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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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•(0845)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): I would like to welcome everyone to this fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We are here to conduct committee business, in particular to discuss the routine motion on the order of questions. You have the motion and the amendment to this motion, which we discussed at our third meeting in June. We are going to continue the discussion about Mr. Aubin's amendment to Mr. Galipeau's motion.

Would any members like to discuss this? Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to speak for the last time on this topic, if you will allow me. I would like to try to give a summary because I think the committee needs to discuss something other than procedure.

What we have before us is a question of fairness. We must try to create a situation where we can all work together. During the proceedings, I gave an example, probably the best—no, definitely the best—example I could find in a situation involving a minority government where there were five parties in the House that were sitting on a committee. All the parties were able to speak during each round, which broke down to 20% per party. I thought it was a wonderful example of cooperation. I don't expect it to be the same in this case.

I also spoke about the history of this committee, in which we have always supported the ability of all the parties, including the third and fourth when there were three and four, to speak during almost every round. I thought we had reached an agreement at a certain point with the main government representative on this topic, but this does not seem to be the case. In the end, under that agreement, one of the government's frustrations was eliminated, which is that member could attend an entire meeting and not have an opportunity to speak. I'll admit that this has happened to me and I found it very frustrating. That needed to be resolved. I thought we had found a compromise, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

We have before us the amendment to the resolution, which I think is acceptable. I am going to vote in favour of it. I hope that others will as well so that we can proceed fairly. However, I do not intend to drag out the discussion. I think we need to get down to it and work constructively for the well-being of everyone, so we can perform our duties.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

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

I'll echo Mr. Bélanger. I may be repeating myself, but sometimes that's what we have to do. I have been sitting on this committee for a good long time now. Mr. Galipeau continues to call me "the veteran", even though I haven't retired yet.

I think it's important to move forward. I am prepared to support this amendment. It is a compromise and, at the same time, it gives all the parties a chance. I must say, for both the Liberals and the Conservatives, that I have been on this committee since 1998 and that there has always been a great deal of respect. Actually, I had the right to speak as the representative for my political party. I think that we have done good work together, and I am ready to support this amendment.

I am eager to have the committee start working because we have work to do. Two communities are following our committee's progress, there are two official languages in this country and we have a lot of work to do. There are concerns in these communities across the country and we need to get to work quickly so that we can find solutions together and make recommendations to the government. Because the most this committee can do is make recommendations. We are doing our work, we are conducting our studies, we are making recommendations to the government and, at the end of the day, the government makes the decisions. The government was elected and has the power, so it must make the decision. But we can influence the government by making recommendations. It is important for this committee's work.

For these reasons, I will support this amendment, and I ask my colleagues to do the same.

•(0850)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Do any other committee members want to add anything? I see that no one does. In that case, we will proceed with the vote.

(The amendment is defeated.)

The Chair: We are now at Mr. Galipeau's motion. You have the motion in front of you.

Would any committee members like to discuss this motion?

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I will vote against the motion and here's why. Let's look at what Mr. Galipeau is suggesting. I have been on a number of committees, and I have never seen the government party ask the witnesses questions first. If I understand it correctly, according to the proposal, the government party would go first?

The Chair: No, it would be the official opposition.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Okay. I am going to look again to make sure.

The Chair: It says that it is the official opposition party.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Okay. I was looking further down. I didn't see the first few lines of the motion. So the first round will be: the official opposition party, government party, third party, government party.

Okay, let's vote.

The Chair: Do any other members want to say anything?

I give the floor to Mr. Aubin, then Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Without going back to my amendment that was defeated, I would mention that it at least respected alternation, but in this case, unless I'm mistaken, the conservatives finish the first round and begin the second round. The committee could change that so that the official opposition would also start the second round, so that the alternation is respected. I still need to reword my amendment, but that is what I am suggesting.

So, the suggestion would be quite simple: we were reverse everything. Where it says "government party", it would become "the official opposition", and where it reads "official opposition", it would become "the conservatives". Can I dare suggest that the liberals would be the last to speak? If it's defeated, the order could be: NDP, conservatives, NDP, conservatives, NDP, conservatives, and so on.

The Chair: Could you repeat your proposal for the committee members?

Mr. Robert Aubin: The first turn would be: NDP, conservatives, liberals and conservatives. The second round would be: NDP, conservatives, NDP, conservatives, NDP, conservatives, liberals.

• (0855)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have an amendment. Would any committee members like to discuss it?

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): I am wondering about the fairness for all the committee members. This will just hold up the liberals when we come to the next round.

This way, we would all get a turn and there would be an extra question for the NDP in the first and second rounds. I think Mr. Galipeau's motion would give everyone an opportunity to speak at least once in the first and second round. It's simpler that way.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Let's be honest. You want the government members to have the opportunity to speak once. Is that what you want?

Most of the time, when you don't have time and you have only a few questions, it's often the same member who asks questions two or three times.

Are you saying that you are going to give each member of your party a chance to speak? Or will it always be the same one or two people asking questions?

Actually, that is the argument you are using, Mr. Gourde. You want each person to have an opportunity to ask a question.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: It's true that, historically, I do not have the experience that Mr. Godin has when it comes to the number of sessions attended of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

But Mr. Godin must admit that, since I have been on this committee as parliamentary secretary, I have always given all the members of my party the opportunity to ask questions. You just need to look at the committee meetings I attended. I was often the last one to speak and sometimes, if not everyone had an opportunity to speak, I would give up my turn. I think everyone will be friendly about this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Would any other committee members like to discuss Mr. Aubin's amendment?

Mr. Bélanger, the floor is yours.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I am requesting a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. We are voting on the amendment.

(The amendment is defeated by 6 to 5. [See the *Minutes*])

The Chair: The amendment is defeated, so we will continue with Mr. Galipeau's motion.

Would any members like to discuss Mr. Galipeau's motion? No.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I am requesting a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We are now voting on Mr. Galipeau's motion.

(The motion is carried 6 to 5. [See the *Minutes*])

The Chair: We have carried all the routine motions of this committee. Thank you for your cooperation.

We are now going to discuss three other motions in this order: Mr. Bélanger's first motion, then Mr. Godin's, and then Mr. Bélanger's second motion.

The first motion Mr. Bélanger gave me in June reads as follows:

That the third report entitled "Recruitment, Intake and Integration: What Future for Immigration to Official Language Minority Communities?" of the Standing Committee on Official Languages in the third session of the 40th Parliament be adopted again as a report of this committee and that the chair do present it to the House, and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request a comprehensive response from the government on the recommendations contained in the report.

• (0900)

[*English*]

Could you move the motion?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Do I have an opportunity to speak a bit about it? Good.

I understand that it may be asking a lot from the new members of the committee, given that they were not there then. All the same, I hope you will support this motion.

Some members of each party were present, including Mr. Godin, Mr. Gourde, Mr. Galipeau, Mr. Lauzon and myself. I hope I'm not wrong in saying that the committee worked very hard to conduct an in-depth study of the current situation in the communities and the effect of immigration and the need for immigration. The committee gathered information, then drafted and adopted a report in the hope of coming back to this matter. We were well aware that there were other issues to study, but we wanted to do that when we knew what direction the government wanted to take.

The report was adopted and tabled. If I remember correctly, that happened in December 2010. The House was dissolved before the government could respond. I would hope that we can take up the report again without making any changes and table it again with a view to getting a response from the government. It's as simple as that. Once we get a response, we would be able to start the second phase of studying this issue, which is a very important one for the official language minority communities. It's quite simple.

I am asking the new members to have confidence by trusting their colleagues. I for one would rely on myself.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Would any other members like to speak?

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I support the motion. I just want to say that all of this is normal, that if a study is conducted, an election will follow and we would not get a response to the report.

The conservatives are very concerned about the economy and taxpayers' money. We wouldn't want to disappoint the taxpayers because they paid good money for this report.

The government was in favour of the report. I think that it was unanimous in this case. We would like the government's response. It would be very important to get it. We have the opportunity to go back, to take the report that was studied and to ask the government to give us a response to the report. Otherwise, we might have to do all the work over again, work I think is important.

It is very clear that there are a lot of places in our communities where the birth rate is low. With immigration, people from elsewhere settle in these communities. This is the case in Acadian communities like ours. In New Brunswick, committees have been formed and people brought in. A ration was established so that a given number of francophone immigrants support the francophone regions. The situation is the same in Manitoba, in St-Boniface.

We have conducted a good study. Now, all we need to do is obtain the government's response. If I was in its place, I would be interested in responding to this study.

Thank you.

● (0905)

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): I can appreciate that this was something that was considered and discussed in the 40th Parliament, and I really would be mistaken if I wanted to speak against the merits of the work that was done there. By the same token, it's very hard to speak to the report, not having read it, not having seen it. As a new member here, it is very difficult for me to support something that I have not seen, that I have not heard, and that I haven't considered. That's the difficulty I have with this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I am one of the new members who has not read the report. I am also a newcomer to politics, and it seems to me that this would be an excellent opportunity to send the message that the time of an election brings committee work to a halt, but it does not cancel out the fact that the work has been done.

For these reasons, I will be voting in favour of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Since I am also new, I do not know what is in the report. But I think that it is a crucial issue for the good development of the minority communities. Their needs must be taken into consideration, and we have to ensure that we examine this matter to help them protect all the elements that are specific to them.

I trust the colleagues who were here. Generally speaking, these are sincere and experienced individuals. I think that the work they did had to have been of good quality. We will have access to it, and it is important that we get a reply back from the government on this.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

[*English*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: We're not asking to change the report; we're just asking the government to answer to the report.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I don't know what the report is. I haven't seen it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary a question. If the government's position is that it cannot respond to the subject of the report because it has not seen it, perhaps we could make an amendment to the motion saying that we will ask the same thing in one month, to give everyone a chance to read it, if that is what is needed.

He doesn't need to reply, but he must go over the report.

The Chair: Mr. Gourde, you may reply if you wish; it's your choice. You have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Out of respect for the new members here acting in good faith, I think that it would be better to refuse this motion today.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I am moving an amendment to have this motion postponed to one month from now, in other words four weeks. It will give them time to read it.

The Chair: Theoretically, as the committee chair, I must put this motion to a vote. If the motion is not carried, you will be able to bring it back the next week or in four weeks, if you wish, it's not a problem. But, according to the procedure, a motion that has been discussed must be voted on.

If you want to give the same motion in two weeks, that's fine.
[English]

If you don't want to debate it any more, we'll just call the vote. If it gets defeated, you can give me the exact same motion in a week, tomorrow if you want. That's the way we'll dispose of it, if you wish to move on to the next motion.

Is there any debate on the motion?

Mr. Bélanger.

● (0910)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I'm a little bit sorry that it seems it's going to be rejected. This is a public document tabled in the House and available on our website. I gave notice of this in June, so anyone could have taken it upon themselves to obtain it. I'm quite prepared to ask our clerk to distribute a copy if it's simpler for members to get access to a copy of the document and read it.

But to defeat the motion on the grounds that we haven't seen or could not see the document I find is rather a weak argument. I'll respect it, and therefore I'll give notice that if that's the true basis of rejection, then fine, let's delay the vote or let's bring it back. But let's not be told, Mr. Chair, in two weeks' time when we bring it back that it's not acceptable to bring it back because it's been defeated once.

I'd like to know from you, first, that an exact same motion, to use your words, brought back in two weeks will not be rejected on technical grounds. If that's the case, then let's deal with it today. Then we'll see the true reason for a rejection in two weeks' time.

The Chair: Just to clarify, it can't be the exact same motion.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I thought so, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: But if it's similarly worded, I'll accept it. If you want to do this correctly, technically, then what we should do is this. Monsieur Godin, if you could move a motion to adjourn debate on this motion, I will accept that motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If I put a motion that we adjourn the debate on the motion, the same motion can come back?

The Chair: Yes. I would ask if you're going to do that, to make the planning of the committee easier, you give me notice 24 or 48 hours ahead of the meeting that you're going to move the motion again, so I can put it on the orders of the day, so that we're all prepared to discuss it.

If you would care to move the motion...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, I do move the motion.

The Chair: All those in favour of adjourning debate on this motion by Monsieur Godin?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: A nominal vote, please.

The Chair: If adopted, the motion by Monsieur Godin is that we would adjourn debate on this motion of Monsieur Galipeau.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, no; Mr. Bélanger.

[English]

The Chair: Oh, sorry, Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You are really mixed up.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): It's not the cheeky guy with no hair; it's the cheeky guy with lots of hair.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I'll give the floor to the clerk to call for the recorded division.

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

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Godin's motion is carried.

Yes, Mr. Bélanger?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: May I ask the clerk to distribute a copy of the report to all members who would like one?

[English]

The Chair: Sure. I'll instruct the clerk to do so.

As stated before, if you give me at least 24 hours' notice so I can put it on the orders of the day, that will help everybody in their planning.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes. My motion reads:

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages study the tabling of documents regarding Afghanistan in the House of Commons on June 22, 2011, hear witness testimony and report to the House by October 13, 2011.

It says October 13, but given the current situation, perhaps we could postpone it for a few weeks and adopt an amendment later.

Can we make the change right away, Mr. Chair? It was October 13, but could we postpone it to October 27?

● (0915)

The Chair: Mr. Godin proposed an amendment to his motion after reading it. Do any committee members want to discuss it?

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When documents need to be tabled in committee, we ask that they be provided in both languages, out of respect for both official languages.

After all the work that has been done to table this report before the House of Commons, it makes no sense that it can't be ready by Canadians in both official languages. Importance was put on the fact that members of the House had no choice but to agree to receive this report. That's incorrect. We should be able to study this to find out what happened. Why wasn't the report translated as the work was being done on it, so that both of Canada's official languages could be respected?

So I ask you, dear colleagues, to support this. We need to know what happened and report back to the House. I'm telling you now, I will be disappointed if you vote against this because it is going to show whether we support both official languages in our country. We cannot start producing reports and doing work to present to the House of Commons without respecting both official languages.

We talked about that back in June, before we left. Everyone knows what happened. It's unacceptable. I am asking for your support so that we can study it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bélanger, it's your turn.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I am going to support the resolution, but I want to make a clarification. I might commit a crime by saying this, but here we go anyway.

I can imagine that there are cases where it might not be impossible, but not very practical, to translate everything. That might be the case here. I was told that there were 40,000 pages, for example.

I'm not so pompous as to say that absolutely everything must be translated. But I was in the House when the report was tabled, and I was shocked at how it was done. We were caught a little of guard and were told that if we didn't obtain unanimous consent, we couldn't table the document. That's no way of proceeding. There should have been a consultation beforehand or advice sought from all the parties and members—the independents as well—to ensure that there was consent. It's a very important issue. Canadians and the House were waiting for this report.

There was no objection to the tabling of these documents because of the importance of the issue. But we must understand how this type of thing can happen, so that it doesn't happen again. I'm not saying that everything must always be translated. There might be exceptions in some cases, and I may have approved such cases in the past. This may be a similar case, but we'll see.

The fact that we weren't informed is unacceptable. That's why I'm going to support my colleague's motion, so that we can find out how this happened and why the government gave authorization to table a document that went against the standing orders of the House. I agree that the government sought unanimous consent, but it didn't try to obtain it first and inform others. That isn't right and we should avoid this type of thing in the future.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, I am going to vote against this motion. Yes, there was unanimous consent to table the documents, and the members of Parliament studied this 40,000-page report. The four parties agreed that they had to proceed quickly. The opposition asked that it be tabled quickly and that it be studied as quickly as possible. All the parties agreed, including the Bloc Québécois, which was an official party at the time, to accept the tabling of the documents.

Most of the documents were in English, but there were some in French as well, and the members of the four opposition parties present accepted that.

So, the government party is going to respect the choice made by the members of the four parties of Parliament at the time.

● (0920)

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

Ms. Éline Michaud: The parties present certainly didn't choose to prevent some of their members from working with certain documents. As you know, there are individuals in each party who are unilingual and speak only one official language. I think that some conservatives have trouble reading documents in English, and others who have trouble reading them in French. It's a crucial issue that Canadians asked the members to look into. We all want answers.

No one agreed to the tabling of documents in this way. I think that we really have to ask ourselves this question. The 40,000 pages wouldn't have been translated in one day. The study took place over a long period of time. I think that it's possible to gradually send a certain number of pages at a time. There would have been a way of doing it. It's important that the committee members look into the situation. It's beyond partisanship. It's really a failure to comply with the Official Languages Act. It's even a question of parliamentarians being able to do their job properly as a result of this untranslated document.

The committee needs to look at how Parliament works. I would not like this to become the norm when future documents are tabled. I think that the committee members should work together as responsible colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Harris, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): I just want to continue the discussion. It's how the documents were studied. More than a year passed before they were tabled in the House. Why were they not translated at the time? One of the committee's responsibilities is to ask these kinds of questions so that we can improve the situation for the next time. So we are presenting an amendment or a motion so that we can really ask questions in order to make it better next time, and that's all.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aubin.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Maybe I'm extrapolating. But I think we must all agree that this situation should not have happened, even though it did.

It seems far more important to me to understand the how and the why of the situation. Then it would be easier for me to pardon a mistake, if a mistake was made in the process, and to find solutions for future situations, than to skip over that and send the message that our Official Languages Act is important on paper, but that in practice, we can get around it without much difficulty.

So I'm obviously going to vote in favour of Mr. Godin's motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Galipeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The entire issue of official languages in Canada is very serious, very important and very relevant. We must always comply with this act, which has been in place since 1969. Occasionally it is the subject of controversy, but it must always be defended.

But there are times when we raise an alarm when there is no need to and we harm the overall cause. At some point, if there really is a problem, no one will believe us when we cry for help. In this situation, I think that those people who were ringing the alarm bell were just trying to attract attention in a calculated way.

This study was done by members of all parties except, I think, the party that is now the official opposition. The official opposition party, which was a fourth party at the time, refused to take part.

The Liberal Party was involved, and its participant, the honourable Stéphane Dion, was one of the biggest defenders of official languages. The Bloc Québécois, which never kowtows when it comes to the French language, was there as well. The report tabled in the House was bilingual. The notes in the appendix, written by military members in the field in Afghanistan, were published in the language they were written in. The House gave its unanimous consent during the 40th Parliament. That's what it did.

The 40th Parliament is over. I voted against the dissolution of the 40th Parliament. I wasn't the turkey who voted for an early Christmas.

We are now in the 41st Parliament, and we need to get to work in this committee to defend official languages and stop our witch hunt.

I do not intend to support the motion.

Thank you.

• (0925)

The Chair: For your information, the report was tabled during the 41st Parliament.

Mr. Harris, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Harris: I don't think that we are setting off alarm bells or that this is a witch hunt, although that could be interesting. It is precisely to avoid hot situations in the future that we want to discuss this. We want to come up with some ideas and put things in place so that in future, when documents are tabled in one language or another, there will be a structure in place to ensure they are translated.

We aren't asking that this be done overnight. But documents have been coming in for a number of years. Yes, we've studied them. The reason our party did not participate had nothing to do with this: we

wanted public hearings and the government wanted private ones. That is why we did not take part.

Whatever language documents are submitted in, we don't want to hold up our work here, we want to get down to the business at hand. So from time to time, we have to accept this to do our work. However, the committee is entitled to wonder why these documents were not translated at some point during that period of a year or more. That, among other things, is the very reason for this committee's existence.

So I don't think we are setting off alarm bells. We simply want to prevent this from happening again. If this happens again and nothing has been done about it here, that will certainly set off some alarm bells.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Perhaps I was one of the turkeys who was in favour of holding the last election, but I recall there was a whole flock of turkeys... I'm sorry if I'm insulting you, but I don't much like being called a turkey this morning. I remember there being a law pursuant to which elections were to be held every four years. But your government ignored the law, and it triggered an election, not the fowl you were referring to. I object to being called a turkey in this committee, Mr. Galipeau.

• (0930)

The Chair: Okay, okay.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: You weren't the one on the block.

Mr. Yvon Godin: As to that, I'll tell you one thing: when I feel the government isn't doing the right thing, I'll vote against it, and I'll continue to do that.

In this case, we are talking about a report to be submitted to the House. We all have the right to see that report. Mr. Galipeau said so himself: officers' letters aren't hard to translate. Was some effort made to get these letters translated, yes or no? This committee is entitled to know if efforts were made, how far people went to get this done, at what point they decided there were too many, or whether they decided not to translate them—and the committee would like to know the reasons behind that decision. This could have been a newspaper article instead, or something like that. We have the right to know what it is. We are entitled to that much respect here. Our work here at the official languages committee is to conduct studies, and not to sit here being called turkeys.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I wasn't talking about you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but when you speak generally, you include everyone, my friend

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I'd like to ask everyone to address their comments to me, as chair of the committee, in order to cool things down a little here.

Mr. Weston, the floor is yours.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Chong, regardless of how important we think our work here is, I feel that compliance with the Official Languages Act, as well as its longevity and viability, rely on the support of Canadians, just like any legislation does.

If we try to find problems where there are none, if we exaggerate the flaws in our legislation, if we do irrelevant work and if we lose the support of people in British Columbia, New Brunswick or anywhere else in Canada, we are going to find ourselves in a situation where we will no longer have the support that is so vital to meeting our objective of promoting the use of the official languages.

I heard about the circumstances in which those documents were submitted. I don't think this is the right place for a study like that. In my view, that is likely to be ridiculed by people who think that what we do is neither relevant nor useful for Canadians.

That is why I am not in favour of starting a study like that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weston.

Mr. Harris, the floor is yours.

Mr. Dan Harris: I would like to ask Mr. Weston a simple question.

How can we find out whether there have been problems or gaps if we don't look into those issues?

[English]

What information is available to say that there wasn't a problem, without studying it? That's really what we want to do, and when you talk about *le soutien des Canadiens*, if this committee is seen as being inept and not studying issues when they arise, then people will start to lose respect for the committee and for the official languages.

It's not a witch hunt. We just want to study whether there was a problem or not.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

If Mr. Weston wants to answer that later, he can.

[Translation]

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: My remarks will be quite short. There is no point in going on and on about it, since there are other ways of doing things.

Did you know that we are the only parliamentary committee whose existence is prescribed by law? All the other committees are agreed on by the parties.

Our responsibility is to be the watchdogs of Canada's official languages.

Just because Canadians think that we are out to lunch, we are not going to start saying that it's better not to do something because we are going to look bad. When we asked for francophone schools in British Columbia, I can tell you that francophones looked bad. When we asked to have French schools on Prince Edward Island, I can tell you that it looked bad. When we asked for francophone schools in Nova Scotia, it looked bad. If we had listened to public opinion, we would have never had schools. When we asked to have francophone

schools in Ontario, it looked bad. If we had listened to public opinion, we would have never had any. Are we here to look good or bad, or are we here to ensure that the two official languages are respected?

I will follow my colleague Mr. Harris in saying that the sole purpose of this motion is to figure out what happened. Could we have done things differently? Once that gets to Parliament, they will have to agree or disagree with it. I will leave it at that.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aubin, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert Aubin: In my first comment, I didn't think I was crying wolf; I just wanted to point out that a situation had occurred, that it should not have occurred and that we have to figure it out.

In Mr. Galipeau's last comment, I must admit that things were heating up a bit more. I can guess that that's not what you were trying to say. You are saying that the report was submitted in both official languages, but the notes weren't. To me, that's a slippery slope. If we start thinking that the report being in both official languages is an acceptable and reasonable compromise and that we should not be too greedy—that's what a number of people might understand from an expression like that—I think the slippery slope is dangerous. I don't want us to get into these types of comments or this type of debate, but I do just want us to clarify something that happened and that should not have happened.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

Ms. Éline Michaud: I am really very shocked to hear this nonsensical discussion. My colleagues opposite refuse to accept a report being submitted later because some of them have not read it. We are expected to agree to this type of report without being able to have access to the working documents. I think that's a bit ridiculous and I'm not quite sure what is going on.

We are talking about the support of Canadians. As my colleague said, Canadians expect us to be the watchdogs of the official languages. If we are not able to comply with the Official Languages Act ourselves, how can we have the support of Canadians to do our work? We have no credibility if we don't do these types of studies, which go beyond partisanship, as I said earlier.

Mr. Galipeau raised some very good questions just now. Why did the Bloc never stand up? What went wrong? We will never know if we don't look into it together and study the issue. After all, we share some of the same concerns that have been raised here and we have to address them by getting the job done. That is why we are here. Since we finally managed to get through our routine motions, we could start doing the real work. We have a golden opportunity to think about the parliamentary process and find ways to improve it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gourde, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In closing, I would like to remind you that we had the unanimous consent of the House and the parties to do what we just did. We cannot override the unanimous consent of the House. Regardless of what we are going to study, the fact of the matter is that the House gave its unanimous consent. So we are going to vote against that.

The Chair: Mr. Harris?

Mr. Dan Harris: The unanimous consent had to do with the fact that Parliament had been waiting for over a year for that report. It was very important that Canadians had access to the report. That is why we did that. We have to know why it wasn't done in both languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor. Then it will be Mr. Galipeau's turn.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I just wanted to clarify the unanimous consent.

If it hadn't been unanimous, all Canadians could have said that they are fighting for the languages whereas we are not even able to produce a report on something important. So they would have had something to say.

Even though it was a unanimous decision by the House, that does not prevent us from saying, after the fact, that we are doing the study to make a recommendation that perhaps in the future things should be done differently. We cannot change the decision now.

Mr. Chair, I hope that Mr. Gourde is listening to what I am saying. That is how studies and recommendations work—with the future in mind. At no point have we talked about changing Parliament's decision; we are thinking about what to do in the future. That is our responsibility.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: I really appreciate the responsibilities of this committee, on which I have been for a few years and whose proceedings I have been following for over four decades. I am well aware that this committee has major responsibilities, but I don't really like hearing some of the new members try to lecture us. Actually, in many cases, it is not so much lecturing as it is wagging fingers.

I have been defending the rights of francophones in a minority situation in Ontario in education, justice and health, and I have achieved tangible results. So I do not appreciate the tone we are being lectured in. The unanimous consent given by the House in June was not conditional; it was unanimous and unconditional. If some people want to get into BS or demagoguery, they can go right ahead, but not at my expense.

Thank you.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

Ms. Éline Michaud: You can talk about BS if you want, but I feel that we are sort of at cross-purposes in this debate. I think we are stooping rather low, but we can still get back on the right track. I am very surprised to see that some people don't want to do this work. I honestly think it's very disappointing.

We have many things to do. But how could we refuse the report when everyone was waiting for it? We would have never known that there was a problem if we had not agreed to receive it and to look at it. How can we guess the content and the form of a report before we see it?

It is all a matter of perspective: some are talking about a forced unanimous consent whereas others think that the consent was legitimate. We have to see. I personally felt I was pushed to the wall. We had no choice. In order to continue our work and move discussions forward, we need documents. They have to be submitted; we have to get them.

But once we have them and if we realize there has been an affront, a major blow to official languages, what do we do? We no longer have a way out, we are trapped, we can no longer do the study, ask questions and continue with the research because we agreed to receive the documents? Our hands are tied and we can no longer do our work, is that it?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, I had no intention of making another comment, but I have been following the debate and some clarifications must be made.

Refusing unanimous consent is no easy task. I know this because I have already experienced it in the House. I did so in the House when I was on the government side. So it is not easy and it comes with private and public consequences.

I agree with my colleagues who said they would have given their consent. I am hearing that consent can be unconditional, and it certainly seems to be. But the reality is that consent is often given to move things forward. I think that is what happened in the House that day. It was an issue of importance for Canadians who were waiting for information. We had been talking about it for a number of days. If it had been refused—and I agree with my colleague Mr. Godin on that—because the translation was not available for a 40,000-page document, there would have been two public debates in the country, one of which would have been very negative in terms of the linguistic duality issue.

I am one of the ones who gave their consent; I was in the House. However, I did so reluctantly, since I wanted to know why we had not previously sought the approval of members and parties. So I had let it go at the time because I thought the issue at hand was so important that it couldn't wait. My hope was that I would understand what happened afterwards. The goal was not to punish or reinvent anything, but to understand and try to make sure it didn't happen again. I think it's fair and it is part of the committee's mandate. That is why I support Mr. Godin's motion.

Yet some of the things I have been hearing here have made me frown and I have to put a stop to it. First of all, we have to stop insulting each other. We must understand that we have work to do. If the government decides to stop everything, it will become clear very quickly; we will understand and we will act accordingly, Mr. Chair.

But I intend to cooperate until further notice. I have shown my intention this morning and I will continue to do so until it becomes obvious, if it does, that the government has no intention of cooperating in any field whatsoever. If it is systematically blocking everything, we will know what to expect. We will see when the time comes. I have not reached that conclusion yet. Meanwhile, we should show flexibility and understanding so that we do not poison our relationships too much.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

I will call the vote on Monsieur Godin's motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can I ask for a recorded vote, please?

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Godin has called for a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are currently studying the last motion of the day, introduced by Mr. Mauril Bélanger.

Mr. Bélanger, could you read the motion?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Certainly, Mr. Chair:

[*English*]

That the Committee invite the government, specifically the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, to introduce a bill before the end of 2011, regarding the application of the Official Languages Act to Air Canada, its subsidiaries and partners.

The Chair: Monsieur Bélanger has moved a motion.

Monsieur Bélanger, would you care to speak to your motion?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: If you insist, Mr. Chairman.

This is a longstanding issue, and I'll try very rapidly to explain the genesis of the motion today.

Air Canada used to be a crown corporation. When Air Canada was privatized, it was understood by all that Air Canada would be subject to the Official Languages Act of the country, and Air Canada willingly accepted that. We had representatives of the corporation come before this committee confirming that not too long ago. So there's no question about that.

In the early 2000s, after some financial difficulties—and I gather that was the reason it undertook what it did—Air Canada started restructuring its corporate structure, creating subsidiaries, and so forth. One in particular was the crux of the issue, Jazz, and Air Canada's maintaining at the time that Jazz was not subject to the Official Languages Act. The view of the government was different, the view of the official languages commissioner was different, the view of the courts was also somewhat different. The government at the time introduced legislation in 2005; that is, the Minister of Transport, Jean Lapierre, introduced legislation to clarify that situation.

We had an election and the government changed. Mr. Cannon, the Minister of Transport in the Conservative government, introduced the same legislation. It died on the order paper at prorogation. He reintroduced it afterwards and it died at the dissolution of Parliament for the 2008 election—which was referenced this morning in another discussion. Since then there has been no introduction of the bill.

● (0950)

[*Translation*]

Some committee members will recall that the committee had passed a motion asking the government to introduce a bill like this. We reported the motion to the House and I had asked that the report be adopted by the House. It was passed unanimously by the 252 members who were there and who voted for the government to introduce a bill.

I believe the minister at the time was John Baird. He spoke before this committee, saying that he would introduce a bill rather quickly. His successor, Chuck Strahl, said the same thing in the House. Yet the bill never happened.

I asked the minister a question yesterday and his answer sort of whets my appetite. That is why, after the obvious desire of the Conservative government at the time and of the previous Liberal government, I want us to clarify the terms of the legislation for Air Canada, its subsidiaries and its partners. It is important that this be clearly laid out in legislation.

So I move today that the committee try again and ask the government to introduce a bill like that— by the end of the year, I hope—so that we can move forward. That is the history behind the motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am going to vote in favour of the motion. It is true that this has been going on for a long time. The bill was introduced in 2005, according to Mauril, if I am not mistaken. In addition, it was introduced again by the current government in 2006, but it seems that nothing ever came of it. But we are not going to be called a “bunch of turkeys” again; we have four years ahead of us. If the bill were introduced today, we would like to know what the government would do.

There is a problem with the history of Air Canada, which is subject to the Official Languages Act. However, in terms of its affiliates, like Jazz, not all parties are protected. So this is about closing the loop. That is what the bill was supposed to do.

I also spoke with Minister Baird and Minister Cannon when they were the ministers of transport. We talked about this and a bill was supposed to appear somewhere. If not, we are definitely going to miss the boat. If we truly want to protect the French language, the Air Canada bill is appropriate. It could be a solution.

We have already heard about it from witnesses who appeared before the committee, and Air Canada knows that the bill is underway. This is a good motion and I am going to support it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Trottier, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): I am going to vote against the motion because the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, has just submitted his report. It seems that the commissioner did a study. So it would be a bit redundant for the committee to go over the issue again.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, I would like to let Mr. Trottier know that, two years ago, it was the commissioner himself who made the recommendation in his annual report for the government to introduce this type of bill. And he has stood by this recommendation ever since.

We are definitely not going against the Commissioner of Official Languages; we would be siding with him if we adopted a motion like this. I just thought you should know that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would certainly echo those comments: we are not going against the commissioner, but rather in the same direction. The Commissioner of Official Languages says that a bill is needed.

It is one thing to make recommendations about Air Canada, determining whether it complies with the Official Languages Act and what is going to do to comply. But it takes a piece of legislation to get companies that are part of Air Canada, like Jazz for example, to comply.

That is the purpose of the bill.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Galipeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am very sensitive to this whole situation. When Air Canada was a crown corporation, it did not comply with the Official Languages Act. The legislation passed by the Parliament of Canada in order to privatize this former crown corporation included a section that required Air Canada to remain subject to the Official Languages Act.

Every year for decades, the Commissioner of Official Languages has complained about Air Canada for not meeting its obligations year after year after year. I remember the study that the Standing Committee on Official Languages did on Air Canada nearly 10 years ago. When my MP submitted the report to the House, he even agreed with the work that I had done in preparing the report.

A few minutes ago, during a discussion on another topic, both sides pointed to the fact that there must be some form of understanding between government members and the members of the opposition before moving ahead with a bill. I feel that the question raised by a member from the third party has its merit, but we should have found a way to reach a consensus before bringing the question up.

Some work had been done, but I think more work should have been done when the third party was in power, 15 years ago. There is still work to be done. I feel there is goodwill on all sides. Perhaps there is not enough goodwill on Air Canada's part.

I intend to tell the minister about the history of this issue, but I am not about to force his hand with a resolution passed by a parliamentary committee. I think it would be more practical to do it man to man, eyeball to eyeball, so to speak.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Harris: The words used there suggest that the committee would be inviting the government, rather than insisting. It is simply a matter of discussing the issue with the minister. If Mr. Galipeau wants to go and talk to him, he will certainly have the committee's support. We can show our support by passing the motion. That will definitely help us get a consensus on the issue.

● (1000)

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So you are telling me that only the motions we have discussed with government members will stand a chance of being passed. That is my understanding. But the motion I am introducing today has already been passed by the committee. Some members of the committee who were on the government side at the time voted for the motion, but they are against it today. Why? What is different? Is it because the government has a majority now? That is the only thing that seems to be different. I am starting to ask myself some serious questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Almost all the members of the committee have spoken in French until now. This being a committee that deals with the two official languages and given that I am more comfortable speaking in English, my comments will be in English.

[English]

You know, I think we're in danger here. Many of the members have talked about how well this committee gets along, etc., and I subscribe to that theory, but we have to be careful not to get too much into partisanship. On May 2 we had an election and our government was elected by the Canadian public with a majority government. The NDP was elected as the official opposition. The platform we ran on was jobs and the economy.

I think we've proven our mettle in the last six years we've been in government as to how much official languages mean to our party and to our government. There has been no question about it. We've advanced that agenda tremendously. We've put more financial resources and more human resources into official languages than ever before. I don't think that's in question, so I hope nobody is thinking that there's any doubt about our commitment to official languages.

But let's do the business. We have a very heavy fall agenda. We went to the Canadian public with our agenda and it was endorsed by the electorate. You see what's being tabled in the House. I think we should continue that. There's a time and a place for suggestions like this, and I think that when the time comes, you won't have to worry. We're very committed to official languages. We'll make sure that mandate is carried out to its fullest extent.

As a result, I'll be voting against this, because I think we can depend on our government to carry out the mandate of both official languages.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I would very much like to keep the partisan politics and the pointing of fingers on what the governing party will do or what the opposition party will do when a motion is presented.... On this side, that's not the purpose of the committee, and I don't think we'll get anywhere if we continue down that road.

The fact of the matter is that Commissioner Fraser submitted a report last week. The ministry is considering the report. An integral part of the report is the protection of the language rights of the travelling public. Our government has demonstrated repeatedly and consistently over its mandates, including this one, that it respects and promotes the protection of both official languages in this country. It respects that.

I think it's premature right now to invite the minister, not having given him the opportunity to study the report. His findings may very well be in agreement with what the members opposite are saying at this time. Because of that, I'll be voting against this motion.

The Chair: Before I give the floor to Monsieur Godin, it doesn't appear we have a consensus on this third motion of study for the committee. It would be helpful if government members would propose some areas of study.

So if we don't come forward with a plan of study for what to do in the coming weeks, it looks like we'll devote next week's Tuesday meeting to discussing what we're going to do for the fall session. On my calculation, if we spend next Tuesday discussing what we're going to do for the fall, that leaves us with 19 meetings in September, October, November, and December to occupy our time with.

If all members could come forward with suggestions as to what we're going to study, suggestions that have some sort of consensus on the committee, the clerk and I can plan out the fall session, but perhaps we'll get some agreement before 10:45.

I'll give the floor to Monsieur Godin.

● (1005)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, Mr. Lauzon has just said that we shouldn't get into partisanship. I'm sorry, but we are in politics, and that's what we do in politics. Let's stop making a big deal out of it. There will be partisanship. I really don't like hearing people say that

we shouldn't get into partisanship. Then what are we doing here? Come on.

We are told not to get into partisanship, but we are reminded that the government received a majority and that we must remember that it is a majority government—in other words, that we are now going to have to listen to it.

Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I think that, if we want to move forward, we need to know what is on the government's agenda. If there is no partisanship, we should be able to know what is on the agenda of all members of Parliament and make suggestions. Let us hope that we won't end up in some dark corner or that we will have to go out for a beer to find a topic of discussion for the committee. That's almost what this is all about.

We might think that it is not even worth raising questions that will not get these people's approval because they are likely to do what they did this morning; three topics were proposed, and all three were refused.

Is that what the new Conservative majority government is all about? Is that what you are going to do?

The Chair: I am not the government; I am the chair of the committee.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, but someone talked for the government, Mr. Chair. Someone said that Canadians gave the government a majority. Under our system, the majority actually goes to a political party. But 60% of people were still not happy. I can tell you one thing. We are talking about official languages. These people want to brag about not being partisan and say that the government gave everything to the two communities, that it is a decent government, and so on. So it is strange that I have received calls from communities whose program was cancelled right at the ministerial level in July, although it had been approved by the departments. These people praise the government and say that it has done everything for francophones, but let me tell you that, when it was in a minority position, it voted against the bilingualism of Supreme Court judges.

People have to stop hiding things and saying that we are not partisan. In that case, they should not talk about those things and they should stop praising the government. The same goes for both sides. It has to be clear. I expect the Conservatives to praise their government and us to praise our party. That will happen. That's what politics is about. We are in Ottawa, inside the Parliament of Canada. We are in a democracy.

Whatever, we must conduct studies and advance the cause of communities. So far this morning, three motions have been defeated. So I am going to suggest that a steering committee be formed to brainstorm ideas and then bring them before the standing committee.

The Chair: We are talking about Mr. Bélanger's motion now.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is a good motion.

The Chair: After this discussion, we are going to talk about what we are going to do next week. It doesn't matter whether the planning is eventually going to be done by the full committee or a steering committee, we are now going to deal with this motion.

Mr. Harris, the floor is yours.

Mr. Dan Harris: I am going to yield the floor to someone else. I wouldn't be able to come up with something better than what Mr. Godin said.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Trottier.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: The thought has left me now, so....

Mr. Yvon Godin: You agree with me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Weston.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Mr. Bélanger for presenting this motion. This is the first time that I have clearly understood the history of Canada in terms of the official languages.

Unlike Mr. Godin, I feel that one of the values of this committee is debating and learning about the official languages. I feel that it is very valuable to understand all those things, even though I do not agree, either personally or as a member of the government, that this committee should be setting priorities for the Department of Transport.

We have just received this report. I read it very quickly, but I do not see a recommendation like the one my colleague Mr. Bélanger made. As to setting priorities, I think that this is neither the time nor the place.

But we are still dealing with the two languages, and I feel that it is very important to have that kind of debate.

I am grateful to Mr. Bélanger, but I am not going to support the motion.

•(1010)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will hear from Mr. Gourde now, then from Mr. Trottier.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I am one of the last to speak in this debate. Mr. Godin can surely see that, by and large, I have given everyone the chance to speak. Sometimes he seems concerned that I am monopolizing the floor, but I have not done that. Since everything has been said on this matter, I am calling for the vote.

The Chair: Do you have anything to add, Mr. Trottier?

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier: I have just one thought on that. I have briefly read the report, and there are 12 concrete recommendations for Air Canada, which already has a mandate and a certain set of laws with respect to official languages. It's really up to Air Canada now to take this report into consideration with respect to its own internal policies, rather than dictate that the Minister of Transport propose a bill to debate in the House of Commons. I think Air Canada, as a good corporate citizen, will be acting on these recommendations. I think it's not useful for this committee or the transport minister to invest time interfering in that. I think Air Canada and the Commissioner of Official Languages have made some good progress in advancing this file already.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Monsieur Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I know we're not going to be voting soon, because one member of the government side has left, and there would be a tie. That would be putting you in a very difficult situation. The answer to my question—and I don't know if anybody has it....

[*Translation*]

By the way, Mr. Lauzon said just now that some members were speaking mostly French. I would just point out to him that I myself have used both languages almost every time I have spoken—as the transcript will show.

Could our clerk or our analyst tell me whether the Standing Committee on Official Languages passed a similar motion during the 40th Parliament, perhaps in April or May 2010? The motion was subsequently tabled and passed by Parliament in May 2010. I seem to remember that it was passed unanimously.

May I ask the clerk or the analyst if I am right in thinking that it was passed unanimously? I would also like to know who was at that meeting.

The Chair: The motion...

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, I am looking for information. It should be easy to find. We just have to look at the minutes.

Mr. Lauzon is here now, so we can vote.

It is a serious question, Mr. Chair. I could find the answer, but since we have people here to help us, I will turn to them. I would like to know who was in attendance in 2010, when this committee passed a motion very similar to this one, unanimously, I think. That will help me to see whether some people have changed their minds.

The Chair: Would the clerk please provide the answer to all members of the committee?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Can he give it to us now?

The Chair: No, not now.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Anyway, the decision this morning will clearly be negative. But when we have that information, we could be looking at an interesting contrast.

[*English*]

The Chair: So you want to know if a similar motion was introduced at the committee in 2010 and whether or not it was adopted and, if so, whether it was unanimously.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It was adopted, because we reported it to the House. My question is whether it was unanimous.

The Chair: You want to know whether it was adopted unanimously.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I seem to recall that it was. Who was present at the time?

The Chair: Okay. I've just asked the clerk. The clerk doesn't know. I don't know either.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It's an interesting tidbit of history that might reveal certain things.

The Chair: The clerk will send all of you an e-mail with the answer in due course.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you. I'd like a nominal vote on this if we're going to be voting.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any further debate?

Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is important to point out, by the way, that the government party said that it is not up to this committee to dictate the department's program. But this is an invitation to introduce a bill. As Mr. Bélanger said, the same invitation was extended in the previous Parliament, unanimously, in fact. I just want that noted for the record.

Mr. Trottier also said that, because the Commissioner of Official Languages has tabled a report on Air Canada, we should wait to see what would be done with it. This is not a question of waiting to see whether Air Canada says that it is complying with this, that or the other. It is a question of passing new legislation so that Air Canada has a law to abide by. That is something that the Commissioner of Official Languages cannot ask for. Even if Air Canada says that it has decided to comply, it could do the opposite in two years.

The act protects both languages. We are here to enact legislation, not to ask people to please get together to make things work.

•(1015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aubin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Robert Aubin: I was just wondering if, in the present wording of the motion, the problem was the invitation or the end of 2011. if we could clarify that, we could put together a motion that would be acceptable for everyone.

The Chair: Are you making an amendment?

Mr. Robert Aubin: No, I was asking a question and hoping to get an answer.

Mr. Dan Harris: He is asking if the problem is with one or other of the terms.

[English]

It's just the whole thing.

The Chair: I don't see any other members willing to make an intervention. Unless there's further debate, I will call the question.

Monsieur Bélanger has requested a recorded vote, so I'm going to pass the floor to the clerk.

(Motion negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

[Translation]

The Chair: Now we have two things to do.

First, we passed a routine motion about the subcommittee. The motion says that the subcommittee is made up of the chair, the two vice-chairs, the parliamentary secretary and a member from the government party.

[English]

I need you to tell me which government members are going to sit on the subcommittee. Do we have any volunteers?

A voice: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Monsieur Galipeau will be the fifth member on that subcommittee

Thank you for volunteering and filling that gap.

That was the first thing we needed to do before we adjourn. The second thing is that next week, on Tuesday, we need to meet to plan our future business. It was suggested that we meet as a subcommittee rather than a full committee.

What is the wish of the committee? Is it to meet and plan as a subcommittee, which is made up of me, the two vice-chairs, and the two government members? Or do you wish to meet as a full committee to discuss it? Normally, the planning meetings take place in camera, so I'll do it as such unless you want it in public. What would you like to do? Do you want to meet as a subcommittee or as a full committee?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Who composes the subcommittee?

The Chair: The subcommittee? I'll read the routine motion:

[Translation]

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of five (5) members including the chair, the two vice-chairs, the parliamentary secretary for official languages and a member of the government party.

That's Mr. Galipeau.

•(1020)

[English]

There are five members, including me as chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Who are the two vice-chairs? I know that I am one.

The Chair: The other one is Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I just wanted to check, because I have already seen a case where the second vice-chair was a member of the government party. I just want to make sure that the Liberals will be represented.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: They haven't changed those regulations yet.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Just wait until Thursday, Mauril. I am glad we did that last month. If we had done it this week, you would have lost your place.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's coming.

[English]

The Chair: What would you like to do? Would you like to meet as a subcommittee? I need some direction here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think that we should start with the subcommittee. Frankly, I am not happy with my morning. With a smaller committee, I think we could try to come up with an agenda. Then we could see if we could get consensus on it. That is why we have a subcommittee. So I propose that we start with the subcommittee.

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

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I agree with Mr. Godin. Let the subcommittee meet and then all of us will agree on the agenda that we have come up with.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Absolutely.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. So I'll call a meeting of the subcommittee for next week, on Tuesday, and the five of us will meet. Hopefully we can quickly come to a consensus about what we're going to—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: For nine o'clock, as opposed to a quarter to nine?

The Chair: Yes, I can do that, but I can't book the meeting past a quarter to eleven because this room will be used by another meeting. If you want to meet, we'll meet at nine o'clock. Okay? I'll book it for an hour and three-quarters. Hopefully we can come to an agreement before that time.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Since there are only five of us, does it have to be here?

An hon. member: We need translation services—

Mr. Yvon Godin: *Oui*.

An hon. member: —or we're going to get into another witch hunt.

The Chair: Let's just—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Royal Galipeau: We are all bilingual.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's just meet here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: What was he asking?

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's just meet here, because everything's here and—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: What was his question?

The Chair: He asked if we could use another room for the subcommittee meeting.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I am going to ask the clerk to research that. I would like to ask Mr. Galipeau what he means when he says that we are all bilingual. What does that have to do with anything?

[*English*]

The Chair: I didn't hear that, so—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I did hear it, though.

The Chair: I didn't hear it. I had the floor. I was talking—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I did hear it.

Are you saying that we should have a meeting without translation?

The Chair: No, no, he never said that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I didn't say that he said that. I want him to qualify why he said that we're all bilingual.

The Chair: I will give the floor to Monsieur Galipeau to clarify what he said.

Monsieur Galipeau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Royal Galipeau: We make up the Standing Committee on Official Languages and, in its wisdom, our committee has appointed to the subcommittee five people who all can speak both official languages. That's all I said.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Does that change anything?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Nothing at all.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Royal Galipeau: The change is that the committee is much smarter than we thought.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. I will call the meeting—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Excuse me. I have the floor. Please let me say one thing before we adjourn. We've had only one suggestion to date, from Monsieur Godin, on a possible course of study, which was the tabling of documents in the House. I'd ask the four members of the subcommittee to come prepared with things to discuss about what we could do for the rest of the autumn—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I think that you are slightly mistaken. I would like to ask our research analyst to distribute a list of our unfinished business. The list is quite exhaustive, after all.

The Chair: That has already been done.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, exactly. So that is where I think the subcommittee should start its work, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure. All I'm saying—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I intended to bring that up.

[English]

The Chair: Yes. The analysts have circulated a list of possible studies for and previous studies of this committee. All I'm asking the four other members of the subcommittee to do is to come to next Tuesday's meeting prepared to come to some sort of agreement about what we're going to do, because clearly we haven't had an agreement yet, so—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: All of this will be flushed, but let's go through the motions anyhow—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Monsieur Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I just want to comment on that, okay? It is possible that some new idea will come out of the 41st Parliament. Not everything that happened before we came here needs to have precedence.

● (1025)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for your help. I'll call the subcommittee meeting for next week: Tuesday at 9 a.m.

This meeting is adjourned.

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