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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1540)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number seven of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. This committee meeting is for the purpose of committee business.

[Translation]

I would like to start by reminding members to turn off the ringers on their cell phones for the health and safety of the interpreters.

Next, I want to welcome our new committee member, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

I also have a few reminders, and I'll be reading some excerpts from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Please raise your hand if you have a question or would like to speak. The clerk and I will do our best to maintain the speaking order, but that is, of course, easier when we are all together in the committee room. I will tell you when you can put your hand up, either electronically, if you are participating virtually, or by letting the clerk know, if you are on site, in the meeting room.

The last few times we met, members had many points of order. Often, they weren't so much points of order as requests to speak. Going forward, I would ask committee members to clearly state which rule was broken. Nevertheless, in the event of a technical difficulty, do not hesitate to raise a point of order. As regards suspension versus adjournment, I feel it's important that I read out a few paragraphs from our procedural guide, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

A committee meeting may be adjourned by the adoption of a motion to that effect. However, most meetings are adjourned more informally, when the Chair receives the implied consent of members to adjourn. The committee Chair cannot adjourn the meeting without the consent of a majority of the members, unless the Chair decides that a case of disorder or misconduct is so serious as to prevent the committee from continuing its work.

Committees frequently suspend their meetings for various reasons, with the intention to resume later in the day. Suspensions may last a few seconds, several hours, or span even more than one day, depending on the circumstances, and a meeting may be suspended more than once.... Meetings are suspended, for example, to change from public to in camera mode, or the reverse; to enable witnesses to be seated or to hear witnesses by video conference; to put an end to disorder; to resolve a problem with the simultaneous interpretation system; or to move from one item on the agenda to the next.

Pursuant to the Standing Orders, the Chair of a standing, special, legislative or joint committee is required to suspend the meeting when the bells are sounded to call in the Members to a recorded division in the House, unless there is unanimous consent of the members of the committee to continue to sit.

At the end of our last meeting, I suspended the meeting. However, given what I've just told you, I cannot suspend last week's meeting indefinitely, because all the technicians and staff must be on site when the committee is ready to resume the meeting. Therefore, the meeting was adjourned, but the debate was suspended so that Mr. Beaulieu could resume debate this afternoon.

What's more, this is our seventh meeting on committee business, and like you, I would like to see the committee get to work on its studies. We have tried a number of times, but to no avail. There is nothing preventing us from holding one last meeting on committee business today, but if we do manage to establish a meeting schedule for the studies, we will not be able to invite witnesses to appear on Thursday.

Since we did not reach a consensus last Thursday, I gave a directive to the clerk to start the study on Ms. Lattanzio's motion this Thursday, since it was adopted. Further to the motion, we are to invite witnesses. She is trying to reach out to witnesses who are more likely to be available to appear soon. Members from all parties proposed a total of 35 witnesses, two of whom have already agreed to appear this Thursday. The clerk will continue reaching out to witnesses.

If we decide—

• (1545)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: If you don't mind, I am going to finish what I was saying first.

If, in committee business today, we decide to focus on another study, nothing prevents us from moving forward on that next week. We can conduct more than one study at a time. I asked that, on Thursday, we meet on Ms. Lattanzio's motion, but the committee may decide to undertake another study next Tuesday.

According to the clerk and in accordance with the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, in my role as chair, I can determine the schedule if the committee is unable to do so itself. That was the basis for my decision.

Currently, two motions have been adopted and 10 motions are on the table. Since the meeting was adjourned, Mr. Beaulieu will start things off this morning. His hand is up.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think that distorts things a bit given what we voted for. We did indeed vote on a motion, but we have received neither the minutes nor the amendment. We were assured that the schedule would not be touched, but now we are suddenly finding out that the study will take place next Tuesday because someone tweeted that Tuesday was a go. I want to say that this alters the meaning of what we voted for, in my view. I do not understand why the committee is proceeding in this way.

That said, I don't want to split hairs. We can carry on with my motion. I moved it at our last meeting, and there are already a number of amendments. We had wanted to study the situation of French in Quebec and the impact of the federal government's language policies on the situation of French and the Charter of the French language in Quebec. We agreed to study the situation of French and of English in Quebec—they go hand in hand, at any rate—and the situation of francophone and Acadian communities.

That study is urgently needed. It hasn't been done in 51 years, which is pretty hard to believe. The Standing Committee on Official Languages was never interested enough in the situation of French in Quebec to study the matter. I must stress the urgency. What's more, researchers in Quebec and French language advocacy groups in Quebec have never been invited to share their views with the committee.

For those reasons, I think the committee should adopt the motion.

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

Can Mr. Beaulieu read his motion again?

With all due respect, Mr. Beaulieu, I would like to hear it again. You mentioned certain aspects, and I think we will be able to come to an agreement today. I just want to be sure I understand everything you are referring to.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

I would remind you to address your comments through the chair. Also, please wait for me to give you the floor.

Mr. Beaulieu, you may go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right.

Informally, we had discussed Mrs. Lalonde's suggestion. She had a new point, and we came up with amendments that could be added in two places. I can talk about that at the same time.

The motion reads 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;

The amendment we came up with to accommodate Mrs. Lalonde involved adding—

• (1550)

The Chair: Pardon me, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right. I won't speak to it.

The Chair: Very good.

Please read the motion as it stands.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right. Here it is:

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.

Given how much time we've lost, the committee can decide whether to keep the same deadline.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We will now have debate on the motion.

I see that Mrs. Lalonde's hand is up on the screen.

You may go ahead, Mrs. Lalonde.

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

My apologies for raising the point of order earlier. I am very sorry.

I completely understand and respect Mr. Beaulieu's motion. It's important that I move my amendments to the motion, if I may.

Mr. Chair, I know you have the amendments to hand because I have sent them to you already, so they can be distributed to the other committee members. I did not send them to the clerk, but with your permission, we can read them together. It's usually easier when everyone has a copy.

I will just read the amendments. Then, they can be distributed to the honourable members via their P9 accounts.

Nothing in the preamble or paragraph (a) has changed. I will, however, read paragraph (b) of Mr. Beaulieu's motion with my amendments.

- b) Evaluate the effectiveness of the government's language policies, as well as the current role of federal and provincial laws, 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).

Those are the amendments I am proposing to paragraph (b) of Mr. Beaulieu's motion. First, “, as well as the current role of federal and provincial laws,” is being added after “Evaluate the effectiveness of the government's language policies”. Second, in the French version, “celles-ci” is being replaced by “ces politiques”.

I would like to know whether my fellow members wish to debate the amendments.

The Chair: Very well.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Could I have Mrs. Lalonde read it again, please?

The Chair: Of course.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Absolutely, Mr. Beaulieu.

I'll go slowly to make it easier for the interpreter.

b) Evaluate the effectiveness of the government's language policies, as well as the current role of federal and provincial laws, 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).

We are making a few additions I think are important. As a result, the committee would review the various laws in force around the country and their current role. That would also help us identify any gaps.

As Mr. Beaulieu was saying, it's important that the committee study this issue.

• (1555)

The Chair: We will now have debate on the amendment.

Are there any comments?

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: To be clear, when we say “Evaluate the effectiveness of the government's language policies”, we mean the federal government and the current role of provincial and federal laws”. It's a bit redundant.

We could simply add “, as well as the current role of provincial laws”. Ultimately, we can leave the wording as amended, but it is redundant.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Could Mr. Beaulieu provide some clarification on the subamendment he is proposing to Mrs. Lalonde's amendment, so I can be sure I understand.

Is his suggestion to make it clear that the federal government is being referred to? Where it says “the current role of federal and provincial laws”, do I understand correctly that he wants to remove “federal” and leave only “provincial”?

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, is that what you are proposing?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It was more or less that.

My point was that where it says “Evaluate the effectiveness of the government's language policies”, it is implied that the federal government is being referred to. The amendment would simply re-

peat it. In the end, it's not a big deal. We can leave the amended wording.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blaney, you may go ahead.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I looked at the amendment.

I have a question about Mrs. Lalonde's amendment. If I understand correctly, she would like the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages to examine the repercussions of federal laws on the decline of French. That may be a useful addition in order to fully understand the big picture. This is, of course, a federal committee, so we should be focusing on federal laws. I would, however, be open to supporting the proposed amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Since we don't have any other hands up, we will now vote on the amendment.

Are there any objections to the amendment to paragraph (b), as moved by Mrs. Lalonde?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, would you mind rereading the amendment with Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment?

The Chair: We actually don't have a subamendment by Mr. Beaulieu. We are voting on Mrs. Lalonde's amendment to Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Would it be possible to get it in writing?

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I sent the amendment to your P9 account. I hope I sent it to the right person, the clerk, Ms. Ménard. I just want to make sure the honourable members did receive it. If not, I will resend it.

If I could have 30 seconds, it would be appreciated. What is the clerk's name?

The Chair: Her full name is Josée Ménard.

Mr. Beaulieu, would it be all right if I read the amendment again in order to speed things up?

• (1600)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would prefer to have it in writing. It won't take that long. Could the clerk send it out to us? Surely, she heard the amendment, and we will be able to read it over. It's just a small addition.

The Chair: Very well.

Mrs. Lalonde is going to send the amendment to the clerk, who will then send it out to everyone. I assume there won't be any amendments to what she just read. To speed things up, I would like to have the committee vote on the amendment as read.

Is that acceptable, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would prefer to vote on the amendment once we have it in writing. In the meantime, we can move on to the next amendment, if there is one.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we can't proceed that way. If it is the committee's pleasure, we will wait until everyone receives a written copy. There is a hard copy in the room, but we are meeting in hybrid mode. We need to make sure that Mr. Généreux, in the meeting room, receives a copy as well.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I just sent Ms. Ménard the text of the amended paragraph b).

I see that I sent it to you too, Mr. Beaulieu, as your name appeared in my P9 account email.

The Chair: Let's take the time to receive the email and read it. I will talk to the clerk.

So I will suspend the meeting for up to a minute.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): One second, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault: I don't want to get bogged down in details, but the term "efficiency" is a very bad anglicism. It should rather say "efficacité", but I can tolerate "efficiency".

The Chair: Thank you for that comment.

Respected colleagues, I am suspending the meeting for a few seconds.

• (1600) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1605)

The Chair: We are resuming the meeting.

We all just received the text of Ms. Lalonde's amendment. I will read it to you before we vote.

b) Evaluate the effectiveness of the government's language policies, as well as the current role of federal and provincial laws, 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);

Is anyone opposed to this amendment?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like to comment.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have considered the proposed amendment. We are a federal entity, and here we are, evaluating the role of provincial policies. I don't think that is really our role. I would rather propose the following:

b) Evaluate the effectiveness of the federal 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...

I agree with evaluating the impact of federal measures on the provinces, but I'm not sure it is our role to evaluate the merits of provincial policies. I propose rejecting the amendment, or adding the word "federal" after "government".

The Chair: According to procedure, we cannot do things that way. If you want, you can move a subamendment to the amendment. If you do, please move a clear subamendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): I apologize, Mr. Chair, but I have had my hand raised for a while. I was wondering if you saw me.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Martinez Ferrada, I know you are new to the committee. You have to click on "participant" instead of raising your hand on screen.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you for letting me know, Mr. Chair. Things work differently in other committees.

The Chair: Okay.

I am coming back to Mr. Beaulieu very briefly.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The subamendment would be worded as follows:

b) Evaluate the effectiveness of the federal government's language policies...

That would replace the rest of the amendments Ms. Lalonde proposed.

The Chair: Okay.

We have three speakers on the screen: Mr. Arseneault, Ms. Lattanzio and Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

The debate is about Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment.

Mr. Arseneault, go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault: I heard what Mr. Beaulieu said to us about the subamendment. However, talking about the federal government's language efficiency—if you could use the word "efficiency"—and its impact on provincial legislation will inevitably lead to us evaluating it, or studying it. Did I correctly understand Mr. Beaulieu's comments to mean that we should not do that? This worries me a bit. I'm not sure I understand the subamendment.

I'm not opposed to it, but I'm not sure whether I understood what Mr. Beaulieu was trying to explain to us. It is impossible not to evaluate or study provincial measures that will interact with federal government policies.

That is why I felt that Ms. Lalonde's previous amendment did all that simultaneously. That's my two cents' worth.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Ms. Lattanzio, go ahead.

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

I would like Mr. Beaulieu to clarify something. I agree with my colleague. If we carry out that study, we must necessarily look at the role provincial legislation is currently playing in achieving the objective.

My question is specifically about Mr. Beaulieu's proposed wording, which includes the promotion of the French language and of the legislation—the Charter of the French Language in Quebec. I would like to understand his questioning or his hesitation to include provincial legislation because, in the first version, we are targeting Quebec legislation, which is also a provincial piece of legislation.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next speakers on my list are Ms. Martinez Ferrada and Mr. Beaulieu. Mr. Beaulieu could use the opportunity to answer these questions.

Ms. Martinez Ferrada, go ahead.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to come back to the efficiency of language policies and the role of federal and provincial legislation. I think that the two elements complement each other. Determining whether policies are effective is one thing, but understanding the role of various levels of government in terms of the issue we want to study seems just as important to me.

I give you the example of immigration. That area is managed through an agreement concluded with Quebec, which is unique to that province. I think it would be just as important to understand how this agreement could impact language.

This is why I think that studying the role of legislation remains important in the amendment moved by Ms. Lalonde and that it takes nothing away from the essence of the motion moved by Mr. Beaulieu. All it does is add another extra layer that will help see the study proposed in the current motion from a different angle.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

There are no other raised hands. The next speaker will be Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This was actually implicit in my previous comments. What I want to study is the impact of the federal language policy on provincial language policies.

The original intent mainly focused on the Charter of the French Language instead of evaluating each provincial piece of legislation, their repercussions and possible differences. In any case, paragraph c) says, “Consider possible amendments to the Official Languages Act...”.

As a result, the objective will certainly not be to propose amendments to provincial legislation, but to propose amendments to the project to modernize the Official Languages Act.

I think the amendment adds nothing. It complicates everything and emphasizes provincial language policies. At the same time, I won't light my hair on fire if my subamendment is not accepted.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Lalonde, the floor is now yours.

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

Mr. Beaulieu, your comments are somewhat of a validation for the reasoning and basis of the amendment to your motion I proposed. I know very well why the French language in Quebec is declining. As the member for Orléans, in Ontario, I can tell you that we are also seeing a shrinking of the francophone pool in our population.

I thought it was very relevant to know what role provincial legislation plays, for example, and its potential impact. Far be it for me to meddle in provincial business and recommend anything at all to the province. However, the committee should at least be concerned about what is happening in other provinces, including British Columbia and Alberta, and even Ontario—I would gladly speak more about Ontario.

Why not take an interest in the provinces, in their current legislation, in its impact, in the possibility of cooperation and in the errors made?

How can the federal legislation better support the process that has been triggered through the modernization work on the Official Languages Act?

I sort of understand your hesitation, Mr. Beaulieu, but you are emphasizing Quebec's case, while I am speaking on behalf of my other colleagues who represent communities outside Quebec, where the French language has been declining, as we know full well. So I ask for your indulgence.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

So I am putting Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment to the vote.

Do the committee members agree with Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I request a recorded division, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: So we will go ahead with a recorded division.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 10; yeas 1)

The Chair:

I am now putting Ms. Lalonde's amendment to the vote.

Are there any objections to us passing Ms. Lalonde's amendment?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair:

I am now putting Mr. Beaulieu's motion as amended to the vote.

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

I would like to move another amendment on paragraph c).

The Chair: Ms. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I ask for your indulgence, respected colleagues. I am sending the text immediately to your P9 accounts.

Ms. Ménard, I am sending it to you, as well.

Once again, Mr. Beaulieu, I am talking about your original motion, more specifically paragraph c).

I will read it.

c) Examine all the tools available to the government, as well as consider possible amendments to the Official Languages Act, to harmonize the government's commitments to protect and promote both official languages of Canada;

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you.

While we wait for the email to arrive, we will debate this amendment.

Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Blaney have raised their hands.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This amendment greatly changes the motion by proposing to examine “all the tools available to the government”. I don't see what other tools, aside from amendments to the Official Languages Act, could foster the protection and promotion of Canada's two official languages. What we are interested in is examining the situation of French. I don't see why we need to add “both official languages”.

I will let Mr. Blaney comment, but I could come back to this. It seems that no focus is being placed on French and that people absolutely want to talk about both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Généreux is in the room and has signalled to the clerk that he would like to speak before Mr. Blaney.

Go ahead, Mr. Généreux.

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

Ms. Lalonde, I can see that, although this committee is meant to be independent, Liberal members could use this amendment to delay the introduction of a bill to modernize the Official Languages Act.

I am wondering whether that is the case.

The Chair: Thank you.

I said that Mr. Blaney was up next, but Mr. Arseneault is actually next on my list.

Mr. Arseneault, go ahead.

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

I want to respond to Mr. Généreux, who has been sitting on the committee with me for a long time, at least since 2015.

Mr. Généreux, Ms. Lalonde could answer your question directly, but this amendment suggests to “examine all the tools”. That can support the promotion and protection of official languages in Canada, both directly and indirectly.

Mr. Généreux, you will remember the report on immigration we produced quickly. That could be part of a modernized version of the Official Languages Act, but there could be other measures or other regulations on immigration to support the promotion and protection of our official languages. I am just giving you an example.

I support the amendment. We should not limit ourselves to the Official Languages Act for the promotion and protection of the French fact or of the country's language minorities. A number of federal departments could also get involved. We will inevitably have to examine and measure all the tools during the study proposed in Mr. Beaulieu's fine motion.

Thank you for this amendment, which makes us cast a wider net. Some work has already been done. I will support the amendment for the reasons I just gave, but we could also study other things.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

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

I read Ms. Lalonde's motion. The Official Languages Act has been in place for over 50 years. We know the importance of modernizing it. To this end, the Conservative Party has already made concrete proposals that affect all official language minority communities.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

The committee's role is really to support and promote both official languages, but also to pay special attention to official language minority communities, meaning the anglophone community in Quebec and the francophone minority communities in the rest of the country.

I'll now address Ms. Lalonde's amendment. The motion that we're dealing with today opens up new opportunities for the Standing Committee on Official Languages to look at one of the two official languages diagnosed as being in difficulty. There's cause for concern. The status of French is a matter of concern in all French-language minority communities, but also in Quebec.

The motion moved focuses on a new aspect that we haven't studied in the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This aspect is the status of French in Quebec. It seems that, to be consistent, paragraph (c) should reflect this specific focus on the status of French in the country. The scope has already been broadened to include all francophone communities across Canada. I believe that the motion is consistent and that broadening it to include both official languages wouldn't reflect the spirit of the motion, which is to address one of the two official languages.

I read an article in *La Liberté* entitled “French in decline”. The article states the following:

Canada recognizes English and French as official languages. Yet these two languages are not represented in an equitable manner...

We must promote one of the two official languages. We're doing this. However, there's a real concern about French right now, both in Quebec and across the country. On that note, I'm referring in particular to your government's Speech from the Throne.

That's why I believe that the motion, in its current form, is preferable to the proposed amendment.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

The next speakers will be Ms. Martinez Ferrada and Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Martinez Ferrada, you have the floor.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to build on what my colleague Mr. Arseneault said about the Official Languages Act. By taking a broader look at the act, we could focus not only on the French issue, but also on all the provisions that the government can use to support the promotion of French in all its policies. Simply talking about the Official Languages Act may be limiting, in the sense that other government departments or entities may also be able to support the French issue.

I also want to reassure my colleague Mr. Beaulieu with regard to the motion. Mr. Blaney also just made some points. We must still refer to the motion proposed by Mr. Beaulieu. The preamble clearly states that the French issue is being addressed. The preamble is really found in the Speech from the Throne in terms of taking responsibility and promoting French. This is really about the French issue. Adding the official languages issue doesn't take anything away from the motion.

The amendments to the Official Languages Act will certainly improve the status of French in linguistic minority communities in Quebec and across the country. However, all other possible ways to improve the status of French must be explored. The focus on only the Official Languages Act limits us.

As parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, I can tell you that, even in terms of immigration, we must consider measures to improve the situation regarding the demographic weight of francophones. However, this isn't necessarily enshrined in the Official Languages Act. I think that other elements of the government could help us develop much broader proposals and a more comprehensive report to improve the situation of francophones across the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll echo what Mr. Blaney said. The preamble to my motion specifies at the outset what we want to focus on. It's in line with the Speech from the Throne, which acknowledged for the first time the responsibility to promote and protect French not only outside Quebec, but also in Quebec. The speech also stated that, as a result, the government would strengthen the Official Languages Act.

Our motion talks about the status of English and French in Quebec. We also take into account the English issue. We don't want to prevent the English-speaking community from thriving, but we also

want to preserve the future of the French language. That's the purpose of our motion. The preamble talks about the responsibility to protect French. Yet we're reverting to the traditional view of both official languages. That's why we shouldn't support this amendment.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: I'll reread the text. However, I don't know whether I interpreted Mr. Blaney's comments properly. I understood that paragraph (c) would exclude from our study the impact on a linguistic minority community.

We're all saying the same thing about the preamble, namely, that it clearly states the scope of this study. The Speech from the Throne talked about protecting our linguistic minority communities while promoting the French fact in North America.

I'm a francophone outside Quebec. I would feel very uncomfortable telling Canadians that the 51-year-old Official Languages Act will disregard the anglophone minority communities in Quebec, which are the counterparts of the francophone minority communities outside Quebec.

Clearly this is part of the Speech from the Throne. How can we harmonize this with the French fact in North America, which we want to protect and promote? I don't think that you meant to say this, Mr. Blaney. However, that's how I understood your comments. This would distort Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

We acknowledge that there are two linguistic minorities in the country. We must also talk about the Acadians, Franco-Manitobans, Fransaskois and anglophones in Quebec. I live across from the Gaspé Peninsula. There are people named McDonald and Day. Mr. Blaney, you're a perfect example, since you're a francophone of Irish origin.

I'm appealing a little to everyone's reason. The preamble is excellent, because it clearly sets out the scope of the proposed study. This is what we all want to study. We must harmonize what may seem paradoxical, but perhaps isn't. Perhaps our study will prove otherwise.

We must harmonize this desire to promote French in Quebec and in North America. The more French is promoted in Quebec, the better it will be for francophone communities such as my community and Ms. Lalonde's communities and for all francophones outside Quebec. When the Official Languages Act was drafted, it included the two founding peoples. The act was designed to respect these peoples by protecting the two linguistic minorities.

I think that this goes part and parcel. However, the fact remains that the preamble and everything I just said is consistent with the Speech from the Throne. That's really what we want to do.

This was my two cents' worth. As a francophone outside Quebec, I would feel very uncomfortable telling the other linguistic minority, which has been recognized for 51 years in legislation, that we don't want to see the potential impact on them and that it isn't important.

I'll digress for a moment and finish on this note. We've all travelled a great deal, I'm sure. As parliamentarians, we must stop focusing on Montreal, because there are anglophones in Quebec outside Montreal. There are some right across the bridge from where I live. We mustn't think that Montreal is the only place where there are anglophones in Quebec.

I support the amendment. I think that it aligns with everything that has been said and, above all, with the preamble to Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

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

I don't have much to add. My colleague Mr. Arseneault very eloquently covered all the points that I wanted to make.

I want to add only one thing. My colleague Mr. Beaulieu used the wording of his paragraph (a), which specifically addresses the issue of English and French.

The amendment proposed by my colleague Ms. Lalonde seems quite plausible. It would complete the circle by encompassing the statements in the preamble and paragraph (a) of Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Mr. Blaney, you now have the floor.

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

I'll respond to Mr. Arseneault's comments.

Mr. Arseneault, I said earlier that the French fact was in decline in Canada. The purpose of this study is to look at the decline of the French fact across the country, and particularly in Quebec. This amounts to a big job for the committee. As you know, we've often looked at official language minority communities without considering the fact that Quebec is in a sea of English in North America. That's really the new part. That's why the study can focus on this issue.

To support all anglophone and francophone minority communities, the committee has recommendations on the modernization of the act. We look forward to seeing what the government will do to modernize the Official Languages Act.

I'll turn to the motion. I think that the original wording is perfect. That's why I don't plan to support the amendment.

The Chair: I'll now read Ms. Lalonde's amendment:

(c) Examine all the tools available to the government, as well as consider possible amendments to the Official Languages Act, to harmonize the government's commitment to protect and promote both official languages of Canada;

Madam Clerk, I'd like you to proceed to the vote on Ms. Lalonde's amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

• (1640)

The Chair: We'll now vote on Mr. Beaulieu's motion as amended by Ms. Lalonde's first amendment, which concerns paragraph (b).

Madam Clerk, once again, let's proceed to a recorded division.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: A few hands are raised to take the floor, including Mr. Beaulieu's and Mr. Blaney's hands.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm very pleased with the result of the vote. Thank you. I want to reassure all my colleagues that we don't want to harm the English-speaking community at all. However, the French language is under threat in Quebec right now. It's losing ground, while the English language is increasingly present. This will be the subject of discussion.

I also want us to vote on different motions and then establish an order of priority. I don't know whether we'll have time to do so.

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

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

There are two good motions before us: the study on the pandemic and the study on what I'd call the status of French in the country.

I see that you took the initiative to call witnesses for Thursday. This is a welcome initiative that gives our analysts the chance to do their work.

Before discussing our work for next week, I want to address one thing, Mr. Chair. We've talked a great deal about this topic. It even came up in question period. We also just passed a good motion unanimously.

The Official Languages Act dates back to 1969. It was slightly modernized in 1988. As my colleagues know, we must move forward with the modernization of the Official Languages Act. A few weeks ago, I introduced a motion to the committee members. As we say in the House, I believe that, if I ask for unanimous consent, I'll get it. That's why I'm quite calmly moving the following motion:

That the committee recommend to the government that it introduce its bill to modernize the Official Languages Act by December 11, 2020, and that the committee report the adoption of this motion to the House.

I want to point out that December 11, 2020, is the last day of the parliamentary session.

I remember Mr. Arseneault saying that it was important to achieve results in the committee, so I'd like results.

Mr. Chair, I'll be brief, but this is worthwhile. As committee members, we have a good history of working together.

I'll refer to the letter from the president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. We could almost copy and paste the words of the Quebec Community Groups Network, which also called for modernization. This letter is dated November 4—

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, could Mr. Blaney be asked to lower his microphone a little, for the interpreters? I think that it's a little hard to hear him.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Généreux. I had followed the clerk's instructions.

Dear committee members, I was saying that I have here a copy of the letter that Jean Johnson sent to all MPs. I found two excerpts particularly important. I'll read the first one to you:

Although the government informs us in the Speech from the Throne that it intends to table a bill, this commitment was not accompanied by a timetable.

I was thinking of Mr. Arseneault, who was the spokesperson for the linguistic minority in New Brunswick, and some of my colleagues who belong to other minorities.

I'll read the second excerpt to you:

Hon. Member, you know as well as I do that in a minority government, the more time passes, the less time Parliament has to move this legislative priority forward. We are concerned that if the government does not introduce legislation before the end of 2020, both Houses of Parliament will not have the time to pass the changes our communities have wanted for decades...

We therefore encourage Committee members to undertake, as a matter of priority, an [action to] modernize the Official Languages Act ...

... we encourage the Committee to study the notion of promoting French throughout Canada.

Mr. Chair, we have here a roadmap drawn up by those who are giving us the work, that is to say, both anglophone and francophone minority communities. They want us to invite the government to conduct this study. I would like to point out to my parliamentary colleagues that I used the word "invite" correctly. We aren't forcing the government's hand, but, as members of Parliament, we are inviting it to take action. That is very constructive.

In terms of what happens next, the FCFA was very clear. I believe that the study proposed by Mr. Beaulieu's motion, which we have just adopted, would be very well received by all the communities.

Mr. Chair, I repeat: essentially, I am tabling this notice inviting the government to table its bill to modernize the Official Languages Act. This was part of the Speech from the Throne and part of the government's promises. I think it's consensual. It'll be one more step. For the members of the committee, it's a way of indicating their willingness to represent communities across the country.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

The debate is now on Mr. Blaney's motion.

Would anyone like to speak?

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

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

Allow me to qualify what our colleague Mr. Blaney has just said.

I won't speak for all of Canada's francophone minorities, far from it; I don't have that claim. However, I can at least speak on behalf of New Brunswick's Acadians. We have the SANB, an organization that has been dedicated for decades to promoting the French language in New Brunswick. It's the watchdog of the French language in New Brunswick. The SANB has an excellent relationship with the current government. I don't want to contradict the FCFA, but I would add this to what it has to say. According to the SANB, which is the leading organization in New Brunswick for the defence of the French fact, we give the runner a chance, we have great collaboration with the current government, and we give the minister until February to put together this project.

I wanted to provide this nuance. For me, as an Acadian from New Brunswick, I have no problem recommending what you tell us. However, time being what it is, I prefer to see a bill that is well developed, rather than forcing the issue when it may not be necessary.

In short, it isn't just the FCFA that speaks for francophones outside Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Généreux would like to say something.

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

As Mr. Arseneault said earlier, we're the two oldest, if I can put it that way, on the committee. I've even been on the committee since 2009, at least during my years in Ottawa. Calls for this modernization of the act have been going on for several years. The current government was first elected over five years ago. I think the minister made it relatively clear today in the House of Commons that she was preparing to table this new modernized act. So I would suggest that we proceed to a vote. That way, the motion can be adopted by this independent, it must be said, committee. I think it's important for everyone to understand that this committee is independent. In fact, the minister said so again in the House today.

We have the opportunity and like to think we can defend the interests of all francophone communities outside Quebec and the anglophone minority in Quebec. This bill deserves to be tabled as quickly as possible, so that we can assess its scope here in this very room as soon as possible

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

I'll try my luck: is there any objection to adopting Mr. Blaney's motion?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Can we hold a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Yes, with pleasure.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

● (1650)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Looking at all this, I'm telling myself that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

When we spoke informally, everyone seemed to agree enough to give priority to the study on French. To do this, I would suggest that we start inviting witnesses as early as next Tuesday.

The Chair: That's a given.

If it's the wish of the committee to begin this study next Tuesday, then the list of witnesses should be drawn up as quickly as possible so that the clerk can begin to make calls.

Since today is Tuesday, I'd suggest that we should have a list of witnesses by Thursday noon at the latest. I don't know what you think about that.

Ms. Lalonde would like to say something.

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

Mr. Beaulieu, I want to talk about the spirit of collaboration that we've seen today. We had moved away from the informal agreement that we had previously had, and that had stirred up feelings that touched us all. So we're back to where we should have been a few weeks ago and where we would have been if some of the people on the committee had followed the general ideas of the informal committee that we can't talk about today. You know very well what I'm referring to.

I think we did a good job today. I'm proud to see that the committee has worked so hard to get these motions adopted, which are really very important.

Having said that, we are facing an exceptional health crisis in Canada. I'm sure, hon. members, that the people who are calling you are sharing with you their anxiety about what they are experiencing as a result of COVID-19. Moreover, during this period of public discussion on the realities of this crisis, our two official languages have sometimes not been respected. I would therefore like to emphasize that the study proposed by Ms. Lattanzio is very relevant.

If I may, Mr. Chair, in this spirit of collaboration and given the extraordinary work we've done, I'd like to propose to the committee a kind of tandem approach. You can let me know if it's possible. Given that we will have witnesses this Thursday, it would be interesting to continue the study proposed in Ms. Lattanzio's motion. On Tuesday, we can look at Mr. Beaulieu's motion, which is very relevant. We've discussed this matter at length, and I think it needs to be studied. I'm wondering if there's any way that we could work together, given that we have only five meetings left before the holidays.

We all have this sort of anxious feeling, but I'm not sure why. We shouldn't forget that we'll resume our work in January. For me, at least, I'll be coming back refreshed. Certainly, we'll all be working through the holidays and January. I think we all want to start our good work again. So there will be a process between December 11

and the end of January, when we return from the House, and we'll be able to continue our good work.

So I propose a tandem approach. Madam Clerk, Mr. Chair, you may wish to share with us possibilities for the next five meetings. I know this has been done in other committees. I'm suggesting that we work together, that we work collaboratively, and that we go down that path that seems to be shining today.

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

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

● (1655)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: First of all, I take exception to the references Ms. Lalonde has just made to the informal committee. One of the reasons for this may be that many people weren't present at the beginning and didn't fully understand the discussions.

I do indeed consider that we must work together. However, there has already been the study by the Commissioner of Official Languages that deals with services offered in both official languages during the pandemic. The FCFA has also done a study on this subject. In my opinion, there is an urgent need to consider a new point of view in the wake of the Speech from the Throne. That's why I'm maintaining my proposal. We'll be able to receive the witnesses who have already been invited next Tuesday, but we should then proceed with the study. If we want this to have an effect on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, which is urgent, I believe we should move quickly on this study.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor.

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

Still in the same spirit of collaboration, your proposal to provide the list of witnesses for the study on the decline of French in Canada by Thursday noon seems reasonable to me. This gives us the flexibility to hear witnesses on Tuesday as part of this new study.

I'd like to reiterate that I fully agree with receiving the witnesses who have already indicated their availability on Thursday to come and discuss the pandemic's impact on official languages. We're in the middle of it, and I'd like to tell you that we're wondering what kind of holiday season we're going to have in Quebec, because the opportunities to get together are shrinking by the hour.

Having said that, as for Tuesday's study on the decline of French, a lot of ink has been spilled and there's been some grandstanding, but it's important to be factual. In this regard, Statistics Canada is one of the committee's good allies. In the list of witnesses for the Conservative Party, there will be people from Statistics Canada, because the numbers on each community are important. That would certainly be a good way to start the study, especially since we're aware that we won't be able to finish either study before Christmas.

Early in the week, we could invite Statistics Canada's factual specialists. Statistics Canada has always been an ally for us and our analysts. It will enable us to produce a quality report. This report on the situation of French in Quebec will be important. This is unexplored territory for the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I believe that Statistics Canada will be able to make a considerable contribution.

I agree that we hear from witnesses on Thursday about the impact of the pandemic on official languages and that we hear from witnesses on Tuesday about the decline of French.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Ms. Lattanzio, the floor is yours.

[English]

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

I just wanted to tell my colleagues that the reality is that we are in the second phase of COVID. As my colleague suggested, our phone at the office rings because people are in the middle of this pandemic. Unfortunately, there are people who are losing their lives right now. There are community groups and individuals who are complaining that they're not having access to services in one of the official languages; the minority groups, the anglophones in Quebec and, I would suspect, the francophones in the rest of the country.

It is not to privilege one motion over the other. We firmly believe, and I think the display of co-operation that was eminent in this committee today showed clearly, that members want to forge ahead with the other motion and get to work, really. We are in the middle of November. I think it is high time we moved on and started looking at and executing the studies on these two very interesting motions, and the other motion that we passed also, this afternoon.

It is not to prioritize one over the other. All I want to say is that I think in other committees there has been the possibility to be able to work, as my colleague says, in tandem; I'll call it in parallel. I can see the study being done in four to five sessions, as I mentioned last week, before the holidays. If it is the wish of my colleagues to initiate the other study, nothing impedes this committee from being able to alternate.

We have two days of sittings right now in the committee. We can devote the first hour to one and the second hour to the other, or we can move into the first day, which would be Tuesday on one, or Thursday on one and Tuesday on the other, and alternate. We would be able to forge ahead with the two very interesting motions that we have before us.

I would suspect that we already have witnesses who have been assigned to come before this committee on Thursday to begin on the pandemic one. I would see no problem with regard to working on the other one next week, but I don't see that we need to focus on one to the detriment of the other, or that one is much more important than the other. I think both have their valid reasons to forge ahead.

Remember, the first motion is strictly on the pandemic. We cannot in good conscience start looking into that one at the end of this pandemic. Canadians are relying on us to be able to deliver ser-

vices, to be able to deliver information, and just to be cognizant of this pandemic that's still rampant. People are having issues with service and with not receiving communication in their language. But it's not just a question of language, as the commissioner has well established; it's a question of safety; it's a question of security.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Chair, I know that today there was a beautiful display of co-operation and collaboration amongst all of us, and I wish to pursue it in that vein. I hope we can march along and do our work. I for one am looking forward to doing this before the end of our session, and with great enthusiasm, when we come back in the month of January.

Thank you.

• (1700)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

I understand what the members of the committee would like.

As I said, next Thursday, we will have a two-hour meeting, but, at the moment, we only have two witnesses. The clerk has made a number of calls and has left a number of voicemail messages for the witnesses she has contacted.

We will do whatever is necessary to begin studying Mr. Beaulieu's motion as quickly as possible. I would ask you to submit your list of witnesses by noon on Thursday and we will start playing with it. The clerk and I are waiting for several witnesses to call us back. It is possible that we would do the study on Ms. Lattanzio's motion on Thursday and that the topic on the agenda of Tuesday's meeting will depend on the list of witnesses that you submit and the calls we make. It may also be that, on Tuesday of the following week, depending on the availability of witnesses and to avoid us coming back to committee business, we may have a second meeting on Ms. Lattanzio's motion. That is the likely situation.

After this meeting, the clerk and I will stay in contact, but the sooner you submit your lists of witnesses, the sooner the clerk will be able to invite them.

We must also think about our analysts. They have worked on the meeting with the commissioner. We have this motion on Thursday's agenda, which our analysts are already working on. If we have a meeting next Tuesday on a new study, our analysts will have to hurry in order to provide us with documents by then.

I think I fully understand what members of the committee would like to do. At this stage, I would ask you to leave it in our hands and we will keep you up to date as things develop.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So we will not be voting to prioritize my motion. However, once we have the lists of witnesses, I would like that study to be given priority. If none of the witnesses is available, we can adjust, but it is important to clearly indicate that we want to prioritize that study. That is the gist of my proposal.

• (1705)

The Chair: I understand. The schedule of committee meetings is often preferably debated at the subcommittee. I hear what you are saying, but the schedule is determining how things are being done. We are not prioritizing any one study in particular.

I hear what the members of the committee want to do. As I said at the beginning, we can always move forward in our work by conducting two studies at the same time. Our studies in the next four or five sections, before the session ends on December 11, will be determined by the availability of the witnesses.

I have three speakers on my list, Mrs. Lalonde, Ms. Martinez Ferrada and Ms. Ashton.

Mrs. Lalonde, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Why not be flexible? Since we have two sessions per week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I would like our committee to consider using one day for one study and the other day for the other study, all the while working on the list of witnesses. I know that people are very busy, but I feel that, if we work at it, we could establish a fine list of witnesses for you and for our clerk, Ms. Ménard.

Personally, I would like to alternate our studies for the final five meetings. I think that would be a great way to end the year. Then, in January, we will continue our studies and see where things go. As we know, in terms of COVID-19, the situation is changing every day. We know that the second wave of the health crisis is fully upon us. We can see the very sad numbers of all the people dying from the virus. We also know that there will be vaccines next year.

For the next 5 meetings, I feel that it would be good to alternate. I think that it would also be good for all the people who have complained to our offices about language problems during the crisis. I also think that it would be good to obtain perspectives on language. That also can have very harmful effects in this area, believe you me.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

I saw Ms. Lattanzio's hand up. I don't know if she pressed the button accidentally.

Okay, then the floor goes to Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was actually going to make the same comments as my colleague, Mrs. Lalonde.

I am experiencing this situation in other committees and you certainly experience it in other committees: people are busy. We have a very specific schedule each week. It's really quite a challenge to have participants whenever we would like. I feel that, if the sessions for each of the studies were held alternately, it would enable us to be more flexible in hearing from witnesses.

I feel that we will need the flexibility when we start the holiday season. Schedules are full and people really are busy. Working in that way will give us more flexibility.

It is not a matter of giving one motion priority over the other. Moreover, I feel that work on Ms. Lattanzio's motion has already

started. We really have to be sensitive to the time and to the schedule of when witnesses are available.

I understand that, from the 35 different witnesses proposed for this Thursday, only two will be able to be present. Basically, that shows how complicated it is to schedule people at the time we want. I feel that, by having this organizational and logistical flexibility, it will allow us to deal with the two motions in parallel and to move our studies forward.

I think that Ms. Lattanzio's motion proposed four meetings. The study proposed in the motion we have passed today will take seven or eight meetings. In any event, at some stage, we will be able to focus solely on the motion we passed today and probably finish it in January. As Mrs. Lalonde reminded us, we are all coming back in January.

So, let's give ourselves the space and the time we need, let's give ourselves more flexibility in inviting witnesses. That is what I would like us to do, so that we can have a number of witnesses.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

[*English*]

Madam Ashton, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to go back to the difficulty of reaching the witnesses. We have suggested inviting the President of the Treasury Board, Mr. Duclos, as well as representatives from the FCFA. We have suggested potential witnesses, particularly elected officials who, we can but hope, will agree as a priority to appear before the committee, since it has not sat for several months. I hope that they will show some goodwill and make themselves available as soon as possible, given that it has been a long time since the committee has sat. Of course, I understand that it may be difficult to reach them, but, let's be honest, in this case, we have to rely on the goodwill of key people.

I also wanted to bring this up while we are in a public meeting, so that those individuals can hear what we are saying. We are not talking about any old person, or about those in organizations with few means in these difficult times. We are talking about key people, elected people, people with responsibilities directly linked to the topics that we are discussing at this committee.

I hope that those people will make themselves available, not only for this Thursday, but also for next Tuesday and beyond.

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

We have 35 witnesses on the list, and I can assure you that the clerk is working as hard as she can.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Out of concern for efficiency and so that we do not waste any time, may I propose something? Next Thursday, we will have two witnesses here. In the second hour, could we meet as a subcommittee to finalize everything that will follow?

The Chair: Yes, that is a possibility. At about 3:15 p.m. this afternoon, I received the names of the two witnesses who have accepted our invitation. The clerk is continuing to work on it. So it is possible to meet for an hour and then move to committee business.

Mrs. Lalonde, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair and my dear colleagues, you have done an extraordinary job, together with our clerk, Ms. Ménard, to reach the witnesses on the lists that all parties have submitted.

In my opinion, we are perhaps being a little impatient when people do not reply right away. Certainly, when we invite them, we expect a reply. However, as Ms. Ashton was saying, people have other responsibilities. We are going through a health crisis at the moment. So, I would like to give the witnesses the opportunity to appear on this topic on Thursday. It's important to submit the list of witnesses on Mr. Beaulieu's motion as amended, which we have passed today.

My colleague, who is now joining our committee, expressed what I was saying very well. We all know that we have five meetings left. So we can be flexible and deal with these motions in parallel, in order to have as many witnesses here as possible. Then, in January, we would be able to continue our work and begin to ponder the reports.

Above all, we must give witnesses the opportunity to respond to the telephone calls from the clerk.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Lalonde.

I would just like to clarify my comment just now. In my reply to Mr. Beaulieu, I was talking about one hour meeting with the witnesses and I raised the possibility of working in subcommittee. Unfortunately, that is not correct. It is not about the subcommittee. If that meets, the minutes must be translated and we must report to the committee. It's really about a committee meeting, with the first hour reserved for the appearance of witnesses.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

• (1715)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In that case, could we add a third hour, during which we would have a meeting of the subcommittee?

The Chair: Are you talking about this Thursday?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

The Chair: No. That needs too many arrangements to be made during this pandemic. We must make sure that the House of Commons and all its staff are able to respond.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor. Please use your microphone, Mr. Beaulieu, so that we can hear you better.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My apologies, it's just that I'm hearing the interpretation in English all the time. Anyway, the meeting is almost over.

The Chair: Very good.

Mrs. Lalonde and Mr. Blaney still want to comment.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: With all due respect, I really do not understand why we would not meet in subcommittee.

I think we all saw eye to eye today when we passed a new motion, Mr. Beaulieu's motion, to be precise. Last week, we passed a motion that dealt with the impacts of the health crisis on minority communities, with reference to their access to services in the language of their choice.

We have previously tried to have meetings of the subcommittee and we have seen what has resulted from that. It all made us move forward better. We now have a plan, in that we will use the list of witnesses for Mr. Beaulieu's amended motion. Then we'll see what results from the appearances of the witnesses on Thursday. Then we will make decisions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I will be quick, Mr. Chair.

I like the idea of having two parallel studies. As I understand it, next Thursday, the witnesses will appear in the first hour. As for the second hour, it will be difficult for our clerk to give us a list of witnesses and a preliminary schedule, because we will not have given her our lists until that same morning.

Nevertheless, we have definite witnesses who can be here. To the extent possible, we could come up with a draft schedule and discuss it on Thursday afternoon. Thereafter, as we receive replies, we will be able to confirm it all.

I think we have consensus this afternoon on our approach, which is to conduct parallel studies, one on the pandemic and the other on the decline of French in the country.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you want to talk about the schedule that you were alluding to, Mr. Blaney?

Hon. Steven Blaney: No, I said that we could talk about it on Thursday afternoon in the second hour.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I just want to say that it is normal practice to establish the priority of proposals at the subcommittee. I don't see why we could not have an official meeting of the subcommittee.

We started by giving priority to one study and now, the proposal is to conduct the two studies in parallel. It would have been helpful to consider that at the subcommittee.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, as I have told you, when we have a meeting of the subcommittee, it is during one of the periods reserved for the committee. We can have a meeting of the subcommittee, but then, at the next meeting, we have to submit a report to the committee, a report that must be approved before we can move any further forward.

A number of calls have been made to witnesses and we are waiting for their replies. As Mr. Blaney mentioned, if we only have two witnesses on Thursday, we will, in the following hour, be able to discuss committee business and the way forward. It will all be done during the committee meeting.

The floor now goes to Mrs. Lalonde and then to Ms. Lattanzio.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Ms. Lattanzio probably has the same idea as I do. Is it possible to ask the clerk to send us the list of the 35 witnesses? We can try to help you.

Ms. Lattanzio, I think that is what you were going to ask. Am I right?

• (1720)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: You are.

The Chair: We will happily do that. Officially, 38 witnesses were suggested, but three of them were suggested by more than one colleague. That brings the total to 35 witnesses. We will do what is necessary to send you that list of witnesses.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, when specifically can we expect to get it? I know that it is now 5:20 p.m., but could it be done by tomorrow at the latest?

The Chair: I just received the answer. Tomorrow morning, the clerk will send us the list of all the witnesses.

I see that no one has their hand up to speak anymore.

To summarize, the committee will be able to continue deciding on a schedule and on other motions for study, as appropriate. I am very pleased with the way today's meeting went. Now we know which studies we are going to do. These topics are extremely important and we will be able to start them right away on Thursday.

On behalf of all the members of the committee, I just want to pass my warm thanks to all the staff working with us, the analysts, the interpreters and the technicians. The technical problems are behind us.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you an excellent evening.

[*English*]

See you on Thursday.

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