



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Official Languages**

---

LANG • NUMBER 008 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

---

**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, December 4, 2013**

**Chair**

**The Honourable Michael Chong**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Wednesday, December 4, 2013

• (1530)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)):** Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Wednesday, December 4th, 2013, and this is our eighth meeting.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Chair...

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Gourde?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Can we go in camera, Mr. Chair? I would like to table a motion that we go in camera.

**The Chair:** Are you moving that motion?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Yes.

**The Chair:** We have a motion before us. As this is a dilatory motion, there will be no debate.

[English]

All those in favour of moving in camera? Opposed?

(Motion negatived)

**The Chair:** The motion is defeated. We are public.

[Translation]

We have two subjects to discuss today.

We will begin with committee business. Mr. Godin has submitted three notices of motion that he wishes to table.

Following that, we need to discuss the draft report.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Chair, my first motion reads as follows:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to appear prior to Wednesday, December 11, 2013, to provide the committee with an update about the government's intentions regarding the Maritime Search and Rescue Centre in Quebec City.

Mr. Chair, I am tabling this motion because this subject has become extremely important. We must remember that it was in June, 2011, that the government announced for the first time its intention to close the MRSCs in Quebec City and St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. It is now December, 2013. In the intervening months, the government even announced that it would wait until the Commissioner of Official Languages had undertaken a site visit and given his approval to make the transfer once the centres in Halifax and Trenton were up to snuff and able to receive emergency calls.

As we all know, the centre in Quebec City is the only maritime search and rescue centre in Canada that is not only francophone, but also bilingual. This is mainly because of the St. Lawrence. We need to remember the history of this rescue centre. It was set up in Quebec City specifically because the other centres had not been able, in the past, to answer calls concerning incidents on the St. Lawrence, which is a very challenging waterway. It is important to know the river. It is important to know the landmarks. This is impossible for people from outside the area.

Since 2011, the government has not provided an action plan, nor has it announced that it is now safe and that the transfer can go ahead. I find this very troubling. When I questioned the Commissioner of Official Languages on this issue, he answered that it was not up to him to do this work. He was very clear last Wednesday, when he appeared before the committee. It is not up to him to tell the government whether or not these centres are ready to provide services, nor is it up to him to give his approval if they are. He will determine after the fact whether or not the services are adequate. He will undertake an audit after the fact, but it is not up to him to tell the government whether or not it can move forward.

We have been in this situation since 2011, and the transfer still has not taken place. It is essential that the government not go ahead with this. People's safety is at risk.

I will end my remarks there, Mr. Chair. I ask my colleagues to support this motion.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** Further debate on this motion?

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As for December 11, 2013, we will have to consult our calendar to see if that's possible, because we don't have a lot of meetings left. Furthermore, I don't believe anyone has checked to see if the minister would be able to appear before the committee. I don't know if we can request that the minister appear on such short notice.

Moreover, I believe that the Quebec City Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre is still open, and in the meanwhile, efforts are being made to ensure that the entire community has access to services in both official languages.

We will not be supporting this motion, because the notice is much too short, and because we don't believe that there is a problem currently.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Ms. Papillon, you have the floor.

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to add something to this motion. It is very important that we invite the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, since she is new in that position. She could provide us with a very useful update on the matter, since this decision dates back to 2011. For the time being, we still don't know what's going on with the transfers to Halifax and Trenton. She could tell us where things are at with the staff and what decisions have been made for both Halifax and Trenton. That is information that we do not have. People are very worried because they don't know what will become of the centre in Quebec City. People don't want that centre to close down, because they don't know what would happen next, but at the same time the centre is losing their staff.

Mistakes were made in February and May. For example, on May 18, off the coast of New Brunswick, a number of calls were made to the centre in Halifax. Unfortunately, the first calls were not successful and the people on the other line could not be transferred to someone who spoke French. Given these concerns, we are wondering if any changes were made. It is now December 2013. The first closure was announced in April of 2012, and then in April 2013. Then it was postponed until the fall of 2013.

Now we are completely in the dark. We have no idea what the plans are. Clearly the closure will be very costly. So far, many competitions have been held to recruit people with the right skills in Trenton and in Halifax. It's becoming very expensive and we want to know how much this will ultimately cost. Do Halifax and Trenton have to update their centres in order to accommodate those who will be transferred from the centre in Quebec City? Do we have any solid numbers? Could the minister provide us with this information? A number of questions involve both safety and economic issues. How much will the government earmark for this matter?

Providing this information would be a sign of respect for the people of Quebec City, but also for those who live along the St. Lawrence River. Those people could tell us what the current situation is like. People in Halifax are worried because they see these people arriving, but unfortunately they don't know how many bilingual people they need. The minister could also inform us of what she will say to the Commissioner of Official Languages when they discuss the number of bilingual employees that are needed in these centres and so on.

I've been following this issue for the last two years in Quebec City. In fact, it was one of the first responsibilities given to me. I am not able to get any information. During that time, a number of simulations were carried out and they failed. I would like to know what has been done in two years. Where are things at? Has a deadline been established so that we can change strategies if we realize we are on the wrong track? In three years, if things aren't working and if it turns out that it wasn't the best decision, could this process be stopped?

This is the kind of information the minister should be giving us. After holding a number of competitions, if we still can't find qualified individuals who understand the unique navigating condi-

tions of the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and who also understand the French language well, the process needs to be stopped. These people not only have to speak an international French, but they also have to understand different accents. There are very unique accents in Quebec. My mother tongue is French, and even I would have a hard time understanding all of them. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I couldn't understand an accent from some of the regions, but it would be a challenge.

• (1540)

In addition to this dangerous situation, there is the stress factor. People who were in their boat were saved at the last minute thanks to the rescuers' intervention, when the water was up to their ankles. It was a question of minutes and seconds. If the person cannot be understood in their native language, the language which they speak, we might not be able to save their life. As for me, I want to know what the plan is.

In Canada, we are surrounded by water. The St. Lawrence River has 11 sections. Even a sailor cannot pass from one section to the other freely, because each section has its unique challenges. History tells us that it was the same 400 years ago. The navigators had difficulty navigating. Today, despite all our technology, we are in the same position and we don't know what direction to take.

I have started reading the reports, not only those of the official languages commissioner, but also those about shipwrecks that happened or rescues that happened at the last minute. It seems incredible, but there are a whole series of details that I understand now. I never thought I would have this expertise. I even have a few more questions of this type to ask. I always wonder if language was an issue, if there was a problem with coordination, and if the transfer will lead to this kind of problem. Those are the questions I am raising.

I think everyone can approach this subject in good faith. Supporting this motion, to see where we stand, could help shed light on the situation, and not only on this side of the table. Everyone could benefit from it. I know there are people concerned about this subject everywhere in the country. The centre in Quebec City is the only officially bilingual centre not only in the country, but in all of North America. The centre has already sometimes helped franco-phones who were in trouble in Boston. Right now, this is a major question. I know that the centre in Quebec is in fact a secondary centre, but personally, I want to say that the centre is very important.

Supporting the proposal to have an update from the minister would be appreciated. I also think that it would be a sign of respect for the recreational boaters, sailors, and various associations. More than a hundred resolutions have been passed in Quebec in support of the centre. I would like to hear the minister's comments on the subject. Has she considered the resolutions of the various municipalities, fishermen's associations, marinas, and so on? What did she conclude from them? Will she say that she visited the site?

When I went to the Maritime Rescue Centre of Quebec in January 2012, I met some people. The minister's predecessor did not take the time to go there. Is the minister prepared to go meet people at the Quebec centre? These are questions that I am very interested in. I know that the minister is very busy, but I would very much like her to dedicate a bit of time to this subject, which is very important.

We don't want to be discussing this subject again in a few years and reading a report that is catastrophic because we didn't make the right decision. I know that everyone around this table cares very much, and is thinking about this situation. As far as safety questions are concerned, I am absolutely convinced that we can agree.

That is what I wanted to say, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Papillon.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chair, I would like to add something that I consider important.

I don't know if you recall, but we had already asked that a study be done on the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in Quebec City, and the government refused. I remember that at the time, Mr. Gourde said that it was up to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to conduct this study, not our committee. I would like to give some information to the public on this subject. The Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans had requested the same thing, and its request was turned down. This is the Standing Committee on Official Languages, and it is up to our committee to conduct this study, because it concerns language. It does not concern people's skills at sea and that type of thing, but rather language and communication with fishers.

The accident in Tabusintac cost the lives of three fishers. People called Halifax and were told "I don't speak French." It took six calls before they were able to speak to someone in French. The man was not trying to be difficult; some of his colleagues were drowning.

If ever there was an incident on the St. Lawrence and someone somewhere in Canada answered a distress call by saying "I don't speak French," I would not want to be in the Conservatives' shoes. They had better not shed crocodile tears in the House of Commons when we ask questions about accidents that cost people their lives, and they had better not say that that is not the place to discuss it. And that is not a threat, it is a promise. I can guarantee you that they will be held fully accountable for the loss of life, if, one day, someone on the St. Lawrence makes a distress call that is transferred to Trenton or Halifax, where the sub-centres are being transferred, and is told: "I'm sorry, I don't speak French". That is currently the case with Service Canada. Whether you call Halifax, St. John's, or Newfoundland and Labrador, the answer is the same.

As members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we have responsibilities. I would like the government to answer a question. Mr. Gourde said earlier that the minister cannot appear before the committee on December 11, but could she come after the holidays? Is she going to appear or will the government simply refuse by saying that it is making the changes required and it is doing what it is supposed to do? If that is the case, then what purpose do Parliament and parliamentary committees serve? Why do we conduct studies?

Our committee has a fundamental responsibility, which is to put questions to witnesses. I want people from Quebec City, experts on the St. Lawrence River, to be able to have their say. Based on that, the government can make a decision and assume the consequences.

If the government maintains its decision, makes the change and sends people to Halifax, it had better be prepared for the consequences, because I guarantee that we will not accept loss of life because of language issues, here in Canada. The law is clear: both languages are equal. Despite that, that was not the case in Tabusintac. The fishers had to call Halifax, but there were no services in French there. Try telling our families that there are no emergency services in French in a country like ours, when such services should be provided. Someone is going to have to take responsibility and face the consequences.

If the minister cannot appear before the committee on December 11, then can the government move an amendment to set a date for her to appear in mid-February or mid-March? Nothing is going to happen before then. They need to give us a date when she can appear so we can discuss this matter. I want the government to think about certain things. Why don't we conduct a study on this? Why can't we have experts come and testify before the committee? What is the government afraid of? Is it just a matter of saving money? People's lives are at stake. So it is not a question of saving money, far from it.

I have said enough about this. I want the government to reconsider its decision. If it thinks that the minister cannot appear before committee on December 11, it can always move an amendment, but it must ensure that she comes to testify at some point. I would even say that we should invite experts; that is what the committee wants. The change that was made represents a fundamental problem. They want to close the only francophone centre in Canada, which, in addition, is bilingual. It is pathetic.

There was an incident involving a sailboat that was heading for Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. The call was received in Boston, then transferred to Halifax, then transferred back to Boston, before it ended up in Quebec City. Only the people in Quebec were able to answer in French and help these people.

• (1550)

It's the only francophone centre in Canada. What's the problem? Why pick on this one? I am sorry, but the committee does not often study situations involving the closing of English centres whose calls would be redirected towards a francophone region where nobody speaks English.

In 2013, we should not have to talk about this kind of thing anymore. The government should have a conscience and state that the reason we don't need to talk about these things anymore is because the government will look after the situation, and make sure that both languages are treated equally, and that services are provided equally in both languages.

However, since June 2011, we have not been able to find people with the necessary skills to work in these call centres. There is one thing that scares me. Imagine if you finally found qualified people, but that six months later, three or four of them decided to quit their job to work elsewhere. And then what? It would not be possible to reopen the centre in Quebec, because the employees and the experts would have left. In the meantime, what can we do? Who will answer the phone?

You are carrying a burden on your shoulders which is not justified. As far as I am concerned, I would not want to carry that burden.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Here again we are dealing with a serious issue which requires good faith all around. We are all engaged in politics. We are members of different parties which have different visions. However, we are talking about the safety of people on some of the most dangerous waters in the world. Some of you might not even know the river. I have been sailing on the St. Lawrence River for 10 years. There are 10,000 traps on the river; it's a huge water lung. You may not know this, but every day the current switches direction. At the Saint-Roch crossing, the current changes its east-west axis at a speed of 10 km/h.

Not only does the Quebec centre offer bilingual services, but it also has an expertise with regard to local phenomena, and that is important. This summer, there were 1,500 distress calls. The people involved were not expert sailors. They were probably sailors like myself who headed out onto the water and who, at some point, were caught in a cross-current or in a katabatic wind, whatever. So their vessel would have become destabilized, they would have needed help, and they placed the call.

If I head out next summer and encounter major problems, I do not want to hear English spoken at the other end of the line. That's pretty obvious. The expertise was acquired in that area; it's a local expertise. This river is one of the most dangerous places in the world. So we cannot afford to lose this expertise.

I want the minister, if she appears before us, to tell me who will actually answer the phone. Will these people know exactly what is going on? If I call from the Saint-Roch crossing because my keel is broken, will these people know where I am? Will they know, at any given time, whether the current is flowing from east to west or from west to east? Will they have all of this data? Will they know if the cross-current will carry me to the north shore or whether it will keep me on the south shore? The Quebec centre has all of this information right now, and we don't want to lose it. The people in Halifax might not have all of this data.

The best evidence underpinning our argument is that for the last two years we have been looking for people who are not only bilingual, but who are familiar with the river, and we still have not found anyone. Actually, they already exist: they are in Quebec City. This decision will have to be rethought and these questions will have to be put to the minister.

If I go to the Magdalen Islands this summer and if I am in any kind of danger on my boat, will I have access to rescue services in French over the phone? That is my question.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

Ms. St-Denis, you have the floor.

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** First, I find that my colleagues have defended their point of view very

effectively. They presented good arguments. So I don't really understand why you would be opposed to them. I don't see any good reason for that. The minister might not want to be put in a position where she does not know what to respond, but I imagine that she is familiar with this file. She should also be able to take a bit of time to meet with committee members.

I will support the motion, because I find it is completely justified.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. St-Denis.

[English]

Mr. Nicholls.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP):** I'll be brief, Mr. Chair.

Friends, this motion calling on the minister to clarify the situation is quite simple. I think the onus is on the government to show goodwill towards respecting the offer of two official languages in this country. This has become a heated point, particularly in Quebec. The willingness of the government to step up to its responsibility to offer two official languages is in question through this very decision. The government could decide today to clarify this situation by allowing the minister to come here and answer questions about this Maritime search and rescue centre. In doing so, he'll show the goodwill and the leadership that, the commissioner has told us over the past two meetings, are required of the federal government.

The francophone community in this country is looking for leadership from the federal government. It wants to see goodwill on the part of the government and the ministerial party. I hope you will vote for this motion. I encourage you to do so. In doing so, you'll show your goodwill towards the people affected by the decision that's been made.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Nicholls.

[Translation]

Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** I am going to move an amendment. The beginning of the statement would remain unchanged, but instead of "before Wednesday, December 11, 2013", it would read "in February".

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have an amendment before us.

Is there debate on the amendment?

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** Of course, I am referring to February 2014.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I listened closely to everything that was said and I respect what was said. The common denominator in the views expressed was ultimately safety. We know what happened at the Maritime Rescue Centre in Quebec over the last two years. I can assure you that, since then, the government has provided services in both official languages, and it did so perfectly. This issue is not related to official languages. I understand that people have questions about safety, and so that really falls to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I don't agree that this is an official languages issue, since there is no evidence supporting the fact that services were not offered in both English and French in Quebec over the last two years.

However, as far as safety is concerned, that I understand. Therefore, this matter should be sent to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, which has more expertise in issues involving the safety of Canada's waterways, especially in the area we are talking about. That committee is no doubt the place where there will be an explanation for how long it took to react after calls were placed. This is not an official languages issue. If we were able to show that official languages were problematic in Quebec today, which is the starting point for all of this, I would understand. However, if we are concerned about safety, protocol and response time after a call has been received, that is the purview of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

We are going to vote against this motion, because we believe that the matter should be studied by the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. That committee will decide what needs to be done. I would invite Ms. Papillon to take her case to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I think that this is the right way to go.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Anyone else?

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I cannot just sit here without saying anything.

Mr. Gourde said that there had not been any problems, but the fact is that the transfer still has not taken place.

Mr. Gourde, that is not the issue. The government announced the transfer, and we are asking the government to conduct a study before proceeding with it. It's not what happened today or since 2011 that is at issue. We want to have a study on the transfer which was announced. I want all Canadians and all Quebecers to understand this. We are not questioning either what is happening now, nor the expertise which is in Quebec. We want everything to stay the way it is.

It's a language issue. If a person calls Halifax or Trenton, and that person hears: "I don't speak French", that's a serious problem. I don't know if other committee members have interpreted this the way you have, but I believe that we have been clear: we want to discuss the government's announcement to close the Maritime Rescue Centre in Quebec, and to transfer its activities to Halifax and Trenton.

A little earlier, I spoke to someone from Tabusintac, New Brunswick, who had called Halifax, and she talked about the service she had received. We don't want that type of situation to be repeated.

Today, the government intends to close the centre in Quebec and transfer its activities to Halifax and Trenton. However, the reason why the Standing Committee on Official Languages is involved in this matter is simple: in that situation, safety was at issue because the people in Halifax and Trenton did not speak the same language as those in Quebec. If people understand each other, things will work themselves out, but if they do not share the same language, there will be problems. It seems to me that this is not difficult to understand. I don't want to be mean in saying this, but if you don't get it, you've got a serious problem. It's obvious what we are talking about.

Regardless, we are ready to vote.

**The Chair:** Ms. Papillon, you have the floor.

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** I will make some final remarks.

In my view, this is more than a safety issue; it is truly an issue of official languages. We know that these are difficult days for bilingualism, especially here, in Ottawa. I think we could do something meaningful. Listen to this; I think it says a lot.

In the early hours of May 18, at about 4:30 a.m., a small fishing boat capsized in the Tabusintac channel, in New Brunswick, and the three men on board died. After having gone out in an attempt to save the men, a francophone fisherman called the Halifax rescue centre to provide information on the search that he had conducted and to ask for new instructions. An anglophone answered his call. After that, he called back five or six times. The second time, another anglophone answered. He had to wait for his call to be transferred to someone who spoke French. He spoke to a francophone the other times.

That situation occurred after a visit by the Commissioner of Official Languages representative to the Halifax centre, last February, and after the coast guard had ensured the commissioner that it would take steps to make the rescue centres in Halifax and Trenton bilingual before closing the Quebec Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre, which is already bilingual.

Let's summarize the incident. A francophone fisherman had to call three times—I repeat: three times—before being able to talk to a French-speaking coordinator at the Halifax centre. There was a francophone team member on the shift when the first call came in, but he was busy elsewhere. That is unacceptable. It proves that operations cannot be effective if only some staff members at a rescue centre are bilingual. For a centre that manages emergencies to be truly effective, 100% of the staff must be bilingual.

Following his visit to Halifax, the Commissioner of Official Languages announced that there would be another visit in November to ensure that all of his recommendations were being followed. If they were not being followed, public safety and the safety of navigators would not be guaranteed. Bear in mind nonetheless that the Commissioner of Official Languages is looking after this file. That shows that it is not simply a safety issue, but also an official language issue. That is why having our committee discuss the problem is not completely off base.

I can clearly see what will happen if we leave this matter to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. They will pass the buck back and forth. I am looking at everyone around this table, and I personally think that Canadians are paying taxes for us to be here discussing this. I don't think it would be a good idea to throw their money out the window. That makes no sense. We must examine the issue.

When you make decisions, you must take full responsibility for them. If the minister and her government saw fit to make this decision and if she is convinced that she has made the best decision of her life, the best decision on the planet, she needs to come and defend it. My colleague was right when she said that. It would be very appropriate for the minister to come and explain the situation to us. She could provide us with an explanation on some incidents that have occurred, like the one last May 18 or others.

This is more than a safety issue; this is also a language issue. The two aspects are intertwined. You have to understand that. I know that many people from Quebec, even some Conservatives, voted against the decision. Closing that centre makes no sense.

Having said that, I had to allow myself these final remarks. It would be completely wrong to say that this issue is not linked to official languages. I hope that people will listen to reason. That is really what it is about at this committee.

●(1605)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Papillon.

Do any other committee members want to speak?

Ms. Bateman, you have the floor.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** I would like to clarify something, Mr. Speaker. What does the word "grenu" mean?

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Do you mean the word "saugrenu"?

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Yes.

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** It means something that is completely far-fetched.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you. It is a nice word, and the new word of the day.

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Good, you're welcome.

**The Chair:** All right.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** It is a frog that fell into a lake and does not know where it's going.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll have the vote on the amendment. We'll have a recorded vote. I'll pass the floor to the clerk.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** We're back to the main motion. Is there any discussion on the main motion?

[Translation]

Mr. Dionne Labelle, do you want to make a comment?

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** Perhaps, since we have some time left.

It is mainly for Mr. Gourde. Someone who represents a riding along the river, in Quebec, near a rescue centre, and who decides to go ahead with closing this centre...

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** But the boats are still there for the rescues. Frankly, it's demagoguery...

**The Chair:** Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** If the government does not plan to close the centre, it should say so openly. I think that it should not only be kept open, but that we must ensure there are better bilingual services in that area. Safety must be enhanced. There will be oil tankers, and all of the pipeline projects, among other things. The water on the river will be as rough as it has ever been. I think that safety issues will be of crucial importance. I don't see how we will be able to provide safety for Quebecers and other boaters using the river if we don't have a bilingual centre in Quebec.

We are talking about a member from the Quebec region who is not fighting for jobs and to protect the French language.

I wonder how you will get reelected. That is my question.

●(1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

I will not answer your question.

Are there any other comments?

[English]

Seeing none, we'll have a recorded vote. I'll pass the floor to the clerk, for a vote on the main motion as moved by Mr. Godin.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, do you want to move another motion?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

My next motion reads as follows:

That the committee invites the President and Chief Executive Officer of CBC/Radio-Canada, Hubert T. Lacroix, to appear before the Committee prior to the end of February 2014 [...]

I made a small change, here.

**The Chair:** At the end of January or February?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** At the end of February.

I will continue to read the motion:

[...] for a two-hour televised meeting.

Here is the wording of the motion that had been submitted to the clerk. I would like to add, at the end of the motion: "to discuss new programming since the recent budget cuts".

**The Chair:** The motion is now before us.

Any debate?

[English]

All those in favour of the motion? Opposed?



(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The clerk will contact

[Translation]

CBC to invite Mr. Lacroix to appear before the end of February 2014.

Thank you.

Mr. Godin, do you have a third motion to move?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Yes, it reads as follows:

That the committee invite the Minister of Justice to appear before the committee before the end of February 2014 to report on his department's strategy for implementing the recommendations of the Commissioner of Official Languages further to his study on access to justice in both official languages.

**The Chair:** We will now go to debate.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

From what has been heard in the news, and what the data and studies indicate, bilingualism has not been doing all that well over the last few years. The government's duty is to uphold the Official Languages Act and offer services in both languages.

A law passed about 25 years ago states that the Federal Court must hold its hearings in both official languages, in the language chosen by its clients. The same thing holds for the Federal Court of Appeal.

The Commissioner of Official Languages conducted a study on access to justice in both official languages and made recommendations on this matter. Mr. Gourde talked earlier about safety, but here, we are talking about official languages. Is he going to say that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights should do this study? What we are really dealing with here is access to justice in both official languages. It would be worthwhile for the Minister of Justice to come and explain his strategy to us and what he intends to do. It has been said that the number of francophones who learn English is higher. Mr. Daniel will be happy to hear it. However, the percentage of anglophones who learn French is going down.

We talked about Supreme Court justices. Lawyers' organizations throughout the country have said that there is a big enough pool of bilingual lawyers to support the motion on bilingual Supreme Court justices. It was the government who said that there weren't enough. Perhaps enough bilingual people or francophones have not been appointed to the Federal Court. Perhaps it was not sufficiently forward-looking. It was the government that argued that the pool of bilingual lawyers was not big enough.

There is also the Commissioner of Official Languages. He is mandated to conduct studies and made recommendations in this matter. I don't see why the government would refuse to have a minister come before our committee. What are our committees good for, if ministers don't want to appear before them and answer our questions?

Mr. Chair, we should ask you to move another bill to require that ministers appear before committees. That would be a great initiative coming from you.

● (1615)

**The Chair:** I already have enough work to do.

**Some hon. members:** Oh! Oh!

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** With this government, I understand.

Seriously, I don't think that our request is beyond the pale. It's normal for ministers to appear before committees and explain themselves. If the government refuses yet again, that shows that it's not transparent, that it's not ready to answer Canadians' questions.

I ask you to support this motion, which is very simple. It's normal to ask a minister to come before a committee and explain him or herself. This motion is really about official languages, without forgetting that the commissioner tabled a report containing recommendations in this matter. Besides, Canadian legal experts said that justice must be accessible in both languages. If the Conservative government refuses to support this motion, that will prove that it has a lack of respect for both official languages. It's blatant and that is what it is doing.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

[English]

Mr. Nicholls.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Thank you.

I'd just like to share with the committee that as an Anglo-Québécois I can get legal services in both languages in my home province. I would hope that at the federal level we would protect the minority language as much as they do in Quebec and that we would be able to offer these services in both languages.

This is a very simple request: to have the Minister of Justice appear and tell us about the strategy for implementing that. It's a very fragile relationship that we have and we should protect it and take care that we respect the engagements we have taken on over the past 150 years of our history. This plays a part in it. I think the minister shouldn't be afraid of coming before our committee and explaining to us his strategy for offering both official languages for justice.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Nicholls.

Is there any further debate on the amendment moved by Monsieur Godin?

Mr. Gourde.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** We are going to vote against this proposal, simply because we believe that the issue of access to justice for all Canadians is a matter for the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, until otherwise proven.

**The Chair:** Very well. Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

[English]

I assume you want to have a vote, or...?

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Godin?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Did I correctly understand that this has nothing to do with official languages? I had to go get myself a glass of water.

If possible, Chair, could we ask Mr. Gourde to repeat himself? I would like to hear what he said. If he is unwilling, that's all right.

**The Chair:** Ms. St-Denis, you have the floor.

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** I wanted to ask the same question as Mr. Godin.

If we invite the Minister of Justice to appear, it's so that we may discuss the official languages commissioner's recommendations with him. Does this come under justice or official languages?

• (1620)

**The Chair:** It is not the committee chair's role to ask a member to answer questions.

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** I am asking a question; I must address it to you.

**The Chair:** All right.

[English]

Does anybody else want to comment?

Monsieur Godin and then Mr. Benskin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Through you, Mr. Chair, we are asking Mr. Gourde to repeat what he said. He does not have to do so. But we must address the question to you. I thought I heard him say that this issue does not pertain to official languages, but rather justice.

Of course, we wish to speak to the Minister of Justice. It is quite normal for different ministers to be invited to appear before our committee. We do not wish to discuss the number of people that will be incarcerated nor the number of prisons that will be built with the Minister of Justice. We simply wish to know what he plans to do about access to justice in both official languages. This issue does not fall under the mandate of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, but rather the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

As Ms. St-Denis correctly stated, the official languages commissioner did not state that this issue did not fall under his jurisdiction and that he would not deal with it. He produced a report and made recommendations. We would like to know what the minister is prepared to do in response to the official languages commissioner's recommendations. That falls under our mandate.

If you are claiming that this is not the case, well, you are stuck in the St. Lawrence and you will not be able to get out.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Benskin, you have the floor.

[English]

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** There are a couple of things that have jumped out at me during these last discussions, one of them being that because of the discussions we have on the search and rescue stations, because of the discussions we'd like to have with Justice, these aren't matters of official languages.

This just kind of makes my head spin a bit, because we just went through a day and half with the Commissioner of Official Languages, who essentially said that it is the responsibility of this government—and when I say “this government”, I'm talking about the government and Parliament—for us as leaders in this country to set an example, to take on a leadership role on the question and the issues of official languages.

The questions and the issues of official languages do not sit in a little box by themselves in this committee. This affects every single, solitary thing that we do. It affects justice. It affects arts and culture. It affects the environment. It affects everything, because if we don't have people who work in those areas in both languages, either for the government or within different organizations, we have people who are affected directly by that.

In terms of justice, there are people from one language or the other who want to be assured that the arguments they're making are both understood by them and can be expressed by them the best way they can. If that's not a question for this committee, I don't know what is.

In terms of search and rescue, the issue isn't simply, as my colleague Pierre Dionne Labelle said, a matter of language. It's a question of the leadership of this government—that we put forward to other Canadians the importance of both official languages in this country. If we are saying that it is better to save a penny here and risk potentially losing a few lives because it's more efficient to have somebody who is a C, D1, A, B, C, D, H, Z level-French in Halifax responding to these, as opposed to somebody who is competent, who exists already in the Quebec search and rescue station, what does that say? What does that say to Canadians about the importance of linguistic duality in this country? What does that say about this committee when we're not even willing to step up and say, “Let's have a discussion about it”?

It boggles my mind. It really does. It boggles my mind how we in this committee can sit and say that this is not the purview of this committee. To sit down and have a conversation with the Minister of Justice to ask him what kind of strategic plan he has in place, or envision, to make sure that official languages are represented right across this country? Yes, every Canadian has the right to access to justice. What we're talking about is, do they have that access to justice in the language of their choice, according to the laws of this country and according to the spirit of official languages and linguistic duality? That's what we're saying.

Is it not irresponsible to find out from the people who are going to be affected by the closure of the search and rescue station in Quebec...is it not important enough to sit and have a discussion about this?

I'm speaking to the motion at hand, and I'm using the conversations we've been having over this table the last hour or so as an example of the limitations being put on this committee to do its job.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Benskin.

[Translation]

Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** It never ceases to amaze me, especially at the end of a day like this one, after having worked hard, to find myself immersed in something out of a surrealist and absurdist play by Ionesco. This is shameful, especially towards our predecessors who implemented the Official Languages Act and created this committee under the said act.

Why did they create the Standing Committee on Official Languages? Because they knew quite well that ministers and other governmental institutions would neglect this issue in the future. They wanted to ensure it would remain central. That is why.

Today, the Standing Committee on Official Languages is invited to study the official languages commissioner's recommendations, made following his review of access to justice in both languages. This goes to the very heart of our mandate, of the work we do. Yet, we are told that this is none of our business and there seems to be no interest in inviting the minister responsible. From my perspective, this is absurd, it's ridiculous, and it is shameful towards those who have worked arduously to implement this act in Canada.

We cannot ignore the fact that the act mainly protects francophone minorities. We are central to this issue. We are witnessing a decline of bilingualism and services offered to francophones. Francophone minorities across Canada are forced to turn to the courts in order to obtain services. In British Columbia, they are lacking 15 schools. Francophones have to sue the government to obtain their schools.

Here, we are supposed to ensure the equality of both official languages. And yet, we are being told this is not the place to discuss the official languages commissioner's recommendations. There is no conclusion to be drawn here. This is simply bad faith.

This time, however, you will not get away with it. People will see what you are doing and tell themselves it makes no sense, that everything is upside down, and they will want to put it right.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** This time, you will not get away with it.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** No, it is over.

Either a committee does its work, or it does not. Everything we have proposed here has always been rejected.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** That is not true; we just accepted one of the motions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, I'll call the vote and it will be recorded, as I assume that members of the committee wish to have a recorded vote. So I'll pass the floor to the clerk.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** I thank members for their participation in the debate of these three motions.

We will invite CBC/Radio-Canada this week, so we can plan for the date of their appearance in front of our committee.

We'll now suspend for a minute to allow us to go in camera for the consideration of a draft report.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

---





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

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

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

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

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

---

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

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

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

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

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>