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Mr. Steven Blaney

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Welcome to the second meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I would also like to welcome our interpreters, who will be with us throughout our proceedings.

First, we will look at the motion moved by Mr. Bélanger. Then, we can proceed to the workplan. I see Mr. Bélanger looking through his papers.

I want to tell you that Air Canada has sent us the CD on its employee training program, called *Hello, Bonjour – Bonjour, Hello*. We have a copy available for those members who would like to see it.

On that note, I will give the floor to Mr. Bélanger, who will tell us about his notice of motion.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the motion before you is not quite what I submitted.

The Chair: Yes, so we can adjust it.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I did not indicate “Contribution Agreement”; I had said “specifications”. Perhaps the clerk could check on that. I do not know whether she has a copy of the document I submitted.

Perhaps you can help me, because it seems that the government gave VANOC specifications detailing its expectations for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic games. And that is the document we should have and not necessarily the Contribution Agreement, unless the Contribution Agreement is not the same as the specifications. So that is not quite what I think. When the people at VANOC appeared before the committee, they mentioned specifications that had been given to them. You can check the minutes from that meeting.

So, I do not want us to get bogged down by a mistake. They really are specifications that the government gave VANOC and that I would ask to see.

The Chair: Unless I am mistaken, according to your motion, the term “specifications” replaces “Contribution Agreement”.

Therefore, I will hear what other members have to say.

Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome Mr. Weston, who is new to the committee.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: There are actually no specifications. It is the only contract that exists with VANOC.

Forgive me, Mr. Bélanger, but I did not understand the same thing as you did. It is the only document that exists on the subject. You have everything there is. There are no other documents.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In that case, we may need to bring back the people from VANOC. If I recall correctly, when they appeared before the committee, one Mr. Gauthier specifically referred to specifications that the government had given VANOC, specifications that detailed the government's expectations for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic games, and that is the document that people want to see.

We are not ready to criticize the government here. The government expressed its expectations, and we would like to know what those were. People have a right to know what they were. Then, we will be able to make an informed decision as to whether there was in fact a deficiency somewhere. Without that document, we are getting nowhere. There is no point in continuing without that information.

The Chair: Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to tell Mr. Bélanger what I was going to say earlier.

We are ready to submit the contribution agreement today. Right now, it is available in English only. We discussed it with the clerk. Obviously, we gave the client the option of receiving the contract in their language of choice, either English or French. The client asked for it in English, and that is what we did. The clerk said that our committee could have it translated into French for us. So that can be done.

In any case, we are ready to give you the document in English right now, if you like. It is a 19-page contract. I can cite parts of it as soon as you receive it. I will not do it until we know VANOC's position, but I can cite the descriptions that VANOC prepared with respect to the requests and expectations. They are all included in the document.

[English]

All of the things Mr. Bélanger is talking about are clearly in this document. Whether we call it a contract, whether we call it a contribution agreement, whether Mr. Bélanger wants to call it a *devis*—they're all in the contract.

I would love for the honourable member to see the contract. As I say, it is available today. We would like to submit it to the committee, but it's available in the language chosen by the client, as is the client's right under part IV of the Official Languages Act.

I leave that with you, Mr. Chairman. I am prepared to distribute that document immediately.

[Translation]

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

Of course, the practice of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, as with all the other committees, has been to distribute documents in both official languages, unless there is unanimous consent from all members of the committee. That being said, if you have a document in either official language, there is nothing preventing you from referring to it in your comments.

Since the document will be made available, we will try to limit the discussion. Perhaps we could dispose of the motion and hear comments.

Mr. D'Amours.

• (0910)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I would like to ask Ms. Glover a question. Once I know her answer, I will be able to continue.

When was the contribution agreement signed? Was it in the past year? Or was it two, three or four years ago?

I want to hear the answer and then continue with my comment, if possible.

The Chair: Fine.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: If everyone agrees, we can hand it out.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): No.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: It was March 27 and 30, 2009. Two witnesses signed it, obviously.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: My comments end there.

The Chair: Do I have the committee's unanimous consent to hand out the document in English only?

No? Fine, it is settled.

So we will carry on.

Mr. Godin.

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

It was said that the client wanted the document in the language of their choice, under part IV of the act, and so on. The fact is that the government produced a document and that, as we have already said,

both official languages should have been respected. It was said that it was in the language of the client's choice, but it is not against any law to provide a document in both languages, especially when it comes to VANOC and how we were treated during the official opening ceremony. It was quite something. It was incredible. It highlighted some of Canada's winter games. We had to tell the House of Commons what it was like for francophones. Finally, changes were made to the closing ceremony of the games. So that says that bilingualism in Canada happens at the end, not at the beginning.

I think it would be acceptable for the document to be submitted to the clerk, and then translated and handed out immediately afterwards.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nadeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Chair, I want to come back to the terms “specifications” and “contribution agreement”. I saw in the news that an access to information request had been made to obtain the specifications for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic games, and that the government had denied the request.

If the government refused to provide a document, it means that it existed. Now, I will need Madam Clerk to help me with my research in order to find out what exactly was reported in the news. I find it a bit disturbing that I am being told today that the document never existed when I read in the news that the government refused to provide the document to the person who requested it.

So I agree with Mr. Bélanger. The committee should dig further into the issue to get the right information, especially since it was reported in today's *Le Droit* that there would be less French at the Paralympic games. But, as far as I know, that is still VANOC's responsibility. So there is something fishy here. We need to do more digging.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Bélanger, the floor is yours.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, it may be the same document, that is entirely possible. I am willing to accept that for the moment. I would like to see the document. I do not know whether Ms. Glover plans to submit it to the clerk to have it translated. If so, then that is okay. On my end, I will check whether it is indeed the document that Mr. Gauthier was referring to. If so, then that is okay. If not, I will raise the issue again and ask to see the specifications. I will check, and I will need the document in question to do that. If Ms. Glover is ready to submit it today so it can be translated, I am fine with that.

The Chair: Okay, we will check on that. If I understand correctly, the committee would not have to make a decision on the matter because you would withdraw your motion.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The motion in its current form, with the term “Contribution Agreement” will do for the time being, if the committee members are willing to accept it. Then, it would be done. The motion would require it to be translated.

The Chair: If I understand correctly, we are going back to the original wording.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I will accept it and check on it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Glover, do you have something to say?

• (0915)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I just want to make sure that everyone understands that the government, contrary to what Mr. Godin has just said, does not have to translate everything it does when it does it.

Mr. Godin, you have never been part of a government. What you are asking is not consistent with the act. We respect the act in force. We serve clients how they want to be served, and we will continue to do so with pride and enthusiasm. Frankly, in my opinion, the important thing is to respect the legislation in force and not to make up whatever, whenever. I am submitting the document right now. It would be very much appreciated if the clerk could see to its translation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I may not have been part of a government, but if I had, I would have appointed two bilingual judges in Nova Scotia instead of two unilingual ones.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will now vote on the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, will it be possible to meet the deadline indicated in the motion even if the document has to be translated?

The Chair: The document is being submitted right now. The time required for translation time is the administrative delay of the House.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Clerk, will the March 18 deadline be respected? Is that possible? Ms. Glover, you said the document was 20 or so pages long.

The Chair: Today is March 11. It can be confirmed by Tuesday. We will let you know if there is a problem. If there is no problem, I will let you know.

The sitting was suspended.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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