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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1610)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number three of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format in public. We will be discussing committee business.

[Translation]

Because of the delay related to the votes, I am advising you that, if there is consent, we can sit until 5:45 p.m. at the latest, because there are other activities planned in this room.

We will proceed this way.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Chair, may I speak?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson: Do you need unanimous consent?

The Chair: Exactly; we need unanimous consent.

Mr. John Williamson: I can't give my consent because I'm attending other committee meetings tonight. I'm sorry.

The Chair: All right, colleague. Thank you.

So we'll be sitting until 5:30 p.m.

Mr. John Williamson: I would like to raise a quick point of order.

When it comes to raising our hand, do we physically do it in front of the screen or by using the "participant" button on the computer?

The Chair: You have to raise your hand by using the "participant" button. Thus, it will be done in order.

You will understand that there are also MPs in the room and I don't see them. It is therefore preferable to proceed this way.

[English]

I'm not going to read all of the information concerning the COVID pandemic. We did that the last session, and you already received an email concerning that.

Our clerk today is Ms. Christine Lafrance. She's here to help us.

This is our third meeting dealing with committee business.

[Translation]

Ideally, I would like to schedule our next sessions. Topics for study have been proposed. I will reserve, if you don't mind, the last 15 minutes of the meeting to prepare our strategy for the next meeting. I think that all committee members agree that after three sessions discussing the work of the committee, it would be good to start looking at these topics. If, however, at the end of this session, we have not yet dealt with the motions, the committee will decide whether it wants to complete the study in a subcommittee or come back to it later in committee.

I'll tell you why we're still discussing the work of the committee. You have received an email that explains it to you. At the last meeting, there was a desire to invite the Commissioner of Official Languages, for example. Immediately following that meeting last week, the clerk took steps to invite the commissioner to appear before us. Unfortunately, he is not available today and there was no other way to proceed. It was therefore decided to return to the committee's work to move things forward as much as possible.

Allow me to outline what we need to study now. Last week, we passed three motions: Ms. Lambropoulos' motion on education, Ms. Lattanzio's motion on the pandemic, and Mr. Blaney's motion on the commissioner's appearance no later than November 24. All three motions were adopted.

There are five notices of motion from the last meeting that we did not discuss. There's Mr. Blaney's motion to invite the minister about the budget; the second motion is that it be televised and the third is about the pandemic. There are also Mr. Beaulieu's motions on WE Charity and on French in Quebec, if I can put it that way. That's eight motions already. In addition, there are three other motions that have been tabled: one by Mr. Beaulieu on French, one by Ms. Ashton on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, and a third by Ms. Lalonde on official languages.

In addition, two other motions were filed, but late. As everyone knows, motions must be filed 48 hours in advance. These are Mr. Blaney's motions. The first one proposes to receive the commissioner on November 27, and the second one proposes to invite the minister to speak about the projects. The last thing is the main estimates, which must also be discussed.

In total, colleagues, there are 13 motions, three of which have been accepted.

When the last meeting ended, Mr. Beaulieu had the floor. I suggest that we discuss Mr. Blaney's motion concerning the commissioner, the one he had first tabled, proposing that the commissioner appear no later than November 24.

We have contacted the commissioner. He sent us an email today, saying that he would be available after the week of November 24, if we still meet on Thursday. We insisted and he let us know that he would be available to meet with us over the break week. I would like us to discuss this possibility first, because that motion was passed. Then we will be able to debate the other motions.

Is this formula suitable to you?

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor.

• (1615)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Chair, essentially, I find it pragmatic.

Indeed, we look forward to receiving the Commissioner of Official Languages and to knowing when he will be coming. The spirit of the motion is that we receive him as soon as possible. We have already met during a recess week, and since we would be meeting just once, I think that's fine.

We only have one hour to do our job, so I agree with you. That would give us a first activity to put on the agenda. I hope that we can do it in the last 15 minutes and that by then we will be able to draw up our roadmap.

The Chair: Thank you.

According to the email I received, the commissioner will be available on Friday, November 13, from 10:30 a.m. to noon or after 2 p.m. So it's up to us to decide.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): In fact, I forgot to put my hand down. I agree with what has been proposed.

The Chair: Fine.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to try very hard to speak slowly, because apparently there is a problem with my device.

I may be out of order, Mr. Chair, but I raised my hand when you were referring to the subcommittee. You advised us last week that there was really no room for a subcommittee and that if we wanted to do a formal subcommittee, we would have to cut the time of the regular committee. I'd like an update on that.

Is there a way to meet outside, for instance, by common agreement among the parties represented on the committee, even if it is informal? This would allow us to save time, plan our motions and talk about them.

As you said, we don't have a lot of time to debate in committee, and we would save a lot of time if we could use a subcommittee, because that's what it's all about. I would just like you to tell me if,

legally speaking, we could meet as a subcommittee informally to bring more fluidity to the debate on our motions.

• (1620)

The Chair: I discussed things with the clerk. As indicated, in the context of a pandemic, if dates are announced for subcommittee meetings, they must be chosen from among those dates. These dates are Monday to Friday.

Since the new calendar has not yet been published, we do not have the necessary information and cannot immediately reserve a time slot for the subcommittee. If we can't get one, then we will have to debate in committee, which is why we have chosen this way of proceeding.

Mr. René Arseneault: So there is no way that representatives from each party can agree to meet, for example, through a Zoom conference?

The Chair: As you know, party representatives are not the only ones who attend subcommittee meetings. There is also the staff who accompany them. In addition, you then have to come back to the committee for approval.

Having said that, I can assure you that the clerk is doing everything possible and that we are on the lookout. As soon as the calendar is published, we will reserve a time slot to hold a subcommittee meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I will continue in the same vein as Mr. Arseneault. If we had wanted to hold a subcommittee meeting, it would have been possible to do so at 3:30 p.m. and hold the committee meeting shortly after.

As far as staff members are concerned, everyone can attend meetings via Zoom, can't they?

Why would we be required to attend subcommittee meetings in person?

The Chair: Could you repeat that?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I asked if the clerk, the analyst and all those usually present could participate through Zoom. If they could participate virtually, it would make things easier.

Do they have to be present in a room?

The Chair: No. In fact, the problem is not the room, but the availability of our staff.

Madam Clerk, could you say a few words about this?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Lafrance): In fact, resources are currently limited. Committees were invited to use their time slot to hold subcommittee meetings if they wished.

Having said that, sometimes there is availability, but you should check the calendar. As a general rule, if a subcommittee wants to meet, it should take the committee time slot that has been established by the whips.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

I see that Mrs. Lalonde would like to speak.

You have the floor, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Before addressing the points made by Mr. Beaulieu and my colleague Mr. Arsenault, I would like clarification regarding the possibility of inviting the commissioner, the hours of availability and the date of Friday, November 13. What slots are available?

Actually, I didn't quite get that, Madam Clerk. Could you tell me what's physically possible for us on November 13, about a possible meeting during the break week?

• (1625)

The Chair: As I mentioned, in the email we received today, the commissioner tells us that he will be available on November 13, from 10:30 a.m. to noon and after 2:00 p.m.

Madam Clerk, do you know whether the room and all necessary equipment would be available on that date if the committee chooses that day to meet with the commissioner?

The Clerk: I'll have to check, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Very well.

Are committee members willing to meet with the commissioner over the November 13 break week? Are there any objections? If yes, raise your hand.

If I understand correctly, we all agree on the idea of receiving the commissioner on Friday, November 13. We still have to determine the time. It would be more likely that we would be able to meet him at 2:00 p.m. I suggest that we leave this in the hands of the clerk, who will send us a notice of meeting as soon as possible for this meeting on Friday, November 13.

Are there any objections?

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Could the clerk let us know today whether the room is available?

I apologize for my insistence, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk: Mrs. Lalonde, I wish I could predict the future for you.

Actually, I just sent a message and I'm told that I have to check with committee administration. So I don't have an answer.

The Chair: We have just clarified that there will be a meeting on November 13, but there will surely be one next week as well. We'll make arrangements today to determine what will happen at the next meeting. That's why I reserve the right to keep the last 15 minutes of the meeting if we don't come to an agreement. We need to know now what study we are going to undertake at the next meeting, rather than continuing with committee or subcommittee work. It will be up to the committee members to decide.

I've painted a picture of the situation. Once again, we are left with 10 motions and the main estimates, which must be tabled by November 27.

As I mentioned, Mr. Beaulieu had presented a number of notices of motion and he had the floor at the end of the last meeting.

Mr. Beaulieu, we're listening

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: At the last meeting, we had started to discuss a motion. Are we going to continue to discuss it? It relates to the WE Charity file. Otherwise, I have another motion that I have amended; I had not yet introduced it. The second motion is the right one.

The Chair: I checked with the clerk and the motions that were not adopted are all notices of motion. You have the floor and it's up to you to decide which motion you want to discuss with the committee members.

• (1630)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We had started to discuss the first motion about WE Charity. The second motion is the one you just received, which has been amended. I am not tabling the other motion, as it is almost the same. I believe the clerk has received it.

The Chair: I'd like to clarify something.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My second motion deals with French in Quebec, but I have modified it to include the francophone and Acadian communities as well as English in Quebec.

The Chair: Okay.

As I said, you can choose which motion you want to consider. I understand that you want to start with the motion that talks about WE Charity. Of the eight motions we've looked at, there are some that overlap. We could group them together or split them up, or we could discuss them in the subcommittee.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Shall I submit the second motion?

The Chair: It's up to you to decide.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I already submitted the first motion. Could the clerk please advise me on the procedure to follow? Do I move both motions at the same time or do I start with the first one?

The Chair: No, it must be done one motion at a time.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I will therefore move the motion on the WE Charity file again. It is about having a single central committee, rather than several special committees, to study the dossier.

We recommend:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages recommend to the House the creation of a special committee to hold hearings to examine all aspects of the design and creation of the Canada Student Service Grant, including those relating to the study to review the safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest in federal government expenditure policies; government spending, WE Charity and the Canada Student Service Grant; the government's decision to select WE Charity, an anglophone organization, to implement the Canada Student Service Grant (CSSG); and the administration of the Canada Student Service Grant and WE Charity;

1. That the committee be composed of 11 members, of which five shall be government members, four shall be from the official opposition, one shall be from the Bloc Québécois and one from the New Democratic Party;

2. That changes in the membership of the committee shall be effective immediately after notification by the whip has been filed with the Clerk of the House;[...]

I can read the rest, but that's basically it. The goal is to create a special committee that will take over all the work of the committees on all the issues that affect the Canada Student Volunteer Grant and WE Charity.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Before I answer you, we have two raised hands.

Mr. Blaney, go ahead.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I would like is for us to have an efficient meeting. We know the positions of the various political parties, and I am open to them.

I want us to hold a vote as quickly as possible, so that we can then move on to committee business, with the objective of establishing our roadmap. We have a planned meeting, potentially that of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Concerning Mr. Beaulieu's second motion on the study of French, we saw that it was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne and there is consensus on it. I think that we have a very nice motion to work on.

I will stop here because I would rather talk about the other motion instead of this one on WE Charity. I think it has attracted a lot of attention, and we are in favour of it.

What I want is for us to be able to move forward and for the committee to set out a roadmap.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Ms. Lattanzio, go ahead.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sorry, but I would like to ask you to examine the motion's admissibility.

We know that the same motion has been moved in a number of committees. The only changing aspect is the preamble. It was amended to suit each committee, be it the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics or the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I can say with certainty that I have seen this motion, as it was moved in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, of which I am a member. The preamble is the only

thing that has changed. Since this motion has already been studied in a committee, I don't see how we can move it again in this committee, for a number of reasons.

First, a position has already been established on that motion. Second, if each committee makes amendments, the result will be different for every committee. What would we do with that? Third, what makes no sense to me is for this motion to be debated in the Senate. It's always the same motion coming back. What is more, I am wondering whether the wording of this motion is within the purview of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

So it seems to me, Mr. Chair, that you should determine whether this motion is admissible or not. I would like you to look into this.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

I will say right away to the committee members that, according to the exchange I have had with officials, especially the clerk, this position is problematic, and I will tell you why.

Standing Order 108(2) states the following:

...the standing committees...be empowered to study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operation of the department or departments of government which are assigned to them...

Moreover, Standing Order 108(3)(f), which specifically affects the Standing Committee on Official Languages, specifies the following:

(f) Official Languages shall include, among other matters, the review of and report on official languages policies and programs, including reports of the Commissioner of Official Languages, which shall be deemed permanently referred to the committee immediately after they are laid upon the table;

Finally, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* stipulates the following:

Like all other powers of standing committees, the power to report is limited to issues that follow in their mandate...

Mr. Beaulieu, this is my decision concerning the motion you have moved on WE Charity.

Before going to other committee members on my list, I would like to ask Mr. Beaulieu what his reaction to the ruling I just made is.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would say that my motion is consistent with the committee's mandate, as it talks about official languages relative to WE Charity. We are proposing a central committee. Our committee can suggest that a report be done on that. I don't see why it couldn't do it.

• (1640)

The Chair: Okay, I understand what you are saying, but...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My understanding of Mr. Blaney's comments is that we should hold a vote as quickly as possible. But you are telling me that my motion is not admissible.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Can we vote on that?

The Chair: According to my ruling, your motion is not admissible because it recommends certain actions to the House, while our official mandate, as clearly stipulated in Standing Orders 108(2) and 108(3), is to report on an issue, and not to make recommendations.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Can we vote on it?

The Chair: I have ruled that the motion is not admissible. However, Mr. Beaulieu, you can challenge the chair's ruling. In that case, the committee will have to vote on the chair's ruling. Depending on the circumstances, we will either move on to other motions or come back to the discussion on this motion and put it to a vote.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: With all due respect, I challenge your ruling, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Before we go any further, I will give the floor to the four people on the list.

Ms. Lattanzio, go ahead.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: No, it's okay, Mr. Chair. I already spoke. I will take away my raised hand.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

So we have something to debate.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Arseneault. I will ask the clerk, once he has spoken....

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I don't think this can be the topic of debate. Mr. Beaulieu is challenging the chair's ruling, but that cannot be debated. We have to hold a vote.

The Chair: You are entirely correct, Mr. Dalton. The clerk just told me that the challenging of the chair's ruling cannot be debated. So we have to vote on the ruling I just made. We will proceed to a vote.

The chair's ruling has been challenged. We would like to know which members of the committee are in favour of that challenge and which ones are against it.

The Clerk: Here is the motion:

That the ruling of the chair be sustained.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The motion to sustain the ruling of the chair has been rejected. So we are returning to Mr. Beaulieu's motion on WE Charity. The debate is reopened.

I have four names on my list, and a number of others are being added to it. The first to take the floor will be Mr. Duguid.

[*English*]

Mr. Duguid, the floor is yours.

• (1645)

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will have more to say. This is more in the way of a point of order.

With some of our speakers, I'm hearing both official languages at the same time, so it does make a difference what channel they put themselves on.

I'm hearing you perfectly, but for Ms. Lattanzio, for instance, I was hearing both languages at the same time. I believe my Zoom is updated, so I don't think the problem is at my end, but of course, I will check after our meeting.

I'm ready for what I think will be a long debate, unfortunately, on this matter that has been talked to death on the floor in various committees. It's really unfortunate that we're not able to get on with the important business of protecting both official languages in this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duguid.

If you have that problem again, just let us know. We'll verify with the technical support if there is a problem.

Mr. Généreux is next.

[*Translation*]

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

On several occasions over the past few years, the minister in charge of official languages, Ms. Mélanie Joly, told us that the committee was independent. So I respect her position that the committee is independent and that it can choose its own debates and fights.

We have been unable to debate this issue since we returned to Parliament. But we now have the opportunity to determine once and for all what happened. I remind you that this is, after all, a contract nearing \$1 billion where francophones were explicitly forgotten.

All governments must be accountable to Parliament, and we must ensure that something like this would not happen again. As parliamentarians sitting on a committee like the official languages committee, it is our role to make sure of this.

The fact that the committee is managing not to debate this motion is contrary to the spirit of our role of parliamentarians and representatives of our respective regions. I sincerely believe that we must get to the bottom of this issue, so that this would never happen again.

I hope that we will be able to vote on this as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

The next person on the list is Ms. Lambropoulos. She will be followed by Ms. Lattanzio, Ms. Ashton and Mrs. Lalonde.

Go ahead, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At our last meeting, we discussed the WE Charity issue for two hours. We explained why we did not think it was a study we should undertake in the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I am a teacher from Montreal, and I have personally dealt with WE Charity in Quebec. The organization worked with my students to take them to a third-world country to build a bridge. So it is false to say that it is not for Quebeckers. That organization exists in Quebec, as well, and it has a French name. It held a conference fully in French, in Montreal, which attracted hundreds of individuals. I have brought this up several times.

I know that the opposition members have not dealt with WE Charity, as I don't think anyone here has had an opportunity to work with young people in the past.

• (1650)

[*English*]

In my experience, it's definitely an organization that has worked in both the French sector and the English sector and across the province of Quebec.

In Montreal, as I mentioned, they had only French speakers. It's actually public information. You can check their Facebook page. You can watch a three-hour long conference that took place in French, with French music and French everything—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: The member said that she already brought this up. I think this is actually the second or the third time. That's all good and well, but our time is limited and we have many things to do. So I suggest to all committee members to keep their comments much shorter.

In addition, I would like to point out that I am also a teacher.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton, but that is not a point of order. All committee members can speak. We are debating the motion. This is not the first meeting where we give it time, and we all want to set a schedule. As I was saying earlier, I will set aside the last 15 minutes for us to plan the next meeting.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you can finish your comments, please.

[*English*]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dalton, I appreciate the fact that you were a teacher, but you were not a teacher in Quebec. With my experience in Quebec and in French immersion schools—that is, with English schools that are French immersion—I have dealt with the organization in French, and that is the point being discussed. I think it's a very relevant point—probably one of the most relevant we'll hear. No offence, but it's just given my experience working with them personally.

As I mentioned, you can check out UNIS on their Facebook page, and you can see the three-hour long conference that took place purely in French to help French youth get involved. The argument that this is an anglophone only organization that does not do anything in French and does not reach the French population is not a good one because it's false.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

We have Ms. Lattanzio, Ms. Ashton, Mrs. Lalonde and Mr. Beaulieu on the list.

Ms. Lattanzio, the floor is yours.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have read my colleague's motion. It is pretty long. I'm wondering whether we should consider only the aspects of the motion corresponding to the mandate of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

As I told you earlier, the same motion has been moved in various committees. Since your ruling was overturned, Mr. Chair, as it was deemed that those elements did come under the committee's mandate, I was wondering whether my colleague Mr. Beaulieu could guide us by telling us exactly what paragraphs he is referring to when he says that it is part of this committee's mandate.

I will comment again after Mr. Beaulieu clarifies this.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Mr. Généreux, it is your turn now.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, I talked about this earlier, but I would like to add a comment to Ms. Lambropoulos's answer.

She may have had francophone experiences in Montreal with WE Charity. Let's give our colleagues an opportunity to come explain to us what those experiences were. I have personally never had any. I had not even heard about WE Charity before this scandal. We could give them an opportunity to come explain to the Standing Committee on Official Languages how they dealt with this case. We could also make sure that the program is available both in English and in French, not only in Quebec, but across Canada.

That's all I have to add for the time being.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Ms. Ashton, go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to reiterate the request made by other colleagues to hold a vote as soon as possible. We have many motions to discuss. I think we have heard everyone's perspective.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be very frank with you, my fellow colleagues. I'm disappointed. I'm very disappointed. Before I came to this committee, I heard about the serious work being carried out on official languages. I was told that this committee was here to address issues that show our shared commitment, as parliamentarians, to making real progress on official languages.

Mr. Beaulieu, with all due respect, you had in your hands other motions that I think could have proposed work that I would have liked to pursue with you to promote the minority languages, meaning French outside Quebec and English in Quebec. We could have worked closely together to ensure that, from our perspective, good progress is made.

Although the chair ruled that the motion was out of order, his decision was overturned. My fellow colleagues, you made a democratic choice. However, I'm truly disappointed in the path that you took.

I think that everyone agrees that the topic in this motion has been addressed in several committees throughout the summer. Discussions have also been held in the House regarding these issues. In addition, you had the chance to discuss how you felt about the government's decision to enter into a contract with WE.

I represent the people of Orleans, the most beautiful community in Canada. As you know, Mr. Généreux, when I speak with them, I obviously talk about the pandemic, health and education. People call me every day because their business is closed or about to close. Mr. Beaulieu's motion, which we're debating today, on this beautiful Thursday, really makes me think about my role as a parliamentarian on a committee that I think exists to make progress on official languages issues.

I feel a bit confused today knowing that we'll be debating this issue. Mr. Blaney, you're the first to say that you want to make progress on the work and set up a working group.

You know that this issue will be debated elsewhere by parliamentarians. I myself had the opportunity to make my case before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics when I participated in that committee this summer.

The worst part is that Mr. Beaulieu's entire motion is nothing more than a fishing expedition on the part of several departments and ministers. In this committee, we talk about official languages. We know that French is losing ground across Canada and that the English-speaking community in Quebec is facing challenges.

We had the opportunity today to rise above partisanship. Unfortunately, my fellow colleagues, you found a way to raise this issue again in a committee that I was told didn't work in this manner. I heard that the parliamentarians on this committee looked at the bigger picture and firmly believed that the Official Languages Act and this committee—

● (1700)

Mr. Marc Dalton: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, I think that you're responsible for controlling the debate, given that our time is limited. You're in charge of monitoring how long someone takes to speak, so that

people don't keep talking for four, five, six or ten minutes. We don't have much time.

I want us to proceed with the vote, please.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Well, I—

The Chair: I just want to respond to Mr. Dalton's point of order.

As I said earlier, we're debating the motion. As long as the comments relate to the motion, the members have the right to speak.

I must remind you that there are currently five people on the list and that it's already 5 p.m. As I requested, at 5:15 p.m., I'll stop the debate to say what we'll be doing at our next meeting.

Mrs. Lalonde, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dalton, my fellow colleague, I understand your impatience and resentment. However, I have the right to speak like every other member. I have the right to talk about the motion that your colleague Mr. Beaulieu moved today, and I'll do so.

I'm disappointed to hear my colleague Mr. Dalton say that he wants to proceed with the vote. We could have discussed a dozen other motions today that—I'm saying this for Mr. Blaney's benefit—would have probably enabled us to start working on issues that we all consider important. Ms. Lattanzio had an excellent motion.

Let's go back to Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

What hurts me the most about all this is that the students were penalized. Not one student was able to benefit from the government's commitment to help students in Canada over the summer and in the weeks that followed. Yet I believe that parliamentarians in other caucuses also made this commitment.

While the government took many other measures, this opportunity was unfortunately missed. I want to remind my fellow colleagues that it was missed for partisan reasons. People wanted to go fishing for scandal when there was none. This contract was never fulfilled, and the students were penalized.

People, especially students, call my constituency office every day to talk about the health and safety of Canadians in the midst of the pandemic. They also talk about business people who need help. Meanwhile, not only are we persisting with a motion that has nothing to do with our committee, we're still showing partisanship. It's appalling that we're still talking about this motion after spending an entire summer doing so.

Sorry for taking all this time, Mr. Chair. However, I had to get my point across.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I wanted to ask for the vote. However, I gather that we aren't allowed to do so.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This means that, if we oppose a motion, we can talk about it endlessly and block everything. Democracy is beautiful.

That's all I wanted to say. I think that everyone is ready to vote. Let's proceed with the vote, so that we can move on and address the real issues.

• (1705)

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

I must respond the same way that I responded to Mr. Dalton earlier. When a committee is debating a motion, as long as a member wants to speak about the motion, they have the right to do so.

It's 5:05 p.m. and there are four people left on the list. We hope to be able to hear from everyone and make a decision. We'll stop at 5:15 p.m.

Mr. Duguid, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Chair, do I have the floor?

The Chair: You do.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would just repeat what some of my colleagues have said. This is—

Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes. It's not so clear, but if the technicians say it's okay, you can go on.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Can the interpreters hear me, Mr. Chair?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Madam Clerk, could you check this quickly with the technicians, please?

The Clerk: The interpreters are unable to do their job.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I don't want to take someone else's turn. I just want to say that you can try to close your video tool. This saves a great deal of data and you can still hear the person speaking. The audio also becomes much more smooth at that point. If this approach complies with the rules and satisfies everyone, we could try it out.

The Chair: Mr. Duguid, do one last test. Otherwise, while we wait for the technicians to fix this, we'll need to continue.

Mr. Duguid, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hopefully, I'm much better looking when I'm not seen.

I would like to reiterate what some of my colleagues have already said, which is that we're wasting time, and we have no time to waste.

I am very proud that 17% of the population in my Winnipeg South riding are bilingual, and French is the first language of 5% of

them. A number of us received a fabulous presentation the other day that the French language is declining, particularly in western Canada. We need to get to work to find solutions to reinforce the Official Languages Act, which we are going to review shortly.

I was reading in my local newspaper this morning—which I know Ms. Ashton reads regularly—that because of the pandemic, we have a shortage of French immersion and francophone teachers and classes have been cancelled, and have not been able to start in some cases.

In western Canada, I hope some of our Conservative friends will speak with Premier Kenney, who is defunding Campus Saint-Jean, which is a very important institution for keeping the French language alive in that province. We have some big challenges ahead of us, particularly in western Canada where I come from, so again I appeal to Ms. Ashton particularly....

May I say I am disappointed, like Marie-France Lalonde, that right at the get-go, the chair was challenged and our committee is likely going to be rife with dysfunction. It is a really unfortunate way to start when there are many good motions on the table from all sides of the House.

I urge my colleagues to let us work together and get something done for the official languages of this country.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The next speakers are Ms. Lambropoulos, Mr. Arseneault, Ms. Lattanzio, Mrs. Lalonde and Mr. Dalton.

Ms. Lambropoulos, the floor is yours.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Généreux said that I know WE from experience and that WE representatives should have the opportunity to appear before the committee.

The motion before us isn't about this at all. There isn't any connection. I wouldn't mind inviting WE representatives as part of another study, but this isn't what we're voting on today.

Perhaps we should all reread the motion before we proceed with a vote, in order to make sure that we know what we're doing today. I just wanted to raise this issue, as I've done several times, and say once again that 948 francophone and anglophone teachers from 400 schools in Quebec have worked with WE Charity and UNIS.

When the Conservatives tabled their motion this summer, they ended up changing it after realizing that the motion wasn't fair at all and that it was almost a lie to say that only one community was affected, and not both.

• (1710)

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

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

My fellow members from all political backgrounds who make up this great and beautiful committee—I'm speaking to Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Généreux and Mr. Blaney, my opposition colleagues from Quebec—there seems to be a serious decline in the French language in Quebec. Mr. Beaulieu placed great value on a very important motion on this topic, a motion that we asked to work on. Do we really want to hear the same old thing again with this motion? Is that what we want to accomplish? Is it that important? We aren't naive. No one here is naive. Is it responsible to sneak a motion through the back door when the motion hasn't been accepted in the House of Commons? Is this more important than talking about Campus Saint-Jean, which, as my colleagues said, is in danger in Alberta? We almost lost the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto as a result of the provincial Conservatives' actions, and the Conservative Party in Ottawa remained silent about the matter. Let's all remember this.

Since I've been a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, it has always been 99% non-partisan. Does the motion on WE Charity, a hypothetical question from an organization that's no longer on the scene about whether it violated language rights in Canada, take precedence over everything that I just brought up, not to mention everything else?

During the pandemic, we heard about the lack of information in both official languages on drugs, dosages, and instructions for devices or equipment that we received. Does the scandal surrounding WE Charity, which we've discussed in I don't know how many committees, overlap with all this? Is it really worth it? Is this motion worth more than Mr. Beaulieu's second motion, which I find very valuable because the motion is of national interest across the country and it specifically concerns the decline of French in Quebec, a Quebec that also has two official languages?

Above all, I don't want to repeat what Ms. Lambropoulos said to my colleague, Mr. Généreux. However, for those who didn't fully understand Mr. Beaulieu's motion—and this brings me to my second point—it doesn't suggest that we address this issue in the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Rather, the motion is asking the House of Commons to agree to the creation of another committee, a third party committee that will review this matter.

This brings me to my question, which may be somewhat similar to my colleague Ms. Lattanzio's question. Does a standing committee such as ours have the authority, under the rules of the House of Commons, to ask the House of Commons to create another committee? That's my first question. Do we have the necessary power and jurisdiction to do this?

• (1715)

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, please excuse me. I must stop you and speak to all committee members since it's already 5:15 p.m.

I want to know whether the committee has reached an agreement regarding the preparation of the next meeting. We must decide whether to address the motions in a subcommittee or whether we should all discuss the motions in the committee, as we're doing today as part of a meeting on committee business.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, I'm getting there.

The third option is to say that two motions have already been adopted. The clerk needs time to arrange a meeting.

Mr. Dalton, go ahead with your point of order.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I want to move a motion to continue our meeting until 6:30 p.m. We've wasted a great deal of time. We have many very important motions to address. I agree with my colleagues on the other side, the Liberals, about the fact that there are several motions. I also agree with the WE motion. This motion is only one of several motions. We shouldn't take the next few weeks and months to debate the motion. We must continue our work.

The Chair: At the start of the meeting, I said that, depending on availability, we could stay later than the scheduled 5:30 p.m. adjournment time by up to 15 minutes. However, this proposal wasn't accepted. This motion requires the unanimous consent of the committee members. Mr. Williamson couldn't stay later than 5:30 p.m., given his responsibilities. At this time, a motion is under consideration.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Marc Dalton: We can still change this, since we didn't vote to adjourn at 5:30 pm. We can vote to continue.

The Chair: I asked for unanimous consent. Mr. Dalton, the point is that we can't debate two motions at the same time. We're currently debating a motion, and we must finish considering the motion before we can move on to something else.

For now, I'll ask for the consent of all committee members to take the remaining 12 minutes to plan our next meeting. If they don't agree, we'll continue the debate on the motion before the committee.

Does anyone object to us taking the last 12 minutes to give the committee instructions regarding the business that it will address at the next meeting?

I see hands raised, so there seem to be some objections. Could the members who object please let us know.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Excuse me, Mr. Chair. What are you asking us to agree or disagree with?

The Chair: I'm asking the committee members whether they agree to spend the last 10 minutes preparing for the next meeting so that the clerk can make the necessary arrangements.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: That's fine with me.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, I want to speak in my capacity as vice-chair of the committee. Although I didn't support your decision, I still have confidence in you.

My suggestion to the committee members would be to hold a subcommittee meeting, since it may be easier to have four rather than 12 people debating. I think we agree that we should move forward. I heard Mr. Arseneault express considerable support for a motion by Mr. Beaulieu that hasn't been adopted yet.

With the agreement of the committee members, perhaps we could agree on an agenda for consideration in a subcommittee. If we want to debate motions for hours, we can do so. However, at least we'll have a road map and we can move forward. I'd even say that we could have a good time and make progress. I've heard about some important issues, including, of course, the decline of the French language. Some very worthwhile motions have been proposed. I think that the committee is looking forward to making progress.

That's why we wanted to meet as a subcommittee before this meeting, in order to come up with a report and recommendations. In the end, we couldn't do so because of Internet issues. However, if we need to take another week to do this, let's do it. In any event, we'll be working overtime, since we'll be meeting with the Commissioner of Official Languages during our break week.

This was my privilege as vice-chair. I'll give you back the floor, Mr. Chair.

• (1720)

The Chair: Okay. I completely understand you, Mr. Vice-Chair.

I want to assure all committee members that, if a date is available for the subcommittee before the next meeting, we'll be the first to let you know, so that we can keep our usual meetings. However, if there isn't any date available, our next meeting will be the committee meeting.

Are there any more comments regarding this subcommittee proposal?

Since we branched off for a bit, I'll ask Ms. Lattanzio, Mrs. Lalonde, Ms. Lambropoulos and Mr. Blaney, who had already raised their hands, to withdraw them. If you want to speak about this matter, please raise your hand now to take the floor.

Ms. Lattanzio, the floor is yours.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I took note of Mr. Blaney's comments.

Mr. Blaney, I hope that you aren't bothered by the fact that we want to speak today. I know that you would prefer a subcommittee meeting. However, please know that I'm very interested in these motions. I look forward to debating these worthwhile motions, which have been introduced and which are still before us. I'm very eager to discuss them.

Mr. Chair, I asked Mr. Beaulieu to clarify which paragraphs of his motion he considers appropriate for this committee. He hasn't provided this clarification yet. I'd like you to ask him to provide this clarification so that I can make comments and recommendations.

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, we've digressed. We are discussing the next meeting, so that may be why Mr. Beaulieu hasn't been able to comment.

Now we'll hear from Mr. Beaulieu in connection with the next meeting.

You may go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If I understand correctly, you'd like to take a moment to discuss the next meeting. Mr. Blaney suggested holding a subcommittee meeting. Has a meeting been scheduled for next Thursday?

The Chair: I'll have to check with the clerk. I don't have the date yet. I am not sure whether the calendar has come out yet.

Madam Clerk, can you check for us?

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, the calendar for next week isn't out yet.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If there is a meeting next Thursday and no other time slots are available, we could also consider having the subcommittee meet first.

The Chair: Yes, it's still possible to have the subcommittee meet first. Immediately afterwards, the subcommittee would report to the committee, as appropriate. That's an option.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I thought of this but didn't mention it. Would it have been possible for the subcommittee to meet today at 3:30, or four o'clock, actually, because of the vote, and, then, for the committee to meet a bit later? That way, both meetings could have taken place and the groundwork could have been laid before the committee met. Would that have been a possibility?

The Chair: No.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I have a point of order.

The Chair: In light of the circumstances surrounding the vote, we always have to check whether staff are available.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have a point of order. You may go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I don't mean to contradict you or the clerk, but right now, according to next week's calendar—which is distributed to all the parliamentarians—the committee is supposed to meet on Thursday, November 5. The schedule I received indicates that our group would meet at 3:30 next Thursday. I think it went out to everyone, because I got it.

Again, Madam Clerk, I'm not trying to impose, but I just want to make sure that this was approved by the clerks and the whips' offices. That was my understanding as far as our schedule for next week goes.

That means we have a meeting next Thursday at 3:30, Mr. Beaulieu.

• (1725)

The Chair: All right.

Thank you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I just received the same information.

The Chair: A lot of information is going around. I assume that, if we can meet during the break week, we'll be able to meet next week.

If, next Thursday, we don't have any dates for the subcommittee to meet, how do you wish to proceed? Should we allocate a half-hour or an hour for the subcommittee to meet and report to the committee, and then have the committee carry on with its meeting?

Mr. Arseneault raised his hand, as did Ms. Lambropoulos.

Mr. Arseneault, you may go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I forgot to un-tick the option.

The Chair: Ms. Lambropoulos, it's over to you.

After that, it will be Ms. Ashton's turn.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: On this motion and all those the committee intends to examine, I think it's important for all members to be present. I have much to say on this motion and others and I'd like an opportunity to say it, so I disagree with referring this to the subcommittee.

My preference is to be part of the discussion, since I'm not on the subcommittee. I'm sure other members on this side have a lot to say as well. For that reason, I don't think it should go to the subcommittee for study. The discussion should continue at the committee level.

The Chair: For everyone's information, the clerk just confirmed that we will have a meeting on Thursday, November 5, at 3:30.

I would also like to clarify that the subcommittee does not decide on which studies the committee undertakes. It simply provides a means of working together to advance the discussion as quickly as possible. The committee is the one that makes the decisions on motions, determining whether to adopt them and move forward or not.

Ms. Ashton, you may go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to say that I agree with what you said. I think it's a very efficient way to do things. I feel as though we've wasted a bit of time in the few meetings we've had. It is important to have discussions, yes, but subcommittees exist for a reason. Let's make use of the subcommittee so we can discuss the crux of the issues we all care about.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

If no other dates are available for the subcommittee to meet before Thursday, I suggest that the subcommittee meet for the first hour of next Thursday's time slot and that the committee take the second hour.

We have time for one last comment, and it will be Mr. Beaulieu's.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I agree with you.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

Members of the committee, Madam Clerk, I acknowledge the will of the committee. Let me say once again that we will do our best to schedule a subcommittee meeting before Thursday, so keep an eye on your inbox.

If we can't find a time for the subcommittee to meet, next Thursday at 3:30, we will begin our study. The first hour or half-hour will be set aside for the subcommittee to meet; it will depend because we don't know whether any votes will be held. The subcommittee's job will be to review all of these motions and determine whether they will be put on notice. It can recommend that certain motions be combined and that others not be considered by the committee; it can also propose a work schedule so the committee can begin its studies as soon as possible.

I want to respect the committee members' will. I know everyone has other commitments; the room isn't available and neither is Mr. Williamson. We all have packed schedules.

I'd like to thank the members once again for today's meeting. I hope that, next time, we will be able to undertake our studies and turn our focus to an issue we all care about.

[*English*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, can I just move that the debate be now adjourned, please?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Madam Clerk, the floor is yours.

I didn't catch who, but someone moved that the meeting be adjourned.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: That was me.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Is there unanimous consent, or would you prefer that a recorded division be held?

There seems to be agreement from both the committee members here, in the room, and those participating via Zoom.

(Motion agreed to)

All that's left to do is adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: I see no objections. The meeting is therefore adjourned.

Thank you everyone, and have a good evening. Thank you, as well, to the interpreters, the technical staff and everyone who helped make this meeting possible.

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