



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 088 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, February 5, 2018

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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are going to study the review of literacy and numeracy support programs in Canada.

It is our pleasure today to welcome Michel Robillard, the Chief Executive Officer of the Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes.

Good afternoon.

Mr. Michel Robillard (Chief Executive Officer, Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes): Good afternoon.

The Chair: We also welcome Gabrielle Lopez, representing the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, RESDAC.

Welcome to both of you.

We will start by hearing your testimony for ten minutes or so, followed by a round of questions and comments from my colleagues.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, government and opposition members of Parliament, thank you for your work, your commitment and your reports. They speak to your willingness to listen and understand the life experiences of the members of our communities.

My name is Michel Robillard and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes, or COFA. I am also an Administrator with RESDAC, and it is in that capacity that I am here.

Please excuse the absence of Donald DesRoches, who was unfortunately unable to leave Prince Edward Island because mechanical problems prevented our national carrier from taking off. I am replacing him today.

I am accompanied by Gabrielle Lopez, the former Chief Executive Officer of RESDAC.

Mr. DesRoches and Mrs. Lopez testified here in October 2016 on behalf of RESDAC, addressing the issue of literacy and its link with immigration.

Today, I would like to discuss two points. I will talk about our complaint to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages

about the core funding, the lack of consultation and the eligibility criteria, as well as about the fallout from recommendation 6, in your report entitled "Toward a new action plan for official languages and building new momentum for immigration in francophone minority communities."

Currently, RESDAC is the only national association that deals with the levels of literacy and essential skills of adult francophones living in minority situations in Canada. We represent community and college groups that provide literacy and skills training and development services at provincial and territorial level.

Despite our being a significant part of the education continuum, we have no longer had any staff since October 31, 2017, because the federal government put an end to our funding in 2014. We remain the only organization in the education continuum that receives no core funding, either from Canadian Heritage or from Employment and Social Development Canada.

After our core funding was eliminated, and given a lack of consultation and many changes in decision-making approaches and processes, RESDAC decided to file a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. We wanted to continue our work with francophones with low literacy levels living in minority situations. We were also ready to work with the department with a view to increasing the opportunities for advancement for our clients from coast to coast, thereby helping to improve the level of essential skills.

I am pleased to announce that, following an investigation, the acting Commissioner of Official Languages found that the practices of the Department of Employment and Social Development Canada were in contravention of part VII of the Official Languages Act. She made two recommendations to the department.

The first recommendation was for the department to re-evaluate its orientation and its eligibility criteria for the funding available for literacy and the acquisition of essential skills. This is in order to pay greater heed to the particular needs and priorities of official language minority communities, or OLMCs.

The second recommendation is that they evaluate the impact of removing core funding from RESDAC, and from its provincial and territorial network, and that they take appropriate measures to redress the negative impacts.

According to international surveys on adult literacy and skills, more than half, 53%, of Canadians in minority situations have not mastered those skills. The skills we are talking about are in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

Francophones and their communities in general can look forward to positive impacts when they do master essential skills. Mastery of essential skills is a vehicle for economic, social and community development. The impact is clear. We earn more money and our health improves. Our children do better in school. Our local businesses are more productive and our social confidence increases. We participate more fully in the life of our communities. Our language and our culture are passed from one generation to the next. Finally, we feel less insecure about our language. In other words, mastering essential skills means that our communities will live on.

What is RESDAC's purpose?

Canadian Heritage funds almost all national sectoral organizations and it funded RESDAC's predecessor, la Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français, or FCAF. In the 1990s, when Employment and Social Development Canada took over, we looked forward to an encouraging future. That is no longer the case. Neither federal department is committed to safeguarding the future of the only repository of best practices in literacy and skills development for francophones living in minority situations.

The future is a concern for RESDAC, but also for our clients who rely on the services provided by RESDAC members.

A new official languages action plan is on our doorstep, but we have no indication that the area will be funded, or, more specifically, that RESDAC will be receiving core funding in order to continue its mission.

It is important to mention that, since the report of the investigation was received, we have indicated to Minister Hajdu that we are interested in working with the key players in the area so that the department can discharge its obligations as defined in the Official Languages Act. We received a reply last week in the form of a letter in which the Minister committed to find solutions by and for francophone OLMCs. Currently, we are holding discussions with that department on a proactive exercise to research solutions that are in line with the approach of the services provided by and for those most involved. The discussions are going well, but the department still does not want to talk about core funding for RESDAC.

The second point in our presentation is about recommendation 6 in your report entitled: "Toward a new action plan for official languages and building new momentum for immigration in francophone minority communities." In it, you recommend the establishment of a pan-Canadian literacy and skills development strategy. We have no information as to the department's intentions on the subject. The department has retained the services of the University of Ottawa to document the status of locations across Canada in terms of literacy and skills development services. The report should be made public this month.

In closing, RESDAC needs core funding, first to continue its mission, second, to continue to play its role in the education continuum, and third, to make sure that all the learning needs of adult francophones with lower levels of literacy are addressed. By "all the needs" we mean not only employability but also family and community literacy.

RESDAC agrees with la Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada when it says that Canadian Heritage

should provide basic core funding, as it does for other national sectoral organizations that are part of the education continuum.

Mr. Chair, government and opposition members of Parliament, thank you for inviting us to appear before you and for continuing to follow this matter. This concludes our presentation.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robillard.

Let us start the first round.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

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

Thank you for being here, Mr. Robillard and Mrs. Lopez.

A network usually implies members. Who are RESDAC's members?

Mr. Michel Robillard: First, there is the Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Of which you are the president.

Mr. Michel Robillard: I am its Chief Executive Officer.

There is also Pluri-elles, in Manitoba, the Association franco-yukonnaise, the Collège Éducentre, the Collège Mathieu, the Collège de l'Île.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You have about 20 members?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We have 12 members.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: How many provinces are represented in total?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez (Representative, Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences): All the provinces are represented, but only two territories.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

You were funded in the past. Do you have any data to verify the impact of that funding, especially in terms of the services you were able to provide in the network?

Is RESDAC in a position to evaluate the success of the programming it carried out with the help of the funding and therefore to show that, now that there is no longer any money, it can no longer fulfill its commitments? Is it possible for you to measure that?

Mr. Michel Robillard: At RESDAC, we put a lot of stock in an integrated approach, whereby we look at the technical skills of a particular trade and we blend the learning of essential and generic skills in with them. In the tourism sector, for example, if someone is taking a course in housekeeping, we use the technical aspects to help them develop numeracy. If they have to measure quantities of soap in millilitres, they will be taking training in mathematics. That is what we call the integrated approach.

At the Coalition, we are service providers. Each year, we train about 3,500 francophones in Ontario using 40 service points. We had not really explored the integrated approach a lot. As part of the research that RESDAC has undertaken, we have just obtained funding for a pilot project in Ottawa and in Toronto. As a result, we are training 60 people in three tourist-sector trades: housekeeping, front-desk staff, and banquet servers. There are nine weeks of technical skills, into which we have blended four weeks of essential skills and three weeks of training in employment courses.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: RESDAC was a kind of—

Mr. Michel Robillard: RESDAC provided us with all the food for thought behind the integrated approach, allowing us to develop the content of the essential and generic skills, so that we could improve and develop the technical component even more.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Robillard, but, in Quebec, literacy is generally funded by the province through the education system. Could that be right?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Yes.

Quebec has two approaches. Literacy is done through school boards, but there is also a community network that funds literacy.

In Ontario, it is different. The structure is completely different. We come under the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.

• (1545)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Is RESDAC involved with adult education only?

Mr. Michel Robillard: RESDAC is involved with adult education.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Always?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Exactly. Starting at 16 years of age.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Mr. Michel Robillard: With literacy, we are often going to be dealing with those who have been left behind. For example, at some stage, a lot of high school dropouts need to improve their essential skills. So they come to our centres or go to literacy centres. Seniors do the same. More and more, seniors are being asked to do business online. Who do they turn to in order to develop their digital literacy skills? They turn to us because we provide training for them. Let me give you an example. Tomorrow afternoon, we have a meeting with the Fédération des aînés et des retraités francophones de l'Ontario, because they are looking for digital literacy training that they have no access to. So that is another service we provide.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: In other words, RESDAC is an organization that serves all its clientele, its members rather—because I do not like using the word clientele in this case—and they in turn provide services. RESDAC does not provide direct services to all Canadian adults living in minority situations.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: No.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That is done through organizations.

Mr. Michel Robillard: That's right.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: On occasion, RESDAC provides one-time services. For example, with pilot projects or research projects, we have groups of adult participants who go through that experience.

It must also be said that Ontario is in a privileged position: it has a lot of resources and the infrastructure is very well developed. That is not the case everywhere in Canada. Other official language minority communities have less infrastructure and fewer resources. At times, federal funding for education is transferred to provincial level but does not make it to the front lines. So there are problems in that respect. RESDAC is there to assist groups, to bridge gaps, and to support infrastructure and expertise.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So your main mission, although you may well have secondary missions, is to provide services to your members who in turn provide services.

However, I imagine that you also do a little research and development in adult education.

Mr. Michel Robillard: We do a lot of research, development, and sharing of best practices. For example, a little earlier, I talked about the integrated model. We used the experience from Nova Scotia that had good results. That encouraged us to move forward.

RESDAC is also a very significant forum, because it allows the various communities represented by our members to connect with other members, to find out about different practices, and so on. We have had projects in which four provinces have participated, and they have had very positive outcomes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What was the budget—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux. I have to move to the next speaker.

The floor goes to Mr. Paul Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Généreux, I actually wanted to ask the questions that you were about to ask, but not right away. I have some quick questions first.

Are you the only organization to provide these services? As I understand it, you are leading and supporting provincial organizations. Is that correct?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes. You should also know that we are the only organization left, even on the anglophone side, because our counterpart, the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, has closed its doors.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Did it close its doors in 2013 as well, because of a lack of funding from the federal government?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Now I am going to ask Mr. Généreux's question.

Before the budget was slashed in 2013, what was the amount the federal government provided?

Mr. Michel Robillard: If memory serves, RESDAC's operating budget was about \$600,000.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: How many employees were there?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Probably six or seven employees. In terms of one-time budgets that we had for specific projects, it could go up to six or seven employees, in addition to the consultants that would give us a hand.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Do your members, who are part of the coalitions in various provinces, pay fees to be part of the network? Does that bring money into RESDAC?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes, but the fees are minimal: \$100 a year. It's not a lot.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: You would not have been able to survive on that.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: No.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Not at all. Clearly.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Actually, RESDAC was about to revise its governance structure and things like that, but the funding disappeared right away. The CEO at the time had to manage the process of decline.

• (1550)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: On that very topic, in Mr. DesRoches' testimony before this committee in 2016, he said that there was a different approach from the one you were advocating at the time. According to that approach, you were operating a little like a private company that can choose its partners and conduct itself only in terms of the labour market development. That's what he mentioned.

Can you explain that?

Mr. Michel Robillard: He was talking about social finance.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes. That actually had to do with the Bureau de l'alphabétisation et des compétences essentielles, or BACE, the entity that we report to in order to obtain funding and whose mandate was to develop literacy and skills. It had changed its direction over time and the Bureau was increasingly focusing on employment only, whereas, at one time, it had funded things like family literacy.

That is why Mr. DesRoches said that.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I understand.

You mentioned previously that you were in talks with the department.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: In 2017, the department made a commitment to consult with official language minority communities to examine viable solutions, and better address their needs in terms of the challenges of developing literacy and essential skills.

You said that those consultations were under way and that you were playing a role in them. Could you tell us more about what is happening right now?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We have met with department officials several times to talk about the different models that could be used to get RESDAC on track again. One of the things we have talked a lot about is trying to ensure that we are well in tune with the priorities of various departments, such as Canadian Heritage and Employment and Social Development Canada.

By the way, when we meet with officials from Employment and Social Development Canada, we insist that the officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage also participate in the talks, because that department is responsible for the roadmap.

For a year or a year and a half now, we have worked very hard to address the collective impact. This includes theories and change models. Since our organization is a member of RESDAC, we have asked ourselves a lot of questions on how we want to evolve in the future. As a result, we are looking at various solutions, such as establishing a consortium of service providers. This idea is on the table, but will it be adopted? I can't guarantee that, but it is one idea among others, and it is very appealing, because the models are there.

We are also looking into best practices in federally funded organizations. For example, there are organizations in high-school education that have formed a consortium. So we are looking to see whether it might be possible, with regard to literacy and essential skills, to implement a similar model, and tailor it to the realities of francophone communities.

We are having talks about that with the department.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: So, the department is open to it.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Absolutely, they are open to it.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: In her report, the acting Commissioner of Official Languages mentioned that it was very important to evaluate RESDAC's direction, as well as its eligibility criteria for funds available for literacy and acquiring essential skills, so that the needs and priorities are better taken into account.

What is your reaction to that recommendation?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We know that small French-speaking communities rarely have the organizational capacity to file very complex funding applications. Other financial organizations have the same problem, be they at provincial, municipal, or federal level.

Given that some of our communities are small and have less developed organizational capacities, the government should be flexible enough, despite everything, to allow these communities to receive funding for specific projects that could have an impact on our clientele, usually people with low literacy rates, whether it is at the level of job skills or family literacy, or for seniors who need to develop certain skills. We should therefore tailor the eligibility criteria to the communities' real capacities. This is why we find the idea of a consortium interesting. The organizations that form it could help communities that do not have the same capacity to submit applications for projects that could have a real impact on their communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our witnesses for being here today. This is an issue we have been following for some time now. Before we had even started our study of the action plan, we had talked about the fact that funding had been cut in 2014.

Do you know why the funding was cut? Was it simply that the action plan had changed? I think I recall early childhood funding also being cut at the same time. What was the idea behind all of that? Did you receive any explanations, or did this happen just out of the blue?

• (1555)

Mr. Michel Robillard: I can answer from my professional experience. There was a time when we at the BACE also received funding. A meeting was held in 2013, I believe, and we were indeed told that funding to 22 community organizations in the area of literacy would be cut. Among them were RESDAC, our anglophone counterpart, Essential Skills Ontario, some organizations in New Brunswick, and COFA. In all, 22 community organizations lost their funding.

Remember that, at the time, we were seeing a number of new directions. The government wanted to invest more and more into developing employment skills. We also heard a lot about social finance, the principle under which organizations partner with the private sector to reap significant benefits, and the results they achieve determine the type of funding they receive.

We have nothing against motherhood and apple pie. Social finance works in some areas and provides wonderful results when there is a critical mass. With our colleague Ronald Bisson, we conducted a study on social finance in small francophone communities. I am sorry, but large corporations like Bombardier that can fund social finance projects to increase essential skills are not at all in the same situation as organizations from small communities in the Yukon, Nunavut or British Columbia. In may not be a viable approach for us. We do not criticize the approach by saying that it is not viable. However, in small communities, it is perhaps not the best solution.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: I would like to clarify that it was the way it was defined at the time. We have colleagues, including Jean-Luc Racine, who are working on a new definition with Employment and Social Development Canada. Various stakeholders in areas like early childhood, seniors, youth, and women have come together in a social finance project. They are trying to expand the definition a little more to better adapt it to our situations.

Mr. Michel Robillard: So the solution may not have been viable in 2013, but the concept is evolving. After all, it has been five years. There may be ways of doing things differently, but, as I mentioned, RESDAC has been asking itself what is next for the last year and a half.

Mr. François Choquette: Adequate funding for the whole education system, from early childhood to adult, was also one of our recommendations for the last action plan. Unfortunately, in the meantime, you have exhausted all your resources. You are still holding on by your fingertips, but without any financial resources.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: We no longer have any staff. The board of directors is holding things together for now.

Mr. François Choquette: The government is aware. You are currently in a consultation. I gather that Employment and Social Development Canada is part of that consultation, as is Canadian Heritage.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: We had a few meetings, but we are losing our contacts. I don't think Mr. Gauthier is there anymore. I don't know what will happen next. Actually, the president of RESDAC is the one with those contacts.

Mr. François Choquette: Earlier, we talked about the anglophones' situation. I know that you are mostly dealing with francophones in a minority situation, but I would like to know what is happening with the anglophones in a minority situation. Are people from the QCGN also involved in your discussions with Employment and Social Development Canada?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We have actually worked extensively with anglophones in Quebec, with Linda Shohet from the Centre for Literacy, or the *Centre d'alphabétisation* in French. That organization no longer exists today. For example, we organized what we called—

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Oh yes, it was like research symposia.

• (1600)

Mr. Michel Robillard: They were summer institutes where anglophones and francophones said the same thing about literacy and skills development. We actually have exactly the same problems. The francophones are not the only ones who lost their funding. Our anglophone colleagues did too. In total, 22 francophone and anglophone organizations lost their funding. Our anglophone colleagues are going through exactly the same thing as us.

We asked Employment and Social Development Canada whether it was possible for an observer to attend discussions on the francophone side.

It is important to understand that the situation in Quebec is completely different from that in the rest of Canada. In Quebec, there are four anglophone universities and some anglophone colleges. Good for them; I am very happy for them. In Ontario, there are some bilingual universities, but only one francophone university: Université de Hearst. There may be another one in Toronto in the future. Apart from that, that's pretty much all we have left.

Mr. François Choquette: I just wanted to make sure that—

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, I have to turn to the next speaker.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here today to talk about the situation on the ground. They provide us with information that allows us to do our job, which is to get to the bottom of things so that the needs of both communities are met.

You said that the situation of anglophones and francophones was the same. I would like you to clarify, because I'm not sure I understand. Were you referring to anglophones in minority situations and francophones in minority situations? You were not talking about anglophones in a majority situation, were you?

Mr. Michel Robillard: No.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That changes everything. It is essential to make this distinction from the beginning.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Absolutely.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In other areas, the federal government gives equalization payments to the provinces so that they have a level playing field. The goal is the same in this case: we must ensure that both communities have the same opportunities.

We are really talking about anglophone and francophone minority communities. Is it the same with respect to official language majority communities? No. So there is a serious problem and we have to get to the bottom of things.

Mr. Michel Robillard: I would just like to clarify that Mr. Choquette's question was about anglophones in Quebec, who are a minority community.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, and you answered the question very well. I just wanted to make sure that the people around us understood.

I am interested in the Commissioner's recommendation that the government assess the impact of cutting the funding to organizations. What do you think the impact is? Please make a comparison with the situation of the organizations for the anglophone majority. I want to know whether, on the ground, both communities have the same opportunities. I do not think that's the case.

Mr. Michel Robillard: It's very simple, it's a question of math or critical mass. For example, there are 20,000 Fransaskois in Saskatchewan. The loss of a francophone organization would have a much greater impact on the francophone minority community than it would have on the majority community. In that were to happen, the majority community would have two, three or four other organizations that would take over.

The same could be said for Quebec. If the francophone majority lost an organization, a few others could take over. If a minority community loses an organization, there is nothing, or very little, left.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So we agree that it is a whole different story.

Mr. Michel Robillard: It's completely different.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's an essential distinction.

I would now like to address a second topic: services in French.

For services in the regions, a moratorium was called. Some criteria were used, but the 5% seemed to cause a great deal of problems. If the minority population accounted for less than 5% of the province's total population, it lost its services; a truck came to get the desks and everything else. In its wisdom, the government has put in place a moratorium and is in the process of holding consultations and reviewing all of that. This 5% criterion can play a role. It is not what eliminates the services, but it can be a factor.

The consultation helps determine what other essential things should exist in the communities. Basically, those analyses and consultations have shown that there were other essential things, such as francophone schools and community centres. We must think about the vitality and sustainability of communities. It's not just the 5% figure. If francophone immigration drops to 2% when it was 4% before, the population of the official language minority communities will shrink and automatically represent less than 5% of the total population. Let's scrap it.

Let's talk about the facts now. This relationship is very important. It is important to figure out how the communities will ensure their success. This should be talked about in the consultations on French-language services.

I know I do not ask a lot of questions, but I make a lot of comments.

• (1605)

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): You have actually asked some excellent questions so far.

Mr. Darrell Samson: This brings me to my most important question.

What do you think the solutions are? If, tomorrow morning, you were in government—not the old one, but the current one—what would you do to fulfill your mandate?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Having lived in small francophone communities in Nunavut and elsewhere in Canada, I can tell you that, in all francophone communities outside Quebec, the action is in community organizations. It's clear. Community organizations play an absolutely vital role in the sustainability of our organizations. People often begin to develop organizational capacities in those organizations. This is often where people, having developed skills, have the momentum to become entrepreneurs and share what they have acquired with the community.

I live in Ontario. I can tell you that the structure of the community sector is very powerful there. It is the lifeblood of our community. The situation is the same elsewhere. Whether in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, Saskatchewan or Manitoba with the Plurielles organization, the community sector is the lifeblood of francophone communities. It is very important to invest in those sectors.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So you need funding to do your work on the ground, in francophone minority communities.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Absolutely

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: The funding is minimal, and Canadian Heritage could provide it. The department funds many other francophone organizations that are part of the education continuum.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No. Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your remarks, Mr. Samson.

More generally, how do you manage to identify clients and their needs? How do you determine that a particular community in Saskatchewan, for example, needs a literacy program or other training?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Let me give you an example. In the last international assessment of essential skills, Canada provided the largest cohort of respondents. In fact, 27,000 people were surveyed in Canada, compared to 5,000 in the United States. Data from the international survey showed three overrepresentations in three francophone communities in Canada: New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba.

We therefore have clear evidence on levels of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. In Ontario, 48% of francophones are level 1 and level 2 functionally illiterate. The level 1 functionally illiterate can barely read a very simple article. The level 2 functionally illiterate are lost if there is any complexity. In terms of numeracy, 56% of francophones in Ontario are functionally innumerate. Finally, 78% of francophones in Ontario are functionally illiterate in terms of digital literacy.

Think about it: our governments increasingly want access to services through the Internet, but 78% of Ontario's francophones are functionally illiterate. I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but we have a big problem on our hands. Those most affected are our seniors. We must provide them with minimum support so that they can access services.

We have clear evidence, and we are also working with Statistics Canada. We have worked with Statistics Canada to create a link between essential skills, economic development, and social development in some communities. So we have data that help us know exactly where the problems are in certain communities.

Extrapolation also helps us. Archetypes help us determine, with some precision, the literacy level of people at a given age.

So we can use evidence to truly measure the needs of our communities. We are not throwing around figures indiscriminately. We rely on data from international surveys in which Canada has participated fully. Those data are all quite significant.

•(1610)

Mr. René Arseneault: Can you remind me when the data came out?

Mr. Michel Robillard: The survey dates from 2013.

Mr. René Arseneault: Is that how you determine the needs and their source?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We can tell you, for example, that 70% of Greater Sudbury francophones are level 1 and level 2 functionally illiterate. We can tell you that this percentage is 50% in Prescott-Russell. We can tell you what the percentage is in the Ottawa area. We have clear evidence and we can extrapolate. With the help of Statistics Canada's cross-referencing, we can provide the same type of data for Manitoba or New Brunswick, for example. Actually, I think New Brunswick has prepared a similar report to clearly define the needs of its communities and the levels of literacy.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes, it has.

Mr. René Arseneault: Not to mention the dropout rate, which is really high among francophones outside Quebec, and even among Quebecers.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Exactly.

Mr. René Arseneault: That said, it was an aside.

I will come back to my questions now.

In short, what was your situation before the funding ended in 2013? How was that organized? How were you able to provide services?

If we could give you what you are asking for tomorrow morning, would that be enough?

Mr. Michel Robillard: First of all, we can hardly compare the situation before 2013 to that after 2013, because, as I said, we have changed. We are in the process of adopting a completely different model.

Prior to 2013, RESDAC had discussions about best practices. We had research reports on various topics of interest to all RESDAC partners or members, reports that we used. Let me give you a very concrete example. We did a study on the skills needs of employers and employees. We realized that the skills needed were not only related to reading, writing and counting, but also to problem solving, communicating, and so on. So not only essential skills, but also generic skills were needed. This is the sort of study that RESDAC helped us develop. As a result, in our provinces, we are able to direct our efforts toward the specific skills we want to develop with employers. I'm thinking of problem-solving training for our employees, for example.

Now, given the work we have done with the local collective impact strategy and all the change management that we are doing with RESDAC, it will probably take a different form. We were talking about a consortium of service providers, people with whom we want to partner to deliver services that have a direct impact on the population.

So it is difficult now to compare the period before 2013 with the period after 2013, because the way we operate is different.

Mr. René Arseneault: I understand what you are telling me, especially because of the report.

Now that you can better identify the needs in order to help them, how can you measure the results? In other words, if you receive funding, how can we see that it works?

Mr. Michel Robillard: When we get funding from Employment and Social Development Canada or the Department of Canadian Heritage, we have mandatory performance measures. Now, when you sign a contract, the funding comes with mandatory measures. For example, in the tourism project I mentioned earlier, 90% of the 60 people have to get a job. We follow up after three months, six months and 12 months to see what impact it has had on their social life, their health, their finances, and so on. Performance measures are part of an evaluation framework that we put in place at the request of our funding agency.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Clarke, you have the floor.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Robillard, Mrs. Lopez, thank you for being here this afternoon.

You said that RESDAC received about \$600,000 a year and that the budgets were scrapped in 2014. Is that right?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's four years ago. How did you survive for the last four years?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We had a reserve, but we have exhausted it.

Let me give you an example of what we did. You may have heard of NALD, the National Adult Literacy Database, also known as Copian. It was a database that retrieved all the literature on literacy and essential skills development in Canada, whether in English or French. It was an incredible resource. When there was no more funding, we could not maintain it. RESDAC took money from its reserve to retrieve this database and migrate it to the CDEACF platforms in Quebec. CDEACF is in charge of managing this database.

We did not want to let it go, because it's an incredible resource for literacy, training, and essential skills development. So we used some of our funding to save the database.

We then used our reserve sparingly and we have managed to keep at least one or two people in the last four years, but now we are really getting to the bottom of the reserve.

• (1615)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: This is your last gasp right now.

Mr. Michel Robillard: The budget is not worth a hill of beans.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: There is the reserve, but there is also funding for each project. Projects were funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Some of what we had left from Employment and Social Development Canada also allowed us to continue until last October.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay.

We read the media reports. Mr. Choquette, who is very concerned about what is happening to you right now, has talked about it as well. We wanted to see you today to truly find out what was going on.

When will your organization close, if nothing is done?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Officially, we have no more staff. Board members from COFA, Pluri-elles, Collège de l'Île and Collège Éducacentre, keep RESDAC alive and hope that it will get a lung transplant to breathe a little more easily. For now, we are keeping the body alive. We do not intend to close it and hand over our founding documents. We want to continue existing, because we believe the organization is vital to francophone communities.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: We are not expecting manna from heaven either. We are actively seeking a solution to reconfigure our work to better reflect what is happening on the ground today as well as government expectations.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Today, if the Liberal government agreed to start directly funding RESDAC again on an annual basis, would it still be \$600,000 or would your needs be greater?

Mr. Michel Robillard: It's difficult to say because, as I said earlier, we are looking at different solutions. Among others, we are looking at the possible solution of a consortium. We will see where the negotiations we will have with the funding agencies can lead. For now, it's really difficult to answer your question. Until we have a well-defined, well-articulated model, it will be very difficult to assess our funding needs.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Let me add that, under the model we are looking at, it is clear that the operating costs would be minimal and the money received would be used to provide services on the ground. That's what we are looking for.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I'd like to go back to something that Mr. Lefebvre addressed earlier.

In your discussions right now, do you see the light at the end of the tunnel? Do you believe that the action plan will include an envelope for you?

Basically, the Liberal members on this committee can influence the government. They are able to put pressure on the caucus at its meetings. So it's time to talk to them about it. If nothing is happening, you have to know. If, according to your own analysis, you will not get an envelope, you have to know.

On a scale of 1 to 10, what are your chances? Have you had confirmation or not?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: We have not received any confirmation of funding.

Also, if there is an opportunity for literacy funding in the next action plan for official languages, will there be a funding opportunity for an organization like RESDAC? It is hard to tell whether such funding will be available. So we have to see the details. The devil is in the details.

Mr. Michel Robillard: In all fairness, I must say that there are people who are actively listening right now. Personally, it gives me a lot of hope. Then we will see. The government will have to decide what it wants to do. It is not up to us, but we will adjust accordingly.

That said, the current discussions are really interesting. I think there is very good progress. We just have to determine what form it will take.

As I mentioned, we want the key players to come together around the table, not just Employment and Social Development Canada, but also Canadian Heritage.

When we talk about literacy and the continuum of education and training, we are talking about early childhood, primary, secondary, college and university levels. However, we are the ones who recover those whom the system has dropped. So we are part of the continuum. In that regard, I think we should be adequately funded, along with other national organizations that are part of the continuum.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

We are going to continue now with Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Was it in 2013 that the federal government abolished your funding?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: It was announced in 2013, but I think it came into effect in 2014.

Mr. Dan Vandal: At that time, the funding was about \$600,000 a year, right?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Is it fair to describe RESDAC as a sort of research centre, a think tank?

• (1620)

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes, that's what it was: a forum for exchanging best practices, training and trainers.

Mr. Dan Vandal: The board is made up of 12 members from across the country, including Pluri-elles. Is that correct?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: When you used to receive \$600,000, was a portion of that going to the organizations?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Can you elaborate a little more on that?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Let me give you an example. At one point, RESDAC asked us to conduct three pilot projects on the integrated approach in three Franco-Ontarian communities. In fact, we obtained funding from RESDAC to implement those three projects and see what the results were after a certain period of time. Nova Scotia had the same type of experience.

For example, when we received the data from the international assessment of competencies, RESDAC funded some provinces so that organizations could work with Statistics Canada to obtain even more evidence.

In some cases, a small amount allocated to us has a leverage effect in the provinces.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Yes.

Mr. Michel Robillard: If, in this case, I receive \$18,000 or \$20,000 from RESDAC, I can go to the province and get \$100,000 to pay Statistics Canada.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Over the course of a year, was a percentage allocated to provincial organizations?

Mr. Michel Robillard: It always depended on the projects we were putting in place. When the board met, we would discuss the projects we wanted to put forward, such as studies or projects on the ground.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

Mr. Michel Robillard: As it dates back to 2013-14, I would be unable to provide you with a figure or a percentage.

Mr. Dan Vandal: To your knowledge, have provincial community organizations closed because RESDAC's funding had stopped?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: In the wake of the cuts, some organizations have been affected. In Alberta, for example, literacy

services in French are no longer available. A learning centre carried out a pilot project last year or the year before, but lost funding.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Does this mean that those people are no longer receiving provincial or federal funding?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: That's right.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Doesn't literacy fall under the provinces instead?

Mr. Michel Robillard: There are two things to consider. Education, in general, is indeed the responsibility of the provinces.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Yes.

Mr. Michel Robillard: On the other hand, some communities are significantly less equipped than others that are larger. Take the example of Ontario, where the government is heavily investing in development, education, literacy, and so on. We have resources that Alberta or Prince Edward Island, for example, don't have. So there is a lot of sharing between the organizations. Once again, critical mass is always tied to the funding they receive.

RESDAC helped bring forward certain projects. For example, it has funded projects in Nova Scotia for a number of years. This has allowed a literacy organization in that province to access funding to conduct projects and obtain results. As I mentioned earlier, the results of the Nova Scotia project pushed us to use the integrated approach in our tourism project. Some communities with fewer resources used RESDAC to implement projects that impacted them.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Our government spends almost \$2 billion on skills and training in every province.

Are you called on to exercise your influence in this context?

Mr. Michel Robillard: I was director of learning at National Defence for four years. I can talk to you about it at length. When we talk about the development of essential skills for National Defence military and civilians, that's another story; it's completely different. National Defence invests heavily in developing the skills of its employees and the military in general for very good reasons. National Defence has its own training system, whether for the military or civilians. That's why we are not involved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

We will now go to Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good afternoon. I'm pleased to see you here with us.

Earlier, one of my colleagues asked you a question. You mentioned 2013 and the fact that it was implemented in 2014.

When your funding was scrapped, were you given the main reason?

•(1625)

Mr. Michel Robillard: As I already mentioned, there were actually two reasons. First, the department's priorities had changed. Then the whole concept of social finance was coming into its own and developing. In addition, we were told that the department no longer wanted to provide core funding to organizations; it wanted to support project-based funding instead, which is completely different. So we ended up losing all of our core funding.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So you lost all your funding.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: If I'm not mistaken, with transfers, previous governments did not allocate funding to you directly, but to the province, which passed some on to you.

Mr. Michel Robillard: No.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You were funded by the federal government directly?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We were funded by the federal government directly, according to contribution agreements that came with a very significant and very appropriate audit mechanism. The objectives were actually in our contribution agreement, and, each year, we were judged by the objectives we achieved.

Organizations never receive a blank check. When they receive funding, they have goals to achieve. They are subject to quarterly assessments and audits, among other things. It is a highly structured approach.

For the funding we received, we were evaluated each year based on the goals we had achieved from year to year.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: When the funding was eliminated in favour of project-based funding only, did you have projects that would have allowed you to continue to receive funding?

Mr. Michel Robillard: It's not that we didn't try. We proposed a number of projects that were not selected for reasons we are unaware of. We are not told why a project is not accepted.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: You did not even get any explanations?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Not really. It's difficult for us.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It's hard to know why your projects were not selected.

Mr. Michel Robillard: It is important to know that 22 organizations lost their funding at the same time. RESDAC was not the only organization at the table; there were 22 others.

In fact, we have made requests on several occasions.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: We filed a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, precisely because we had no answers. The directions and decision-making processes were unclear. There were changes and communication was difficult.

It has now been two years since I was Executive Director of RESDAC. There is a new team, as well as new administrators at the department. Some of them have told me that they had taken another look at one of our projects and that they thought it was a good project. They were shocked to find that it had not been selected. It was a project that brought together several provinces. I explained to them that it had taken so long to get an answer that, in the meantime,

Ontario and the Yukon had started their own projects. That's what happened.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: When you had a project turned down, you were given no reason. You were turned down, period. There was no explanation at all.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: We were told that the project did not meet the criteria or the direction. I do not know if it has always been that way. I have the impression that there was a time when it was much less—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No, it has not always been like that. I think it depends on the ministers and the government.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Perhaps. In any case, communications were more difficult for a certain period.

I also imagine that the OLES was trying to figure out its approach.

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

Before concluding, I would like to share something with you. If things are not happening as quickly as you would like, there is the Canada Summer Jobs program for students that you are no doubt familiar with. The linguistics department at the University of Ottawa or an Ottawa-area MP could also help you. I am telling you this so you can keep going in the meantime and do not give up.

Mr. René Arseneault: I think February 2 was the deadline.

The Chair: Okay.

On behalf of all committee members, I would like to thank you for the information you have shared, Ms. Lopez and Mr. Robillard. We will follow up on it. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Thank you.

Mr. Michel Robillard: Thank you very much for the invitation.

The Chair: We will take suspend for a few minutes.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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•(1635)

The Chair: Let us resume.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we shall begin our review of support programs for official language minority community media.

We are pleased to welcome, from the *Coalition pour la pérennité de la presse d'information au Québec*, Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau, president and publisher of *Le Droit*.

Welcome Mr. Noreau.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau (President and Publisher, Le Droit, Coalition pour la pérennité de la presse d'information au Québec): Thank you.

The Chair: We also welcome Ms. Sophie Gaulin, Executive Director and Editor-in-Chief of *La Liberté*.

Before we begin, I would like to say two things.

First, copies of *Le Droit* have been provided. If you wish to take one after the meeting, please go ahead.

Second, Mr. Lefebvre asked to say something at the outset.

Mr. Lefebvre, please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the owner of a newspaper and community radio station, I would like to declare a conflict of interest regarding this study. As a result, I will not ask any questions, will not vote, and will not take part in drafting the report. Although I am in the room, I will recuse myself and will not make any comments.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: [*Inaudible*]

Some hon. members: Ha, ha!

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What did you say?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: He moved that you should be expelled.

Mr. René Arseneault: I second that motion.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: No, come on.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We are all agreed.

The Chair: Very well, Mr. Lefebvre. The record will show that you declared your conflict of interest.

Mr. Noreau, you have about ten minutes for your presentation. We will then move on to a round of questions and comments from committee members, except for Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Noreau, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Thank you for your warm welcome, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for their interest in the media that serves official language minority communities.

We do not want to be alarmist, but the situation is nonetheless extremely serious. As you will see, Ms. Gaulin and I are in general agreement about the critical situation of the minority media, and we have a number of joint solutions to offer.

Allow me to introduce myself. I am part of the *Coalition pour la pérennité de la presse d'information au Québec*, a coalition fighting for the survival of news media in Quebec. Above all, though, I am here as the president of a newspaper that serves francophone Ontario. In other words, I serve the Franco-Ontarian community.

Let me say a few words about *Le Droit*. The newspaper is a hundred years old, and its first edition was published on March 27, 1913. Its history is closely linked to that of Franco-Ontarians. You will recall Regulation 17 which, at the time, sought to ban French as a language of instructions in Ontario. You will also recall the Montfort hospital. The newspaper *Le Droit* was directly involved in these fights.

When it comes to the interests and aspirations of Ontario's francophone community, we are there and are listening. You may have read in our newspaper over the past year articles from Ontario's French-language university about making Ottawa a bilingual city and about the revision of Ontario's French Language Services Act. We serve the Franco-Ontarian community.

If you ask Franco-Ontarians today what they think of *Le Droit*, you might hear something like this: *Le Droit* is a serious daily newspaper that provides quality information, a daily newspaper that has surprised us by publishing a monthly business magazine, but that focuses too much on Quebec. Money is king, they say. As the City of Gatineau has grown, *Le Droit* has found readers and business partners on the Quebec side, so much so that nearly three out of four readers are now Quebecers. But we have not forgotten Franco-Ontarians. We were born of the Franco-Ontarians' struggle and we are still focused on it.

The daily *Le Droit* is part of the Groupe Capitales Médias, whose sole shareholder is Mr. Martin Cauchon. The other dailies in the group are *Le Soleil*, in Quebec City, *Le Quotidien*, in Saguenay, *Le Nouvelliste*, in Trois-Rivières, *La Voix de l'Est*, in Granby, and *La Tribune*, in Sherbrooke.

Le Droit is the only daily published in Ontario. Our offices are nearby, on Clarence Street, in the Byward market. That is where 74 of our 78 employees work. We have sales of about \$13 million. *Le Droit* offers the news on several platforms: the print edition, the tablet and cell phone app, and of course the website.

How far does *Le Droit* reach? Every week, it reaches at least 215,000 individuals, which is more than half the francophone population in the national capital region, on both sides of the river, that is.

When I was asked to be the president of the daily *Le Droit*, Martin Cauchon specifically told me that I had to recapture Franco-Ontarian readers. We have made a tremendous effort to do this, and Franco-Ontarians have taken note.

It has been a tough period. We are trying incredibly hard, but it is difficult. In the two and half years I have been in the job, we have cut 15 positions, including five in editorial. It is difficult to increase our service to the Franco-Ontarian community when we cut five editorial positions.

Being profitable is a formidable challenge. We are questioning our business model, which is based on two things. A newspaper has two sources of revenue: subscriptions and the advertising space that business partners buy in the newspaper.

● (1640)

As to subscriptions, it is clear that information is available, abundant and free on the Internet. That is why subscription rates have fallen by 10% every year for the past five years.

As to advertising, there is local advertising, which is purchased by our business partners, which has also dropped by 10% every year, and I will explain why. Second, there is national advertising, such as Air Canada, the Royal Bank or Ford, which has fallen by 25% per year in recent years. So money is tight and we have to fight to stay afloat. The problem is that Google and Facebook claim more than 70% of advertising dollars in Canada; that is nothing new to any of you. Their prices are so low that they are sabotaging the value of the market.

How are governments responding to this critical situation? Honestly, I have to say that our concerns are growing. The proof is that we are here before you today talking about it. For my part, I also appeared before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. The concern expressed is real, but there has been no action so far. It is time for action. The government has a very clear responsibility to official language minority communities under the Official Languages Act. Federal institutions have to take positive measures to enhance the vitality of English and French linguistic minority communities and foster their equal status in Canadian society.

What supports the development of a language and culture? It is of course family, friends, school, the workplace and the media. If the media are taken away, a major instrument for the transfer of culture is lost. The media are a mirror; they provide an open forum for people to meet, get to know each other, and talk; they are a meeting point. It is in the media that we discuss our successes and the challenges we face. To be blunt, right now the federal government is not living up to its responsibility for supporting the media that serve official language minority communities. In my opinion, it is failing all media in Canada.

Of course no one wants the government to control the media by controlling their finances. Yet steps can be taken to prevent that from happening. Many countries that are much more generous than Canada are in fact able to prevent the media from being controlled and becoming propaganda tools.

It is primarily the Minister of Canadian Heritage who is in charge of this file. She said the government cannot invest in a business model that is not viable. What business models are viable? Aside from *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail*, which newspapers make money? I do not know of very many that make enough to be worth the effort. Is *La Presse* a viable newspaper? Without venturing out onto thin ice, I can tell you that community and regional media do not have sufficient sales at this time for long-term profitability.

That said, are we relevant and useful to democratic life? Do we support the cultural life of our communities? We firmly believe so.

As to the solutions, there are several.

The first solution would be for the government to give our media a reasonable share of its advertising. We have been urging the government to do this since this topic has been under discussion. From 2006-2007 to 2014-2015, in eight years, federal spending on advertising in community newspapers fell from \$1.9 million to \$430,000. The government has divided its budget by four. For radio, spending on advertising fell from \$730,000 to \$200,000. Once again, the government has divided its budget by four. At the same time, spending for all advertising for federal institutions on the Internet is increasing by millions of dollars.

• (1645)

Do not say that newspapers do not reach their communities. With an equation of $a + b = c$, I could prove to you that newspapers reach their communities and that the communities read them.

My second point pertains to a tax credit for the production of original Canadian information. This exists in the film world. As you know, we sometimes hear that things are not going well in the

aerospace or automotive sector and the government has to step in. Should the government step in when it comes to building strong information technology pillars? Yes, but only tax credits are offered. If the media are not of particular interest to the government, we have serious problems. A tax credit for the production of original information would be another approach.

Would it not be possible to quickly establish a program to partially refund our investments in digital technology?

The Chair: Mr. Noreau...

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: I think my time is up.

The Chair: Yes, your time is up, but you can continue with these explanations when you answer questions from the MPs around the table.

Ms. Gaulin, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin (Executive Director and Editor-in-Chief, La Liberté): Do I also have ten minutes or did he use up my speaking time?

The Chair: Yes, you are entitled to 10 minutes as well.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you for inviting us.

I do not want to be alarmist, but the situation is alarming. I know you hear this all day long. I simply want to tell you a story, the story of a hamster who is constantly being asked to do more, but with less food. At some point, the hamster will fall down. That is our story. That is the story of official language minority newspapers.

In Manitoba, there is a minority French-language community newspaper called *La Liberté*. It has been around for 105 years. Franco-Manitobans have been producing a quality, credible newspaper for 105 years. I will pass around some copies because I think it is important for you to see it. For 105 years, if you asked Manitobans what they thought of *La Liberté*, they would say that it is too Manitoban or very Manitoban. We are closer to our readers than other official language minority newspapers or community newspapers are.

I am happy to be here today because the situation is critical. In fact, there are two things that I think the government does not properly understand. The first is the definition of local media, media that are close-by, that serve the community. Sometimes, when you are in a bubble somewhere else or far away, it seems that the community media are nice to everyone, that they feature someone you know well, and so forth. That is true at times. But community media also work to defend linguistic rights when they are under attack in their region.

Let me give you a few examples. A few weeks ago in Manitoba, *La Liberté* discovered from a few sources that the provincial government was going to dismantle the *Bureau de l'éducation française*, its French-language education bureau. Not only did we uncover the whole story about the dismantling of this bureau, but we published dozens of letters to the editor in the newspapers I am distributing.

People react in their newspaper. That is their way of protesting. They do not have access to a CBC microphone to say what they have to say. The only place they can do that is in their newspaper. They can do it on Facebook if they are members; they can do it on Twitter if they are members. But people do not have to subscribe to *La Liberté* to sound the alarm, to send a distress signal to say that the French-language education bureau is important to them.

It is the same thing with the French-language express clinic. It was locked up, shut down. It is finished, gone. *La Liberté* was there to cover the whole event. Otherwise no one would have noticed.

In 2012, a Service Canada office was quietly closing its doors, and no one was taking notice. *La Liberté* was able to breakdown the rumours and show that the government was indeed about to close the Service Canada office right in Saint-Boniface, the bastion of the French language in western Canada. That is another role that a community newspaper serves.

I can tell you that, in 10 years, if we do not recognize this important role and, if *La Liberté* no longer exists, if *La Voix acadienne* and *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse* are shut down, along with many others, no one will speak out, and that will destroy the vitality of our communities. When a newspaper closes, it does not reopen.

I have strayed from my notes, but it does not matter.

Another thing that concerns me is when I hear the government, the minister, talk about the digital transformation. Let me tell you something: at *La Liberté* we have made that transformation so fully that we have made a complete circle. We have a website that can be accessed from all devices, an IOS application and an Android digital edition, a newspaper for the visually impaired, and 100 years of *La Liberté* issues have been digitized and indexed through a partnership with the University of Alberta, so that Franco-Manitobans and researchers the world over can now do research into the francophone communities of Manitoba. As proof, I can tell you that someone from Barcelona is in the process of writing a thesis about Franco-Manitobans thanks to this partnership.

•(1650)

We have filmed round tables on election issues that affect French-speaking Manitobans and posted those discussions on the Internet. We make community events, concerts and business contests available for viewing, not to mention midnight mass for people who can no longer make it to church. They watch in French, not an hour later, but live, thanks to our production company partnerships.

We are currently working on a cartoon. In the paper, you can read a comic strip about an African's arrival in Manitoba and his integration into society. It deals with integration and reception. It was such a resounding success that we were asked to create a cartoon. *La*

Liberté is in the midst of becoming incorporated so it can produce a cartoon. The only thing we don't do is make pizza.

•(1655)

At *La Liberté*, we do everything. I hope I've shown you that we've made the digital shift, so much so that we've done just about everything you can on a digital platform. Therefore, when I hear a minister talk about the digital transition, my inclination is to invite her to pay our newspaper a visit.

The Internet is not the solution. In fact, it's a problem for newspapers, and this is why. At our weekly paper, we had one or two journalists, an editor, and a graphic artist. When a weekly newspaper becomes a daily newspaper because it has to supply its website with content once or twice a day, every single day, more journalists, more proofreaders, more fact-checkers, more outings, more photographs, more video editors, more software, and more powerful computers are needed. How much money does all of that take? The same amount as before? No, half that amount.

Well, I'm here to tell you that the department of miracles is closed. It's time you realized that. Does the government want Canadians to be equipped to vote as responsible citizens, yes or no? That is the real question. That is not possible without newspapers.

Since 2008, *La Liberté* has been in a stranglehold. Allow me to illustrate. The decrease in the number of federal government ads has already been mentioned. Also dropping dramatically is the number of ads taken out by the province and non-profit organizations—which have no money left because their funding hasn't gone up. Postage has increased, and we are not talking by 10%. The cost to mail a copy of *La Liberté* has risen from 62¢ to a dollar.

Now for some good news. Everyone said that, once the transition to digital had been made, everything would be fine. That's true, except for the fact that people in Ste. Rose du Lac, in northern Manitoba, can't access the digital platform. What's more, no one will go there to deliver three newspapers. Whether we have three, 10, or 100 newspapers to deliver in Ste. Rose du Lac, must we tell the people there that the government no longer wants them to get their copy?

The other thing is that the only federal support we had—through the Canada periodical fund—was reduced. The funding we receive to help with mail distribution costs went from \$120,000 to \$55,000. I thought things would get better under the Liberal government, but they haven't. In fact, our funding has dropped by a further 10%, leaving a small community newspaper with a \$125,000 shortfall.

Today, we make a profit of \$5,000. I will tell you how we manage that. We set up an advertising, communications, and marketing agency. We went from six employees to 15. Thanks to that, we managed to turn a profit of \$5,000. It's tenuous. We put out 30 special issues a year. We produce advertorial content for the websites of 40 organizations, in addition to developing animated content, videos, posters, brochures, video booklets, and calendars. We perform communication audits, we build communication plans, and we supply social media content for our clients. Again, I would point out that the only business we aren't in is the pizza business.

Owing to the lack of federal government advertising, the *La Liberté* newspaper has shrunk from an average of 40 pages to 27. That translates into a yearly loss of 600 articles that our readers will never get the chance to read. That means 600 articles they will not read about the issues that matter to them or their community. I'll let you reflect on the impact that has locally.

Thank you.

•(1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gaulin and Mr. Noreau.

We will try to keep things moving along fairly quickly, since we still have a lot of questions and comments.

Mr. Généreux, you can start us off.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Noreau and Ms. Gaulin, I would put you in two completely different categories. Let's be very clear. Ms. Gaulin, you work for a community organization, and you, Mr. Noreau, work for a private company.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: I do too, for that matter.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Your newspaper is a private company?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I thought it was a community organization.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: No, not at all. It's a share-capital corporation owned by an organization.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That's good to know.

I'm going to ask a very blunt question. If the Government of Canada decided to give you back some sort of funding support, be it through the purchase of advertising space or some method it had used in the past, would you continue to bite the hand that feeds you? I'm not sure whether you catch my drift. If the Government of Canada were to give you \$50,000, \$100,000, or \$200,000 in funding support a year—

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Is Radio-Canada able to do it?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Truth be told, it doesn't have much of a bite. I can assure you.

It's important to understand that advertising is one thing. I used to head community newspapers and other organizations of that nature. I agree with you that the program to allocate advertising dollars is an important one. By all accounts, a rebalancing effort is under way.

Mr. Noreau, you said that Google, Netflix, Facebook, and others were taking a large chunk out of the advertising pie. Your newspaper also has a website, but is it popular enough for the government to advertise on it?

You're a private company. By the way, I'm a business person as well. That's why I am looking at this from the standpoint of a private company. If you have a successful website, I don't see why the Government of Canada wouldn't advertise there.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: There is a difference between advertising on the website and advertising in the print newspaper.

Under the current model, the print paper holds up the organization. It has nothing to do with not being successful on other platforms. On the contrary, we are. Every week, *Le Droit* reaches 215,000 people in one way or another.

Google sells ad space at a cost per thousand impressions of three dollars. I, however, have to charge a cost per thousand impressions of \$70 so as not to lose money. It's not the same thing.

By asking us whether we are going to bite the hand that feeds us, are you challenging the fact that the media is trying to shake things up and press the government into action?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Personally, I don't think the media is doing enough to shake things up and press the government into action.

It's important to understand that the government is an entity that represents all Canadians.

Ms. Gaulin, I was certain that yours was a community newspaper. In fact, Mr. Noreau and Ms. Gaulin, both of you represent private companies. You came here today to tell us that the government should purchase more ad space from you so that you can stay afloat. That is basically what you are saying.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Let's say the government were to advertise in your newspaper, even though it could purchase the same ad space somewhere else at a cost 10 times cheaper. Would you, then, stop railing against the government because it was giving you money?

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: I have received money from the government before, but that didn't stop me from challenging it and trying to shake things up.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'm going to switch gears now.

The government does not tax Netflix, Google, Facebook, or the like. That's revenue that the government is not collecting. If it were to make those companies pay taxes, though, it could pass on the money to you in one way or another. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: I am completely in favour of taxing Netflix, Google, and Facebook. Their competitive advantage is without question unfair.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: It is totally unfair.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What's more, they use all the content you produce free of charge.

•(1705)

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: That's the cherry on top. They plunder everything we produce.

Right now, a Canadian vendor that buys ad space on *Le Droit's* website has to pay taxes, but when that same vendor places an ad with Google or Facebook, the vendor doesn't have to pay taxes. They can't believe it, of course.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You are here on behalf of not just publishers, newspapers and magazines, but also community organizations. I see the two as completely separate.

There is a difference between investing in a business and investing in a community organization. To my knowledge, the government has always placed ads in all sorts of newspapers, community-based and private alike. Correct me if I'm wrong, but you are asking the government to subsidize community media and organizations in francophone minority communities. I see no problem with that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

It is now over to you, Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the committee, and thank you for being here today.

You represent French linguistic minorities. My riding, however, is in Quebec, where anglophone media organizations are in the minority.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: The situation is the same.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It's very similar.

The member for Saint-Boniface will no doubt focus his attention on you, Ms. Gaulin. Mr. Noreau indicated that *Le Droit's* readership was around 200,000 people. I'd like to know, though, how many people your publication reaches a week, Ms. Gaulin.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: We have 6,000 subscribers and, according to a Leger survey, 20,000 readers.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: All right. I'm trying to draw a link with the local papers in my riding, the northern suburb of Montreal. The only way we have to reach people is through local newspapers. We have nothing else. You might say we are lost in the wilderness of the greater Montreal area. We survive only on local newspapers, be they in French or English; we'll talk about that. Thank you.

Mr. Noreau, I'd like you to talk a bit more about tax credits. What do you see as the solution? When you talk about producing original national information, are you referring to journalistic content?

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Solely journalistic.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Tell us what your wish is.

What would you do if you were able?

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Currently, we have a program called the Canada periodical fund. News Media Canada, a nation-wide media advocate, is recommending an increase to the fund. We produce original news in Canada because it is crucial to our democracy and communities. If all our news came from outside the country, we would hear about Donald Trump all day long and nothing else. I, for one, think we already hear enough about him these days.

The tax credit, which applies solely to news and excludes entertainment, operates at a rate of about 30%. We have 25 journalists in our newsroom. They make up a third of our 78-member staff. That said, they are paid the most. Staff members in other sections usually earn less. That provides some relief. The government places value on the production of news. Otherwise, it would be anything goes, as Mr. Généreux mentioned. We should not support a situation where anything goes.

I am not saying our advertising representatives should receive government support. All they have to do is roll up their sleeves.

They already squabble enough and do a great job, but the conditions are very challenging. Be that as it may, the tax credit is effective in that context.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Very well. Could it be improved?

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Oh yes, it could be expanded.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I see.

You mentioned another solution, partial reimbursements for digital investments. Given what you said, it really seems that you've done everything you can, both in terms of mobile and tablet applications.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: The answer is no, even though Sophie is saying yes. We've done a lot, but there are still digital opportunities we could build on.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: It takes resources.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Yes, we need resources. Few newspapers have chosen not to make the digital shift, even at the community level. Almost all of us made the transition a while ago. We have an application and a website, we post videos, and so forth. Regardless, we could do a lot more to support our business model when it comes to digital platforms.

For instance, Groupe capitales médias is currently working on an e-commerce project. It's a digital investment that will support our platform. The digital world still holds a myriad of possibilities. We could do a much better job of reaching people if performance support were available.

Le Droit's digital application is available through the App Store and Google Play. We make improvements to the application every three months. Simply integrating sudoku into such a platform costs half a million dollars. Every investment is—

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I have one last thing to say.

The Chair: We have to—

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Ms. Gaulin, if you extended an invitation to the Minister minister, I have no doubt she would go out to see you.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: We have written letters.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I just meant your comment that she should pay your newspaper a visit.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Yes. It is true, though, that we have written a number of letters, including open letters in the paper, but we have never received a response. Be that as it may, I will extend the invitation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Now over to you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for being here.

I've been hearing a lot on this subject for some time now. Unfortunately, the situation has become more serious from one month to the next.

In June 2017, the Acting Commissioner of Official Languages published his final report, which included three recommendations for minority media. The Department of Canadian Heritage and Public Services and Procurement Canada were tasked with performing an impact analysis on community media, motivated by the Government of Canada's decision to move its advertising online. Furthermore, these two departments were to adopt positive measures related to the effects observed after the impact analysis.

Do you know where the government is at on these two recommendations? Has it started this analysis? To your knowledge, have these departments started using positive measures to address these effects?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Many things came out in this report.

Initially, we experienced radio silence for some time.

Then, in December 2017, we received a report from what was Public Works and Government Services Canada at the time. It contained a report from EKOS Research that showed Canadians' media habits. In my opinion, this survey was completely rigged. It was a catastrophe.

Hold on to your hats: The methodology involved asking questions to more than 2,000 Canadians aged 18 or older. There's quite a large age bracket between 18 and 70. How many of those surveyed were 18 years old, how many were 40 years old, or 60 years old? This methodology was rather dodgy.

We have written to the Director, Marc Saint-Pierre, about this issue. We were heard, but we're still waiting for an honest answer.

By the way, I know that Mr. Raymond Th  berge, the new Commissioner of Official Languages, started on January 29, and that the Association de la presse francophone asked to meet with him as soon as possible to follow up on this report.

I think it is essential to understand the main issue here: Will Canadians still be reading French newspapers coast to coast in 10 years? That is the real question.

Mr. Fran  ois Choquette: You also mentioned that it is important to understand that official language minority media are part of the vitality of these communities. Whether we are talking about Ontario, Winnipeg or Manitoba, they are crucial to community vitality.

On this note, you talked about two things that could help you, advertising aside, because we don't really know what's going to happen on that front. There is the tax credit for the production of Canadian content, but there's also the Canada periodical fund which, as you mentioned, is continually having its funding cut.

Can you explain why the Canadian periodical fund is important?

• (1715)

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: In 2010, the Canadian periodical fund gave financial assistance to newspapers and magazines that were delivered by mail. Part of the \$75 million was given to newspaper and magazine owners who used the mail. It worked well. This

money didn't go into our pockets; it went directly to Canada Post. This represented a 50% decrease in mailing costs.

Later in 2010, the government decided to call this the Canadian periodical fund, and decided that all periodicals would be eligible for funding, no matter how they were sent to readers. Instead of giving money directly to Canada Post, it decided to give it to newspapers and magazines.

It goes without saying that the lion's share of the \$75 million, which stayed the same, was significantly lower for those who used the mail. We were left to compete with Chinese newspapers in Vancouver, for instance, that have absolutely no problem distributing their newspapers with carriers. We're talking about a city with a high population density, and they have no problems getting carriers to deliver newspapers to their readers' doors. That being said, my readers are scattered across Manitoba. Maybe one day polar bears will be able to deliver our papers, but for now we have to rely on the mail.

This sum of \$75 million was shared between many papers that compete with mine, but do not face the same challenges as mine. The amount was never reviewed. We can say that \$75 million isn't bad, but the worst part is that, for years now, only \$7 million has been allocated to newspapers in official language minority communities.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Out of the \$75 million?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Yes. The rest went to the following publications. *The Hockey News*, which is very important for our democracy, got \$1.3 million; *TV Hebdo*, equally important to our democracy, got \$1.5 million. Last year, *TV Week*, also a true staple, got \$1 million. *All   Vedettes*, which publishes feature articles on C  line Dion, got \$218,000. *Good Times*, a magazine for retirees, got \$588,000. *Flare* magazine got \$408,000, and *Ch  telaine* got \$1.5 million.

Can we all agree on the fact that, at some point, it would be important to allocate funding to general information newspapers? When Bell Media, which owns television stations, produces TV listings and gets \$1.5 million in funding, I honestly find the world a little less fair when I fall asleep at night.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaulin.

Mr. Vandal, the floor is yours.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you Ms. Gaulin and Mr. Noreau for your presentations. I also thank you for coming by my office for a meeting after Christmas.

Going digital is far too often presented as the answer to everything. The point you're making about the digital shift for newspapers in official language minority communities is so important that I would like you to state it again.

What particular challenges do these communities face when it comes to going digital?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: That's a good question.

There are unique challenges. In the western provinces, in order to recruit four or five journalists, we have to get them to come to us. In fact, there isn't a single journalism program given in French in any of the western provinces. When we have a website and a well-functioning Internet connection, instead of needing only one or two journalists, we suddenly need four, five or six. Furthermore, I need to send these journalists for training in French, since that is their mother tongue.

We need to give them the training, as well as adapt the software and the equipment, but the main problem is with the labour force. Even with four journalists, I still need fact-checkers, as well as people to reread and revise the articles. Suddenly, my payroll just got a whole lot bigger: from \$250,000 at the time to \$700,000 now.

• (1720)

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Mr. Vandal, please allow me to add to the response.

There are 650,000 French-speakers in Ontario. Is it conceivable that there is only one French newspaper that serves them? This French newspaper, which is *Le Droit*, isn't even able to have a representative covering the activities at Queen's Park.

Franco-Ontarians criticize *Le Droit* for reflecting the Quebec context. Mr. Leitão is very nice, but he is the Quebec Minister of Finance. Ontario's is Greg Sorbara, and we would like to hear from him in Ontario.

The problem is that we don't have the means to cover the Ontario scene. I would be the happiest of men if I had any kind of correspondent at Queen's Park.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: A freelancer.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Yes, exactly. If I had a freelancer, I would be happy. However, we do not have the means. I can't talk about northern Ontario, Windsor, or Queen's Park, but I'm very good at talking about Prescott-Russell, Vanier, Orleans, Ottawa, and Kanata. Unfortunately, we should have more resources than our own.

I will illustrate my point as follows. Earlier, we talked about advertising. Ten years ago, the Canadian government poured \$20 million into newspapers. Now it is injecting \$495,000. What does that mean? In the case of a newspaper like mine, the government is injecting \$4,800 a year. In *Le Droit*, an advertising page costs \$1,600 to a major customer who regularly buys advertising. In short, it's as if the government was buying three pages of advertising a year in *Le Droit*. It's even worse for community media. Each community media receives \$2,875. There is an imbalance. Don't think we aren't successful, because we are.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Ms. Gaulin, you mentioned that your readers were rather reluctant to subscribe to the digital edition. Is that the case?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Yes.

We often have subscription drives for the digital version because it would reduce the cost of mail, production and printing. But it's not the answer because it leads to loss of income.

Readers tell us that they subscribe to both versions, the paper version and the digital version. When they travel, they read the digital version, but they like to read the paper version at home.

Mr. Dan Vandal: *La Liberté* has 6,000 subscribers. Is that correct?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: It is.

Mr. Dan Vandal: That number is for the paper version. How many subscriptions are there for the digital version?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: That's the total number.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What is the breakdown for the subscriptions?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: I have them here. There are 4,933 subscribers. There are 3,133 print subscribers and 1,800 digital subscribers. There are also kiosks where people can buy a copy.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Vandal.

We are now going to start the first round. We will hear from Mr. Darrell Samson, Mrs. Sylvie Boucher and Mr. René Arseneault, who will each have about three minutes.

We'll start with Mr. Darrell Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Three minutes doesn't give me time to start my intervention.

Mr. René Arseneault: You can pass it off to me, if you want.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Noreau, thank you very much for the information you have given us.

I also want to confirm what you said, that the media are the pillar of our communities, culture and language. I know that the *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse* represents communities in an excellent way.

I also really liked the expression you used. You said that the media is the defender of minorities. It's really exceptional.

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage has made recommendations. Which do you think might be useful? Have we made any progress on this?

For example, I know that a recommendation affects federal institutions, so that they share more information through billions of dollars spent on advertising. Then there is another recommendation about a training tax credit for journalists. That said, is there enough meat for you? Should we be putting our efforts into these recommendations? If so, where? From there, we can do our job.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Personally, I don't think there's really been any progress so far. The recommendations of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage are rather minimal.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Do you think any of the recommendations are useful? If so, which ones?

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Obviously, anything related to training assistance is very useful, particularly in places like Manitoba, I imagine. The key is that the government recognizes that we, the official language minority media, really reach our communities. So it must give us a part—I'm not saying all—of its advertising contracts and the production tax credit. These are the two best recommendations.

• (1725)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Was this recommended by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage?

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Is that what you want?

Ms. Gaulin, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: I think the tax credit is a win-win solution. I'll explain why. If the government is counting on the salaries of journalists, if it has to give payroll tax credits for the production of a newspaper of original Canadian content, it will be happy because it will have quality information: journalists will have done some research because they will have time to do it. When one journalist does research, there are three others who are writing.

The solution is also win-win, because the readers are also winners. For newspapers, the biggest expense is wages, not printing. In any event, that's the case for *La Liberté*. The digital version still needs to be fed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

We will now move on to Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good afternoon. Your comments are very interesting. Since I live in a rural area—I do not live in a minority community because I am in Quebec—I can tell you that our small rural newspapers are very important. Of course, advertising is too.

At my age, which is 55, I am still a fan of the newspaper in paper version. But, to be honest with you and to help you, I have to tell you that the new generation—I'm thinking of my daughters here—doesn't have the slightest interest in paper versions. People between the ages of 25 and 35 are all connected to their devices. However, I'm aware of the need to keep publications in print because they leave traces.

I totally agree with you. There was mention of the minister, who talks a lot about the digital age. But even if I don't want to criticize it, I think we might have to resort to incentives.

As for the future, not for my generation—I'm overwhelmed by technology—but for new generations, who live only through technology, I would like you to tell me how you think governments could adapt to this reality in the best way possible.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: It would be through tax credits.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Tax credits?

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Yes, for the content.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: It is normal for a boy aged 20 to 25 not to read the newspaper. Since I'm 62—so I'm older than you—I can tell you that reading the newspaper was not so common at the time. People start a family, have kids, pay taxes and buy a house, but no matter if they read our publications on their tablet, on their computer or on paper, the important thing is that they read them. Of course, the situation will have to progress on the advertising side. The prices will have to change, but in fact, Facebook is changing its own. At the moment, this company sabotages everything we do by setting prices that we can't compete with, but it's still changing prices as well. So it will cost more to place advertising on Facebook. We'll end up being similar.

Currently, in Quebec, 80% of commercial enterprises do not have a transactional site. On their sites, we can see clothes, bicycles, and so on, but we can't make transactions. We, the newspapers, will offer this opportunity. At some point, we will overcome the obstacles and become profitable again, because we will have adapted our business to our customers who are now using their tablet or phone. We will be there too.

In New Zealand, for example, a media group uses e-commerce to the tune of \$1 million every day. These people receive 3% or 4% of sales and use these funds to provide information. This is the exact same recipe we used before.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

We'll now move on to Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Noreau and Ms. Gaulin.

I don't need to tell you how much I admire you. I'm from the Acadian community; I read *L'Acadie Nouvelle* every morning. It's my daily Bible. In fact, I sometimes send my colleagues articles that affect our community.

Since we are short on time, I won't be able to ask all my questions. That's why I'd first like you to write a kind of mini-brief, concise—I don't want something 15 pages long; if it can fit on one page, that would be perfect—something that specifies how we can help you. You talked about tax credits. That's one way, but there are others, including the famous Canada periodical fund, which I didn't know about. Tell me what means, be it advertising or something else, can affect all of our media, regardless of whether it is in a majority or minority community.

Mr. Noreau, you also referred in your presentation to a provision of Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

How should the federal government help you while respecting its obligations under Part VII of the act?

The support would be at two levels, namely for the media in general and for media in a minority setting. If you could provide us with this document, it could help us a lot.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: I have already given the clerk documents that are not translated, unfortunately. So they aren't acceptable to the committee. In addition, a document I gave you listed solutions that we believe are the most promising. Also, you can find—I'll send you the document electronically, so you can share it—a list of studies that have been done in which other measures are specifically identified. You will then have a very wide choice of possibilities.

I have the privilege of working with Francis Sonier, the publisher of *L'Acadie Nouvelle* and president of the Association de la presse francophone, who subscribes to the measures mentioned in these studies. Also, you have received the brief of the Association de la presse francophone.

There's plenty to meet your expectations, but if there's anything missing, I will leave you my contact information, and you can call me.

Mr. René Arseneault: I just want to make sure we understand each other. If we are to communicate with the Minister or report to her, I want to make sure I know which solutions fall solely under Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

There is also a general solution that involves all media.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Let me answer this question quickly. In my opinion, Part VII of the Official Languages Act demonstrates that the decline in advertising has a direct impact on the vitality of official language minority communities. It's very simple, and it's in the document I submitted to the clerk. You can get copies.

In 2008, we printed 40 pages a week. In 2017, we printed 27. This means that there are more than 600 pages fewer per year, more than 600 articles we aren't able to publish. That means we can't focus on the rural area, we need to have some restrictions and cutbacks. We also can't sponsor non-profit organizations, people who organize dance tournaments, card tournaments, and who can't afford to advertise to attract people.

I submitted my presentation which contains emergency solutions and solutions to perpetuate original Canadian content. Part VII of the Official Languages Act is directly related to the number of pages and the way a newspaper operates. In a newspaper, it's very simple. Two advertising pages produce two pages of content. Four pages of advertising produce four pages of content. When the government pulls 10 pages of advertising from our newspaper, there are 10 fewer pages of content. The calculation is very clear.

The Chair: This concludes our meeting today.

On behalf of all the committee members, I would like to thank you very much. You have enlightened us a lot. As I understand the comments of the other members of the committee, we will try to offer you as much help as possible.

Mr. Pierre-Paul Noreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your welcome and your questions. We are available if there is anything else.

Ms. Sophie Gaulin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noreau and Ms. Gaulin.

We are adjourning until Wednesday at 3:30 p.m.

I am told that the clerk will have the documents translated. You will all receive them.

(Meeting adjourned)

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