainable development

and through the management of the western Canadian francophone economic development fund for the Pacific region.

My colleague from the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick talked about some flagship projects, but I would like to talk to you about the challenges the SDECB faces in its three areas of intervention.

Here's how we see the main challenges in entrepreneurship. While funding to support our employability initiatives has increased over the years, thanks to funding from Employment and Social Development Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, funding for entrepreneurship has not gone up in 20 years. The funding we get from PacifiCan, the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, has not changed in 20 years. The fact that this funding is not indexed is a major challenge in the current inflationary context.

Nevertheless, PacifiCan funding has enabled us to deliver personalized coaching services, mentoring, training and networking activities in Vancouver and Kelowna, as well as activities for women entrepreneurs. We would like to expand our services to other regions and offer more programs to support things like business takeovers and interprovincial economic missions or missions to Africa.

With respect to employability, more and more employers are relying on our organization to recruit bilingual talent. That means we have to draw from francophone foreign countries. However, our current funding requires us to limit our efforts to participating in Destination Canada, which is funded by Employment and Social Development Canada.

Until now, the SDECB had little control over employment services offered to Canadians from other provinces; they had to turn to provincial employment centres offering certain services in French. We therefore welcome Employment and Social Development Canada's announcement of funding for employment centres run by and for francophones. That funding will be available to the SDECB.

Here are the challenges we face in community economic development. The SDECB is missing opportunities to promote francophone tourism because our province doesn't prioritize francophone tourism, the funding criteria for federal government programs are not in sync with our reality, and we lack financial and human resources.

The French fact and bilingualism drive economic growth in communities such as ours. Enabling anglophone tourism businesses to provide services in French, promoting francophone tourism and optimizing investment opportunities are initiatives that offer excellent opportunities for growth.

Francophone countries in Africa represent opportunities for francophone businesses looking for new markets and for provinces able to attract investors, visitors and job seekers from there.

Another opportunity to raise the francophone community's profile is coming up with the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will attract many visitors from francophone countries in Africa and elsewhere to Vancouver. All we need is a commitment from the federal government to launch a project that will galvanize people, engage the community, stimulate the economy and spotlight our culture.

Generally speaking, the federal government's latest funding opportunities have increasingly emphasized bilingualism. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy is one example. Economic organizations in minority language communities sometimes have trouble competing with majority language organizations responding to calls for funding because they're addressed to all francophone and anglophone stakeholders in Canada. Organizations like ours often have to rely on the good will of anglophone partners or partners in Quebec to work collaboratively in an equitable manner. This approach isn't "by and for francophones".

• (1550)

The Chair: Ms. Letellier, please wrap up in under 20 seconds.

Ms. Mylène Letellier: In closing, I would like to point out that the SDECB is part of a national network, the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, whose mission is to promote prosperity and economic development. In 2023, they produced a white paper with some great recommendations. I invite you to read it.

Thank you for your attention, and I'm available to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Nadeau, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: Good morning, Mr. Chair. Thank you for inviting me to take part in this meeting.

I didn't prepare a fancy speech like my colleagues. As you'll see, I'm a businessman and I don't have the jargon and turns of phrase of a public servant, but I will be clear and to the point.

As you mentioned, I live in the wonderful city of Haut-Madawaska, the most beautiful city in Canada. I am the president of the Haut-Madawaska Chamber of Commerce, and I also belong to other committees in the region.

The main purpose of my presentation today is to explain how Haut-Madawaska Chamber of Commerce members see the francophonie's opportunities and challenges. I'll go over the points we decided to focus on as a result of the steps we've taken with chamber of commerce members and other stakeholders.

One of the biggest issues in our region is recruiting workers, and one of our main economic activities is the poultry sector. We know chicken farming. I believe our region is the nation's leader in raising, slaughtering and processing chickens, as well as wood processing. Those two sectors are extremely important to us. Because we are in a small remote area, we recruit workers from Canada and from other countries. Our entrepreneurs actively recruit francophone workers. We are in a francophone region, and preserving our language is important to us.

Our companies compete for workers with Quebec City, Montreal and southern New Brunswick, mainly. Many of the workers we recruit from outside our region want to go to those large francophone centres. However, once they set foot in our region, they realize that, compared to big cities, the quality of life here is exceptional. Young families that settle here are well served.

The chamber of commerce runs a few projects, including the community incentive plan. Funded by three leading members of the chamber of commerce, this plan helps subsidize newcomers and their families who want to come and settle in our region.

I'd like to talk about some of the challenges our businesses are facing. First of all, credential recognition programs can be very onerous because there is too much bureaucracy. They are also extremely expensive for our workers. Second, like everywhere else in Canada, we lack housing to accommodate new workers and new families. Chamber of commerce members and the City of Haut-Madawaska are trying to tackle this problem. The situation should be rectified in a few years.

• (1555)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: Okay.

Anything to do with communications, such as Internet access and the cell network, is another problem in our sector.

As you can see, I'm not an expert, but I will answer all your questions to the best of my ability.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau, Ms. Michon and Ms. Letellier.

During the first round of interactive questions, each party will have six minutes.

We're going to start with the Conservatives.

Mr. Dalton, you have six minutes.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): I thank the witnesses for their comments.

As a member from British Columbia, I'd like to start by saying that I visited a number of francophone organizations in Vancouver last week together with a few colleagues, including Mr. Godin. I want to congratulate Mr. Godin, our vice-chair, on receiving the Kermode award from the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique for his efforts to advance the French fact in minority language communities.

Ms. Letellier, we visited the Chambre de commerce francophone de Vancouver and met with some 60 business people.

Do you have a relationship with that chamber of commerce?

Ms. Mylène Letellier: Good afternoon, Mr. Dalton and Mr. Godin. I did indeed have the pleasure of meeting you last week at the award ceremony.

Unfortunately, I did not attend the latest meeting of the *Chambre de commerce francophone de Vancouver* because I was at the reception in honour of Mr. Godin. We do work closely with them, though. Their mandate is local, and ours is provincial. Our mandate is to set up meetings and facilitate networking among entrepreneurs. We often refer entrepreneurs seeking counselling services to the chamber of commerce for networking activities. In return, the chamber of commerce refers entrepreneurs to us when they need support for more specific services, such as training.

In fact, as I said in my presentation, we also manage the fund previously called the *Fonds de développement économique francophone de l'Ouest*, or FDEFO. It's part of the Economic Development Initiative, the EDI, and it enables us to redistribute that money to francophone community organizations for community economic development projects. Over the past two years, the chamber of commerce has benefited from that source of funding, which we manage.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Do you communicate with anglophone businesses to make sure they're aware of francophones' services and needs? Do you work with other organizations?

Also, in your work, do companies generally come to you or do you go to them? Or both?

• (1600)

Ms. Mylène Letellier: We work closely with anglophone organizations in the business community. For example, we work with Women's Enterprise because our mentorship programs for women are from the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada program.

We also work with the Community Futures Network of Canada because they offer services in the regions such as business takeovers, which we don't offer. We work closely with that network to keep tabs on businesses for sale throughout the region. We also work with InnovateBC on the Intellectual Property Program. We make our community and the needs of our francophone entrepreneurs known by finding more and more opportunities to work with businesses that offer essentially the same services as we do, but to the anglophone community.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Your organization is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Thank you for the work you do in the province.

It's always a battle, but is it getting harder and harder? How would you describe your progress and the challenges?

Ms. Mylène Letellier: Let me see. I think the main challenge for our organization is that needs are growing, be it in entrepreneurship, in employability or in economic and community development. We're getting more and more requests for partnerships and projects, but we don't necessarily have enough funding. We have core funding, but to do more, we sometimes need project funding. I think that's the issue.

We could do a lot more, but we don't always have the funding to do more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton. Thank you as well, Ms. Letellier.

I'll now give the floor to Annie Koutrakis, from the Liberal Party.

You have the floor for six minutes, Annie.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses who are with us today for sharing their comments on this very important study.

I'll start with you, Ms. Michon. New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province. It's quite unique, linguistically speaking. Although the two languages are equal, what measures have your Acadian businesses adopted to better promote and affirm French as the language of work and trade?

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon: Being the only officially bilingual province is definitely a double-edged sword, as they say. Obviously, the language of business is English. There's no denying that. I think francophone businesses recognize that bilingualism is a strength that makes it possible to integrate other markets. For our part, we're trying to point out that French has the same power as English in business. Through the *Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick* and all its francophone members, we try to show our business network that doing business in French is as powerful as doing business in English.

We're also working on a project that brings together the four Atlantic provinces in order to develop business relations with Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. There are francophone businesses there that want to expand their services. We're trying to develop exchanges and promote francophone entrepreneurship to some extent.

I don't know if that answers your question.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. Nadeau.

Could you tell us about the specific case of the Haut-Madawaska region and its linguistic profile?

In addition, are there tricks you could share with us that could also be used in regions where francophones are in the majority?

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: Yes.

We are mainly francophones in our sector. That's good to say. As Ms. Michon mentioned, even if we are completely francophone in our sector, or 95% of us, the language of business is also English.

New Brunswick and the northwest of the province are production and export regions. Naturally, English is therefore important.

Even though the French language is the language most used by all our fellow citizens and workers, businesses want to protect the French fact while ensuring a certain level of bilingualism so that they can continue to do business.

In terms of tricks, the programs we've developed at the Haut-Madawaska Chamber of Commerce are mainly focused on recruiting and retaining our fellow citizens and people from the outside, speaking French as much as possible, so that they can settle in our territory. Hence the community incentive plan, known as PIC, as I mentioned earlier, which is an investment program designed to encourage people from outside to come and settle in our territory.

In terms of foreign recruitment, the process for obtaining permanent residence is quite long and arduous. So it is a challenge for us to get these people to participate in the PIC program. However, that program is now available. It has been in place for five years and about 20 families have come to settle in our territory so far. If memory serves, a family is in the process of obtaining citizenship or permanent residence and intends to take part in this program.

So it bodes well and it gives our businesses some breathing room. Naturally, we also have to think about housing these people. This is extremely important.

The federal programs that appear to be unveiled in this area will certainly help us a great deal.

However, in terms of French, it must also be said that organizations in our region provide training in French. However, the main disadvantage our members mention is that people who want to take courses and learn French have to do so within a fairly limited time frame. Since the courses are normally given during the day, the people who work don't have access to them. Therefore, we are asking for some flexibility so that the training can be offered in the evenings or on the weekends so that as many people as possible can take French courses intended mainly for adults.

The children of young families are already in francophone classes in our schools, which helps a great deal with integration. Having had an experience this week, I can say that the integration of these young people who come from outside the country is fantastic. It's a different generation. This is a generation of young people who are much more open to difference. We certainly notice that. In one of the schools in our territory, the student population from outside has represented nearly 40% in the past two years. That's huge.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

You will be able to continue as other questions are put to you.

The next speaker will be Mario Beaulieu, the second vice-chair of this standing committee, representing the Bloc Québécois.

You have the floor for six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses, who are sharing their experience with us.

My first question is for all the witnesses.

Several of you said that the language of business was English.

Is there a way to work in French in your regions and businesses?

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon: Of course, there's a way to do business in French. We have quite a large francophone business network in New Brunswick.

Toward the end of May, we're organizing Rendez-vous Acadie-Québec, which allows francophone businesses in New Brunswick and Quebec to network.

We're always trying to forge closer ties with the Quebec community, but also with the francophone community outside Quebec. The members of the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, or REDEE Canada, including my counterpart from Alberta, who is here today, all work together and also share their best practices and good tools to support francophone businesses in each of our provinces.

Our best practices are exported to other provinces, and all that creates a good francophone business network.

• (1610)

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: I agree with Ms. Michaud on this point, Mr. Beaulieu.

All the work we do in the province and in Canada is mainly done in French, but the manufacturing sector does a lot of exporting.

I was talking about bilingualism earlier, but it's French that predominates in businesses these days. We are proud to keep our language alive by recruiting francophone workers from outside Canada. This allows us to promote the French language and keep it alive in our part of the country.

Ms. Mylène Letellier: There are 7,000 so-called French-speaking businesses in British Columbia. For them, the French-speaking market is often their first market, but they will quickly want to develop their business by working with the English-speaking market. We're trying to develop more and more francophone markets in the other Canadian provinces, in other official language communities, be it in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island or Quebec, and even, as I said earlier, in Africa.

In terms of employment, we do a lot of recruitment for employers. The bilingual workforce is growing in our regions, and we're increasingly being asked to work with sectoral associations, such as the British Columbia Hotel Association, to go and work with them to find bilingual staff in francophone countries.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I don't know if you've implemented measures regarding the use of French at work. The last census showed that the use of French as a language of work was declining. All the indicators show that French was in decline.

Do you have any data on the use of French as a language of work?

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon: I don't have the data on language of work, but 30% of New Brunswick's population is francophone.

To add to what Ms. Letellier and Mr. Nadeau mentioned, we've set up an online business purchase platform to promote the purchase of businesses by francophones and further develop the market for francophone businesses. It's already in place for the four Atlantic provinces and Saskatchewan.

I don't necessarily have the numbers—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd like to ask Mr. Nadeau another question.

You said that people in your sector speak French. The government has developed a strategy to promote francophone immigration outside Quebec.

Do you think that we're more likely to promote French by sending foreign workers to places like yours or by sending them to mainly anglophone environments, where they'll have access to very few resources in French, in addition to not being able to work in French?

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: Our companies recruit in francophone countries. As a result, the workers who come to our territory speak a minimum of French. That makes it easier for them to integrate. That's the foundation. It also makes it easier for them to communicate with their co-workers.

Companies are scrambling to keep discussions in French in the workplace, in the plants. This makes it possible to support the French fact. We realize that people who come from non-francophone countries start speaking French. However, we agree that learning French is quite a challenge. Learning French is difficult, compared to other languages.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau and Mr. Beaulieu.

We'll complete the first round of questions with Ms. Ashton, from the NDP.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us.

I'd like to start by asking Ms. Letellier a question.

I wanted to ask you about something else. Based on your testimony, but first, I want to highlight one of the points you raised, which is the financial support you'll need when Vancouver hosts the FIFA World Cup in 2026.

As members of Parliament, we do a lot of work to support our young people and to determine the role that Canada should play in this regard. We have in mind the World Cup and the investments in programming for recreational activities, particularly as it relates to soccer. So I was interested when you mentioned this sporting event, since we all recognize that it will be a historic moment. It's the

largest sporting event in the world. It's unique, and it will be the first time Canada will host the FIFA World Cup, and it will be in your region.

Can you tell us specifically what you'll need from the Government of Canada to support your work? Also, how would you like to welcome the francophone community that will be coming to your region in two years?

Ms. Mylène Letellier: Thank you for your question.

In fact, we would like the federal government to commit to promoting the francophonie at this event.

I'd like to give you an example.

During the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique, together with pan-Canadian partners, inaugurated a Place de la Francophonie, which was on Granville Island, to promote the French language in our province and across Canada.

This event was a showcase with different dimensions. For example, francophone businesses organized culinary tasting evenings. There were musical performances, a booth showcasing all the country's francophones through their language. This event was a golden opportunity to raise the profile of the French-speaking community, particularly within our province.

As I said, from memory, we received several million dollars from the government. I think that the Department of Canadian Heritage and Economic Development Canada had invested money so that we could set up an event of this kind.

I can tell you that, since that event, we've seen a keen interest in British Columbia from francophones. Francophone companies are moving here, and francophones are coming to work in our communities. In our opinion, this is a must-attend event. I think we should be able to repeat the success of 2010, but we need to be able to count on the government's commitment.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

We know that some of the best teams in the world are in countries where French is still one of the official languages.

We hope you will get support for that event.

I want to go back to a question that we've been asking ourselves a lot in this study. Perhaps you could start, Ms. Letellier.

What are the repercussions of the labour shortage in francophone schools, francophone child care services and health care in your region, in British Columbia? What impact does this labour shortage have on the economy of a francophone community in your region?

Ms. Mylène Letellier: The labour shortage has a negative impact on the hiring of francophone early childhood educators and francophone teachers in schools. Of course, that puts a brake on those services. That's a given.

That's why, thanks to events such as Destination Canada, but also with the province's help, we're going to do more and more recruitment in francophone countries to attract people to come and work here, in early childhood centres, in restaurants and in schools.

• (1620)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Mr. Nadeau, would you like to share your thoughts on this question?

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: Yes.

You've hit a nerve for us. French-language education in our province is affected by the labour shortage and the exodus of young people and families. People are leaving for work, and we know that Canadians are having fewer children than in the past.

However, as I mentioned, the arrival of new families from elsewhere in Canada or abroad has made it possible to ensure the survival of one of our schools. Without that, it would have closed its doors last year. Thanks to PIC, known in English as the community incentive program, which I mentioned earlier, this year that school has one-and-a-half times as many students as it did four years ago. There's a great dynamic, the school is full of young children, and more than 40% of our students come from other communities in Canada or abroad. That's very encouraging.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau. We're well over six minutes.

In the next round of questions, I appeal to the discipline and collaboration of committee members, since their speaking time will be short. It'll be two minutes for the first two parties, then one minute for the Bloc Québécois and the NDP.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I have to declare a conflict of interest: I have a company in New Brunswick. I wanted to make sure you knew that.

Ms. Michon and Mr. Nadeau, you seem very positive about what's happening in New Brunswick. My understanding is that the province has had a budget surplus for the past four years.

Do you think that was done at the expense of francophones? I'm asking you this somewhat thorny question, but it's important to know if we want to put pressure on the province to invest more in the francophonie.

Second, a few weeks ago, we met with people from the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Canada, or RDEE. It's a great organization. You're very dynamic. In fact, I had the pleasure of meeting people from New Brunswick. You have to keep up the good work.

I asked them if they felt that too many organizations were taking care of the francophonie, generally speaking, in all the provinces where francophones are represented. I would like to put the same question to both of you, on the RDEE and on the number of structures we have to serve the francophonie.

The Chair: Please answer in less than a minute.

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon: It's true that there are a lot of structures at the service of the francophonie in New Brunswick, and that is also the case at the national level as well. It's important to recognize organizations that have been doing this for a long time and that have developed expertise.

Obviously, some organizations discover an employability mandate when a new fund is set up. We have to observe that and be aware of the expertise and mandate of each organization.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, please answer in 15 seconds.

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: In my case, we are talking about community organizations that promote the integration and retention of newcomers. They are sorely underfunded.

Was it misspent in New Brunswick? I couldn't say for sure, but federal investments would be a great help to those organizations, which are doing miracles right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses who are with us.

Ms. Letellier, you mentioned that the companies you work with face certain barriers when it comes to accessing federal funds.

Do you have any specific examples of what might be a barrier for those businesses?

• (1625)

Ms. Mylène Letellier: Are you talking about what I mentioned in my five-minute opening remarks?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes, exactly. You mentioned a number of things that could present challenges, including federal funding criteria, for example.

Ms. Mylène Letellier: The federal government issues calls for proposals through Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. These calls are for everyone. There are requests for a bilingual program for both francophones and anglophones. Often, when minority organizations such as ours compete with majority organizations, the criteria, the impact and the numbers obviously cannot be compared.

Let's take the example of an organization like ours, which helps 7,000 francophone businesses, and compare it to what an organization that serves anglophones can do. The number of companies is much larger. You'll understand that we represent 2% of the population, whereas they represent 98%. Sometimes it's a little difficult to compare us to them. It's often suggested that we get closer to anglophone organizations. Sometimes it's possible and it works well, and sometimes it's a little more complicated. We depend on the goodwill of each organization. That's what I meant.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Letellier.

Mr. Beaulieu, you'll have to be very disciplined because you have the floor for only one minute.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll jump in really quickly. There is one measure that could help you. It was in Bill C-13, which created a new act to provide the right to access services in French in federally regulated businesses. Have you heard of that? Do you think that's a good thing?

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon: I can't comment on that act because I'm not familiar with it. I don't want to say just anything. I'm sorry.

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: I'm not familiar with it either.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay, we'll see. We hope—

It already applies to Quebec. It seems to me that it's supposed to apply in the next two years in all the regions.

Mr. Reginald Nadeau: Hopefully.

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon: Allow me to add that, when it comes to employees, we make sure they're French-speaking because that's part of our mission, which is to promote the francophonie in business. The difficulty is that people often choose the three major centres in New Brunswick, which are in the southern part of the province. The Moncton region is bilingual, whereas in the other two major centres, bilingualism leaves a lot to be desired. The francophone communities are mainly in the northeast. It's difficult to choose a rural area because the cost of living is extremely high. There's no public transit. So it's much harder to choose to settle in a small community in the northern part of the province.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michon and Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for one minute.

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

I have the same question as before, and it is for Ms. Michon. It pertains to the impact of the labour shortage, especially in our schools and French-language day care centres.

How is it impacting the economy of francophone communities in your area?

Ms. Marie-Eve Michon: There is no question that there is a labour shortage in all sectors, but it is especially critical in education and health care, given the issue of recognition of credentials. This obviously has to be addressed; we need to break down the barriers and walls. We have to try to relax the requirements.

We are in the process of preparing information sessions for immigrant candidates to make them aware of jobs in the education sector other than teaching, in order to encourage them to work in

schools and thereby lighten the load on the staff. We created this partnership with school districts, among others.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Michon and Ms. Ashton.

I want to thank the witnesses.

I know it is irritating to be cut off, but I had to do that because we will be welcoming the next witness panel and the sound checks have to be done.

If you wish to submit any further information to the committee, feel free to send it to our clerk, who will pass it on to the committee members. The committee would really appreciate that, and it will help us draft our report.

Once again, thank you for taking part in this process. It has been very interesting. As I said, don't hesitate to send us any further information that might be relevant.

On that note, the meeting is suspended.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Chair, before the witnesses leave, I would like to say hello to Ms. Letellier, whom I had the privilege of meeting last week.

Ms. Letellier, please give my regards to the people of British Columbia.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: We are now beginning the second part of the meeting.

I want to welcome the witnesses. Mr. Fortin, we will try to resolve all the technical issues so you can give your testimony.

For those of you not familiar with virtual meetings, I want to say that even though we can hear Mr. Fortin clearly, there is a problem at the console, between the transmission and the interpreters. That is where the sound has to be optimal.

So I would like to welcome Mr. François Vaillancourt, a professor who is appearing as an individual. Welcome also to Ms. Cathy Pelletier, general manager, not to say mother superior, of the Edmundston Region Chamber of Commerce, which as I said is the nicest region in Canada. I am in a conflict of interest here since I know Ms. Pelletier well. I also know Mr. Pelletier, who appeared earlier.

Finally, I want to welcome Mr. Roch Fortin, the owner of Maple Roch, who we hope will be able to join us soon despite the technical issues. Mr. Fortin, I understand you learned the maple syrup business in New Brunswick. I suspect it was in the area I come from.

As to how we will proceed, each witness will have a maximum of five minutes. You will then be asked questions by each political party. I am very strict with your speaking time to ensure that committee members can ask as many questions as possible.

We will begin with Mr. Vaillancourt.

You have the floor for five minutes, Mr. Vaillancourt.

Prof. François Vaillancourt (Professor, As an Individual): Thank you very much for having me.

Mr. Arseneault, I also want to mention that my wife is from the Madawaska Valley, so I agree with what you said about the great things that Edmundston and that part of New Brunswick have to offer.

Someone said earlier that French is a difficult language. My wife, who is a speech therapist as well as being from the Madawaska Valley, would disagree with that statement. She would say that English is actually harder to learn than French because of the many identical sounds that are written very differently. The argument that French is a tremendous challenge to immigrants as compared to other languages may not be entirely true.

I want to say three things. First, you might be wondering what an economics professor has to say about language. Economists have in fact been interested in the field for about fifty years. For economists, language has two components: first, it is a cultural feature, something that very often partially defines who we are. Above all, though, it represents human capital, which is the most important thing to us.

Human capital equates to what you have. Most of you have post-secondary education or fairly specialized training. You have acquired skills in the labour market or in politics. That is what we mean by human capital, but in 99.9% of cases, language is what allows you to make that specialized human capital accessible to buyers in the market and to other people you interact with. If you don't know the required language, it doesn't work. My first observation is that it is a person's human capital that interacts with the human capital of other people.

My second observation, perhaps more interesting, pertains to the research conducted recently in Switzerland by professor François Grin regarding multilingualism. In Canada, people are bilingual, and in Switzerland, people are bilingual or even trilingual. That research showed that the more languages a person knows, the greater the diversity, and the greater the person's originality and ability to contribute in areas that benefit society.

In other words, there are benefits to having more bilingual people and promoting French more widely, for minorities and the anglophone majority alike. Those benefits affect the economy indirectly, to be sure, but it makes us more mentally alert. People have always said that bilingualism helps protect against cognitive decline, but it also seems to benefit young people and give rise to interesting thinking.

My final observation came to me while I was listening to the last witness, who asked the federal government for more money. In this regard, I would point out something that is very obvious to an

economist: spending wisely is important, but not spending in every case is equally important.

So if you make recommendations, try to think of how the money can be invested as effectively as possible. Is it by increasing the demand for services offered by francophone businesses? Is it by increasing the supply of francophone workers in order to offer services in French? It will depend on the circumstances.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't think I have gone over my time limit.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaillancourt.

You spoke for three and a half minutes, so you were under the time allotted.

Ms. Pelletier, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Cathy Pelletier (General Manager, Edmundston Region Chamber of Commerce): Hello. Thank you for inviting me to join you today.

My name is Cathy Pelletier, as Mr. Arseneault said. I am the general manager of the Edmundston Region Chamber of Commerce.

I am also pleased to say that the Edmundston Region Chamber of Commerce is the largest francophone chamber of commerce in New Brunswick.

The role of our chamber of commerce, as you know, is to always provide the best support possible to our businesses in terms of economic development. We manage two initiatives to support our businesses. First, we operate the Retiree Employment Agency, which has a pool of retired persons. We also have the *Emploihabilité Plus* service, which helps people with special or specific needs return to the labour market.

Our chamber of commerce has over 360 members, from the smallest businesses to the biggest, including manufacturing and the tourism sector, which is quite strong in the region.

We are in the northwest of the province. We of course share a border with the United States on one side, and also share a border with Quebec. Given our unusual geographic location, it is not always easy to host or accommodate people or businesses.

I listened to the witnesses earlier and can say that the majority of our businesses are run by francophone entrepreneurs. Given our geographic location, however, they need to offer services in English, and increasingly in Spanish as well.

I will stop here and wait for the members' questions. I will answer to the best of my ability.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Pelletier.

Mr. Fortin, you have the next five minutes.

Mr. Roch Fortin (Chief Executive Officer, Maple Roch): My name is Roch Fortin. I live in the municipality of Summerland, British Columbia.

My presentation today will be in two parts: first, I will talk about my experience as a francophone in Canada, and secondly, my experience as an entrepreneur in British Columbia.

To begin, I left Quebec in 1979 after I graduated. I was hired by the RCMP in 1980 and travelled all over the country. In the 1980s, francophones in western Canada faced a lot of challenges. Honestly, it was a bit tough as a francophone, but I liked my career. Once people got to know me personally, we all became good friends. This year, 44 years later, our little detachment from Hope will reunite here in Summerland. It's a great story.

My career took me to Whistler, Richmond, fighting drug-related activities, to Vancouver headquarters, to Ecuador, Haiti, Mackenzie, Montreal and Yellowknife. I ended my career as district chief on the Acadian peninsula, in New Brunswick. I have worked in every province in Canada. I have met a lot of incredible people. I have a lot of memories from my years with the RCMP.

I also have two children: Luc who is 17 and is in grade 11 at a francophone school in Penticton, and Samuel who is 19 and is in his second year of political science at Vancouver Island University. I mention my sons because they are both perfectly bilingual. Seeing them speak French with my parents and the rest of my family in Lévis gives me cause to celebrate.

I am proud of them and I want to thank all the MPs and all the people who made it possible for my children to be educated in French.

That brings me to the second part of my presentation. After retiring from the RCMP, I promised to help the people on the Acadian peninsula as much as possible economically. I moved to Summerland, British Columbia. We started importing maple syrup from New Brunswick. I started with an order of six barrels of maple syrup from Mr. Rioux from Saint-Isidore. Then we imported maple syrup from Paquetville. Now we import maple syrup from Mr. Côté from Saint-Quentin. We also work with Mr. Fontaine from Saint-Philémon, Quebec, with his unique products.

Twelve years later, we order 200 barrels of maple syrup per year, and our local partners in British Columbia have created more than 20 maple syrup products. Today our social enterprise has eight employees and our clients include the Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Kelowna airports. We also supply maple syrup from New Brunswick and Quebec to chefs in British Columbia through Sysco, and we import lobster from New Brunswick for special events in our region.

As a francophone business in an anglophone region, we face certain challenges. For instance, we have to explain to officials in British Columbia that we contribute to the agri-tourism and food sector even though the maple syrup comes from eastern Canada.

Further, as a small company, it is very difficult to navigate all the programs that are offered. Many companies like ours do not have the necessary staff to fill out all the paperwork.

There are two ways to support small businesses like ours. The first is to create a national tourism register listing all the small businesses that offer services in French in Canada. The register would help visitors from Canada or other countries know what to visit.

Secondly, the federal government should support minority-language small businesses by promoting their unique products to embassies and consulates. On the whole, big companies that are close to major centres have an advantage over us.

• (1645)

As to the official languages, it is important for package labelling and related documentation to be in both official languages in Canada. Right now, a lot of businesses are cutting corners—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

You will have the opportunity to say more when you answer the questions from members.

Mr. Roch Fortin: Okay. My apologies.

The Chair: No problem.

Now that our three witnesses have got the discussion rolling, we will begin with the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes.

We will begin with the first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Mr. Godin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will ask my questions quickly.

Mr. Vaillancourt, I agree with you that it is much more difficult to learn English than French. I know from personal experience. Further, in your opening remarks, you reminded us of the importance of spending wisely, but also spending less. Investing and managing our investments wisely is a good motto that the federal government should follow every day.

My first question is for Ms. Pelletier, who represents the Edmundston Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Pelletier, you mentioned that New Brunswick borders the United States and Quebec. The regulations that apply in Quebec and in Maine are obviously not the same.

How can the federal government facilitate access to the Quebec market, for instance? We will talk about the U.S. market another time. Our concern is facilitating trade between Quebec and New Brunswick.

Can you make any recommendations? What would you like to see in our report?

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: Those are good questions.

Let me tell you how things worked before.

At some point, I don't remember exactly when, after a meeting of the Congrès mondial acadien, what we call a "team of leaders" formed a committee made up of representatives from Maine, New Brunswick and Quebec. The committee's mandate was to take steps to improve or maintain dialogue between the provinces, territories and countries. Unfortunately, that committee is in decline as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. I think it should be revived and action should be taken, even if it requires some funding. It existed before, and it was a winning formula. As a result of the pandemic and the lack of funding and support, it is now in decline. It led to some very positive initiatives, including a buyer day, for instance. On that day, businesses had the opportunity to meet with subcontractors or small businesses to develop new contacts or new collaborative initiatives in the Acadie des Terres et Forêts region. It was a great initiative, but now it is in decline, unfortunately.

Would it be possible to revive it? I think so, but we would need some support.

• (1650)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Pelletier.

As you said, that initiative was interrupted by the pandemic. Is the real issue a lack of funding or a lack of leadership and drive? I would call that a speed meeting event for entrepreneurs so they can do business elsewhere.

Shouldn't that be reactivated? Couldn't the Edmundston Region Chamber of Commerce take the lead on that?

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: It absolutely could.

I referred to funding. As far as I know, because I was also on the committee, there are still some funds. So the main reason isn't necessarily a lack of funds. As you mentioned, it's also a question of leadership.

That said, to be a leader, you need to have support. One person alone can't take care of everything. Yes, the Edmundston Region Chamber of Commerce could do that, if it had the support of its colleagues in the region.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Pelletier. In fact, it's probably a question of willingness on the part of the business community to mobilize and put in place the necessary means.

I'm now going to head for western Canada.

Mr. Fortin, your story is impressive. You were born in Quebec—we're very proud of that—you left and travelled across Canada. You return on occasion and your children speak to their grandparents in French. Continue to encourage this relationship.

You have imported to western Canada a product from New Brunswick that is a fine Canadian trademark, or rather eastern Canadian trademark, and one that is dear to us. You successfully developed this business.

What obstacles have you encountered? What would you ask us to put in place to help young people who want to follow exactly the same path as you—that is go to the east coast, the west coast, the centre and the North of the country so that the francophonie serves economic development and is a positive element for our official language minority communities?

The Chair: Please respond in 15 seconds, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Roch Fortin: We need to work together, not in isolation. I hear about New Brunswick and all the other regions, but we need to bring all of the people together so they can talk to each other. Right now, we're talking about exporting products that we've created here in Quebec. This shows the importance of working together.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Fortin. I'd like to ask you more questions, but my colleague can continue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for six minutes.

• (1655)

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Pelletier, I want to come back to the questions my colleague opposite raised.

You said that it was possible to revive the initiative you were talking about, but that you would need support. You mentioned the two levels of government—presumably they'll help—but would other organizations be willing to help you move forward?

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: Yes, absolutely. These are mainly municipalities, some in Quebec, of course, but also others in the state of Maine, where we already have good collaboration. There's also the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick, whose representative testified before you earlier today. These people are also very important in this process. Then, the RCMs of Quebec, those of our region, of course, have also been important partners.

So, yes, it's not just the two levels of government. There are also the municipalities in the regions concerned and the organizations that are primarily involved in economic development, such as Opportunities New Brunswick and the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: All right.

You also said that some funding would be welcome. Can you tell us if there's a strong will for the French language to continue to exist and grow? Is the will weak or only apparent? Do people express themselves and act in a way that suggests such a will?

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: Yes, absolutely. There's certainly a will, and it's not just apparent. It's important. We're not just saying we want the French language to persist in business.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Mr. Fortin, British Columbia is the only province in Canada with no French-language services legislation. Yet it has just launched its French-language services policy.

Can you tell us about this new policy? Are you satisfied with it?

Mr. Roch Fortin: We work very hard, but I must point out that we work a lot on the English side, because that's where we do business.

I don't know much about the new law. However, I have received support for my children's education in a French-speaking environment, and that has been very beneficial.

I'm sorry if this isn't the answer you were looking for, but I'm not familiar with the new law.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Do you feel that the provincial government offers enough support to French-speaking entrepreneurs, like you, who start businesses?

Mr. Roch Fortin: I have to say that it was very difficult to explain to the provincial government that we were an agrotourism business. Our raw material didn't come from the province of New Brunswick; we had a hard time explaining to officials that, yes, maple syrup comes from eastern Canada, but that we had used it to create 20 other products, including granola, mustard, barbecue sauce, in short, all things that are very popular.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Vaillancourt, what has been the impact of federal language policy on official language minority communities?

Prof. François Vaillancourt: I think we need to distinguish between two types of policy. On the one hand, the recognition of the right to minority-language education, found in the Constitution Act of 1982, has created a foundation that may not be as secure as it could be, but still ensures important fundamental rights. What's more, it is the main source of provincial spending on minority language policy.

On the other hand, federal policy creates opportunities for French-speaking minorities outside Quebec—they are often more bilingual than French-speaking Quebecers—to work for the federal government in Ottawa. We see this quite often. So these opportunities further the maintenance of the French language, and that's interesting, in my view.

We were talking about Spanish and French. What about our international trade policy of opening up to different countries? Surely, being open to Africa is positive, but let's be honest, English is the language of international trade. So that's much less important.

I would say to you that maintaining human capital through basic education rights is the interesting question that is never really asked. You'd have to look at the interaction between post-secondary training in French and the use of human and linguistic capital in the

labour market. This question, I think, has perhaps not been studied. Yet the federal government could do so; it has a certain role in post-secondary education through research funds, or via your committee.

• (1700)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Vaillancourt.

Mr. Chair, I think my time is up.

The Chair: You have less than 10 seconds left. Thank you very much, Mr. Iacono.

The second vice-chair of the committee will ask the next questions.

Mr. Beaulieu, for the Bloc Québécois, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

My question is for Mr. Vaillancourt.

We have had as a witness the Provincial Employment Roundtable, or PERT, whose studies revealed that anglophones in Quebec are more exposed to unemployment and that there are more of them below the poverty line. Anglophones are poorer overall than francophones.

To arrive at these conclusions, they used the variable “person's first official language spoken”, which includes around a third of immigrants to Quebec; first nations people were also predominantly included as anglophones. They also used the median, which, let's say, removes some of the economic disparities and therefore favours anglophones more in this type of comparison.

What do you think of the situation and of this kind of methodology?

Prof. François Vaillancourt: Defining who is an anglophone or francophone is always a bit tricky when it comes to determining what services we can offer. However, historically, let's be honest, it's the mother tongue that's used. If you look at the comparisons over time of English speakers, French speakers and mother-tongue speakers in Quebec, what happened was that there was significant immigration between 1970 and 1980. This happened following two external shocks, the October Crisis and the election of the Parti Québécois in 1970 and 1976 respectively.

This prompted a significant number of wealthy English speakers to leave Quebec. People a little older than me benefited greatly from the drop in house prices in the town of Mount Royal at that time. It also helped in the francization of the town a little.

Since then, we've observed that the average working income of anglophones is still higher than that of francophones, if we take mother tongue into account in both cases. However, when we do a slightly more sophisticated statistical analysis, where we say that the gap comes from the fact that anglophones are perhaps better educated, have more experience, and so on, then we note a significant difference. In 1970, a unilingual English-speaking man earned about 10% more than a bilingual French-speaking man. For women, the gap was smaller, at around 5% more for the unilingual anglophone. From 1980 to 1985, the opposite was true.

Francophones have therefore benefited from various measures, and I'm not talking about language laws, but rather the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec and francophone investments. A whole range of measures have significantly strengthened the French-speaking economy in Quebec, and English speakers, relatively speaking, have lost out.

Now, to get back to your more specific question, we usually use the mean. As you say, the median tends to overlook the fact that, by definition, there are people to the right or left of the median, dragging the average up or down. The trouble, I think, is that there might be some quibbling about this. Let's face it, academics sometimes like to split hairs, and split them some more. However, I think that the first official language spoken, as you mentioned in your question, is not as good an indicator of group membership as are the mother tongue and the language spoken at home. Those would be the two best indicators, in my opinion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I read in a study that when education levels are equal, incomes are roughly equivalent. However, according to recent data I've read, in Quebec, francophones still have roughly 10% fewer university graduates than anglophones. Funding, federal research funding, for example, still goes disproportionately to English-speaking universities.

In your opinion, what explains the fact that there are still 10% fewer francophone graduates?

• (1705)

Prof. François Vaillancourt: There was the Quiet Revolution, in 1960. This revolution was necessary because we were lagging behind. Let's give Duplessis his due: He had started to put in place a catch-up plan for high schools, not university, but high schools. Traditionally, we've had lower-paying jobs, lower-rung jobs. It's going to take 50 or 60 years for generations to change direction. The Université du Québec network was created in 1969, if I remember correctly. CEGEPs appeared in 1967. I was in CEGEP, in 1967, and that was the first year these institutions existed.

So, 50 to 60 years have passed since the Quiet Revolution. We are in the process of converging. However, our anglophones, during this time, have always had a comparative advantage stemming from their more favourable socio-economic situation. There are both social factors that explain the convergence of francophones with anglophones, and historical, individual factors that still hold them back.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In your opinion, if there were funding roughly proportional to the demographic weight of francophone university institutions, would that help us?

The Chair: Please respond in less than 10 seconds, Mr. Vaillancourt.

Prof. François Vaillancourt: I don't think federal research funding would have a significant effect on the training of francophones.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Vaillancourt.

The NDP has the last turn in this round of questions.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us.

I want to go back to the topic of economic development, which we talk about a lot at this committee. That is the issue of recruiting and retaining people who can come to our regions to set up businesses, work in French and be part of the francophone community.

My question is for Ms. Pelletier first.

In this context, what are the repercussions of the labour shortage on French-language schools and child care services? What is the impact of the labour shortage on the economy of francophone communities in your region?

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: The answer to this question could be quite long and take many minutes.

I think the labour shortage is felt in all businesses. Indeed, it's a big issue in education, child care, and so on. We don't have a lot of resources.

A lot of day care services are saturated here in New Brunswick. Some people can't go to work during the day because they don't have day care, because the babysitter isn't available, or for any other such reason. Resources are very limited in these areas.

The implementation of the daycare assistance program helps us a lot, but, on the other hand, there aren't many resources.

There is indeed a shortage of educators in the day care centres and of teachers in the schools. People are being hired as substitute teachers, even though they don't necessarily have the required training. The lack of resources in this sector is such that they are hired anyway.

It goes without saying that this situation snowballs, because everything is connected, especially when you have children and can't go to work. Unfortunately, some industries can't afford to be short of employees. More and more companies are setting up child care services for their employees to try to solve this problem. Employees take their children to the child care service offered at their workplace.

Yes, it's a very important issue. It's also a very sensitive issue, and this labour shortage is greatly felt in this sector.

• (1710)

Ms. Niki Ashton: I see.

Thank you very much for your reply, Ms. Pelletier.

I wonder if Mr. Vaillancourt or Mr. Fortin have any comments on this point.

Mr. Roch Fortin: Yes, I'd like to comment on that.

On our side, we see great job opportunities for francophones. I'd love to see students from Quebec and New Brunswick come and work with me during the summer; I'd like to show them a francophone presence, and demonstrate the greatness of Canada.

As for retaining French-speaking staff, my two children sometimes come to help us. There's always someone who speaks French in our store, in our business. Many winemakers hire a lot of French speakers to talk about wines or other wine products.

Employers will go looking for people who are able to speak both languages in schools that offer French and English immersion programs.

Ms. Niki Ashton: That's very good, Mr. Fortin.

Thank you for bringing that aspect up.

Mr. Vaillancourt, do you have a comment to add on this topic?

Prof. François Vaillancourt: I just have one comment to add.

It's entirely reasonable for employers to set up in-house child care, but it's not good for society. It hinders worker mobility between employers. Say you put your one-year-old in your employer's child care program, and down the road, when your child is three, you get a great opportunity to work somewhere else. You will probably turn down the job offer, so you don't have to find a new child care provider.

If you could recommend something to the government, at the very least, it would be to improve the availability of child care to encourage worker mobility, as opposed to supporting employer-provided child care programs.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I see. Thank you for sharing your views on that.

I want to follow up on something else that has come up during our study, the importance of welcoming francophone foreign students and recognizing their contribution to francophone communities, businesses and so forth.

We recently learned that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship put a cap on the number of foreign students admitted to Canada. Thus far, Canada has not made an exception for francophone students. French-language post-secondary institutions have already expressed concerns about that.

Ms. Pelletier, given the work you do, do you think it's important to ensure that our regions can bring in francophone students? Would that contribute to regional economic development? Does the federal government need to make an exception for these students so

as not to negatively affect the ability of our communities to welcome them?

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: Yes, absolutely. Bringing in foreign students is very important. Here in Edmundston, we have seen a significant increase in the number of foreign students. It's gone up 50% to 60% across two institutions, Université de Moncton and Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick.

We have agencies to help them settle in the region. Our city is designated as a welcoming francophone community. That involves two things, welcoming people and adequately supporting them when they arrive in the region. We also have—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Pelletier. I'm sorry to cut you off, but we are really over Ms. Ashton's six minutes.

We will now begin the next round. The Conservative Party and the Liberal Party will each have five minutes.

Mr. Dalton will go first, with five minutes.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations on the success of your business, Mr. Fortin. What a great undertaking.

The Conservative Party wants to get rid of the carbon tax. I know that British Columbia collects its own carbon tax, but the province has to raise the tax in accordance with federal regulations, and it's supposed to go up on April 1. As a resident of the province, I can tell you that we pay the highest price in the country.

Could you please tell us how the tax impacts your business?

• (1715)

Mr. Roch Fortin: It has a very big impact. I import a lot of products from Quebec and New Brunswick. A pallet of maple syrup that used to cost \$400 to \$500 now costs me up to \$900, if not more.

All those costs have to be [*Inaudible—Editor*]. Paying tax on tax really affects us as a small business. We do our best to keep costs down, but as you can see, the price of everything is going up. Every time we come up with a new product to sell in our store, we have to factor in all the new taxes that apply.

For example, I have to pay a fuel and transportation surcharge. On top of that, in British Columbia, I have to pay a [*Inaudible—Editor*] tax of \$85. Then, of course, I have to pay the carbon tax, as you mentioned. Let's not forget about the GST, which is on top of all the other taxes. Plus, I pay another \$15 when I get a call letting me know that a delivery is on the way.

Yes, frankly, the taxes make a big difference.

Mr. Marc Dalton: The Liberal government said that businesses receive more money than they pay in taxes.

Has that been your experience?

Mr. Roch Fortin: Honestly, so far, I haven't made a single profit from my business. I'm not trying to be negative.

It's simply a fact that everything is affected by not just the carbon tax, but also the slew of other taxes. It really puts a strain on us.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you.

Ms. Pelletier, the committee heard from the president of the Haut-Madawaska Chamber of Commerce. His region is right next to yours.

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: You're talking about Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes. He talked about the challenges his members face when dealing with bureaucracy. Is that a problem for your businesses too? Is it getting harder and harder for them?

Tell us, if you would, about the problems and challenges of having to deal with bureaucracy.

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: There is no denying that we've run into issues with bureaucracy in the past. We still do, and we always will.

It hinders our economic development in many ways. Certainly, things could be improved. We have to jump through a lot of hoops just to achieve something minor and tangible. It's such a complicated process. We have to knock on a lot of doors, just to be able to do something locally or regionally. Sometimes, it's even more complicated when working with our counterparts in other chambers of commerce.

Unfortunately, a lot of businesses walk away from their plans because of it.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you.

Did you want to answer that question, Mr. Fortin?

Mr. Roch Fortin: Yes.

As I said in the beginning, all the requirements we have to meet are geared towards big businesses.

As Ms. Pelletier pointed out, small businesses often walk away because they don't have the resources to fill out all the paperwork. A big business can check with its accountant, push a button and produce all the required information. For us—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

We now go to Mr. Serré for five minutes. I'm going to be strict on the time.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all three witnesses for their input, which is really going to help us with our report on economic development.

My first question is for Mr. Fortin and Ms. Pelletier.

I want to talk about market development in small regions. What can the federal government do to help you on the e-commerce and export side of things?

Mr. Fortin, you have a niche market with maple syrup. We have good maple syrup in northern Ontario too. We can do a taste test to see which one is better, but I have no doubt that yours is excellent.

What can the government do to give entrepreneurs in your regions some tools?

The question is for you as well, Ms. Pelletier, since you live in a small remote region with a small population.

For businesses to grow, they have to export their products.

● (1720)

Mr. Roch Fortin: Where I am, the Okanagan Valley, is a bit far from big cities, which have a major advantage over us.

It's very expensive for a small business to be on Facebook and other online platforms. The government could help us with that.

All of our labels are bilingual, but a lot of companies take shortcuts. Francophones like myself have to incur extra costs.

I do everything I can to make sure that any information about our business appears in English and in French. I'd like to do more in French, but I have to take into account the cost before I commit to anything. Help on that front would go a long way.

The government is helping us right now. We took a trip down to Washington state to explore how we could export our products from the Okanagan Valley to the states of Washington and Oregon, a market of 56 million people.

Mr. Marc Serré: Those are big markets.

Ms. Pelletier, thank you for your work at the chamber of commerce. It's vital for employers.

Do you have any suggestions for your members when it comes to exporting their products?

Ms. Cathy Pelletier: I agree with Mr. Fortin. Once again, support is needed for online service so that companies can focus on it as much as possible.

Given our location, everything must be in English and French. We support the francophone community in our area.

As Mr. Fortin said, we would be grateful for more support for e-commerce so that companies can export their products.

Mr. Marc Serré: Wonderful. Thank you.

Mr. Vaillancourt, thank you for your years of research and study.

Since 2015, the federal government has doubled funding for official languages as part of its \$4.1 billion action plan. After 50 years, the Official Languages Act has been modernized. We're currently working to expand the francophonie across Canada and also to support minority language communities in Quebec.

What can the federal, municipal and provincial levels of government do?

Many provinces don't provide the necessary support to francophone communities. Yet these people are residents. Mr. Fortin, for example, is a resident of British Columbia.

Do you have any recommendations regarding the role of the provinces and municipalities?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Prof. François Vaillancourt: This isn't about encroaching on provincial jurisdictions. However, while listening to Ms. Pelletier, I thought of a website that could, for example, help companies identify their English-to-French translation needs.

Companies could then be put in touch with translation programs at schools. Students could meet these needs as part of their practical training, for example. This would both benefit the company and provide compensation and a learning opportunity for the students.

The goal is to act as a facilitator in the economy and to create synergy.

In addition, interprovincial trade should be made easier. However, that matter is a bit more complicated.

The Chair: Indeed, it's a complicated matter.

Thank you, Mr. Vaillancourt and Mr. Serré.

Mr. Beaulieu, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Vaillancourt, Frédéric Lacroix conducted a fairly comprehensive study on the funding of post-secondary institutions. I believe that you said that this field of research could be useful. He found that roughly 28% of the total funding from various sources—including the Quebec and federal governments—goes to anglophone universities. That's almost 3.5% more funding than the demographic weight of anglophones.

What's the potential impact of this overfunding?

• (1725)

Prof. François Vaillancourt: I assume that we're talking about Quebec universities. Is that right?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes. We're talking about universities in Quebec.

Prof. François Vaillancourt: Okay.

It's partly historical, because they used to provide services.

There are two strategies: the carrot and the stick. The carrot acts as an incentive.

Let me make a suggestion. This doesn't fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government, Mr. Serré, but it's still relevant. You could ask anglophone universities to grant tenure to professors only if the professors really know French and can contribute to Quebec's economic development. That's my first comment.

When you hire unilingual anglophone professors who can't contribute to Quebec's economic development, you're funding, through Quebecers' tax dollars, people who can't give the same value to

their university as they would if they knew French. As I was saying earlier, language is human capital that helps make available—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Sorry to interrupt you, but I'm running out of time, Mr. Vaillancourt.

Does it make sense that, in Quebec, 94% of official languages funding supports English in all areas, including economic development?

Prof. François Vaillancourt: It's important to remain consistent. Outside Quebec, funding is mainly given to francophones. It's a tricky question. How do you take care of René Lévesque's so-called “dead ducks”? Maybe they aren't so dead after all.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That isn't the point at all. The point is that the situation of anglophones in Quebec is hardly comparable to the situation of francophone minority communities outside Quebec.

Prof. François Vaillancourt: That's true.

In Quebec—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaillancourt. Our time's up.

Mr. Beaulieu, that was an excellent question.

Yves Beauchemin spoke of warm corpses, while René Lévesque spoke of dead ducks.

Prof. François Vaillancourt: The relative capacities of both groups must be taken into account.

The Chair: As chair, I don't want to get involved, but I think that they're still quite lively.

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

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

I want to focus on the value of supporting francophone international students and their contribution to our communities in terms of economic development, for example.

Mr. Vaillancourt, as a professor, I imagine that you know the value of international students.

Should the federal government work with francophone institutions to ensure that francophone international students receive proper support? Also, should an exemption be applied to the recent decision to limit the number of international students?

Prof. François Vaillancourt: I believe that asymmetrical treatment applies. This goes back to Mr. Beaulieu's question earlier.

The first international student is often highly valuable to a class, as is the second. When 50% of students are international, having one more doesn't make much difference to the profit margin. The profitability is already there. Small francophone universities outside Quebec with few international students probably benefit more from having international students than Toronto's Canasta University or Cape Breton University, which have many international students.

In my opinion, quantity and ratio are two parameters that must figure into the federal government's formula for allocating places for international students in the various universities.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Mr. Fortin, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Roch Fortin: I have recently received two résumés from people in France who are looking for work in British Columbia. However, I don't think that they're students. We're seeing a big change in francophone immigration. I'm surprised to have received two résumés, but we'll take a look at them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin and Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Pelletier had to leave. She warned us that she had to leave just after 5:15 p.m. This is for the witnesses who are still here. If you have any additional information to share with the committee, please send it to our clerk. She will then pass it on to the committee members.

This concludes our meeting with witnesses on the economic development of official language minority communities.

I would like the committee members to prepare instructions for the analyst for a draft report. We'll be discussing this next Thursday in the first hour. In addition, we'll be continuing our review of the third version of the draft report on increased francophone immigration. In the second hour, we'll hear from the Commissioner of Official Languages as part of the study of language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions.

I want to thank the witnesses once again.

The meeting is adjourned.

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