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## **Standing Committee on Official Languages**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, June 21, 2011**

—  
**Chair**

**The Honourable Michael Chong**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Tuesday, June 21, 2011

•(0845)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)):** Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Tuesday, June 21, 2011, and this is our second meeting. We are here to discuss committee business and the routine motion concerning the questioning of witnesses.

[English]

We're here to discuss a live motion that was moved by Monsieur Galipeau. It is live on the floor, and there is a subsequent amendment that was moved by Mr. Bélanger. They are not yet adopted. That is where we are right now.

You should all have a copy of both the original motion that was moved by Monsieur Galipeau and the subsequent amendment that is now live on the floor, which was moved by Mr. Bélanger.

Just to be clear, the amendment is as follows:

[Translation]

That the order of questions shall be as follows: for the first round, seven (7) minutes be allocated in the following order: New Democratic Party, Liberal Party, and Conservative Party; for the second round, five (5) minutes be allocated in the following order: New Democratic Party, Conservative Party and Liberal Party; for the third round, five (5) minutes be allocated in the following order: New Democratic Party, Conservative Party and Liberal Party; for the fourth round, five (5) minutes be allocated in the following order: Conservative Party, New Democratic Party and Liberal Party.

[English]

That is where we are right now, discussion and debate on that amendment.

Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, some information is missing, something from what Mr. Galipeau said. We will very likely find it in the transcript. At the request of Mr. Julian, who was replacing Ms. Michaud, Mr. Galipeau said that he had intended to make a second proposal, on further to his resolution, which is written above.

He had intended to propose an order for the speaking turns in which the third party—so, the Liberal party—could speak only once during the entire testimony. I am against that. I think that it is important that the committee members be aware that this was to come. Mr. Julian's motion was put forward in reaction to what Mr. Galipeau recommended presenting, if his first motion had been adopted.

When Mr. Julian's resolution was rejected, I presented this one for form's sake. That is the word I used then. Mr. Chair, I don't know if this morning we want to start a discussion that could go on for two hours with no outcome. After our meeting last week, I suggested that we refer this question to the steering committee, which has already been set up, to find a solution that is acceptable to everyone, if possible. I would like to know if the committee is interested in proceeding this way. We might be able to avoid a prolonged debate.

I would like to let the committee know about something else. Ms. Foote, the whip for the Liberal Party, intends to raise this matter this afternoon during the meeting of the House leaders and whips. Three or four committees have already established their sequences, and no two are the same. We risk finding ourselves in a somewhat bizarre situation at times.

I would like to know whether the chair, Mr. Chong, would like to proceed this way. Are we simply going to get into the heart of the debate and see what happens?

In passing, I would like to take the opportunity on this first day of summer to wish everyone a happy summer.

•(0850)

**The Chair:** Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** I understand Mr. Bélanger's position, but I would like to say that the committee is mandated to manage its business the way it wants to. We are deciding what is going to happen here, within this committee. These are the rules that we need to follow during our deliberations.

I simply wanted to point that out.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Harris.

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** I had brought up an amendment to Monsieur Bélanger's amendment, which he had accepted as a friendly amendment, but it wasn't really accepted by the committee.

Would it still be a friendly?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** What was that?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** That was to change your proposed third round to Conservative, NDP, Conservative.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Yes, I had accepted that as a friendly.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** And that would reflect a majority of the governing party on the committee and adjust things accordingly.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** I had accepted that as a friendly, Mr. Chairman.

You can check the record.

**The Chair:** I understand that, but technically there is no such thing as a friendly amendment. What I had read into the record is what we have.

If you wish, Mr. Harris, you can move a subamendment to Mr. Bélanger's amendment and call the question on it.

I want to be clear about this. Otherwise, if we're not clear about what we're doing here, I've found from past meetings that people can become confused about exactly what's going on.

So if you want to move a subamendment to this, by all means go ahead. Then call the question on it.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** I think Yvon wanted....

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Monsieur Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** As you know, I was not here last time when that happened.

[*Translation*]

I would just like the proposal to be read correctly so that we can understand the speaking order that is being proposed.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** If you would care to move your subamendment, go ahead. Perhaps you could read all four rounds so that we're all on the same page.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Yes.

The subamendment would keep the first round at seven minutes, with NDP, Liberal, Conservative; the second round would be five minutes, NDP, Conservative, Liberal; the third round, the only one that would change, would have a speaking order of Conservative, NDP, Conservative; and then the fourth round of five minutes would be Conservative, NDP, Liberal.

**The Chair:** So we have a subamendment, moved by Mr. Harris, to Mr. Bélanger's amendment.

Is there any debate on this?

If not, I will call the question on the subamendment....

Go ahead.

• (0855)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** Could you repeat the sequence please?

**The Chair:** For the first round, it would be the NDP, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party. For the second round, it would be the NDP, the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party. For the third round, it would be the Conservative Party, the NDP, the Liberal Party. For the fourth round, it would be the Conservative Party, the NDP, the Liberal Party.

Right, Mr. Godin?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Perhaps we could propose a subamendment. That's legal. If it's legal, why shake your head? Excuse me, but it's my right. If it's right, it's right.

Actually, I am looking at the third round, and I would agree with it. For example, in the third round, the speaking order could be: Conservatives, NDP, then Conservatives and, since the Liberals would not speak in the third round, in the fifth round, we could go back to: Conservatives, NDP, Liberals. Perhaps the order for the fifth round could be: NDP, Conservatives, Liberals. Actually, it's rare—I have never seen it before, where a party speaks twice in a row. We simply need to reverse it. This is going to be similar, but it's fair so that we don't have two in a row. In the third round, the order could be: Conservatives, NDP, Conservatives; then, it would be: NDP, Conservatives, Liberals. It's just to alternate, instead of having the same party speak twice in a row, which we don't normally do.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Godin has moved a subamendment to the subamendment moved by Mr. Harris.

Is there any debate on Monsieur Godin's proposal?

Monsieur Godin is proposing, for the first round, New Democrat, Liberal, Conservative; for the second round, New Democrat, Conservative, Liberal; for the third round, Conservative, New Democrat, Conservative; and for the fourth round, New Democrat, Conservative, Liberal.

Is there any debate on this proposed amendment?

Yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Out of a concern for fairness, can we take the time to count the number of minutes that would be given to each party to see whether it proportionally reflects the House of Commons?

I think that the Liberals would have 18 or 19% of the time, while in the House, they have 11% of the seats. The Conservatives might be the losers.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Personally, I have nothing against that, Mr. Gourde. We simply need to think about it. In the House of Commons, representation isn't really by the minute.

I have been sitting on the committee since 1998. As you know, I used to be entitled to close to four rounds in the debate but, in 2008, I lost one because there were too many of us. For a while, there were only 13 members, but I was still entitled to four rounds. The committee governs its own decisions, as Mr. Lauzon put so well earlier.

I think that this would be a good start for the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We are going to meet our witnesses, and I have no objection to having Mr. Bélanger ask questions. He has contributed a great deal to the official languages file. We hope that things will work as they did the last time, because the committee functioned very well. Honestly, I tip my hat to the committee because we do good work. We need to move in that direction.

We would like there to be four rounds, but there is one party less. So the discussions will go much quicker. We'll certainly gain 20 minutes because of the five minutes that the Bloc Québécois would have had in each round. The Bloc Québécois isn't here any more. So our parties will benefit from that because we'll have additional rounds. The committee is going to meet for two hours and that doesn't mean that there will be only four rounds.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I would just like to add this. The problem is that, if we have four rounds, and we hear from witnesses for one hour, only four members of my party will be able to speak, and a fifth member will always have to sit out.

As you know, when you are an integral part of a committee and you take the time to review the files, never being able to speak is frustrating. If we sit in committee for two hours and are required to skip our turn once a week, even if there are two committee meetings in the week, it's shocking.

The positive side of this problem is that we have more members. For the members of my party, I think that at least having the opportunity to speak once every two hours is a minimum. That's why we need to find a formula that will allow all members of this side to take part in at least one five-minute round.

• (0900)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chair, that is why I pointed out that there is one party less. I don't think we'll have four rounds; I think we'll have five.

I do not want to be a pain, but the government could give its members the chance to speak. I noticed that it's always the same person who asks questions. Mr. Gourde, you never did that. I acknowledge that you let the others speak.

I remember that you said you wanted each member of your party to have a chance to speak, but it was always the same person who spoke. Your party didn't give them the chance to.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Perhaps we changed strategies.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Time will tell.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Harris.

[Translation]

**Mr. Dan Harris:** I did a calculation. What is being proposed would give five turns to the Conservatives, four turns to the NDP and three turns to the Liberals. As for the number of minutes, it would be 27 minutes for the Conservatives, 22 minutes for the NDP and 17 minutes for the Liberals.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Trotter, you have the floor.

**Mr. Bernard Trotter:** I would basically like to say the same thing as Mr. Gourde. I think that what is important is that all members have the chance to take part in the discussions. By giving 27 minutes out of I don't know how many minutes total... Seven of our members are sitting on the committee, and we are afraid of not having the opportunity to take part in the discussions.

**The Chair:** There are six members.

**Mr. Bernard Trotter:** There are six members, if we exclude the chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lauzon, it's your turn.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Mr. Coderre mentioned two hours. In the last session, the sessions often lasted one hour and there were two witnesses. If we operate in the same way, the members on this side are often going to ask one or two questions. I don't think it's really fair. If we have a witness here for one hour, we need to have at least half the time or more because we are the majority. Maybe it works if it's a two-hour meeting, but if the meeting is only one hour, it doesn't work. It isn't equal, it isn't fair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Welcome, Mr. Weston. To bring you up to speed, we are considering the subamendment moved by Monsieur Godin. Once we have disposed of that, we're going to consider the subamendment moved by Mr. Harris, and once we have disposed of that, we're going to consider the amendment moved by Mr. Bélanger.

Currently, the proposed amendment by Monsieur Godin is the following: that the first round be seven minutes, NDP, Liberal Conservative; the second round be five minutes, NDP, Conservative, Liberal; the third round be five minutes, Conservative, NDP, Conservative; and the fourth round be five minutes, NDP, Conservative, Liberal.

Is there any further debate on this amendment?

Monsieur Lauzon.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** As for the matter of time, if the person testifies for 10 minutes, for example, we would have two rounds, one of seven minutes and the other of five minutes. This would equal a third of the time allotted. Even though we are the majority, we would only have a third of the time to ask questions of a person who would testify for one hour. It isn't fair and doesn't make sense.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Godin.

• (0905)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** You are saying that it wouldn't be fair for you to have only three questions in the House of Commons?

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Actually, we shouldn't have only a third of the time allocated to the committee.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I understand.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Actually, we would be able to ask only a third of the questions. Do you think that would be fair?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Me? No.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** This isn't going to work.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Bélanger.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** I'm a little confused. We started with the principle that all members of the committee should be able to speak. Even though it isn't necessarily how we have always worked, I can accept that.

But we went further. We're insisting on respecting a percentage of the time, so that we have the majority of the minutes. But there is also the matter of knowing what would be appropriate in relation to how we operate.

I don't know what will happen. I know that we were waiting for Mr. Weston to arrive so that the government party has the majority. Now that he is here, I imagine that he will dispose of the matter as he wishes. I'll do a test. I'm going to see if people really do want to compromise and work together. If we gave the Conservatives another turn at the very end of the fourth round, all the Conservative members could speak in the four rounds, at the discretion of the parliamentary secretary, of course.

I am going to confirm what Mr. Godin said this morning. And I also said it at the last meeting, but Mr. Godin wasn't there. In your case, you let your members speak. But I have been in situations where the parliamentary secretary didn't let the other members speak. Some members that we are putting this to can also attest to that, but let's stay with the matter at hand.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Lauzon—or Mr. Gourde, I can't remember anymore—just said that if we gave the Conservatives another turn in the fourth round, only five Conservatives would get to speak. But this is no longer an issue because if this happens, everyone around the table would be able to speak.

Perhaps we could present a new subamendment, but we still have to be careful. Maybe I'll wait until we resolve the current subamendment. So if it were rejected, I would propose this second subamendment to find out, once again, to what extent we are ready to collaborate or if there is no willingness to collaborate.

Mr. Chair, I will close by asking you to remember what I said at the beginning, that we could hand this to the steering committee to determine whether we can somehow agree. Otherwise, we risk spending two hours here this morning for nothing.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm not going to allow the subamendment to be put because we've already nested too many subamendments, but if we dispose of the proposal by Monsieur Godin, then we can go back to the one by Mr. Harris. If that's not satisfactory, somebody can move another subamendment.

Is there any further debate on Monsieur Godin's proposed amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the subamendment. All those in favour of the subamendment as moved by Monsieur Godin?

(Subamendment negated)

**The Chair:** The subamendment is defeated, so we're now back to the subamendment as moved by Monsieur Harris.

Monsieur Bélanger.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** I propose a subamendment to Mr. Harris' amendment.

[English]

**The Chair:** Let's dispose of his first, and if that—

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** No—hear me.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** You heard Monsieur Godin. His rationale for flipping around number four I thought was a good one: so that you don't have two of the same party questioning one after the other. I would propose that same amendment that Monsieur Godin was proposing, that the fourth round essentially read New Democrat, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative.

• (0910)

**The Chair:** Okay. I'll allow this to be put to the floor, to be consistent.

We're on the proposed subamendment by Monsieur Bélanger. Is there any debate on this subamendment?

Are you clear...?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Yes, I'm okay. To add one more.

[Translation]

It involves giving the Conservatives another turn in the fourth round.

[English]

**The Chair:** Is there any debate on the subamendment?

Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** It's simply a question for clarification. Unless I'm mistaken, this means that the third round would end with the Conservatives and that the fourth round would begin with the Conservatives. Is that right?

**The Chair:** No. The third round would begin with the Conservatives, then it would be the New Democrats, and it would end with the Conservatives. The fourth round would begin with a member from the NDP, then it would be a member from the Conservatives, then a member from the Liberals, and lastly a member from the Conservatives.

**Mr. Robert Aubin:** Perfect. Thank you.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chair, unless I'm mistaken, with this kind of amendment, the Conservatives would have six opportunities to speak, for a total of 32 minutes; the New Democrats would have four turns, for a total of 22 minutes; and the Liberals would speak three times, for a total of 17 minutes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Gourde, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I would like to thank Mr. Bélanger for being open to the idea of giving the Conservatives one more turn in the four rounds. If you've got an unequal round, I would prefer to establish everything in the first period of seven minutes. In the first round, four members of the committee could speak, while we could alternate for the three other rounds.

I think there is good open-mindedness here, but we are going to vote against Mr. Bélanger's subamendment. But perhaps we can consider his approach later. So as not to confuse things, we are going to resolve this part. But I am taking note of the open-mindedness of Mr. Bélanger, who is suggesting a round table where four committee members would speak.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** If you are open to this, why aren't you discussing it right away? The first round would be as follows: New Democratic Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party and New Democratic Party. We could put it right at the top of the list.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** If Mr. Bélanger wants to talk about it, I don't want to get in his way.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** It would be...

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** I'm not the one who decides, Mr. Godin, Mr. Chong is.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Anyway, I don't think he'll accept another subamendment.

**The Chair:** No, not right now.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** If we can reach this agreement, we scrap everything, we make a new proposal, and it will be done.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** It will be confusing if we create a new amendment.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** We would need a new amendment, a new motion.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** If we can unofficially agree, we would need a new motion.

[*English*]

**Mr. Dan Harris:** At the risk of starting something again, maybe we could take a five- or ten-minute recess to discuss this and to come to a resolution, come back here, appropriately defeat things, and then propose something new that we're all already in agreement with.

**The Chair:** Okay. Is it—

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** I have a condition. I will agree with Dan's request provided he doesn't tell Peter, because we said no to Peter.

**The Chair:** Is it the wish of the committee to suspend for five minutes?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The committee is suspended for five minutes.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- (0925)

**The Chair:** We will resume from the suspension. It was five minutes.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We're still on the consideration of the subamendment as moved by Monsieur Bélanger.

Monsieur Galipeau.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** I propose that we suspend the meeting until 8:45 a.m. Thursday.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's not debatable. I'll call the question.

All in favour?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** This meeting is adjourned.







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