



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 006

Thursday, November 19, 2020

Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, November 19, 2020

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

The committee is meeting for the purpose of committee business.

[*Translation*]

With regard to a speaking list, the clerk and I will do the best we can to respect speakers' speaking rights.

Madam Clerk, would you please tell us whether there are any replacements and which members of the committee are here in the meeting room?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Josée Ménard): We are pleased to see Mr. Blaney with us here in the room.

There are no replacements today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have six meetings left after this one because we will be sitting twice a week until the Christmas break. Today is our sixth meeting for the purpose of committee business. We will try to give priority to one or more studies so the clerk has the time to summon witnesses.

For the moment, we have adopted 2 motions, and 10 remain to be debated.

I don't know whether anyone here in the room has asked to speak, but I see on the screen that Ms. Lattanzio, Mr. Généreux, Ms. Lalonde and Mr. Arseneault want to speak.

Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

As we've seen in the House of Commons in recent days, some of my opposition colleagues have asked the Prime Minister to remove me from the Standing Committee on Official Languages. For several days now, the media have closely scrutinized the question I put to the Commissioner of Official Languages last Friday. Today I would like to take the time to explain my remarks more fully.

First, I asked Mr. Théberge that question to determine what he thought were the causes of the decline of the French language in Quebec.

The next morning, as I looked at the video of me asking the question, I realized how insensitive and tactless I had been in the way I asked it. That's why I apologized. Since I know that written apologies don't prove the sincerity of the message, allow me, today, to offer my sincerest apologies to all those I offended by asking the question and for the way I asked it.

The fact is that I love the French language. When I go into a store in my riding or elsewhere, I always start the conversation in French. I was a teacher before I entered politics, and I taught in French. I consider it unacceptable that francophone Quebecers can't obtain services in their language in Quebec. This is a province where the sole official language is French. We all have a duty to protect it.

Last weekend, I read parts of the Léger survey and saw that a majority of young Quebecers 18 to 34 years of age attach no importance to the language in which they are served. That's a problem. It is our duty as members of Parliament to ask important, at times even difficult, questions to elicit the right testimony that will help us prepare a report and recommendations that point us in the right direction.

I have been sitting on this committee for two years, and I have always done my best to protect our country's two official languages, by defending the rights of francophone minorities outside Quebec and those of anglophone Quebecers, and to protect the French language as a minority language in this country and across the continent.

It would break my heart, as a former history teacher, to see the beautiful French language disappear from our country. For French to be protected in Canada, it must absolutely stay strong in Quebec.

However, while we look for ways to protect French in Quebec and Montreal, we must always remember that the language rights of the minority communities must be respected. The vast majority of people I know in the anglophone community speak French. I'm talking about people of my generation. Consequently, the two communities must work together to stop this decline.

Having been deeply moved by people's reactions since last Friday, and understanding the insensitive nature of my remarks, I would like to inform you today, Mr. Chair, that I wish to relinquish my duties as a member of this committee at the end of this meeting.

Please rest assured that I will make every effort to stop the decline of the French language in Quebec, while protecting the rights of the anglophone community. I will also work toward its advance both in Quebec and across Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Before rendering my decision on that speech, I would like to take a brief moment to consult the clerk.

● (1540) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1545)

The Chair: We will now resume.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, I'll finish with this matter and then immediately turn the floor over to you, Mr. Généreux.

Having consulted the clerk, I can tell you that Ms. Lambropoulos's speech does not constitute a question of privilege. Members are appointed to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in cooperation with the whips of the various parties. It is up to the whips to make changes respecting members who constitute the committees. Furthermore, the Standing Committee on Official Languages does not have the power to accept or hear the remarks of Ms. Lambropoulos. I would remind members that this speech is not subject to debate.

You had a point of order, Mr. Généreux?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Chair.

First, before the meeting started, you asked me to lower my hand, which I did. However, I saw Ms. Lattanzio immediately raise hers when you began to speak, whereas the meeting had not yet begun. I would like to be able to speak first, given that I raised my hand before she did.

Second, if I'm not mistaken, our meeting is public, not in camera.

The Chair: It is public.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Then it appears that Ms. Lambropoulos's speech, which did not constitute a question of privilege, was not broadcasted. It was cut off at the start of the meeting. I would like Ms. Lambropoulos to raise her question of privilege once again. You determined that it did not constitute a question of privilege, but I would nevertheless like her to have the opportunity to make her presentation again so that it is recorded. That will afford access to it for the journalists and all those concerned by this matter.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

I note two points from your remarks. The first concerns Ms. Lattanzio's situation, and the second that of Ms. Lambropoulos. I will have to suspend once again to consult the clerk. What we have here is a hybrid meeting. Some members in the room may raise their hand and request the floor. The clerk has given me this information

so I can put members in the correct order. The clerk and I are in the process of managing that.

She has asked me to suspend for a moment.

● (1550) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1600)

The Chair: We will resume.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

Can you wait 30 seconds so I can respond to Mr. Généreux's point of order?

Mr. Généreux, I understand that you requested the floor first. The chair has the discretion to decide who will speak. We discussed that internally. We said that a member may not request the floor until the meeting has begun. I understand that you intended to speak at the start. Perhaps the clerk was busy and didn't see you. That's why I will agree to give you the floor following the points of order.

I'm also told that Ms. Lambropoulos's entire speech was broadcasted on ParlVu and therefore need not be repeated.

Once again, I ask for your indulgence in the matter of raising your hand in the meeting room and on the computer so we can respect everyone's right to speak.

Ms. Lalonde has a point of order.

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

I'm very disappointed. I can understand that my honourable colleague didn't receive my colleague's speech from his team. I find that unpleasant. I saw it. I'm surprised to see that the Conservative team didn't know it was available to all Canadians.

I'd like to thank my colleague for her speech. I know it wasn't easy for her.

● (1605)

The Chair: All right.

You have the floor, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to remind my colleague Ms. Lalonde that the point of the remarks I made at the start of the meeting concerning Ms. Lambropoulos's speech was to ensure that all Canadians were well informed. The broadcast wasn't online when I requested that. If it was, it was essentially just a matter of seconds.

Let's get past this and look ahead. I'd like to thank Ms. Lambropoulos for her comments. I think it's important to confess when something like this happens. I think it's entirely to her credit that she did so and that she made the decision she has made.

However, I think we're ready to move on, as they say. I request a vote on adjournment of the motion of Mr. Beaulieu, whom I greatly respect. I entirely agree with the motion.

I think we really must move on to the committee's agenda...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, I want to raise a procedural matter.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Généreux

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'll be brief.

I'm essentially asking that we adjourn the debate in order to vote on the motion as soon as possible so that we can continue with our business. Lord knows we have enough on our plate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Before moving on to the other speakers, I must also tell you that the last time we ended the session, we adjourned the meeting. As a consequence, there is technically no motion on the table for discussion. That's why I began the meeting in such a way that a committee member could introduce a motion.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm here in person and I requested the floor.

The Chair: I didn't understand, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: This is the first time I have attended a virtual meeting of the committee in person. I couldn't raise my hand because I don't have access to my computer. I want you to know that I requested the right to speak.

As you know, I had indicated my intention to introduce a motion.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I had a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu has a point of order.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I just want to know, given what you said earlier, whether Ms. Lambropoulos spoke with her whip before making her decision.

The Chair: I've decided that, Mr. Beaulieu. The matter is not open to debate.

I have no information on how the situation stands with her whip.

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

For clarification purposes, could you read me the speaking list? I understand my colleague Mr. Blaney's comments, but everyone has to have a turn and I'd like the order to be followed.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

That's in fact what I was preparing to do. Apart from you, Ms. Lattanzio, this list, prepared with the clerk's help, also includes Mr. Lalonde, Mr. Blaney, Mr. Arseneault and Mr. Beaulieu.

Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to my colleagues as well.

I'm eager for us to continue our business today, given that the last meeting had to be cancelled.

We heard from Mr. Thériault, the Commissioner of Official Languages, during the meeting before that, and he presented his report and recommendations regarding official languages.

As you will recall, on October 13, we adopted my motion to study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the government's ability to provide Canadians with information in both official languages.

Today, I would like us to move forward and to see the committee start working. I'm eager for us to do what that motion proposes. We are in the second wave of a continuing pandemic, and we have persistent communication issues, particularly in certain regions of our beautiful country. We should address this matter.

The pandemic is already having an economic impact, but it is especially affecting the health and safety of our fellow citizens. The commissioner emphasized that there are deficiencies in communication with Canadians during the pandemic, hence the urgent need to conduct the study proposed in this motion. We must invite witnesses who can tell us what has happened during the pandemic and what we can do to address the problems Canadians are facing.

Mr. Chair, I know the subcommittee usually handles the planning of committee business. However, I'm going to take this opportunity today to propose that we examine the process. When this meeting started, you mentioned that we had six meetings left. Is that correct?

• (1610)

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: One of my colleagues moved that we devote five meetings to studying the impact of COVID-19 on communications with our minority language communities. I therefore move that we spend the next five meetings on that issue.

I'm also wondering about the entire question of witnesses, since I'm new to this committee. How will we proceed? When must we submit our witness suggestions and to whom? Who invites witnesses: is it the clerk? How long does it take to invite witnesses once we've submitted our suggestions? When can we begin our study? I'll let you answer before I continue my remarks.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

I understand from your remarks that you would like to devote five meetings to the study proposed in the motion that has already been adopted.

Before discussing your motion to begin the study immediately, I would ask the clerk to tell us exactly how long it would take to select and invite witnesses once we decide to start the study.

The Clerk: It is up to the committee to decide on the deadline for submitting the witness list. You should bear in mind that it ideally takes at least a week to invite witnesses.

• (1615)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: If I understand correctly, Mr. Chair, if committee members are invited to submit a list of guests between now and next Tuesday, we can then begin hearing witnesses starting at the meeting the following Tuesday. Is that correct?

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, you introduced a motion and I would like to let members debate that motion, following which members will decide how they want to proceed.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Vice-Chair.

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

I have a very simple comment. We've already adopted Ms. Lattanzio's motion and therefore have agreed to study the question. There remains the matter of the order in which we conduct our business, and I remember that an informal meeting was held during which all political parties agreed on the way to proceed.

I therefore think we should have a conversation and then reach a conclusion. For the moment, however, I understand that Ms. Lattanzio has reminded us that her motion was adopted and that the study she proposed therein is thus valid. I think we should listen to the other speeches on the matter before deciding on our roadmap. I therefore leave it in your hands.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

As you said, the original motion was adopted, but we are now dealing with a new motion proposing that we hold five meetings. Let's listen to the various remarks on that motion.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, thank you for clarifying the matter.

My question was precisely on this point. Since we will now debate this new motion, do we have to raise our hand once again in order to speak?

The Chair: Yes. Several individuals previously expressed a wish to speak before this new motion was introduced. For the moment, it would be preferable that they withdraw from the list if they don't wish to speak to the new motion.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I would just like to ensure that the speaking order established before Ms. Lattanzio introduces her new motion is followed once we have disposed of that motion. According to that order, I was to be the next speaker.

The Chair: I understand your point of order, Ms. Lalonde. However, it will be difficult for the clerk and me to manage the speaking list in that manner since we don't know how long it will take to discuss Ms. Lattanzio's new motion. It would therefore be preferable, colleagues, that you withdraw from the list if you don't want to speak to the new motion.

The list currently contains the names of Ms. Lalonde, Mr. Blaney, Mr. Arseneault and Mr. Beaulieu.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, Mr. Arseneault tells us we have an audio problem.

The Chair: I can hear it too. We are having technical problems.

Is it really impossible to follow along?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Perhaps Madam Clerk could keep a list of previously scheduled speakers. Then we could lower our hands. We could then follow the same chronological order if any time remains.

The Chair: Ms. Lalonde, as you know, anything can be done with the consent of the members of the committee. Having said that, I have retained those names.

Consequently, I would now like...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I want to discuss this motion and another one as well...

The Chair: Yes, I understand.

Colleagues, please lower your hands as they appear on the screen. I have taken note of them. You will now sign in to address Ms. Lattanzio's motion on the five meetings.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I don't know whether I'm the only one experiencing audio problems. Everyone's nodding and seems to agree with me. I reconnected my headset, but the sound is terrible when you or my colleagues speak.

The Chair: Yes, I'm having the same problem. I hear noises in my earphones, even when you speak.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Could we suspend for a few moments and determine with the technicians whether the problem can be solved? It's really unpleasant.

The Chair: All right.

Colleagues, pardon me once again. We'll do whatever we need to do to come back as soon as possible.

I therefore suspend.

• (1620)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: We will resume. We apologize for the technical issues.

According to the new list, the speaking order is as follows: Mr. Gagnéux, Ms. Lalonde, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Arseneault. Speeches must address the motion introduced by Ms. Lattanzio, the five meetings and the witnesses to be invited.

Mr. Gagnéux, you have the floor.

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

I'm going back to the point I raised earlier because I'm frankly confused. I'm not sure whether the motion has been introduced or not.

Mr. Chair, here's why I requested adjournment. You explained to me that Mr. Beaulieu's motion automatically failed when the last meeting was adjourned. That's what I understood.

I see that Mr. Arseneault is signalling no and Ms. Lalonde yes. You, Mr. Chair, are signalling no.

The Chair: We adjourned the meeting, the one that was held before the meeting with the Commissioner of Official Languages. When a meeting is adjourned, not suspended, we resume consideration of the motions we wish to examine.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I see.

May I share my speaking time with Mr. Blaney? Is that possible? It's a good question that you've probably never been asked.

• (1635)

The Chair: There is no determined speaking time. There are other speakers on the list. You could inform us of Mr. Blaney's opinion.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'll withdraw that request and let others speak so I don't needlessly take up time. Mr. Blaney or I will speak again later, if any time remains. It's already 4:30 p.m.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Ms. Lalonde has the floor.

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

I very much appreciated my colleague Ms. Lattanzio's speech. It's important to hold meetings and to conduct this study before the end of this session. The study she proposes in her motion, which we all supported, should be conducted as soon as possible. She's asking that we hold five meetings to conduct that study.

I move that our witness list be submitted by tomorrow. I know that doesn't leave us a lot of time, but it would let us begin the study and hear witnesses next Tuesday. We could start work on this excellent study.

I know the clerk won't like my request, but I'd like us to submit our witness list for the study Ms. Lattanzio is proposing as soon as possible, before end of day tomorrow. Then we could determine who will testify at our meeting next Tuesday.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

We can discuss when the members of the committee must send their witness list, but, in your remarks, you don't propose to amend Ms. Lattanzio's motion, which suggests that we should hold five meetings.

Mr. Beaulieu now has the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We should vote against this order of priority. Ms. Lattanzio is proposing that we give her motion priority. That's not the direction we took at our informal meeting. I don't understand why she absolutely doesn't want us to study the matter of French in Quebec.

The Commissioner of Official Languages conducted a study on the situation of official languages during the pandemic and came here and made a presentation on the subject. Now it's being moved that we conduct another study on the pandemic. I don't think that's appropriate.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like to finish what I have to say.

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: My colleague is trying to put words in my mouth. When I spoke at the beginning of today's meeting, I never said that I was prioritizing any particular issue.

My motion of October 13 was adopted by all my colleagues. All I'm trying to do is manage the motion. It has nothing to do with reaching a decision or assigning priority to one particular motion. In fact the other motion mentioned by my colleague was never even debated or adopted. We need to examine and clarify this matter. I don't want anyone to put words in my mouth.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Please continue, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I didn't understand her point of order, but it was nonetheless interesting.

The possibility of submitting the list of witnesses "tomorrow" was discussed. If there were other higher priority proposals, it would perhaps not be appropriate to start tomorrow. Maybe we should wait.

I don't think a date was mentioned in the motion we adopted.

• (1640)

The Chair: I understand your comment, Mr. Beaulieu.

It is indeed for the committee to decide upon the Standing Committee on Official Languages' schedule and meetings.

The clerk has informed me that if we decide to set a priority on one of the motions to be studied, she would need to have the list of witnesses no later than tomorrow in order to make arrangements so that we can hear the witnesses on Tuesday.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, is it the committee or the subcommittee that sets the priorities?

The Chair: According to our procedures, the subcommittee may meet. Of course it would have to report to the committee and the report would have to be checked and translated. Doing it that way means that we would lose an entire work meeting.

I believe that the goal today is to see whether it's possible to set the schedule for our next meetings.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If there is no date in her proposal, are we now voting on the amendments?

The Chair: We are currently debating Ms. Lattanzio's motion, which requires five meetings.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Was this already in her motion? If not, it's an amendment.

The Chair: No. So that's correct. We're debating an amendment to her motion.

Next on my speaking list are Mr. Arseneault, Mr. Blaney, Ms. Lambropoulos, Ms. Lalonde and Mr. Duguid.

Go ahead, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, you have just shed some light on the whole situation. I can understand my colleague Mr. Beaulieu's confusion because I too felt somewhat lost. It is true, and we all remember, that we voted in favour of Ms. Lattanzio's motion. And yet we haven't even got around to voting on the motion referred to by Mr. Beaulieu, which would have amalgamated three motions. In fact, we haven't even agreed on its content or wording. Okay, we understand all that.

I can no longer remember how many meetings we spent on the committee's work, but we have still not produced anything. We heard the commissioner at Mr. Généreux's request, but that's all. It's true, Mr. Beaulieu, that the commissioner came to meet us and that the meeting lasted two hours. He came to summarize what he had done so far, and not to speak specifically about the about our colleague Ms. Lattanzio's motion.

I'm from New Brunswick, and I don't think five meetings are enough to ask all the questions I would like to put to all of the country's provincial authorities. The motion concerns gaps that have affected the communication of health information during the pandemic, but it also concerns shortcomings in other provinces and territories. And at last count, Canada has 10 provinces and three territories.

So based on what I have heard, we have six meetings remaining. And the clerk has told us that this week is already a write-off. This means that in a best case scenario, we have five meetings left to get something done before the Christmas break. That's my understanding of it.

I don't know whether my colleagues have made time to read the commissioner's report, entitled *A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages*. I don't think that five meetings is enough. We will need to submit the lists of witnesses to the clerk, who will have to orchestrate everything quickly before the end of the session that will close the current year. I will refrain from saying that I would have like six or seven meetings. We have only five, but we have to get something done. It's been voted on and we need to get going. Let's make effective use of the five remaining meetings.

We've all agreed on this motion. Now, whether formally or informally, I would ask all of you—everyone gets a chance to join in—to work together on this amalgamated motion. It's so important that as soon as we return in 2021, we need to address it immediately. That's what I suggest. We need to get something done. The situation is becoming embarrassing. We have come up against administrative problems and technical difficulties related to the fact that

Mr. Blaney is the only one to attend a meeting in person. Apparently that is what's causing the most serious problem.

In short, I am appealing to you all, to your heart and your interest in our country's official languages. We are in a pandemic and even if we wanted to stick strictly to this motion, we have only five meetings left, five meetings to talk about New Brunswick, my officially bilingual province which was not up to the task. Have a look at the commissioner's report I mentioned. It's sometimes embarrassing. It certainly is for Ontario and the amber alerts. I could also mention an English-only health notice the government published in a Saskatchewan francophone newspaper. We can talk about it later. Not to mention the shortcomings of our federal government, where we work hard to get things done every day.

At first, I was tempted to argue that we needed more than five meetings, but I will bow to the wisdom of the clerk. If there are only five, then at least we need to make sure that we act as quickly as possible. Let's use this week to come up with the list of witnesses, depending on which federal departments we want to hear from. We need to try to be concise, highly strategic and effective. Let's get this study done by the end of 2020.

In the meantime, if we are unable to work together to come up with a hybrid motion—a consolidation of the motions from Ms. Ashton, Mr. Beaulieu and Ms. Lalonde—as discussed informally at the first meeting, then I think we will have failed in our task as members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. The very first thing on our plate in 2021 will be to work on this motion. We need to agree on a list of future witnesses and meetings.

• (1645)

Mr. Chair, I don't know what to say. To summarize my thoughts on the matter, I have changed my mind. I will resign myself to agreeing to five meetings to study this unanimously adopted motion. Let's come up with something as soon as possible and then move forward. We need to take the time remaining to us to agree on the next motion. I believe that everyone from the various political parties around this table would agree. I am referring to Mr. Beaulieu's motion on the impact of the various legislative measures on official languages, and on French in particular. In short, I do not know whether I explained myself clearly enough. Please let's make sure that our heart is in the right place and get at it. We are in the starting blocks.

The Chair: Good. All right.

Thank you, Mr. Arseneault

Just to clarify, I would like to point out that the technical problems we experienced were not necessarily caused by the committee members.

Over now to Mr. Blaney

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

Further to the clarifications requested by Mr. Beaulieu, I understand that basically, what's involved is agreeing on five meetings to study the impact of the pandemic and to tweak Ms. Lattanzio's motion. That seems perfectly reasonable.

I would now like to return to the comments made by Mr. Arseneault, who is from New Brunswick's francophone community. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada—the FCFA—and the Quebec Community Groups Network—the QCGN—which represents the anglophone minority, would like the government to accomplish something. That something is the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

I am sure, Mr. Arseneault, that I would be able to rely on your support as a member of a francophone community if I were to table a motion asking the government to modernize the Official Languages Act. We know that the francophone minorities in the anglophone provinces and the anglophone minority community in Quebec deserve to be fully respected. But according to the Prime Minister of Canada's Speech from the Throne, there is a new minority in Canada, the francophone minority, mainly concentrated in Quebec as part of North America. It's quite a mouthful to swallow, and that is why we are impatiently awaiting the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Accordingly, I agree with Ms. Lattanzio's proposal. I agree with our chair, who has said that it is up to the committee to set the work priorities. For me, the governments top priority should be the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

As members of the committee, we have already held informal discussions. It is true that the motion has not yet been tabled, but it could be today or next week. Let's study it carefully. In my view, it's really just a matter of giving consideration to the decline of French in Montreal and the province of Quebec. It is a new responsibility that falls to our committee, and I am prepared to take part in whatever discussions are required for us to get an effective study under way.

It's true that we have already done some studies and held a few meetings. We have had technical problems and problems in linking things up. I believe that we can reach consensus. I think that the people of Canada expect it. Minorities expect it. After all, we have some eminent members on our committee; some have held ministerial positions at the provincial level. Some members of the committee represent official language minority communities. As a Quebecer, I represent a North American minority, francophones, even though my first name and family name are Irish.

I agree with Ms. Lattanzio's motion. Let's show that we are capable of holding a productive work meeting. I hope that once the committee members on the list have been able to speak, we will be able to vote on Ms. Lattanzio's motion and then agree on the next steps.

It would be nice to have an overview. I still have some highly relevant motions that have not yet been tabled, and we should put them on the table. I think that we can trust ourselves as a committee. We have moved forward informally in committee. We have had a few problems, but I think that we can overcome them. A lot of people were watching us this morning, so let's make the right decisions this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

You have the floor, Ms. Lambropoulos.

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

My colleague Ms. Lattanzio's motion is extremely important and relevant. We are in the second wave of the pandemic and we have no idea when it will end. It is therefore important to begin immediately to truly ensure that francophones outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec have access to the services to which they are entitled in their language.

There are approximately six committee meetings remaining before the Christmas break. That works, because Ms. Lattanzio's motion suggests studying the matter in five meetings. That works really well. We might even be able to complete the study before the end of the year. That would be very helpful to people across Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Over to you, Ms. Lalonde.

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

I very much appreciate the comments today from my colleague Mr. Arseneault. Mr. Blaney also made several very important observations.

We are living in a pandemic in Canada. We are in the middle of a second wave and each government is implementing its own health measures. I believe that the act is very important. In Ontario, former commissioner Boileau, whose independence was unfortunately removed by Mr. Ford's Conservative government, had clearly said there was a decline in French.

This health crisis has been extremely difficult for many people, families, and seniors. It has affected long-term care centres. Ms. Lattanzio's appropriate motion, and the fact that we have five meetings left before the Christmas break could enable us to come up with a report, as my colleague put it so aptly.

Does this mean that we cannot reach agreement on an appropriate schedule and work plan in January when we return? Like Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Ashton, Mr. Blaney and all our colleagues on the committee, I believe that language is very important. I had tabled a motion on this matter, but we did not have the opportunity to debate it. I do believe that we can reach consensus on the work to be done when we return.

I would at least like to begin with what we are experiencing today, which is the COVID-19 pandemic, and the relevance of what has been agreed since October 13. We could have begun our committee work on that date. Unfortunately, for reasons that I am still unaware of, we did not manage to come up with anything tangible for the communities we represent.

In my riding of Orléans There is a large francophone population, and it is one of the largest pools of francophones, one that I take pride in representing. franco-Ontarians expect us to deal with the crisis, but also with language. In her motion, Ms. Lattanzio referred to this.

I hope that I have your support. I believe that we could all agree on five meetings. However, dear colleagues, we need to submit a work plan to our clerk and our chair and come up with a list of witnesses to invite to the next five meetings.

As my dear colleague Mr. Arseneault pointed out, we could put our collective comments together and come to a consensus with a view to tabling a report in January. To be perfectly honest, I do not think that this study on languages will be possible with only five meetings.

I'm not sure whether to call it a compromise, but I would ask for your cooperation so that we can come up with a report this year with a view to something even better next year.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde

Dear colleagues, I must advise you that the names on the list are Mr. Duguid, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Arseneault, Ms. Lattanzio and Mr. Ashton.

[English]

Terry Duguid, the floor is yours.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wasn't able to attend the last meeting of the LANG committee because of a conflict. I'm sorry I missed it; it sounded like a very interesting meeting.

We're having a discussion about the study, the number of meetings, the witnesses. All are very important. I'm going to defer to the consensus on the appropriate number of meetings, although I worry that five might not be enough. Hear me out on my rationale.

I am sitting here in Treaty No. 1 territory, the homeland of the Métis nation. We have a significant Franco-Manitoban community. We are very proud of that as a nation. Manitoba is celebrating its 150th anniversary, brought about by whom? It was one Louis Riel, whom we have a day named after here in Manitoba. We're very proud of our Métis heritage and our French heritage here in Manitoba.

Mr. Chair, Manitoba is deep in code red. We have the highest infection rate per 100,000 people in the country. We went from zero infections in the summer to literally thousands now. Mr. Chair, we've had some 60 or more deaths in long-term care homes. The premier asked to have the Red Cross sent to our province, which we have done, and they are in four or five of these long-term care homes.

Mr. Chair, one of the big infection areas, one of the hot spots, is southern Manitoba, where we have significant francophone populations who are not getting the kinds of services they need in the language of their choice, which in that case is French.

As I've pointed out in other meetings, we have had challenges in our education system with not being able to find enough French-speaking teachers, and we have the same problem with health care professionals who can speak French.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to read from a chapter called "Access to and Use of Health Care Services in the Minority Language" in a very important study by a number of distinguished authors from the University of Ottawa, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Moncton. I think the honourable members will be very interested in this, because our challenges in health care and in serving our minority communities predate the pandemic but have only grown worse.

I quote from this—

• (1700)

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: We are discussing putting five meetings in a motion. Perhaps Mr. Duguid could tell us whether he agrees or not, and we could then vote on it.

We have ended up studying the amendment to Ms. Lattanzio's motion. I understand that he likes to draw things out, but could we get things moving forward?

Canadians are watching us and they expect results. If this continues, we're going to still be talking about Ms. Lattanzio's amendment between Christmas and New Year's.

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Chair, I think the idea, and it sounds like Mr. Blaney would agree, is that we leave this meeting with a plan to carry out a study, knowing the number of meetings and the witnesses, and that is what I am speaking to. That wasn't a point of order on the part of Mr. Blaney, so I will continue.

I lost my place here, Mr. Chair, but I will repeat that it speaks about our two minority language groups, and

Given their linguistic minority situation, communication between these communities and health care professionals, as well as their access to services, may become hindered. Studies carried out in Canada and elsewhere have shown that the presence of linguistic barriers can limit the access to health services, including preventive care, and impact patient satisfaction, the quality of medical care, and health. Linguistic barriers represent a hurdle to providing adequate follow-up care to patients, especially when these services are largely based on communication.

Mr. Speaker, this is so important in the middle of a pandemic.

The study goes on:

Access to health services by official language minority communities has been investigated in some Canadian studies—

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Génèreux: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Génèreux has a point of order.

Go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I tend to agree with my colleague. If Mr. Duguid wishes to invite the author of this report as a witness, we would be pleased to hear him out. We need to be decide on witnesses and on when they are going to appear before the committee. We are not here today to read reports, but to determine what we are going to do over the next few days and the next few weeks. We don't need to hear all that. We already know that it's a problem. We want to settle it and hear the witnesses who are going to come and speak to us about it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid: What I have been talking about is very relevant to the discussion—to the number of meetings and to the kinds of witnesses we are going to call—and again, that was not a point of order.

Where was I? I don't want to repeat and waste the committee's time.

For the Francophone communities, a 2001 study by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA, which has been referenced today, showed that access to health services in English was three to five times higher than access to health services in French throughout the country. Data from this non-scientific study was compiled following 300 interviews and group sessions with Francophones working in the health care sectors selected from 71 communities.

Mr. Chair, I think you get the picture. This study is extremely important. Communication is absolutely vital to providing quality health services, particularly in a pandemic. This is why this study is important. It's really important that by the end of this meeting, we settle on a group of witnesses, we settle on the number of meetings, and we proceed.

As a number of members have raised today.... The phrase doesn't quite work in English. "Laying an egg" has a different meaning in English, as far as I know.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duguid.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Beaulieu now has the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: For everyone watching the meeting right now, it is clear that the Liberals are once again engaging in parliamentary obstruction.

I made a proposal and we made compromises. We included anglophones, and francophone and Acadian communities. We want to discuss the impact of this study on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

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

The Chair: Excuse me Mr. Beaulieu, but Mr. Arseneault has raised a point of order.

Mr. René Arseneault: I would like to thank my colleague Mr. Beaulieu for his comments, but are we not discussing the order in which things are to be done and Ms. Lattanzio's motion? Isn't

that what we ought to be talking about? If so, I am prepared to submit an amendment, if my colleagues are willing to hear it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I would like to finish my comments.

Hon. Steven Blaney: That wasn't a point of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

You have the floor, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My proposal would, for the first time in the history of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, make it possible to study the status of French in Quebec. We know that our Liberal friends definitely do not want to do so. They are speaking out of both sides of their mouths. In the House, they tell us that they support French and Bill 101, but their actions prove otherwise. It was nothing more than a smokescreen.

I will not speak for too long, except to point out that it is clear that what we have here is parliamentary obstruction. The only aim of this proposal is to add five meetings. The bare minimum of respect would allow all the committee members to submit their proposals, and then to determine their order. We could then assign priority to whichever one we had agreed upon in an informal subcommittee.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, I would like to reiterate that this is inadmissible.

The Chair: As I pointed out at the last meeting, we are not speaking about subcommittee meetings. It's as if we were *technical problems* in the midst of our discussion.

We are having discussions among ourselves, but let's concentrate on the motion that suggests five meetings. Once again, there is nothing to indicate that it's the schedule. If this motion were adopted, we would then have to discuss which motion we would be using for our studies.

Mr. Arseneault is next.

Mr. René Arseneault: Can you hear me?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Call for a vote, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: If I have understood correctly, at issue is the matter of the five meetings. I suggest that we discuss the amendment to Ms. Lattanzio's motion. That is what we are talking about. We are in the middle of the pandemic. That is the motion we adopted unanimously.

Let's move forward and get going on the five meetings remaining before the end of 2020. That is what I propose as an amendment to the motion. I propose that we hold five meetings as soon as possible.

• (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, that wasn't clear.

Can you hear me?

Mr. René Arseneault: I can barely hear you.

Is it okay now?

The Chair: Can you finish up again? What you wanted to tell us wasn't clear.

Mr. René Arseneault: We were talking about five meetings, but if I have understood correctly, the motion has not yet been officially amended to say so...

A voice: *Inaudible*

Mr. René Arseneault: Sorry?

The Chair: No, there's no debate.

Continue, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: I am suggesting five meetings. Depending on the clerk's availability, let's take advantage of the meetings remaining before the end of December 2020 to come up with the names of witnesses we need to hear from.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a point of order.

We are not supposed to be discussing the schedule, but that is what Mr. Arseneault is now doing.

The Chair: What we are doing is commenting on Ms. Lattanzio's motion and the five meetings. That is what we are discussing.

In concluding, Mr. Arseneault, my understanding of what you are saying is that you agree with the five meetings specified in the motion.

I still have Ms. Lattanzio and Ms. Ashton on my list.

You're next, Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, I would like to clarify things.

I initially proposed five meetings because you had told us at the outset when we began today's meeting that there were six. One is usually required to wrap up the report. That's why I suggested five meetings.

I would like to return to the comments made by my colleague, Mr. Arseneault.

I don't believe that it's an amendment because we will be holding the same number of meetings. I would like clarification on this point so that we can vote as soon as possible.

Also, am I to understand that the list of witnesses needs to be submitted tomorrow, on Friday, so that we can begin to hear the witnesses on Tuesday? I would like that to be clarified. After that, I will let the committee members ponder it all.

The Chair: Okay.

To clarify everything once more, the committee sets the schedule of meetings. What we are doing now is debating the amendment to your motion.

You have the floor now, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to be brief, because we've already lost a lot of time.

I am disappointed that we strayed so far from what was supposed to be the substance of today's subcommittee meeting. I know that it

was not an official meeting of the subcommittee, but we ought not to be falling behind in our work.

Our colleague Mr. Duguid spoke about the current crisis we are experiencing. The Canadian Forces came to my riding yesterday to help us with this crisis. Let's not waste our time. Everyone can demand respect, but respect would mean not wasting our time by failing to stick to the subject at hand in today's subcommittee meeting, even though it was an informal one.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Lalonde has added her name to the list.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: With all due respect, Ms. Ashton, I'd like a clarification.

You'll recall that, at the last meeting, the informal subcommittee held a discussion, a collaborative meeting, so to speak. Unfortunately, if I remember correctly, one committee member decided to disrupt our conversations in order to move his motion again. Perhaps the discussion was somewhat unfriendly. I tried to adjourn his motion, which you and all the Conservative members rejected. I remember this very well, Ms. Ashton.

I'd like a clarification today. I'm prepared to vote on Ms. Lattanzio's motion. I'm happy to do this, so that the committee can finally get something done.

• (1715)

The Chair: At this time, we'll proceed to a vote on the motion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Could you read the amendment? I'm lost. I'm told that the motion referred to five meetings.

Could you read Ms. Lattanzio's original motion and the amendment, please?

The Chair: Okay.

I'll read the motion first. Ms. Lattanzio, you can then read the amendment that you moved.

The motion that we adopted states as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the government's ability to deliver information in both official languages;

That the committee also consider how other jurisdictions dealt with the challenges of delivering information to linguistic minority groups, and the impacts on minority language communities;

That the committee examine what policies and measures were put in place to help these communities during the pandemic;

That the committee report its findings to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request a government response to its report.

Ms. Lattanzio, could you read the amendment that you moved regarding the five meetings, please?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I don't have anything in writing. I'll do it verbally. I just want to add: That the committee hold at least five meetings to hear from witnesses and carry out the above-mentioned study, and that the list of witnesses be sent to the clerk tomorrow, November 19, before 5 p.m.

The Chair: We'll vote on this motion.

Madam Clerk, let's proceed to the vote.

First, to make things easier, are there any objections to this motion?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Sorry, Mr. Chair. Tomorrow is November 20, so before November 20, at 5 p.m.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you for the clarification.

First, my fellow colleagues—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So this means that the motion concerns the schedule.

Sorry. I have a point of order.

If we say before November 20, meaning tomorrow, does this mean that the motion concerns the schedule?

The Chair: That's a good question and comment, Mr. Beaulieu.

Give me a moment. I'll check with the clerk to really make sure that this amendment is appropriate, because we had a debate earlier. A number of people spoke.

Like you, Mr. Beaulieu, I understand that there was no mention of a date, whether that date is November 20 or any other date. So I understand what you're saying.

Instead of speaking with the clerk, I'd like to ask Ms. Lattanzio to clarify the motion as she presented it at the start of the meeting.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I want to add that we have at least five meetings to carry out the study in this motion and that we'll begin the study next Tuesday. This clarifies my point. I'd rather the list be submitted tomorrow. For the sake of clarity, I'd say that the work will begin next Tuesday, November 24.

The Chair: The committee members may speak. I gather that we spoke about five meetings and the need to send the list to the clerk as quickly as possible. The clerk confirmed that, if the list were submitted tomorrow, we would be able to start next Tuesday, according to the schedule, if the committee members wish to do so.

This is what I want to put to a vote right now. Does everyone understand?

• (1720)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, you want to put to a vote the five meetings, which could start next Tuesday, if we subsequently vote to that effect. Is that right?

The Chair: Yes. That's what it means. We're talking about five meetings and the need to send out the list of witnesses as quickly as possible, by tomorrow.

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

I think that the motion is very easy to understand. I'll repeat, for the benefit of my dear colleague Mr. Beaulieu, that we all agree that

we've done nothing since October 13, or since Ms. Lattanzio moved a motion, and that we should start working. I think that I spoke very clearly earlier. We want to start working, and Mr. Beaulieu also seems to want to start working.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I have a point of order.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Blaney, you'll let me finish my point of order.

The Chair: Sorry, Ms. Lalonde, but Mr. Blaney has a point of order.

Mr. Blaney, the floor is yours.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, you were very clear. We'll vote on the motion regarding the five meetings and the list of witnesses, which will be provided tomorrow. You clearly stated that, when it comes to prioritizing committee business, the committee must make the decision and that this wasn't in the motion before us. If things change, this change will invalidate our entire conversation. I consider this a breach of procedure.

I think that we must vote on the motion. We can then decide how to prioritize the work. I suggest that we set aside an additional 15 minutes. Before we adjourn the meeting, I'd like us to agree on a roadmap. The people, the communities, expect us to deliver results. I think that we have great staff, who are also eager to get to work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Ms. Lalonde, before I give the floor back to you, I'll consult with the clerk. Unfortunately, I'll need to suspend the meeting for a few seconds.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1720)

(Pause)

• (1725)

The Chair: The meeting is resumed.

Again, I want to be very clear. Ms. Lattanzio moved a motion that referred to five meetings and the need to send the list as quickly as possible, by Friday.

This motion was the subject of a debate. We'll also need to vote on this motion. Since we're running out of time, we'll then decide what we'll do starting next Tuesday.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: The committee members made it clear today that they want to start working. We have other motions to consider as well.

I moved my amendment earlier. I gather that the list must be provided tomorrow so that we can begin the work next Tuesday. Clearly everyone agrees with this and wants to move forward. We spoke about five meetings that would take place before the holiday break so that we can address other very important motions. These motions are piling up, and we must discuss them before we vote on them.

I expect this to be clear for everyone. There will be at least five meetings, and the list must be sent out tomorrow so that we can begin hearing evidence starting Tuesday. That's why I asked the clerk how much time she needed to make sure that the witnesses could come next week.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Yes, this is what the clerk and I discussed. As you just said, the list should be sent out so that we can get started as soon as possible.

However, you referred to dates, such as November 20 and November 24, which weren't in the original motion.

As a result, the decision is to proceed to a vote.

• (1730)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There's still some confusion. You and Ms. Lattanzio aren't saying the same thing.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, thank you for your comments. However, this is the decision. We'll now vote on Ms. Lattanzio's motion to hold at least five meetings and to send the list to the clerk by tomorrow. We debated this motion.

However, I clearly stated that the purpose of the motion was to begin a study as soon as possible.

In terms of the schedule, right after we vote on this motion, we'll have two motions. We must decide which motion to start with. If the committee wants to get started as soon as possible and there's another motion, we would really need to see whether the witnesses are available, for example.

That's the context and the current situation.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. You're talking a bit about the schedule again here.

I'll vote against the motion, because this isn't what we debated initially. The point of the debate was to hold five meetings. Now, the issue is more about setting dates and choosing between two motions. There are many other motions on the table. I think that we shouldn't be voting on whether these motions will be introduced.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Here's what I said. We'll vote right away on Ms. Lattanzio's motion to hold five meetings and to send the list of witnesses to the clerk by Friday. I'll stop there. The committee must then decide which study will be started next Tuesday.

The clerk is in the meeting room. In order to proceed quickly, I want to know whether there are any objections to this motion to hold five meetings and to send out the list of witnesses promptly.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I would like a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: The motion was adopted unanimously.

Colleagues, it is 5:33 p.m. Unfortunately, we have had some minor technical difficulties. However, as other committee meetings are scheduled, I propose to end the meeting in 10 minutes, at the latest, that is, at around 5:40 p.m.

Are there any objections?

You have the floor, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like to present my motion, of which I have given notice. Its purpose is to conduct a study on the situation of French in Quebec for francophones and anglophones, as well as the situation in francophone and Acadian communities.

It would also study the impact of the Official Languages Act on measures to protect French, such as Bill 101, and would seek to determine how to integrate this into efforts to modernize the Official Languages Act.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Do you want to speak to the motion that was informally discussed?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I believe we can go to a vote.

The Chair: Can you please tell me which motion you are putting forward now? Is it the one—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This is the second motion I submitted. I can read it to you, if you want.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. The motion is worded as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the Committee undertake a study on the measures that the Government of Canada can take to fulfill its responsibility, as set out in the Speech from the Throne, to protect and promote French not only outside Quebec but also within Quebec; that, as part of this study, the Committee:

- a) Provide an objective and detailed portrait of the situation of English and French in Quebec, as well as of francophone and Acadian communities, based on key linguistic indicators, such as French as the mother tongue, main language spoken at home, language shifts, main language of work, and so on;
- b) Evaluate the effectiveness of the government's language policies with respect to the objective of protecting and promoting French as well as the impact of these policies on provincial legislative measures to protect and promote French (particularly the Charter of the French Language in Quebec);
- c) Consider possible amendments to the Official Languages Act to harmonize the government's commitment to protect French with provincial legislation;

That the Committee allocate a minimum of seven (7) meetings to this study and that these meetings be completed no later than March 1, 2021; that the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Government table a comprehensive response.

I feel it's important. As far as the pandemic is concerned, the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne have already done studies. Especially on this issue, we must act now to ensure that health authorities respect people's right to be served in English or French. We should start working on this study immediately.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Did you send us a copy of the motion? I am looking for it in my documentation and I don't know if I have a copy.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes, you already received notice of the motion.

The Chair: All right, thank you. I don't have it at hand.

Mr. Blaney, Mrs. Lalonde and Ms. Lattanzio wish to speak. I may have to interrupt you when the meeting is about to end.

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor.

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

I'd like to speak in favour of Mr. Beaulieu's motion. I believe this study needs to be done urgently. We are all concerned about the pandemic, but it is important that our committee focus on its priority, which is to ensure that the language rights of communities are respected. There is a sense of urgency, given the linguistic realities in Montreal. So I feel this study is extremely important.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to make one important point. This is that it would be worthwhile to have people from Statistics Canada appear before the committee. They could be called to appear very quickly. They are available and they have the relevant data. We must get an idea of the linguistic landscape in the communities, whether they are the English-speaking communities in Quebec or the French-speaking minority communities in English-speaking environments.

The new minority community is the community of Quebec in North America. Statistics Canada has all the data on the French that is spoken. It would be easy to call them to appear very quickly, and we could start working. It would also give committee members time to draw up their list of witnesses.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Members of the committee, I'm so sorry. It's 5:40 p.m., and the House of Commons cannot accommodate us.

[Translation]

We have to stop here.

I remind you that, after we pass this motion, we will need to send a list of witnesses to the clerk as soon as possible. Given the wishes of the committee, I want to emphasize that it is also the Chair's duty, in consultation with the clerk, to decide whether or not we are going to begin a new study next Tuesday.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It was very clear that we were not going to decide on the schedule. Next Tuesday, therefore, we will continue to consider the proposals.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Vice-Chair, this is your last opportunity to speak. We really need to end this meeting.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, you told us that motion would be defeated if you adjourned the meeting, but that it would stand if you suspended the meeting. I therefore invite you to suspend the meeting so that we can continue, given that the motion has just been put forward.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I am sorry, but I'd like the debate to be adjourned. I would like us to start working as quickly as possible next Tuesday. I know that you are going to make a difficult but informed decision about this.

I therefore move that the debate be adjourned.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, we have a motion before—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Beaulieu, but when I receive a formal request for adjournment, I must put it to a vote.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Is that the case even if you have received a prior request to suspend the meeting?

The Chair: We can discuss that, but when I receive a request for adjournment, it must be put to a vote. It is not debatable.

Does anyone object to the debate being adjourned?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Yes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, please proceed with the vote. Based on the vote, a decision will be made regarding this meeting.

To be clear, this is the motion to adjourn.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The motion was defeated. Therefore, I suspend the debate.

The meeting is over. Have a pleasant evening. Goodbye.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>