



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 076 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 19, 2017

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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1540)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): We are now in public session.

I now give the floor to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to talk about the two motions for which I introduced the notices earlier.

Let me summarize the first motion. Its intent is to invite the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to come and speak to the Commissioner of Official Languages' report, entitled "Early Childhood: Fostering the Vitality of Francophone Minority Communities". The goal is to have him tell us about the progress made on his announcements regarding early childhood.

Agreements have already been reached. It's good news to hear that we are able to sign agreements with the provinces with a view to investing in early childhood. That's very important in light of the Commissioner of Official Languages' report.

I think it would be nice to hear from the minister on this particular topic, especially since early childhood is a significant part of Graham Fraser's report and in light of everything we have heard recently.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Are there any comments?

We'll start with Mr. Samson, followed by Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): I can start and Mr. Samson can jump in afterwards.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Okay, Mr. Lefebvre can start.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, although I agree that we should invite the minister, I have to remind you that that the department is currently negotiating with the provinces. Mr. Choquette is aware of that. The discussions are in camera, since the parties do not want to disclose information before the agreements are worked out.

I see that you did not include a date in your motion, Mr. Choquette. I think we could give the chair an opportunity to check with the minister when he would be available to appear. We would let the minister determine the date of the appearance.

If that were the case, I would have no issue with it. Do we agree on that? The minister would determine the time, and it would be up to the chair to contact him.

The Chair: Very well.

Mr. Samson, the floor is yours.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I pretty much wanted to make the same comment. There's no point in the minister appearing before us in the middle of negotiations. Agreements need to be signed. Prince Edward Island, Ontario, New Brunswick and the Northwest Territories have already signed one. My understanding is that Nova Scotia will sign one next week. Let's give the agreements a chance to be signed, and then the minister can report to us.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Clarke, go ahead.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I'm sorry, I made a mistake; The comment I wanted to make was about the other motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Does everyone agree? The date is to be determined. I will see how we can arrange it.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Let's move to the next motion.

Mr. Choquette, go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: The other motion is the one I moved on October 4, 2017, with a view to inviting the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

I included a deadline: "by December 1, 2017". I think that works, but we can check whether it works for my colleagues.

According to the motion, the minister would appear before us to give an update on the Action Plan for Official Languages, but the discussion could be broader. For instance, we could talk about the recent annual report and, if appropriate, she could also give us an update on the action plan. We can change the wording by placing more emphasis on the annual report than the action plan.

• (1545)

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

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's as if he can read my mind; that's unusual. It isn't something I recommend doing often.

Mr. François Choquette: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: That said, it's exactly what I wanted to propose. I think the minister should come and talk to us about the annual report. It could include the action plan and other things. And she wouldn't be limited to one subject.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I would like to make an amendment to your motion, Mr. Choquette, to make it clear that we would also like to hear about the agreement with Netflix. She could tell us what in the agreement promotes or guarantees investments to protect francophone production.

The Chair: If you are proposing an amendment, I would like to see a clearly defined text.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I thought I could introduce an amendment orally.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke): He can, but the first amendment must be voted on first.

The Chair: Okay. I accept Mr. Clarke's amendment.

Now, I would like to hear your comments on the amendment.

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): My comment doesn't concern the amendment, but rather what my colleague Mr. Choquette said initially. It isn't exactly the date that poses a problem, but discussing something as specific as a report.

Mr. François Choquette: It will be less restrictive with the amendment.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That's it. That's exactly what I wanted to hear.

You didn't read my mind like that of my colleague, but that suits me.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Your thoughts are much more complex than mine.

The Chair: So the purpose of the first amendment is to add a reference to the annual report. The motion would refer to an update of the annual report, including progress on the action plan. Is that it?

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, including progress on the action plan.

The Chair: Does everyone agree?

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): One moment. Wasn't there a proposal for an amendment?

The Chair: Mr. Choquette introduced his amendment first.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The annual report will automatically include everything, because it will cover all the activities undertaken during the year. We don't need to be more specific.

The Chair: Right.

Does that suit everyone?

Mr. François Choquette: I accept Mr. Samson's amendment to remove the reference to the action plan and specify that it will be to inform us about the annual report on official languages.

(Amendment agreed to).

The Chair: Is there a date for that?

Mr. François Choquette: It would be the most recent report. So it will have to be the annual report for—

The Chair: No, I was talking about the date the minister would appear.

Mr. François Choquette: It says "by December 1, 2017". Do you agree with that?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Let's say in December. That would give her some flexibility.

The Chair: In December?

Mr. François Choquette: By the end of December?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Let's say by December 15.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

The Chair: Are we in agreement about saying by December 15?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to).

The Chair: We are now moving on to the amendment introduced by Alupa Clarke.

I would like to hear your comments on it.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: It's really positive. I would just like the minister to be aware of our concern about the agreement she has made with Netflix and that she tell us in a public meeting what safeguards are included in the agreement that will help to promote francophone production.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Put it in writing, and then we can discuss it.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Once again, Mr. Chair, the annual report covers everything. Anyone can ask questions about it.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Indeed, you can ask all the questions you want.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's part of the annual report.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: The Netflix agreement isn't part of the annual report. Am I wrong?

Mr. Darrell Samson: No, but it's part of the vision she shared on culture, I think. You will be able to ask the question.

Mr. René Arseneault: An interesting point.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: This is interesting for two reasons.

Mr. Clarke, what expression did you use already?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I talked about safeguards.

Mr. René Arseneault: As I have often heard, the safeguard of francophone culture is Quebec culture. This ignores Netflix's knowledge of francophone culture outside Quebec. I like this perspective. But, I'm reluctant to support this amendment right away, and it has nothing to do with its content.

I discussed it earlier with Ms. Lecomte. We study things, it takes us on other paths, and we all get excited. We all want things to be fine, but when it's time to make reports and recommendations, we've lost the thread. It would be so nice if we could finish what we started, meaning, report back and move on to something else.

The Air Canada file is the perfect example. We have to go back, retrace ground we've already covered, remember what was said, search the witnesses' statements.

I understand the need to look at this soon. I'm not against the idea. I'm really worried about this situation, too, for the reasons I explained. However, could we study this a little later, but early in 2018? That way, we could finish what we've already started before moving on to something else.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Clarke, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I totally understand what you are saying, Mr. Arseneault. However, when I was a member of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, we could conduct a dozen studies at the same time. Sometimes, we had ministers come so that we could ask them questions, and it would take half an hour. There is a technical dimension to the studies, but we also have a political duty as a committee: to cross-examine ministers on what they are doing.

The Chair: Did you say “cross-examine”?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I mean that ministerial responsibility is not just limited to the House; it extends to committees too.

That said, if you want to do it in January, I understand. Personally, I feel that we could easily take half an hour.

So, how long do you want to invite the minister for?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: That is a very good question. Excuse me, that's my fault, I did not include that detail in the motion. I left it a little open.

If my colleagues agree, my proposal would be for a two-hour session, made up of a one-hour televised session with the minister and then an hour with the officials. That is my proposal. That is generally what happens, anyway. So I propose an hour with the minister and an hour with the officials, as part of a televised meeting, if that is possible.

So we can add that to the motion, if my colleagues agree.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, as I understand your comment just now, you are of the opinion that it should be in another motion, rather than an amendment to this motion. Is that the case?

Mr. René Arseneault: No. I don't want to complicate things.

I was talking about Mr. Clarke's proposal. I am not against the idea. However, I know how we operate: if there are areas we want to look into more closely, we will get more people to testify and we will not finish the reports we are working on at the moment. We are going to end up making recommendations and preparing reports that we are going to have to check line by line, on topics that we dealt

with six months earlier. I would prefer us to deal with one topic at a time.

The Chair: In other words, are you asking Mr. Clarke to delay the introduction of his amendment?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: If you decide to delay consideration of my amendment, we will also have to delay the meeting that Mr. Choquette's motion is asking for. It would mean that the minister would come before the committee in January or March 2018.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Darrell Samson: According to the motion, she will be coming in December.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay, but if the minister comes before the committee as a result of Mr. Choquette's motion, I would like to talk to her about Netflix. I would like to give her a heads-up, so that she can be prepared.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think you just did.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's right, so—

Mr. Darrell Samson: It doesn't stop you in the slightest from asking questions about it.

Honestly, I am not sure that it is up to our committee to answer the question that our colleague Mr. Arseneault is pondering at the moment. I think that question should be studied by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and not by the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, but the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage will not do it.

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

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: My comments are along the same lines as Mr. Samson's.

Mr. Clarke, nothing is stopping you from asking the Minister about that when she comes before the committee. You will be able to ask her questions about the annual report, which includes everything that happened during the year. You just have to ask her.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I will send her an email to tell her that you want to ask her that question.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: She never replies to me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I absolutely agree with what Mr. Clarke has just said, that the matter concerns us as well. In fact, it is up to us to promote both official languages, and to make sure that there is content in both official languages.

That said, I understand Mr. Arseneault's concerns. We have been working on the Air Canada file for a long time, and I would like to finish the report too. The same goes for the justice file. Unfortunately, that study will not be finished before my bill is put to a vote. It's unfortunate, but it's the sad truth.

In that context, I understand that Mr. Arseneault wants to do one study at a time. However, Mr. Clarke and I are both going to ask questions about Netflix. The minister will be made aware, because this session is public at the moment. So she can be advised that we are going to ask her questions about it.

The Chair: Mr. Clarke, can I conclude from this that you are withdrawing your amendment?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, I am.

The Chair: So, the main motion, as amended, reads as follows:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage to appear before the Committee by December 15, 2017, to provide us with information about the Official Languages Annual Report 2015-16; and that this meeting be televised.

Do you agree?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

●(1555)

The Chair: We are now going to continue our study on Air Canada, unless any committee members want to discuss something else.

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I want to make sure that we all keep working along the same lines. We are not here next week. When we come back, we are going to finish the Air Canada file. Then we will do the one on access to justice, the one on the field of nursing, and the one on Statistics Canada.

We have to finish all that before we look for any other work.

Mr. François Choquette: I agree, Ms. Lapointe.

The Chair: If no one else has anything else to add, we will switch to the Air Canada file.

So I am going to suspend the meeting so that the committee can continue its business in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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