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—
Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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•(0910)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning and welcome to the 40th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

On the orders of the day this morning, we have a motion that Mr. Chong would like to move during the public part of our meeting. We will then go in camera to discuss the report on the Canada-community collaboration accords.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

It was recently reported that federal money given to the Province of Ontario for French language instruction in private schools is being eliminated from certain private schools. I want to bring this up in committee because this is an example of where the federal government has a role to play.

Since 1970, the federal government has used its spending power to encourage French language instruction in Ontario in its private schools, and that program has continued for over 30 years. However, the Province of Ontario recently announced that it will be eliminating this funding to a substantial number of private schools in Ontario.

There are a number of issues here. The first issue is one of unfairness. Presently there are about 230 private schools in Ontario that receive federal funding, administered by the province. The province has announced that it plans to restrict funding to only those schools that are secondary in nature and spend at least one-quarter of their classroom time teaching French. In other words, the province has announced that they're going to eliminate federal funding for primary schools, any schools that are religious in nature, and any schools that do not teach at least 25% of the curriculum in French.

I think the problem here is twofold. First, it's an issue of fairness. If you're going to fund certain private schools and certain religious schools, like Catholic schools, for French language instruction, then in Ontario, with such a diverse population, you should fund all religious schools and not pick and choose which religion you're going to favour.

The second issue is simply the preservation and promotion of the French language. I don't see how it is in anybody's interest to eliminate or reduce the amount of French language instruction or the

support thereof in Ontario. If French language instruction is being provided because of federal grants to certain private schools, that should continue regardless of the affiliation of the school or whether it's a primary or secondary school.

I would argue that eliminating funding for primary schools versus secondary schools is the wrong way to go. As a matter of fact, we need to be encouraging children to take French at the primary level, because that's where they set their habits and their interest in the French language.

I bring this up because I think it's a very important issue. I'll give you one example of the type of school that will lose its funding. There is a school in Kitchener-Waterloo called the Kitchener-Waterloo Bilingual School. It has 350 students from kindergarten to grade eight. This school spends half its time teaching the curriculum in French. It will no longer be eligible for funding. I think this is an abomination.

We should support this motion because it's federal money, it's an issue of fairness, and this committee is responsible for an issue where the province is eliminating federal money from certain schools in the Province of Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

There's no problem with the motion itself. There are some speakers on the list.

We'll begin with Mr. Denis Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will of course agree with anything that ensures respect for bilingualism and the official languages. I would not do as my colleague Mr. Lemieux has done in his riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, where he has not taken a position on bilingual signage.

Without wanting to echo his jurisdictional arguments, I would like to ask Michael a question. If we are talking about federal funds for a one-time event, that is one thing, and we can get involved. If federal funds are given to the provincial Ministry of Education for it to manage those funds, like what is done pursuant to the framework agreement on social union, then that poses a problem. Indeed, we should not intervene in provincial matters. Provincial governments have their own powers, and we have to respect their jurisdiction.

I am willing to discuss this file, but I first would like to clear up the jurisdictional concerns. Does this refer to such basic training as English as a second language or French as a second language programs? There are such related programs, particularly in the immigration sector. In the case at hand, are funds being transferred from the Canadian government to the provincial Government of Ontario? The Ontario government might make mistakes, and we might disagree with some of its initiatives, but it has free rein over such matters, and it is up to the Government of Ontario to decide what it will do with those funds. We cannot interfere and ask a provincial government to account for its decisions.

I want to understand before making a decision.

● (0915)

[English]

The Chair: I will stay clear of the list, and we can come back to Mr. Chong for some comments.

Mr. Nadeau.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand the principle here. If federal funds are not used for their intended purpose, particularly for French second-language instruction or, in this case, French first-language instruction, then we have to know what is going on. I know that, at one point, the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française had done a study in that regard, a study entitled *À LA COURTE PAILLE*, which showed that in British Columbia, for example, federal funding had been allocated to neither French as a second language nor French as a first language instruction. No one knows what the money was used for exactly. This is a major problem, both in terms of education and French as a second language or French as a first language scholarships. We should indeed be concerned when funds are not used for the intended purpose.

That said, I have noted that Mr. Chong spoke about private schools. We could at least invite witnesses here to explain how the system works. Do we also want to consider public schools? Do we want to include school boards and therefore deal with public schools?

Here is how things work: the federal government gives money to the province; the provincial Ministry of Education redistributes that amount according to how its school boards are structured; and school boards decide to provide a given school with more funding or cut funding for another school altogether. We end up by looking straight at how the province's system works. Indeed, the following question arises: what to do about the private and public sectors? Is Mr. Chong referring to both? We would have to meet with people who could explain how federal funding is distributed to the provinces, how the federal government can follow that money, and if there are ways to encourage provinces to respect their agreements. We agree on the fact that when we deal with provincial areas of jurisdiction, we are no longer dealing with our own.

The issue is worth raising. We could talk to the people whose job it is to ensure that federal funds are channeled to the province, to know how the funds are distributed and whether results are obtained. Are there accounting records proving that the money was sent? Are

the provinces required to keep such records or not? You understand what I am talking about. We cannot simply be told that this is none of our business and that we are outside our jurisdiction.

There you have it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you.

If they tell us to mind our own business, then that might be because this is not within our jurisdiction. The motion is clear:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and various stakeholders to explain why federal money for French-language instruction is being eliminated from certain schools in Ontario.

I have received letters from people in southern Ontario. In them, principals and teachers indicate that they used to receive money from federal programs, but that that had been cut. They find that regrettable, because those programs allowed anglophones to learn French.

I think that this is a good motion. We will hear federal government officials explain how the funds are distributed. We will also hear from provincial representatives who will tell us why the funding that was granted to those schools was cut. We could also invite school principals, other officials or members of the commission. What reasons were given for eliminating that funding? This way, we could bring the problem into the open.

I am still receiving letters from people who say that it does not make sense. Canadians want a country where they can be served in both official languages. That is what schools were doing by teaching young people another language, and then, all of a sudden, the funding was cut.

The same problem occurred in Nova Scotia. Funds were allocated to Nova Scotia so that it could provide French-language educational services, but it appeared that the money was used for other purposes. A ruckus was raised in Ottawa, and then things came back to normal. The communities received the money that was owing to them. At least, that is what I think happened, given that we did not receive any further complaints.

For all those reasons, I think that the motion is headed in the right direction. We can assess it once we commence our study, and see whether it falls within our jurisdiction. We can perhaps help them out.

● (0920)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

At this point in time, I think Mr. Chong would like to comment.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I want to first address Mr. Coderre's concerns about jurisdiction.

We give nearly \$1 million a year to the Province of Ontario so they can use that money to promote French language instruction in private schools, specifically in private schools. Private schools in Ontario are defined as non-public, which is the secular system, and non-Catholic. Ontario funds two school systems completely. It funds a public system that is secular in nature, and it funds a Catholic system that is run by the Roman Catholic Church. All other schools, whether they be religious or secular, are considered private. This money is supposed to be for French instruction in private schools, that is to say, non-Catholic/non-public schools in Ontario.

The money is governed by a four-year agreement between the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario. What exactly the terms of those agreements are I don't know. They very well could be in violation of the agreements—they might not be, they might be—so that would be one of the questions we could ask. What are the terms of the agreement? Can the province do this?

Secondly, it's an example of the federal government in the past using its spending power to effect priorities in provincial areas of jurisdiction. Certainly that's the case. However, it still is federal money, so I think it's worth our looking at it.

I'll add a final answer to your question. This money has been given in a consistent manner since 1970 to private schools in Ontario. Suddenly, after 38 years of this program running, the province announces that it's cutting funding to a majority of those schools that have received that money for the last 30 to 40 years. This is causing a lot of concern, not only in terms of delivering French language instruction in those schools, but in terms of fairness. Where is the equity here? Where's the fairness here? Since this is federal money, and since I've always thought the federal government was the primary institution of state that protects citizens' rights through the charter and through other mechanisms, I think we have a responsibility to take a look at this.

In terms of what Monsieur Nadeau brought up about accountability, I think he raises a very good point. Apparently one of the concerns of the province was that they didn't have a mechanism to prove where the money was going in these private schools. I think that's a legitimate concern, but the solution is not to cut funding, the solution is to put accountability in place. That's the solution.

These are the kinds of questions I think we can ask.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Coderre, I think you wanted to add something.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chairman, I am familiar with the separate school system, but in light of the situation, an even more relevant question needs to be asked and here I am thinking of my colleagues from Quebec. When we reach any type of federal-provincial agreement, terms and conditions obviously have to be respected, but we have to ask ourselves whether money should be allocated to the Ministry of Education so that it in turn can be redistributed. This poses a serious jurisdictional problem.

Just imagine for a moment that I have reached an agreement regarding English as a second language with the Government of Quebec, and I want to ensure that the federal government is administering the money it pays out as part of this agreement in

proper fashion. There would be an unbelievable mess. We are talking about money, but this is not just federal money: it is also taxpayers' money.

Furthermore, certain significant jurisdictional elements must be respected. We can go right back to the British North America Act to see that education comes under provincial jurisdiction. Even if, in the interest of good government, we have the power to spend, as we do already in several sectors, we need to be very careful that we do not, as part of the agreement, meddle in matters that come under provincial jurisdiction. It is not because we have spending power that we necessarily have an accountability relationship and that the Government of Quebec or Ontario has to, for example, be accountable to the Government of Canada.

Unless this question is answered in greater detail—and I think that the analyst could provide us with this answer—I am not sure that this motion is in order. First of all I would like to look at the parameters of the agreement. As I told you, I agree that we need to invest more and protect official languages. I can understand the fact that schools are sending letters. I have received some as well. However, we do have to deal with a jurisdictional reality. This is even in the framework of the social union. If the federal government gives money to provincial governments, they are not obliged to be accountable. Indeed, the federal government cannot get involved. I would like our analyst to examine this issue.

It would be premature to vote on this matter. Indeed, just imagine that this was about the Government of Quebec and not about the Government of Ontario. We know what the reaction would be.

● (0925)

The Chair: I would simply like to clarify, Mr. Coderre, that I ruled that the motion was in order when it was presented.

We will now give the floor to Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I think that we should support this motion. Over the past two years, I have seen us intervene in many sectors where we did not appear to have to do so for the purpose of protecting official language communities in minority situations. I must confess that I was surprised when I saw the motion. Indeed, Ontario has a long history when it comes to language problems. I think that everybody would acknowledge this. In addition, for some time now, other provinces have been following suit. There is, for example, New Brunswick, where anglophones have demanded French immersion programs in their schools. The Liberal government said no or, at least, was obstinate. There is another Liberal government in Ontario and there too, there is a problem.

As a central government, I think that it would be important to see whether people in official language minority situations are being respected. We are entitled to know whether or not the federal money earmarked to support francophone groups in Canada is going to the right place. I am speaking on my own behalf, but I believe that, as a Quebecker, I have a duty to support these groups. I may be aggravating those people with convictions that we should not get involved in provincial matters, which I do agree with, but I can assure you that, as a francophone, I find it deplorable that we still have to raise this issue today.

I thought that Ontario was a province that was a little bit more enlightened about the big linguistic problem that we have had throughout Canada, but recently I saw that the same situation prevails in New Brunswick. I therefore think that it is very important to deal with this issue as a committee, so that we can resolve the problem. Perhaps we could make some recommendations or suggestions that would be valid for Ontario, New Brunswick and Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

There are still two speakers on the list. Most committee members and all political parties have had a chance to express their views. Therefore, when committee members are ready, I will call the question.

Mr. Lemieux, the floor is yours.

● (0930)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to say I don't quite understand why Mr. Coderre might be opposed to the motion. I do understand the argument about *les champs de compétence*, the areas of responsibility. But I think what's important here is that there is federal money going to the Province of Ontario, and there's been a change in policy. I don't think many of us know, or any of us knows the details about this. I think the aim of this motion is to have people come in front of us to simply explain what was happening originally, what is happening now, why there's been a change, and what the impact on the schools has been, and to just gather information.

We do this for many other topics, for many other studies that we do. For example, CBC has *champs de compétence* as well. They made certain decisions. We asked them to come in front of our committee to explain why they made such decisions. What was the impact? What did we think the impact was? What was some of the feedback we had received? What did they think about that? It was to enter into dialogue with the key stakeholders on these issues.

This argument of *champs de compétence* has never stopped this committee before, certainly not from having productive discussions with key witnesses about a matter of key importance. I just wanted to explain. I think what I see here is that this motion allows the committee to gather very useful and important information regarding a subject that touches on second-language training in the province of Ontario using federal money. As Mr. Chong rightly pointed out, federal funding is supporting this. If there is a change in the policy, I myself would like to know what the change is exactly and why the

change was made. I'd like them to explain that. Then I'd also like to know from the schools, particularly the smaller schools, what the impact is on them. I see this as giving us an opportunity as a committee to work together and to gather useful information.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

I would like to add at this moment that the committee is free to study whatever topic it's willing to undertake. The committee has a recommendation. It has no power indeed in any jurisdiction, I would say. This is why I consider the motion fully acceptable.

Mr. Chong would like to add something.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to answer, through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Coderre's concerns with respect to jurisdiction. He mentioned that we wouldn't do this with the Province of Quebec. Well, we wouldn't because the Province of Quebec would never cut French language instruction in its public schooling system or in its support for religious school instruction. Quebec has always been quite sensitive about not just the preservation of the French language, but also the preservation of the English language in minority situations. So I think that's one difference.

The second difference is that Quebec doesn't discriminate against religious schools. It decided to fund religious schools, and it funds them consistently, and they're not making second-class citizens out of people who choose to send their kids to parochial schools.

The other thing I'd add, in answer to some of Mr. Coderre's concerns, is that the reason that we need to study this is because this agreement expires. This is an agreement signed by the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario. This agreement expires on March 31 of next year. This agreement expires next year, and I assume there will be a replacement agreement.

This is an opportunity for the committee to provide its input into that replacement agreement, that successor agreement, to say we've studied this issue and we think this clause should be added to this agreement or this clause should be modified or this clause should be eliminated from the agreement. The minister may choose to listen to us, she may choose to not listen to us, but at least we've had some input into this by saying it's the committee's opinion that this is how the new successor agreement should be modified.

It's timely to study this, it's appropriate to study this, and I think it's important to study this. There are a lot of people in southwestern Ontario—and these are not just people who are sending their kids to religious schools; these are people who are sending their kids to separate, secular, private schools.

For example, there is a bilingual school in Kitchener, Ontario, which is represented by his colleague Karen Redman. It's secular in nature and it's called the Kitchener-Waterloo Bilingual School. Half of the curriculum is in French, but they will be no longer eligible to receive French-language money from the Government of Canada, administered through the province. I think this is of direct concern to us because that means they may not be able to provide the kind of French-language instruction they have to date, and that means another chink in the armour against the preservation of the French language in the rest of Canada. So I think this is very important.

I think it's important also because these people truly feel like second-class citizens. It's our role as federal members of Parliament, as federal institutions, to protect citizens in this country, whether it's because of discrimination on a whole range of grounds.... I think this is a perfect role for us to play. We're not telling the province what to do.

We've called the Government of Canada as well; we've called representatives from the federal Department of Canadian Heritage to tell us what the terms and conditions are of this agreement. We've called representatives from the schools themselves, and from the Province of Ontario, so this is not focused specifically on the Province of Ontario. If you read the motion, it's calling on the two orders of government and the stakeholders involved to just give us information as to what is going on here.

This is funding that has been in place for over 30 years, and schools have come to rely on it, and suddenly it's being chopped. I think this is of concern to us and I think it will allow us to provide input into the successor agreement when this agreement expires next year.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We'll move on with Mr. Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I find it passing strange that the parliamentary secretary, who is responsible for official languages, would lecture me this morning on the respect for official languages, when francophones in the riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, including the mayor, want to ensure that signs are posted in both English and French, in an equitable and respectful manner. Moreover, the parliamentary secretary responsible for official languages is the MP for that region, but he is unable to speak out...

The Chair: Mr. Coderre...

Hon. Denis Coderre: It is my right to speak to that issue, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I would like to speak, Mr. Coderre.

I would ask you to deal with issues that are relevant to the motion. Most committee members have expressed their views. There are still two names on the list, and I would invite you to focus your intervention. If committee members are ready to vote on the motion, we will do so now because we have other things to consider.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, he questioned me on official languages. It is my turn to speak and I

can do so until 11 o'clock, if I want. I have already done so in the past.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Coderre.

Mr. Lemieux.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You made a ruling that he needs to stick to the motion. If we want to have a debate about the Russell bilingualism signage law we can have that debate, but if we're going to be discussing the motion, then we should be discussing the motion.

You just made that clear to Mr. Coderre. He must be deaf in one ear. You can explain it in his other ear. You made a call. He should stick to the motion.

The Chair: I consider this is an acceptable point of order, Mr. Lemieux.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, if I am deaf in one ear, then Mr. Lemieux is mute, because he remained silent.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, please keep to the motion.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I am speaking to the motion since I am talking about first-class citizens and official languages in Ontario. I am trying to understand the relevance of conducting such a study.

Mr. Chair, I find it ironic that Mr. Lemieux is lecturing us on jurisdictional issues. Our role is to protect the official languages, regardless of where citizens live. We should move a motion to congratulate Mr. Hill, the mayor of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, and his council. In spite of the member, Mr. Hill has shown how important the official languages are. He should be commended for that. I am looking forward to the next election, so that we can have a member who truly talks about the importance of our official languages.

Mr. Chair, we agree with the motion in principle. Our party created the Official Languages Act. We invested massively in official language programs; we did not make budget cutbacks, as the current government has done. My colleague, Mr. Petit, spoke about the Liberal governments of Ontario and New Brunswick. I know what is motivating the government to ask such questions. However, it is our responsibility to address the issue of jurisdiction.

Allow me to make an aside. We will have to be very careful. In Quebec, public schools are non-denominational. My colleague, Mr. Chong, knows that a constitutional amendment was needed to secularize the public schools in Quebec. However, we have to understand how the agreements are implemented. I would move an amendment to the motion, Mr. Chair. Before talking about the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario... We have received letters and have been calling for some time now on the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages to appear before our committee.

Before hearing from provincial government officials, I would like the minister to come and talk to us about all things related to the official languages. Basically, if we want to talk about an agreement—Mr. Godin seems to agree with me—then we have to broaden the debate on the official languages. Therefore, to state that the Government of Canada...

I am quite fond of our public servants. I have worked with them and have enormous respect for their work, but I believe it is the minister's responsibility. Before dealing with the motion, I would like the analyst to give us some perspective on the matter.

I am ready to support the motion, but I would move an amendment inviting the Minister of Canadian Heritage, not her officials, to explain how the official languages agreement is implemented. We could also discuss the upcoming cut-rate agreement reached with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, which should be made public tomorrow.

The Liberal Party of Canada supports the principle, it is the party that created the Official Languages Act. Now, we want to work responsibly within our jurisdiction. We can study pretty much anything we want. We should study what is happening in Russell County and the lack of action on the part of the parliamentary secretary for official languages. I will move a motion to deal with the signage issue in Russell and ask that we invite Mayor Hill to ask him whether it is acceptable for Mr. Galganov to treat francophones as second-class citizens. This is something we can do, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, please speak to the motion.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I am speaking to the motion, Mr. Chairman. As you said, we can consider all issues, but they must be pertinent. The motion is perhaps in order, but I am not sure that it is pertinent, because we don't have all of the information. We can wait for the analyst to give us his view, and consider the motion at the next meeting or, if my colleagues agree, amend the words "Government of Canada" and replace them with "the Minister of Canadian Heritage".

● (0940)

The Chair: Can you put your amendment in writing, Mr. Coderre, so that we can vote?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did you make notes?

The Chair: Present your amendment in writing, please.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I want the committee to adjourn for two minutes to enable me to do so.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre is proposing an amendment.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Can I speak regarding the main motion while he's preparing his amendment?

The Chair: We'll just stay on the subamendment first.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: We would strike "Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario" and replace that with "the Minister of Canadian Heritage and a representative of the Government of Ontario".

The Chair: Do you want me to reread the amendment? It's okay? Very well.

Are you ready to vote on the amendment? Are there any questions or comments on the amendment?

Mr. Lemieux.

● (0945)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Chair. This is discussing the amendment, which ties back to the motion, which ties back to Mr. Coderre's comments.

The first thing is that when I last spoke, I was not lecturing on morality. I was simply saying that we as a committee should hear information. We should ask witnesses to come and explain what is going on and give the committee the opportunity to better understand the issues. I don't see why Mr. Coderre would be on the defensive about that and feel that I was lecturing him. I was simply stating that we have an opportunity here to discuss an important issue and we should discuss it. We should hear what the facts of the case are.

The second thing I want to point out is the lack of logic regarding Mr. Coderre's comments, because the first comments he made were that we should in fact respect the areas of responsibility, the mandates of other levels of government. He then moved into attacking me for not interfering in other levels of government. So on the one hand he's saying, "Respect levels of government and respect their mandates", and he then attacks me because I am respecting their mandates and their *champs de compétence*. Then he finishes off by saying we should be respecting the mandates and the *champs de compétence* of these other levels of government. So there's a real lack of logic in Mr. Coderre's thinking.

Regarding the Russell bylaw, we're talking about a municipal bylaw here.

Hon. Denis Coderre: On a point of order—

[Translation]

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Mr. Lemieux. Mr. Coderre has a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You want us to respect your judgment. In that case, he should not talk about Russell either.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, I see that Liberal hypocrisy is strong this morning.

[Translation]

The Chair: I accept your point of order.

I remind committee members that exchanges can continue as long as members want. However, the motion is the first point on the agenda, and the second is the report. It is up to committee members to decide whether the report will be tabled in the House prior to adjournment.

Mr. Lemieux.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Let me finish. I see that Mr. Coderre and Liberal hypocrisy are in full swing today, because after you ruled that he should in fact stick to the motion, he just bulldozed right over your ruling and continued to talk about the Russell bilingual bylaw. Now, when another member wants to discuss it, he wants the microphones cut off and no debate on this.

Chair, we need to respect your ruling. So once again, as I say, it's the hypocrisy that we receive from the other end.

The point I'm making is that there are different levels of government, they do have different mandates, and they do need to be respected. I'm not suggesting that with Mr. Chong's motion we should be taking decisive action and ruling on exactly what's going on. In fact, there's an agreement that exists. I'm saying we should investigate that and we should listen to witnesses. That's completely different from what's going on with the Russell bylaw, where we have no agreement with the Township of Russell or with their bylaw.

Anyway, I did want to address those points, particularly the lack of logic from Mr. Coderre. I think I could find a good secondary institution that offers logic courses that might help Mr. Coderre with his future arguments.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Petit, you have requested the floor.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Chairman, I fail to see what difference the amendment proposed by the Liberal Party will make to Mr. Chong's motion. I know that Mr. Coderre is obsessed with the minister and that he absolutely wants to see her. I understand him, that is his right. But how would that change the motion? According to the proposed amendment, we would discuss certain agreements between the federal government and the Ontario government in depth. So specialists would appear and tell us how they have allocated the funds, how the funding was moved and what the outcome is supposed to be. After having heard from these experts or officials who are much more familiar with the agreement than we are, we could perhaps make recommendations or suggestions taking into account the provinces' jurisdiction. That way, we will have an overview.

I have been in Parliament for two years. Why not invite Mr. McGuinty, the Liberal in Ontario? It is his jurisdiction. Why wouldn't he come to the committee? Doesn't he know anything about this matter because he is the Premier? This is very precise data. Nevertheless, I am entitled to present a subamendment to have him appear. I could invite the other Liberal minister, the one from New Brunswick, who did the same thing to immersion schools for anglophones. How many Liberals will I have to invite?

Mr. Coderre, in Quebec, it was Mr. Bourrassa who misled us.

• (0950)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Point of order.

Mr. Daniel Petit: In French, we don't say "point d'ordre" but "rappel au Règlement", okay?

The Chair: Mr. Petit, I will ask you to watch what you are saying.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Chairman...

Hon. Denis Coderre: I have a point of order. Members must speak directly to the chair and not directly to committee members.

The Chair: You have...

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Chair, please tell Mr. Coderre that it is because of a Liberal that Quebec was shortchanged when it comes to official languages legislation. Consequently, since the Liberals are the ones governing the provinces of Ontario and New Brunswick, we may run into a problem. Mr. Chair, will you please tell Mr. Coderre that we are facing problems?

Mr. Chong's motion is an excellent one, and we should support it. Having the minister appear won't change a thing. We have to listen to those who are well-versed on the file. A minister has officials who are experts in their domains. A departmental official can be a specialist on Ontario, another one can be an expert on New Brunswick, etc. A person cannot know everything.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Therefore, the minister isn't familiar with this.

Mr. Daniel Petit: The minister is perhaps not the right person to have speak on the subject of Ontario because there are specific agreements. Departmental officials should explain them; then we will know exactly what to suggest.

Mr. Coderre's subamendment should be defeated. I know that he is absolutely adamant on inviting Ms. Verner. Mr. Chair, tell him he has a fixation on Ms. Verner. I do not believe that Ms. Verner is the one we should be inviting. We should invite senior departmental officials who can explain the agreement concluded between the federal government and Ontario. That is what we need.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I felt like I was watching the *Titanic* as you were speaking, Daniel. You were sinking.

The Chair: We will now move on to Mr. Chong and then Mr. Nadeau. After that, we can vote on the subamendment.

Mr. Chong.

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't have a problem with this amendment if it means that Mr. Coderre is going to support the motion. The minister has been asked to appear in front of committee on a number of other issues as well. If we can get some consensus on this, modify the motion, support the subamendment, get it passed, and then have some consensus on the motion itself, I'm more than willing to support the subamendment.

I just want to add one thing. Citizens in Ontario, Canadians, are looking for some federal guidance on this issue. This is federal money of close to \$1 million a year that the Government of Canada provides to the province. Many of these schools and administrators are secular in nature, like the Kitchener-Waterloo Bilingual School. They are looking to see what our position is on this, and I think it's important that we at least indicate interest in this.

I'm not preordaining the outcome here. I'm not suggesting that the committee today come to some sort of conclusion on this. But I am saying we have an obligation to at least study this for one committee meeting, come up with some idea of what this is all about and what we may want to do regarding recommendations to the minister for a successor agreement to this program.

I think it's important that we take a look at this. Education is a very emotional thing for parents, and there are literally thousands of parents in Ontario today who feel they're being treated like second-class citizens. This is federal money, and we have an obligation to defend their interests and take a look at this subject matter.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Mr. Nadeau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that there is a total lack of clarity, and that constitutionally speaking, we are digressing from the framework of the British North America Act. With all due respect to the people of Acadie—Bathurst, I'm referring here to the British North America Act, and not Alcoholics Anonymous of New Brunswick. It is very important to understand that certain components of Mr. Chong's motion and Mr. Coderre's amendment need to be rectified. Allow me to elaborate.

I believe that Mr. Chong is mistaken in his basic premise. In Ontario, the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario and the Conseil des écoles catholiques de langue française du Centre-Est both receive public funding. They are a part of the public structure. There are also private schools. When Mr. Chong equates religious schools to private institutions, for example the schools of the Conseil des écoles catholiques de langue française du Centre-Est, he is mistaken. These schools are recognized, and receive funding. A certain Mike Harris made this possible. For a long time, these schools did not receive much funding. The schools in these school boards received less money, because of the way taxes were levied.

Therefore, in a highly socialist-minded gesture, Mike Harris — life is full of unexpected twists and turns — changed things so as to channel funds destined to both separate and public schools directly to the Ministry of Education of Ontario. Consequently, all these school boards now receive the same amount of money, whereas during the pre-Harris era funding levels depended on the financial status of the school boards.

For example, the French-Language School Board of Ottawa-Carleton is very rich compared to the Catholic School Board of Dubreuilville. Mr. Chong and Mr. St. Denis are probably familiar with this area, because it is located in the far northern reaches of Ontario. That school board was poorer than others, and therefore received less when funds were divvied up. This is an important point. When a motion is put forward, one should make sure that the basic premise is accurate, which is not the case currently. I'm very disappointed with the Conservatives, who have not done their homework properly. They would receive a very low mark for that.

At issue are the agreements, specifically the Canada-Ontario agreement on education, if I am not mistaken. If they are signed by

the federal government, and are the responsibility of Canadian Heritage. Each province and each territory has the option of signing on to such an agreement relative to instruction in the language of the minority.

There is French as a first language and French as a second language. With respect to French as a first language, we are talking about schools in which French is used, and where it is important both linguistically and culturally. In the case of French as a second language, this applies to people who do not speak French on a regular basis, but may have spoken it before being assimilated in the context of their workplace, for instance. Be that as it may, it is a second language. The goal is to allow these people to benefit from the funds made available by the federal government through the Canada-Ontario agreements. It is a matter of receiving instruction upon the request made by the provincial partner, as outlined in an official agreement. Everyone must agree on the terms of these agreements.

• (1000)

From that point on, the funds are distributed through a provincial mechanism. The federal government's task is to provide the funding, in accordance with the terms of the agreement concluded between the province and the federal government. This is a rather painful part of the story, and I applaud Mr. Chong for having spoken of it. Some Ontario parents want their children to learn French. But the funding allocated to learning French as a second language in Ontario has been cut here and there.

There have been many cases in Canadian history where francophones have seen their schools shut down.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, could you please conclude on the amendment and the subamendment?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: As far as I know, there is no subamendment yet, but there will be one.

Let me give you an example with which I am very familiar. In 1893, Frederick Haultain abolished French-language schools in the Northwest Territories. The part of the Northwest Territories in question became the province of Saskatchewan. I would like to tell Mr. Petit that Mr. Haultain was a Conservative. Mr. Anderson, with the support of the Ku Klux Klan, was elected in 1929 in southern Saskatchewan, which had a larger population than the north of the province. He abolished French-language schools in Saskatchewan, and those schools were not reopened until 1995, 66 years later. We have never seen Conservatives stand up to help us. They are the people who abolished those schools.

In 1990—and we were all born by then—the government of Grant Devine, a Conservative who had even had his name put forward as senator, if you remember...

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, I would ask you to keep your remarks focused on the motion. We are talking about Ontario and the amendment.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You are quite right, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to say that that Conservative once again delayed the implementation of school governance in Saskatchewan.

That said, in the spirit of this committee—I am not the one who wanted this—and as a good team player, I will comply with the rules and move a subamendment to the amendment of Mr. ...

The Chair: We will vote on the amendment, and then you can move another amendment.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: No, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move a subamendment. I believe that I can. If it could be accepted as a subamendment, that would be excellent and avoid all kinds of argument. In the amendment moved by Mr. Coderre, the Member for Bourassa, I would delete the words “the Government of Ontario”, so that the committee discharges its responsibility of questioning the minister, if she is still minister at the time, because it seems that there will be a cabinet shuffle. The minister could be Mr. Lebel, Mr. Chong, Mr. Petit or Mr. Lemieux—we don't know. It would be very kind to accept this as a friendly amendment.

Hon. Michael Chong: I live in Ontario.

[*English*]

I don't need this. I live in Ontario. This is an issue for citizens living in the province of Ontario. This is a federal area of jurisdiction.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chairman, may I know what is going on?

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Listen, this is in my backyard.

Mr. Chair?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong, I would ask you to keep your comments relevant to the issue.

Mr. Nadeau.

•(1005)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: My subamendment is designed simply to delete the words “the Government of Ontario”, so that the committee can ask the minister about the content of those agreements. It can also inquire about the federal rationale on the direction this subamended motion would have.

Would you please ask Mr. Coderre whether he agrees to the subamendment?

The Chair: Mr. Coderre?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chairman, I will accept the subamendment. The motion will now read: “That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage and various stakeholders [...]”. I think that is quite comprehensive. This motion will make it possible for us to decide amongst ourselves what we understand by “various stakeholders”.

I do see that as a friendly amendment. The amendment now reads...

The Chair: I will read it, Mr. Coderre. Thank you.

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage and various stakeholders to explain why federal money for French-language instruction is being eliminated from certain schools in Ontario.

Is that wording agreeable to Mr. Nadeau and Mr. Coderre? Very well. We will now discuss the amendment, which is still on the table. We will continue with the same speakers' list, consisting of Mr. Lemieux, Mr. Godin and Mr. Chong.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Do we not have to vote on the first subamendment before we—

The Chair: We are still debating the amendment, which is changed by the removal of “a representative from the Ontario government”.

Mr. Lemieux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I must say that I am a bit surprised. We started with a motion by Mr. Chong which I felt was a good way of getting the information. Now the opposition wants us to talk to the federal government and insists that there should be no other witnesses. In reality, we can discuss this matter at length and not come to any understanding of why the Government of Ontario has made this decision about such an important issue. That makes no sense.

The motion provides us with some direction. There is the matter of whether we are going to do a study and whether we are going to hold one meeting or several on this issue, but now we are talking about the list of witnesses. Committees generally adopt motions that are useful, and then witnesses are discussed afterwards.

So I would like us to go back to square one and decide whether we support the motion. I think I have heard everyone else say that this is a good motion, give or take a few details. It would be useful for us to have the discussion, certainly with people from the Government of Ontario, in order to find out what happens to the federal funding.

I am against the amendment. I will simply say that the motion has become something quite different. We are no longer talking about the same motion. I do not understand why we are talking about witnesses before the motion has passed.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

I would like to remind the members that 20 people have already spoken on the motion. We now have an amendment. Basically, if we look at the motion we previously had in front of us, there's only the removal of “Government of Ontario”. I would like to mention to members that there is still the decision about whether various stakeholders could be invited.

At this moment, the members could take a vote on the amendment on the motion. If it is the will of the committee to pass it on, then the members can decide who will be called.

Do the members on the list wish to speak or to vote? Mr. Godin, Mr. Chong, Mr. Lebel, do you want to speak, or are you ready to vote?

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I would like us to deal with this issue as quickly as possible; otherwise we will lose the report, which is very important for the communities. Parliament will adjourn this week and our report needs to be done. We should keep in mind that we have only 50 minutes left. We need to adopt the report and table it in the House. The communities are waiting for the report.

Whether we invite the minister or the Government of Canada is not all that important. I can go along with that, since the minister represents the Government of Canada. If we invite various stakeholders, they become witnesses. The intent is to have the Government of Ontario come before us.

When the decision was made to close the Montfort Hospital, the Quebec government at the time... As Mr. Coderre has said, we need to think back to the 1800s. At that time, people also pointed out that health was under provincial jurisdiction. However, Quebec provided support for francophone communities in Ontario. It could have minded its own business and stayed strictly within its own jurisdiction, but it did speak up and those efforts were appreciated. People need to help one another, if we are to promote the vitality of both official languages in our country.

Other measures have been taken at the federal level as well. The City of Ottawa was asked to become bilingual because it is Canada's capital. On paper, as a city in the province of Ontario, Ottawa is not officially bilingual. The federal government requested that Ottawa be bilingual so that all Canadians working here could express themselves in the official language of their choice. We have those examples of people not minding their own business, but that has allowed us to progress in certain areas.

I am prepared to support the motion as amended, and I would ask my colleagues to do the same. Regardless of the specific wording, the motion says that the minister is invited. She will explain her program to us, and she can invite the relevant experts to accompany her. After that, we will put together the list of witnesses. We will invite the people we need to hear from. If we need to invite the Ontario Minister of Education, we will do so. We want to know what is going on. The communities have a right to education in both languages. Our country is bilingual. If we can help them, we should do so.

Those are my comments. I would urge my colleagues to put an end to this discussion, to vote on the motion and then deal with our report, which is important for the minority communities in Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. I have already proposed that.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

If the term “various stakeholders” includes the Government of Ontario, then I'm willing to support the amendment, also with the understanding that obviously the Minister of Canadian Heritage cannot appear three or four times in front of this committee on three or four separate issues. She simply doesn't have time. If the understanding is twofold—first, that various stakeholders includes representatives from the Government of Ontario, and secondly, when we ask the minister to appear, that she may appear in other capacities in order to answer other questions on other issues upon which we've called her to appear—then I think we can support this motion.

If the amended motion is put with the understanding of the committee on those two issues, then I'm willing to support it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Mr. Lebel, you're on my list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): I can wait, Mr. Chair. Mr. Godin seems to want to react to what Mr. Chong has just said.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I cannot support the second point, which was that the committee would invite the minister to appear only once. We can invite her several times to talk about several different issues. We cannot compromise on that; it depends on the work we are doing. It is not up to us to make that decision for the minister. She is the one who can determine her own availability. We will invite her to come as needed. I agree with Mr. Chong.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lebel.

Mr. Denis Lebel: I listened with great interest to the history lesson that Mr. Nadeau gave us. I find it very interesting that he refers to the past, whereas we are writing tomorrow's history today. It is quite strange to have a subamendment to take out the name of the province of one of our colleagues here, who is speaking vigorously and concernedly today about protecting French in his home province and who is helping us to preserve our two official languages.

We know that this comes under provincial jurisdiction. We want to avoid interfering in provincial jurisdiction. We want to obtain information, and this has been clear from the beginning. That said, Mr. Godin has made the point that we should continue to carry out our mandate, which is to promote the vitality of our official languages throughout Canada. I am very pleased that we are doing this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Everyone who was on my list has spoken. We will now vote on the amendment, which replaces the words “the governments of Canada and Ontario” by “the Minister of Canadian Heritage.”

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Before voting on the motion...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I have another amendment to make, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We have already voted.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We voted on the amendment, but we have not yet voted on the main motion. So I would like to move an amendment to what has become the main motion. May I read it out, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, of course.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I move that we omit everything after the following words: “That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage and various stakeholders to explain [...]” and add the following words: “The functioning of the federal-provincial/territorial financial agreements regarding French language instruction “(French as a first language and French as a second language)””.

The Chair: I would ask you to present your amendment in writing, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is...

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, would you please explain your amendment? Then we can go directly to the vote, if committee members wish.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chair, this amendment stems from the fact that our committee's primary task is to examine how the federal government works or at least signs agreements with the various provincial and territorial partners in order to provide funding for education in French, as either a first language or second language, in the provinces and territories. We need to have a very clear understanding of the various mechanisms involved. In fact, I need to include the words “provinces and territories” in the amendment.

If we decide to expand on this at some point, we can, but I do think that this should be the priority for the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

The Chair: I believe your amendment is in order. It is up to members of the committee to judge its relevance and assess its impact on the main motion, or determine if it deals with an entirely different subject. I will reread it.

Following the words “[...] explain why [...]”, would be replaced with “[...] explain the nature of federal-provincial|territorial financial agreements on French language instruction (French as a first language and French as a second language).”

If members are ready, I will put the amendment to a vote.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Point of order. I believe the amendment is not in order because it is contrary to the main motion. The main motion dealt with the elimination of French language instruction, and now we are talking about a review of programs throughout the country. The amendment is contrary to the motion.

The Chair: As I was explaining, I believe that it does deal with instruction, but I would prefer that members of the committee express their opinions.

(Amendment negated)

● (1020)

The Chair: We will vote on the main motion.

(Motion agreed to unanimously)

The Chair: We will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes. We will then sit in camera to adopt the report.

[The committee continued in camera.]

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