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## Standing Committee on Official Languages

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, June 16, 2015**



**Chair**

**The Honourable Michael Chong**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Tuesday, June 16, 2015

• (1530)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)):** Welcome to the 48th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Tuesday, June 16, 2015, and we are here to discuss Jamie Nicholls' motion.

First, we have a notice of motion from Mrs. Day.

I would also like to mention that Lucie Lecomte had a baby.

[English]

A little girl.

[Translation]

**Ms. Chloé Forget (Committee Researcher):** Her name is Michaëlla.

**The Chair:** I will write a letter to Ms. Lecomte to congratulate her on the committee's behalf.

Is that okay?

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Nicholls also had a baby this past weekend.

[English]

**The Chair:** Congratulations.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP):** Thank you.

**The Chair:** And this is your...?

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** My second daughter.

**The Chair:** Mother and baby are healthy and happy?

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Good. Saturday?

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Yes, at the Lakeshore General Hospital.

**The Chair:** I can't believe you're here.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** I just mentioned it so we can congratulate him.

[English]

**The Chair:** Babies are everywhere. Congratulations to all. We'll write that letter on the part of the committee.

[Translation]

Mrs. Day, you have the floor. You can give your notice of motion.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome all the members.

I also want to use this opportunity to say goodbye to my colleagues, as this may be one of the last meetings of this Parliament.

Here is the motion I am putting forward:

That the Committee undertake, with regard to the Women's Program of Status of Women Canada, a study of the Government of Canada programs that promote women's leadership in francophone minority communities (OLMCs) in Canada in order to inform the Committee members about the challenges francophone women face in attaining decision-making positions and positions of responsibility and that the Committee make recommendations to the government so that it can implement positive strategies that promote equality among women and men in decision-making structures.

Mr. Chair, I would first like to discuss the considerable challenges at play.

We know that the representation of women in networks of influential contacts is low. That includes chambers of commerce across the country. Traditionally and historically, men have held chamber of commerce positions. Those networks are extremely important.

There are also other influential networks. Whether we are talking about hospital boards, boards of directors of banks or credit unions, or municipal, provincial or federal politics, the representation of women is still very low. If the trend continues and the situation remains the same, we might achieve equality around 2097. There will probably be some variables or disruptions that could push that 2097 target back even further if no concrete action is taken and no measures are put forward.

We have to work on boosting women's confidence. Many women hesitate to apply for decision-making positions. That even includes boards of institutions, such as school boards. Yet they follow their children at the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels. They hesitate to step forward. Self-confidence must be developed and promoted.

Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile work and family life. We know full well that it is very difficult for women with children to balance their work schedule and the school schedule. Schedules are not the same in the business world, in the world of boards of directors.

That is why I am moving this motion today.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Do you want to discuss it this coming Thursday?

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Is Thursday afternoon okay?

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Yes, it is.

**The Chair:** Fine.

● (1535)

[*English*]

Now we'll go to Mr. Nicholls, who's given us a notice of motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. St-Denis, did you want to say something?

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** I don't have a notice of motion, but it seems to me that we voted not to have a meeting next Thursday. We already voted on that.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes, we did. You're right. We can meet next week, on Tuesday afternoon. Okay?

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** I remember. Is it possible to vote now?

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** It's votable now because it concerns the work of the committee.

**The Chair:** Yes, we can. Is it the will of the committee to vote now on this particular motion in front of us? Okay.

Is there further debate on the motion?

Monsieur Gourde.

[*Translation*]

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

The motion is very interesting, but had it been proposed earlier, we could have adopted it and worked on all these issues. I suggest that you save it for later. It would actually be a really good idea to adopt it and work on it when we reconvene, in the 42nd Parliament.

We will vote against this motion because we don't have enough time left to undertake a study of this scope. I think we could easily hold six, seven or eight meetings on the topic. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Day, go ahead.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Mr. Chair, we are members of Parliament until the election. So we have plenty of time. The committee can keep sitting until the election. We have the time we need to do the work the motion calls for.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Nothing gets resolved until the election.

**The Chair:** Agreed. Is there any further debate on the motion?

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** I just wanted to add that fact, that the committee itself doesn't dissolve until the election, so it is possible to still do studies.

**The Chair:** Further debate? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

Recorded vote.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** The clerk has the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** I will abstain.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 3)

Mr. Nicholls, you have the floor to move your motion.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Sure. My motion was:

That the Committee begin, before the House rises for the summer, a study to determine whether CBC/Radio-Canada has the financial, human and real property resources to adequately meet its obligations under the Official Languages Act and specific aspects of the Broadcasting Act; that it place special emphasis on official language minority communities, and that the study's meetings be televised.

**The Chair:** Debate?

Yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** I think the motion is self-explanatory. Ontario and Quebec have carried out a study. We saw that they were united and defended Radio-Canada.

We are increasingly seeing that Radio-Canada is having difficulty fulfilling its mandate under the Official Languages Act. Our committee has four members from Quebec and four from Ontario. Sorry, Mr. Williamson, you are not part of that group. Mr. Chong, I forgot about you! You are the fifth member from Ontario.

People from francophone minority communities have told us that they had access to programming in French, but that the coverage focused on Montreal. For instance, they were being given Montreal traffic reports!

Yes, it's in French, and yes, they can hear French on the public airwaves, but their experiences in their own regions are not really being covered. I think it would be a good idea to start focusing more on stories from our regions. I find Radio-Canada's service in Quebec to be terrific, but the broadcaster has problems outside Quebec. I think francophones outside Quebec want to hear their own stories, their own voices in their regions.

Mr. Gravelle, who is sitting next to me, lives in northern Ontario. I think that large region could be a source of many francophone stories broadcast on public television across the country. However, investments are needed for that. When cuts are made and the public broadcaster's funding is limited, the quality of services in regions outside Quebec drops off.

I think the report and the study Quebec and Ontario produced together highlights the fact that we have a long way to go. I know there isn't much time left in this Parliament, but the committee will exist until the election is called. So we could hold one or two special meetings to carry out this study, so as to explore what we can do in coming years to promote the public broadcaster in the regions of the country where francophone communities want to hear their own voices.

● (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Gravelle, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to support my colleague. He talked about northern Ontario and the CBC. There used to be a program on CBC Radio that told stories from all over Canada, and it was very interesting. Unfortunately, that program disappeared with all the cuts.

On Radio-Canada, we can listen to a local program until 9 a.m. and then, until 4 p.m., we can hear about traffic in Montreal and about the Champlain Bridge. We can hear all sorts of things about Montreal, but we don't learn anything about other francophone regions of the country. There are many other francophone regions in Canada, but, unfortunately, ideas from those regions are not heard on Radio-Canada. I think it would be a good idea to hear from francophones outside Quebec.

Mr. Chair, you may know that we no longer even have access to Montreal Canadiens games in French in Ontario. The French broadcast is no longer available across the country, just in the region from west of Pembroke to the Maritimes.

We could do many things to improve Radio-Canada's television and radio broadcasts. Therefore, I will support my colleague's motion.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Ms. St-Denis, go ahead.

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Mr. Gravelle talked about the importance of francophone programs for small communities, and I fully concur. However, he said something that's not true, and I cannot believe it.

I personally listen to the radio a lot when travelling to Ottawa. However, Radio-Canada does not talk about the Champlain Bridge until 9 a.m., but about the cities in the region, Saint-Joseph Boulevard and other Gatineau streets. Afterwards, they switch to the national network, and the programming content becomes more cultural. What you are saying is false, but aside from that, I completely agree that we must make sure Radio-Canada maintains its services to all the small remote francophone communities in the rest of Canada.

However, I completely disagree—my apologies to Mr. Nicholls and others—with working this summer. This is a very important topic. It may actually be the most important issue we can tackle, and that is why we have to approach it very seriously. That cannot be done haphazardly in two meetings, in the middle of the summer, to piss off everyone else. Pardon my impolite language.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Nicholls, go ahead.

• (1545)

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** I want to point out that we have an excellent service in Gatineau, but Sudbury is a long way from Gatineau. I will give you a more concrete example of the town of Hawkesbury, which is very close to the Quebec-Ontario border, in a riding neighbouring mine. Although they have access to the “voices” from Gatineau and Montreal, people from that region don't have their own voice. That's a special case.

I would like to have an anglophone radio station in my region and a francophone radio station in Hawkesbury and its surroundings, Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. I feel the Official Languages Act is all about the vitality of the language, across the country. The idea is to provide minority communities across Canada with a voice.

In my own region, we do not view ourselves as Montrealers. We really are from Vaudreuil-Solanges, and there is a difference. I think the same goes for Hawkesbury residents, who do not consider themselves to be residents of the national capital region. Investments and strategic plans may be needed, but we won't have a study.

I know that my colleagues work hard and believe that we can continue working until the election. If the Liberal Party is not interested in studying an issue that has to do with official languages, what can I say? Official languages have been neglected in the country for 30 years. I would like to know whether our Conservative colleagues have anything to say about that. I am sure they are also prepared to work. We will see.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Williamson.

[Translation]

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am interested in this issue, especially in the second part of the motion. I think, and the comments we have heard so far indicate, that this is not something we should rush. That is why I think it would be better to deal with the matter in the next Parliament.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Gravelle, go ahead.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to clarify, regarding what Ms. St-Denis said, that I was not talking about Gatineau, Saint-Joseph Boulevard or Wellington Street, but strictly about northern Ontario. Moreover, I am not surprised that the Liberals don't want to work over the summer.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Day, the floor is yours.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** I would like to talk about something we have not yet discussed.

Many cuts have been made to Radio-Canada's radio service, totalling \$150 million. Some 3,500 positions will be eliminated by 2020. As a result, the *Téléjournal* air time has been cut by 30 minutes.

Francophone communities outside Quebec have access to national radio and television. That helps them preserve their language and meets their need to watch Radio-Canada programs that are not rebroadcasts or recycled reports as a result of the reduced air time. The public broadcaster must continue to provide adequate service to the communities that need it to preserve their language.

In addition, anglophone communities outside Quebec that wish to learn French need Radio-Canada to speak quality French. A number of NDP members even said they learned French by tuning in to Radio-Canada. Radio-Canada's presence in communities ensures that the information provided on radio and television is neutral. So the small francophone communities outside Quebec cannot be deprived of the programming from the public broadcaster.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Mr. Gourde, please proceed.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I would like to say that an event will soon be held where these issues will probably be discussed. I am talking about the 20th Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie in which the Government of Canada and all the provinces will participate. These issues and all the services provided by all governments to francophone communities across Canada will be discussed there.

After that ministerial conference, we will be in a better position to carry out an even more worthwhile study. At the moment, I think the

study is premature. For the time being, we will vote against the motion.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Seeing no further debate, I'll give the floor to the clerk for a recorded vote.

The vote is on the motion as presented by Mr. Nicholls.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 3)

**The Chair:** Seeing no further business, I wish everybody a good and safe time over the summer and all the best in the upcoming campaign.

This is the end of the committee for the 41st Parliament.

Thank you for all your participation over the last four years. I wish you all the best.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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