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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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•(1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Today is Tuesday, June 18, 2013. Welcome to the 86th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We will be here for an hour to discuss three motions—two from Mr. Godin and one from Mr. Dionne Labelle.

I yield the floor to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Chair, I ask that we stop sitting in camera.

The Chair: We are not in camera.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I would like us to vote on the motion regarding the marine rescue sub-centre in Quebec City.

The Chair: First, you have to introduce your motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I will do so, Mr. Chair. It reads as follows:

That the committee conducts a study on the closure of the marine rescue sub-centre in Quebec City before September 30, 2012.

The Chair: We have a motion before the committee. Would someone like to speak to it?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Chair, as I have said before in this committee, I think this motion should rather be moved in the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. This is a matter of security, and nothing indicates that bilingualism is not respected in any rescue centres. The Quebec City centre has had the same staff for a number of years.

If my colleague opposite really has concerns about security, he could perhaps ask the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to conduct a more comprehensive study on the issue. I don't know whether he wants to debate the matter, but I can continue to do so if he likes. I am just making a suggestion to Mr. Godin.

I am wondering if this is really a topic we should be studying. If Mr. Godin thinks that this is a matter of security, our committee should not be handling it. There is no evidence that a bilingualism issue currently exists. Nothing has changed recently. We studied the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and I think he did an excellent job. I don't know what you think. Could you elaborate, Mr. Godin?

The Chair: I will yield the floor to Mr. Trottier, and then Mr. Godin can speak.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): I would like to support my colleague. I think that this kind of a study should rather be undertaken by the Standing Committee on Fisheries and

Oceans. I don't think this is just a matter of language. Many operational and security issues are also involved. It is a matter of equipment, staff and locations. It's not just a matter of linguistics. So I think it would be a good idea to refer to the mandates of the Standing Committee on Official Languages and the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

In the House of Commons, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans always answers any questions related to this. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages does not deal with such issues. I think that the fisheries and oceans committee is in a better position to deal with this matter. Its members are familiar with the operations involved in fisheries and oceans. Rescue is a fairly important aspect for them.

We could ask the chair of that committee whether they would like to study this topic. As Mr. Gourde said, these operations are important. A connection should be established between operations and this official languages issue.

The Chair: If this is a study on the closing of the marine rescue sub-centre in Quebec City, and it has to do with issues related to the two official languages, it is our committee's responsibility. However, if this motion is adopted, it will be impossible for the chair to do what the motion asks for because it talks about 2012. We cannot produce a study before September 30, 2012.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I ask that we adopt an amendment, whereby the new date would be October 15, 2013. The amendment would read as follows:

That the motion be amended by replacing "September 30, 2012" with "October 15, 2013".

The Chair: Okay.

We have to deal with an amendment. The date is now October 15, 2013.

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I ask that we vote on the amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

Would anyone like to speak to it?

Mr. Gourde, go ahead.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: As for my colleague's proposal to amend this motion...

Mr. Yvon Godin: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

When a vote is requested, doesn't it have to be held right away? He had not yet raised his hand.

The Chair: No. I can call a vote only if no committee members want to debate the amendment.

There is no time limit on a debate regarding an amendment or a motion.

Would any members of the committee like to debate Mr. Godin's amendment?

Mr. Gourde, go ahead.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you for letting me speak, Mr. Chair.

Sorry, Mr. Godin. I know that you are concerned, but rules must apply to all members of the committee.

I understand that you want to make this amendment. We obviously cannot leave September 30, 2012 as the date, since that was last year. However, the motion put forward lapsed about seven or eight months ago. I thought that such a situation would simply require another motion. We cannot vote against an amendment that consists in changing a date, but if we are already opposed to the motion, there is a problem. In a way, you are putting us in a difficult position.

You should have simply proposed a new motion with a later date. That certainly would have been simpler for everyone. I think this is a difficult situation for us. We cannot reject your refusal, but we will probably vote against the amendment, and that will lead to a strange situation.

We have an opportunity to work together in this committee. It would be easier—for you and for us—if you proposed a new motion that complies with this committee's current rules.

• (1540)

The Chair: Mr. Trottier, go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: So the amendment does change the date to October 15, 2013?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: As you know, we are currently conducting a study on immersion. So we would have to look at our schedule. I am wondering how many meetings we will need to carry out the study if we do decide to undertake it. We should nevertheless complete the immersion study. We still have a few meetings to hold on that topic.

Mr. Chair, could you tell us how many meetings we will need to complete the study on immersion?

The Chair: Yes. We have 11 witnesses to hear from. With three witnesses per meeting, I think we would need four meetings to complete this study.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chair, in light of that, I don't think we could begin the study on the rescue centre. We will not be able to hold enough meetings. With four meetings starting in mid-September, we would complete the study in mid-October. I don't think that's feasible. We should perhaps propose a new amendment or a new date.

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, go ahead.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): I think that we could suspend the current study to undertake this other one. I don't think that would be a problem.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Dionne Labelle?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): I'm fine, actually.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Trottier?

Mr. Bernard Trottier: We would need a motion to suspend an ongoing study. However, I don't see a motion to that effect. Consequently, I think we have to continue our current study.

The Chair: We are now discussing Mr. Godin's amendment.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: But another motion was proposed to suspend the study on immersion.

The Chair: Moving another motion at this point would violate the rules. We have to deal with the amendment that is before the committee.

[English]

We're on the debate on the amendment, and the only way we can move to a new motion is if we dispose of the amendment. We can dispose of the main motion either as amended or not amended, and then frankly at that point we're on to the next motion from Monsieur Godin. He has given notice. That's the order in which we're going to consider this.

If you want to amend the main motion after we dispose of this... If we dispose of this amendment and then you introduce an amendment to the main motion that would call for the suspension of the other study. That's fine, but you can't present another motion at this point.

Mr. Chisu—

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, a member on the other side suggested that we suspend the other study.

Is that in order, or are you saying that's out of order?

The Chair: That's out of order.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, so that's off the table for the time being.

It would require a motion, not from Mr. Trottier, but from the person who made it.

The Chair: It would either require an amendment to the main motion under consideration, or a new motion to be made after the other two motions have been disposed of.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): I want to have a clarification.

The amendment on the table is about changing the date, right?

The Chair: That's right. The amendment in front of us right now is to replace before—

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Is it to change Tuesday, May 15 for today's date?

The Chair: No.

The amendment in front of us is to replace “September 30, 2012” with “October 15, 2013”.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Okay.

What about the motion, the title, or—?

• (1545)

The Chair: Everything else is as is.

We're on debate on the amendment in front of us. You can speak in favour of the amendment or against the amendment.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I will speak against the amendment.

When was the closure done for the rescue sub-centre? Is it already effective? Was it closed? What was the date? I don't understand the significance of the date here.

If we are changing October 13, what is the new date?

What was the new date in the amendment...October what?

The Chair: October 15.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: October 15, 2013.

That is not really pertaining to the language issue. I think it is a technical issue. I don't see any real advance to bilingualism and so on, with the closing of the marine rescue sub-centre.

Where is that? Is it bilingual? Is it not bilingual? I don't understand how it pertains to this committee. If somebody could explain it to me, I might eventually agree, but I need further explanation of why this has been brought forward in this committee when it is not pertaining to bilingualism.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

This does not concern....

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This does not concern the amendment. The purpose of the amendment is to change the date. I don't know whether the member listened to what I said or not, but he should get his facts straight. I apologize, but we have been talking about it for long enough.

The Chair: Okay.

[*English*]

All right.

Mr. Chisu, do you have anything further to add about the amendment?

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I'm just saying that I cannot understand why this amendment should be on the same date, October, and it is not November or something like this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chisu.

Monsieur Trottier.

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

I think the relevance of the date is that it takes a certain number of meetings to do an exhaustive study. I think just looking at the language component of marine rescue sub-centres is not looking at the problem holistically. If we're going to do a study, I don't think it should be this committee. Fisheries and Oceans should do it because I think you need to look at the operational requirements, things like response times and the deployment of equipment and resources. These are well beyond the scope of the official languages committee.

There is a small slice of this which has to do with language capability. But I'd say the question of marine rescue sub-centres is something that Fisheries and Oceans has to deal with, and language is one aspect of it.

The question is on how many meetings are required to actually do a study. If you're only looking at one aspect of something as important as marine rescue sub-centres.... Of course, peoples lives are involved, and I think it's important to take those things into consideration.

Can this really be done in just two or three meetings? To my colleague's point, would you maybe need six or eight meetings to do that holistic study? We could bring in the experts from Fisheries and Oceans, as well as the ministry of defence, who could talk about the operations and deployment of equipment and the work with the coast guard. That's why I think we need to discuss the date in that context.

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I know that some members were absent and have not read the motion. If we vote on the motion, will those members have the right to participate?

If the answer is yes, we will hold another debate.

[*English*]

The Chair: If there's no further debate, I'll call the vote on the amendment. I would have called the vote earlier.

Is there any further debate?

Go ahead, Mr. Trottier.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: I think it might be helpful, given some of the logistical challenges of the construction on Parliament Hill, just to do a very brief recap for our colleagues who were just able to arrive—just in terms of there being an amendment that's been proposed and also the debate that's at hand here. I can do that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I can do that too. Just so everyone is clear, we are—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Godin put forward a motion, which reads as follows:

That the committee conduct a study on the closure of the marine rescue sub-centre in Quebec City before September 30, 2012.

Then he proposed an amendment to replace the date of September 30, 2012, with the date of October 15, 2013. That's what we are currently debating.

[*English*]

We're on debate on the amendment. So if there's no further debate, then I will call the question on the amendment. If there is further debate, please raise your hands.

Yes, Mr. Williamson.

• (1550)

Mr. John Williamson: I'm just curious and this is a little embarrassing. Was this a mistake that was made by a political staffer from the opposition, or is it just a typo that was just made out of your office?

The Chair: We were given notice on this—

Mr. John Williamson: No, I mean the error on the date, 2012.

The Chair: It's not an error. We were given notice for this motion on May 15, 2012. That's why the date is the way it is.

We have a point of order from Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I raised my point of order to find out whether, if we vote now, the members who came into the room moments ago will have the right to vote?

The Chair: Yes, they have the right to vote.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They have the right to vote. In that case, Mr. Chair, I would like to speak to the motion. I raised my hand to talk about it.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have to vote on the amendment. You can't withdraw an amendment.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, I didn't say I wanted to withdraw it. I said I want to speak on it.

The Chair: Sure, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: The date was problematic. According to Mr. Trottier, we may not have the time to conduct a comprehensive study because, if it takes longer, we will have to check how the system works. This may have to do with Trenton or Halifax, as that is where the whole thing should be transferred.

As for the date, I think the committee should decide what date to go with. I don't think we had set a specific date for the other study. I have seen studies begin and stop over time. So another study would be carried out, and then the first study would be continued. In the case of the other study, the motion did not set a date; it did not state that the study should be completed without interruption. We have had similar situations in the past, so relevant jurisprudence does

exist. We can suspend a study we are conducting and decide which of the two studies is more important. We could say that the study with a deadline would become a priority. That can still be the committee's mandate.

Mr. Chair, that's all I have to say about the date.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Monsieur Gourde.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I would like to introduce a motion to sit in camera, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. All in favour?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I call for a recorded division, please.

[*English*]

The Chair: The motion is carried. You had to ask me before I got into it. I already called the vote.

We're going to go in camera.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): We haven't voted.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, we did.

Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, you asked who agreed with the motion and those people voted. I called for a recorded division, and you said that, for a recorded division, I should have put in the request earlier, but you did not ask who was in favour of the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm pretty sure I asked.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, you didn't. I cut you off before...

The Chair: Okay. All opposed?

Some hon. members: Opposed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I voted against the motion. We have not yet begun the in camera debates, and the NDP has voted against the motion.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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