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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1545)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Order, please.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, this is a review of support programs for official language minority community media.

It's our pleasure to have with us today, from *The Sherbrooke Record*, Sharon McCully, Publisher, and George Guzman, Co-Publisher of the *North Shore News*. Sharon and George, welcome.

We're starting a bit late, and I think we might have to adjourn prior to when we expected. We're trying to do this as fast as possible, but the message that you are bringing to us is very important.

[Translation]

Minister Joly is going to announce her action plan. As I mentioned earlier, the action plan is on the verge of being rolled out.

[English]

It's very important to hear your comments about that.

You will have 10 minutes, both of you, or five to seven minutes each.

We'll start with Sharon. Sharon, go ahead. Welcome.

Ms. Sharon McCully (Publisher, The Sherbrooke Record): I'm from Monsieur Paradis'—

[Translation]

The Chair: You may be interested to know that Ms. McCully comes from my region.

Ms. Sharon McCully: Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for your invitation to appear before you today.

[English]

I began my career in journalism 40 years ago in the Gaspé. At that time, we were trying to get a minority-language newspaper created. There was no English media whatsoever at that time, and CBC, the only English radio, was coming to them from New Brunswick. There was no way for people in the Gaspé to have any information about the policies that were affecting them, so we started a newspaper there in 1977. I'm happy to say it's still going strong. CBC is also there. We got them up Mont Carleton over the Baie-des-Chaleurs, and everything is fine with them there.

The newspaper I'm with is *The Sherbrooke Record*. You may know it. It's probably one of the storied newspapers. It was the first newspaper of Conrad Black, David Radler, and Peter White. The newspaper was also owned by the Bassett family, who are very important in newspapers, and by Pierre Péladeau. We talked to Pierre Karl about the English-speaking community, because he would come to visit us often. It is also the newspaper, again, of the same corporate owners.

The *Record* celebrated its 121st anniversary last month by launching a user-friendly digital archive of every publication since 1897. The pages of our newspaper are as valuable as any archival resource in documenting the development of our communities. Woven together, they tell a story of a once vibrant English-speaking community that built an institutional network of schools, churches, hospitals, and community centres, many of which have disappeared now. As a historic tool, they provide first-hand accounts of the formation and evolution of our communities.

While access to English media is not an issue for the English-speaking Quebecer as it is with the French-language minority outside of Quebec, the content of English media is rarely relevant to English-speaking people living off the Island of Montreal. For that reason, the presence of community papers is vital, particularly in remote areas, where the local newspaper is the key source of news and information. We appreciate Minister Joly's saying that local journalism is a factor that she is considering.

Every day, readership surveys tell us that even with digital media, the print newspaper, a community newspaper, is the key source of news.

We've had difficulties and challenges over the decades. The new digital media age is not the only challenge we've had. In the seventies it was the proliferation of French-language weeklies. In every community in Quebec, the small but mighty subscriber-based English-language newspapers were quickly vanishing in the face of French-language small newspapers that were being distributed free of charge. This changed the playing field for all of us. Many English publishers responded by abandoning their own subscription base and going to free distribution. With a readership of only 10% in some areas of Quebec, the minority-language paper had to send out 50,000 copies of a paper to reach 5,000 people, so you had to be very selective in how you did your distribution.

The changes in technology have been a constant challenge. Technology not only changed the way newspapers were produced but also gave consumers a number of electronic alternatives to newspapers that fitted with their fast-paced lifestyles. For minority-language newspapers struggling to survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace, the introduction of the Internet and social media presented new obstacles as well as new opportunities, which in themselves present challenges when pitted against giants like Google and Facebook.

• (1550)

We also face demographic changes in Quebec. The declining number of English speakers in the province continues to be a major factor. At our paper, we all mourn when we read the obituary page, because we know that when this generation of older anglophones is gone, unless there is some miraculous intervention, the paper will require another reincarnation to survive. Attracting and retaining new readers is a challenge for all newspapers in a changing landscape regardless of size or language, but more so for a minority publication, which must also contend with readers at one end dying, and at the other end leaving the province or using social media to get their news.

The distribution of a minority paper requires creativity, in-depth knowledge of the community, and a lot of money. Unlike majority-language publications that have well-defined geographic borders, the minority community is dispersed in small pockets over a vast territory, and not all of it in a straight line. The introduction of e-editions of our newspaper has helped us in many ways.

Community papers have benefited from the federal government's publications assistance program for over a century, but that program is also in need of revision to respond to changes within the industry.

Another hardship facing minority newspapers is the absence of a sustained policy or a commitment on the part of the federal government to reach the minority population through newspaper advertising. For example, when a freeze on government advertising was imposed by a previous government, decision-makers failed to recognize the impact such a freeze would have on minority newspapers, both in terms of advertising revenues and on the dissemination of vital government information to the minority community. A special commission was launched to study the impact, and the freeze was partially lifted, though never fully reinstated.

More recently, the federal government's decision to use electronic media to transmit its messages has virtually shut out English-speaking seniors and thousands of others living outside of urban centres. The lack of visibility of the federal government in local newspapers also signals a lack of confidence in our papers, and the loss of those revenues for newspapers has threatened their very existence.

Why, you may ask, with all the challenges facing English-language newspapers in Quebec, do we continue to publish? Well, it's because we must. As long as there is an English-language community, there will be a need, with an expectation that the newspaper will always be there. When we were assessing our losses at the *Record* the day after we had a major fire in 1999, I received a call from one of our elderly subscribers. She didn't get her paper. I explained to her that last night our presses, the equipment, and

everything we had had burned, and the paper was gone. She said, "Well, am I going to get it tomorrow?"

A hon. member: I remember that.

Ms. Sharon McCully: This is quite typical of the average reader of community newspapers. What has remained constant over the century is the commitment that our newspapers bring to respond to those needs.

If they were strictly commercial ventures, the owners would probably have thrown in the towel long ago. However, we're more than purveyors of news; we are the cement that unites members of a geographically dispersed minority community, a bridge between French-speaking and English-speaking neighbours, the link between past and present, and tangible evidence of the continued presence of an English-speaking population in Quebec. As long as there is a minority-language newspaper, there is proof of daily life in our communities to our schools, our churches, and community volunteer groups.

The need to inform communities, particularly those in isolated rural regions, is critical. Past editions of our newspapers documented the centralization of services and the dismantling of rural economies. The demise of VIA Rail and Canada Post and the cuts to regional CBC bureaus testify to the impact of decisions on all rural regions, but more profoundly on the minority communities who live there.

• (1555)

The Chair: Sharon, we're kind of running out of time.

Ms. Sharon McCully: Okay.

The Chair: Can I suggest that you continue answering the questions of members afterward?

Ms. Sharon McCully: I will do that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much for what you've done.

We'll go directly to George now.

Mr. George Guzmas (Co-Publisher, The North Shore News, Newsfirst Multimedia): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Usually I don't have papers in front of me, but because I talk too much, I need to have papers.

It is a privilege and honour for me to be invited by your committee and to have the opportunity to address the viability of official languages newspapers. I would like to thank especially MP Linda Lapointe for making this possible. We've been covering Ms. Lapointe's political career since 2007, and she knows that.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): It's my birthday today, 11 years later.

Mr. George Guzmas: Exactly.

My words and comments reflect the words and comments of all publishers and owners of official languages newspapers. We all work really hard, with great passion, to keep our newspapers alive in order to continue to cover, with journalistic integrity, our local communities' issues and people not covered by any other media. We do all that by being some type of miracle-worker, since the hours that we and our dedicated staff put in every week do not reflect the remuneration allocated.

I assure you that all those working in a local official-language newspaper believe in being part of and helping their communities, especially the seniors who depend on reading their newspaper in the language they understand. In other words, all those working in our official languages newspapers believe in their vocation, and they are proud of it.

Publishing an English paper in Quebec is very hard. French papers outside Quebec have ad support from some of the provincial governments. Here, because of the provincial government's policies, we get nothing as English papers. Furthermore, in the last years we are paying an unfair recycling tax of thousands of dollars because the Quebec government compares advertising flyers with newspapers that print news content.

Also, you must know that aside from a small reduction of our recycling invoice, Quebec announced recently that it wants each paper to spend up to \$30,000 on a study in order to get equal financial help from the Quebec government for innovation. On top of that, in Quebec, with the adoption of Bill 122, municipalities are no longer obligated to advertise public notices in local papers, even though the English papers in Quebec rarely get such notices. That is the context of community papers in Quebec.

Now let's come to the federal government. For your information, the 35 English community papers in Quebec received \$350,000 in federal advertising in 2002. In this fiscal year finishing on March 2018, we received only \$15,000, which is less than \$500 per paper. The federal assistance program, the former magazine fund, does not help any of the community papers, especially English papers in Quebec. This is because, as Sharon said, we distribute for free, most of us door-to-door, which costs a lot in our municipality, and we are sustained only by advertising.

We believe in the integrity of journalism. We provide news and local content as community papers. We are the only ones who cover and write about our MPs, their activities, and the various programs presented through the different ministries. We report and write everything. We check them out because we believe in credible journalism and not in fake news.

You must know that our hard work is used by Google and Facebook to create content and sell ads. Actually, an analysis in a recent study based on stats found out that the content has generated \$23 million of advertising in Quebec, revenue that of course we're not getting. The analysts believe that in Quebec we should get at least half of that, \$11 million, but as you know, we will not get it.

Going digital is not sustainable economically for French newspapers outside of Quebec or for English papers in Quebec. The numbers speak for themselves. Web advertising cannot sustain the papers financially because digital revenue is calculated as per 1,000 views. If the paper sells it, it's \$5 per 1,000 views. A maximum of three ads per page, as instructed by Google, yields \$15 per page.

Let's say my papers go fully digital. To keep my journalists and small staff, I would need \$25,000 per month. To get that revenue, I would need to generate 1.7 million page views, and these are ads that we have to sell. If Google gets those ads for us, then we get \$1 per 1,000 views, for which I would then need 8 million views, the same

number that *La Presse* has. *La Presse* spent \$47 million for its program. *La Presse* generates \$2,300 per day in revenue.

Community papers, you must know, get about 20,000 to 30,000 views per month, which is \$400 in revenue per month or \$4,800 per year. If these ads are sold by Google, revenue comes down to \$2,400 per year. Who am I going to pay with \$2,400 per year? Not even the janitor. Now you know about all ads placed in newspapers.

• (1600)

We demonstrated the importance of ads when H1N1 happened in Quebec and across Canada. There was a big campaign about H1N1 and everybody knew where to go and how to go about it.

We are also faced with unfair taxation. Our ads are taxed, while Google and Facebook ads are not. This is not fair.

In conclusion, by sustaining the viability of official-language papers, you will be sustaining thousands of jobs for middle-class Canadians. You'll be sustaining the newsroom and protecting Canadian journalism, sustaining jobs of our middle-class family employees who work in our newspapers, sustaining jobs for printers and their employees who print our papers, sustaining jobs in the paper mill industry and of their employees who produce the paper we print on, and sustaining jobs in the forest industry where paper material comes from. As you can see, sustaining official-language papers has positive employment repercussions in many other fields. That is the reality check of things.

It's up to you to decide the future of official-language papers. You, the members of the standing committee, have the power to help official-language papers in Quebec and outside of Quebec, which provide local news content with journalistic values and integrity.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, George.

I have just a comment for the members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

We are cancelling Wednesday's meeting as there will be a technical briefing, for the benefit of all members of Parliament, on Minister Joly's announcement regarding the official languages action plan. I think that it would behoove all members to be in attendance.

Mr. Clarke, you may go ahead.

• (1605)

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for letting us know. I very much appreciate it.

That said, I should've liked this committee to have the benefit of a briefing prior to the announcement and ahead of other members of Parliament. I am putting this on the record so that there is no secret as to my thoughts on the matter. I could've sworn that the minister told us that we would be the first to know the details of the official languages action plan, that is, before the general public. This would have given us the opportunity to provide input, which she may have wished to incorporate at a later stage.

I say this without malice. I am very disappointed in the way the minister has conducted herself in this instance.

The Chair: I was informed that the technical briefing is for all members of Parliament.

I apologize to the witnesses while the committee addresses issues of concern to its members.

Mrs. Boucher, do you have anything to say on the matter?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): I would've liked to be briefed ahead of time. We are the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I do not understand. The minister had told us, back when I sat on the committee—I left and then came back—that we would be the first to be apprised of its contents. Now we learn that the briefing will be open to all and sundry. We were never given the opportunity to review the report first. The minister also sent it to the Senate rather than sending it here.

I am not angry, but I do find it regrettable.

The Chair: Thank you for your comments.

I will ask Mr. Casey, who is here with us today, to pass on your comments to Minister Joly. Mr. Casey is Ms. Joly's parliamentary secretary.

That is indeed possible, is it not?

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): I shall pass them on.

The Chair: Very well.

Since Ms. Ryan has yet to arrive, we will proceed with the first round. I will shorten members's speaking time since it is our understanding that the bells, beckoning us to vote, may ring at any time.

You know how things work here. We do not know when the bells will start ringing.

I will therefore shorten members' speaking time. Members usually get five minutes; however, in this initial round, each member will have four minutes.

We will get started straightaway with you, Mr. Clarke. You have four minutes.

[English]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you, sir. Good afternoon to both of you. Thank you very much for being here with us today.

Mr. Guzman, you said you wanted us to speak about the future of papers for small linguistic communities across the country. I just want to ask you two quick questions.

First, last week we had representatives from the Association de la presse francophone, l'Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, and the Quebec Community Newspapers Association. They told us that the \$50 million in the budget will not be coming out quickly enough. Although they said it's good, it's not coming out quickly enough to save your papers. Will your paper prospectively close down in two weeks, or very soon?

Mr. George Guzman: I don't know if it will be two weeks or three weeks or a month, but believe me, we have been cutting staff. Things are really, really hard. On that I speak for at least all the papers of the QCNA, of which we are members.

Ms. Sharon McCully: I can tell you also that we are going month by month, looking at declining revenues and cutting staff. The challenges are real.

Mr. George Guzman: Just to give you an example, for eight months I've had to play the secretary, and believe me, I'm not handsome enough for that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I won't comment on that, but I understand what you mean.

If I understand the case correctly from last week, if there's no emergency action whatsoever, monetary action, you might go bankrupt or die—not you, but your papers—very soon.

Ms. Sharon McCully: No, I'm not closing. We will continue. We will continue to find ways of operating. As I said to you, it is so important for our communities that we find ways of doing it. We have been doing that for the last number of years, so no, we're not closing our newspapers.

Newspapers have closed, though.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes.

Ms. Sharon McCully: When a newspaper closes, very soon after that you will see the institutions and the network that serves them begin to falter as well.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Do you agree with the Quebec Community Newspapers Association that you would need a certain emergency fund?

• (1610)

Ms. Sharon McCully: I would love to see an emergency fund in place.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay.

Sir, you talked about the fact that we on this committee have the power to influence—

Mr. George Guzman: That's what I believe.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That is why I'm going to put forward this motion again today, Madam Clerk.

[Translation]

It reads as follows:

That the Committee recommend that Canadian Heritage establish a \$2 million emergency fund for official-language minority media to be administered by an ad hoc committee composed of the Association de la presse francophone, the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada and the Quebec Community Newspaper Association.

[English]

Our dear colleagues on the Liberal bench said they needed time to prepare for the debate. I think we've had four or five days, so we're coming back with that today. I hope we can go all the way to the final vote this time.

Thank you, sir.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

According to our rules, when a motion is moved in this manner, we suspend the round of questioning that is under way and debate the motion as moved. I simply want all members to understand the procedure.

Ms. Lapointe, you may go ahead.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I am aware of the motion.

To date, there have been few witnesses from the anglophone community, but they are the witnesses we have before us today. You are well aware that the votes have us tied up, and that it will be difficult to hear from these witnesses and ask them questions.

I understand what you're saying. On Wednesday, Minister Joly will be giving her technical briefing. That presents a problem for me, however, especially since I wanted to speak with Mr. Guzman, who spent the last month preparing to meet with us. Quite frankly, this is a problem for me. It is not that I do not want to debate the motion, but we are in the middle of questioning witnesses who are telling us about issues affecting them. Can we not, at the very least, hear what they have to say?

The action plan will be tabled this week. I think that we can wait another week before dealing with this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, do you wish to say anything? You do not?

The next person on the list is Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Chair, on our side of the table, we were on time and ready to begin. We were here at 3:30 p.m. when the meeting began, precisely because there are witnesses from whom we want to hear. It has been two weeks since we submitted this notice of motion, and we want to put it to a vote.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I want you to know that it is by no means for lack of manners that we are taking up this valuable time. I know that you come well prepared, and we want to take all the time available to us to listen to you.

That said, the associations that represent you have also warned that urgent action is needed. You indicated that a number of newspapers closed down. We therefore want to take action before other newspapers and radio stations meet the same fate.

Moreover, we have been told that despite the release of the action plan this week, there will be no injection of the funding needed in the short term. This money will become available only in 6 or even 9 to 12 months. It is our understanding that your budget cycle is drawing to a close late this month, and that you need swift and concrete action now.

This is not rocket science. So many millions of dollars are handed over to Facebook and Google. Can we not take some of that money and give it to official language minority community newspapers and radio stations? That, I believe, is what the motion states, and that is why I support it.

We are sorry to be taking up some of the time allotted to you, as what you have to say needs to be heard. Notwithstanding that, the motion must be the first order of business, in my opinion.

The Chair: I see that Ms. Ryan just arrived. I do not know how we should go about hearing her remarks. She went to the trouble of coming here to appear before the committee, and she is also one of the key players in this issue.

I would seek the consent of my colleagues to suspend debate for six or seven minutes to give us time to listen to Ms. Ryan, before coming back to the issue in hand. May I suggest that we hear what she has to say and ask questions later?

I see that everyone is in agreement.

[English]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Ryan, the floor is yours.

Ms. Lily Ryan (Publisher and Managing Editor, Aylmer Bulletin): Thank you very much.

Please forgive me for being late. The printing presses are running today at our small newspaper.

My sister and I own three newspapers. I am 43. We are young businesswomen. Our newspapers are distributed in the Outaouais region.

• (1615)

[English]

We have the *Pontiac Journal*; the *West Quebec Post*, which was established in 1896; and the *Bulletin d'Aylmer*.

We serve a community that's both rural and urban in minority language situations. We have readerships who live in English, residing in Quebec. We send reporters to French events, cover them, and we publish the news in English so that residents who live in Quebec but don't understand French well have the news. They know what bylaws are being changed.

In my newsroom, we're facing an increasingly diminished ability to do research journalism and cover city council, municipal council, and regional council, let alone any other news that comes our way. Increasingly we're doing—us, as owners—extra time, overtime, before work and after work. We're writing and reporting because we can't afford to staff our newsrooms.

I'm aware that you have the brief that was submitted to the minister in October. The action plans detailed in that brief are at the core of what we do, and any actions that are taken to support those action plans will make a difference to English speakers in Quebec living in a minority-language situation. I understand that everyone has that at the core of why we're here today.

I really thank you, and I'm open to any questions you have.

[Translation]

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

As I mentioned earlier, before we have our questions and comments period, we are resuming debate on Mr. Clarke's motion.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

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

People often say that we talk a lot in committees but that we don't act. Last week, I moved a motion to ask the government or Canadian Heritage to create a \$2-million emergency fund for all minority official language newspapers, which you represent here today. And I thank you for being here today.

We refer to this as “a measure”. The government has a \$50-million fund to ensure the survival of our organizations in the medium and long term. There is a problem related to the creation of that fund, however. Any normal government has to go through all existing processes to implement its policies and to ensure that the various stakeholders are treated fairly. That being the case, we will have to wait at least six to nine months before the money from that fund becomes available. It is a completely normal political and governmental reality. We are not complaining about it. It's quite the opposite; we understand the process.

Like Ms. Lapointe, I would like to be able to continue putting questions to you. Last week, we had the opportunity of hearing representatives from the associations that represent you. They let us know clearly that you, the members of those associations, were in agony and on the verge of closing, and that in September or November, it would be too late.

What we are proposing in our motion is quite simple. We are asking that the Liberal members support this request, despite the fact that tomorrow or next week...

Mr. Alupa Clarke: It will be Wednesday.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Wednesday, the new Action Plan for Official Languages will be introduced. That's perfect, and I have no problem with that. Minister Joly has already announced an additional sum of \$400 million. There are probably measures that will affect you. We hope so and that is our wish.

Concretely speaking, however, that money will not be available for six to nine months. We are simply asking the government and the committee to agree to the creation of a \$2-million emergency fund. My colleague, Mr. Choquette, said earlier that the government had already planned to allocate certain amounts to advertising. Let the government immediately take \$2 million out of the Budget 2018 advertising budget, which it tabled and which will come into effect in one week precisely, on April 1. The math is quite simple.

Mr. Guzman, I don't know if you are an accountant, but if you aren't an editor, you are an insurance specialist. You know figures well because you were very eloquent on this topic.

• (1620)

We will go back to that later, and I hope that we will vote in the near future.

I am saying all of this to explain that it would be very easy for the government to create this emergency fund very quickly. We have to move forward and it's just that simple.

This concludes my intervention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in order to save time, I move that we adjourn the debate.

The Chair: Are you ready to vote to adjourn the debate?

Mr. François Choquette: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We are listening, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: If we put an end to the debate, will that also adjourn the meeting?

The Chair: The purpose of the motion is to adjourn the debate.

Mr. François Choquette: So we can adjourn any debate in this way because it doesn't suit us?

The Chair: I am going to defer to our clerk.

Mr. François Choquette: Very well.

The Chair: The debate would not be closed, but simply adjourned.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, in closing I would like to say that all of the witnesses who came to testify up till now will be able to see how ridiculous this situation is.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

I must immediately ask that we vote on the motion that the debate be adjourned.

Mr. François Choquette: I request a recorded vote.

The Chair: Very well.

The vote having been held, I see that the votes are tied. I am going to refer to Speaker Regan's decision. You will remember that a few months ago the same thing happened in the House of Commons. There were equal yeas and nays and Speaker Regan had to decide.

With regard to continuing the debate, I want to say that we have not yet heard everyone. There are still people who want to give us their points of view. We are members of Parliament and it is important that we all get a chance to express our views and have them heard.

I am going to vote in favour of adjourning the debate so that we can come back to it and hear those who have not yet spoken on this.

(Motion agreed to: yeas, 5, nays, 4)

The Chair: Let's get back to our business.

When I say that the debate on this topic is adjourned, it does not mean it is ended; it has been adjourned. When we get back to it, we will be able to hear those who have not spoken yet.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, you started out well but you seem to have tripped up. According to tradition and what the Speaker of the House, Mr. Regan, said, when there is a vote and the speaker or chair must decide, he must act so that the debate continues and is not stopped.

The Chair: That is correct.

Mr. François Choquette: So, for the debate to continue, you have to vote for it to continue and not for it to be adjourned. That is what Speaker Regan's decision says.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, you are right; the debate must continue. The fact of adjourning it will allow those who have not yet spoken to do so. My objective is to give the members around the table an opportunity to speak. And it is from that perspective that the debate has been adjourned.

We are pressed for time and there are witnesses here before us. I want the debate to continue, but we are going to adjourn it for now and get back to it later. That is what we did the last time. In fact, we had adjourned the debate and we picked it up again today. I am willing to go back to this debate at some point, when Mr. Clarke or others want to pick it up. For the moment, the debate is adjourned.

In fact, Mr. Clarke still had a few minutes.

•(1625)

[English]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: How important are you to the survival of your communities, respectively? How important is your newspaper for the survival of your linguistic minority community?

Ms. Sharon McCully: I would say it's critical. We've seen, evidenced by community newspapers that have folded in other communities, that the demise of the institutional network follows afterwards. We're also the front door, the gatekeepers, for people to have information about health, social services, and education. Those institutions rely on our newspaper to provide information about them. I think the community vitality aspect is critical, and if we're not there to do it, nobody else is going to do it.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Sir, is it the same for you?

Mr. George Guzmas: Absolutely.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay. Did you come to Ottawa today principally to speak about all the burdens that your papers go through—because your association did that—or did you come here to see action from this committee?

Ms. Sharon McCully: I came to see action. As I said at the beginning, I've been 40 years in the newspaper, and I've been before many of these committees. This is not my first rodeo, if you will.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Ms. Sharon McCully: I've spoken about this same subject. In fact, I just recycle my presentation over and over again.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: So it's always the same.

Ms. Sharon McCully: We've been saying the same thing over and over again. This is not new to the committee, I'm sure, and it's not new to anybody in government.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you very much for being here. I appreciate that you take the time to come to the committee to say what you have to say.

You said we have the power to help Canada, Quebec anglophone minority languages, but how would you suggest the federal government solve the problem that anglophone newspapers have now?

Mr. George Guzmas: Do you want something concrete?

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Yes, and thank you for being here. I appreciate it very much.

Mr. George Guzmas: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

I'm sure you have a big staff that's been looking at how they're going to help us, but whatever they do, I think it should be based on content, real content, local content, and not content that people buy from Reuters, The Canadian Press, and stuff like that.

First of all, we've been saying that Treasury Board and Public Works have, in a way, forgotten about us for years and years. I told you the numbers. In 2002 we had \$350,000 in advertising, and now, for this fiscal year finishing in a couple of days, it's only \$15,000. Somebody somewhere in Public Works or Treasury Board just put an X on anything that has to do with English papers in Quebec or French papers outside Quebec. This has to change. This is political will that has to change, because we haven't seen any political will for years and years.

We are the victims of the Gomery commission, because every year we were getting a part of the advertising budget, and then the first thing they cut after the Gomery commission was advertising in the local newspapers, whether it was English papers in Quebec or French papers outside Quebec. That's what they did, and you can check that with your agency of record, Cossette. You could check it out with Treasury Board and Public Works.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

We had witnesses who were telling us that most seniors like to have the paper in their hands. I know that you're on a website, because sometimes I go to your website to look at your newspaper. What are the numbers for those using the website and the ones who read the paper? Do you have these numbers?

•(1630)

Mr. George Guzmas: Let me tell you something. As you know, I have four newspapers—

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Yes.

Mr. George Guzmas: —but we're here for this one. My partner was very savvy. We went onto the Internet back in 1996. We were on the Internet, but it wasn't bringing in any revenue. It was just an extra thing.

The website of the *North Shore News* is the whole paper in PDF, because we don't have the staff to make it. Recently we cut the person who was doing the work on those papers, so we only do a PDF. It's just a picture of the paper. However, if you go to our other paper, *The Laval News*, you will see the work that my partner has done. We've even won the best website award for community papers in Quebec. It takes hours and hours, and it takes a lot of work, and somebody has to get paid for it.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You said that it should be based on “real content, local content”. It would be journalism...?

Mr. George Guzman: Exactly.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Something like that?

Mr. George Guzman: Yes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

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

Again, thank you very much for being here today.

Ms. Ryan, how many people did you say are working for your newspapers?

Ms. Lily Ryan: I have about five people working at one, four people working at another, and a lot of part-time people who contribute one or two pieces or help a bit with distribution and that kind of thing.

Mr. François Choquette: It's really a small workplace, but a lot of work.

Ms. Lily Ryan: It is a lot of work, and I have several positions that are open.

Mr. François Choquette: How many advertising dollars are you receiving from the federal government?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Choquette, but I have to interrupt you. We are going to have to go and vote.

I want to thank our three witnesses Ms. Ryan, Mr. Guzman and Ms. McCully.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for your presence today.

[*Translation*]

You help us gain a better understanding of the situation of official language newspapers in minority communities.

[*English*]

It's very important that we do our best to keep you alive and keep you living well.

[*Translation*]

You can be certain that all of the members of this committee are here to give you a hand up. I thank you for having travelled to come to meet with us.

I want to repeat to the members of the committee that we will not be having a meeting next Wednesday, so that you can be present at Minister Joly's presentation of the Action Plan for Official Languages. Afterwards, we will be in our ridings for two weeks. Madam Clerk and I are going to work on a schedule for the rest of our work, and we will submit it to you when you return. My thanks to all of you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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