



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 081 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, November 23, 2017

—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, November 23, 2017

• (1645)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Dear friends, the first motion, from Mr. Clarke, proposes the following:

That the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to appear before the committee on the new immigration targets as they relate to official languages.

We will now debate the motion.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): I just wanted to say that I am not opposed to the motion itself, but the minister already appeared before the committee, with Ms. Joly, last June. That was just about five months ago.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): He will not have anything new to say to us.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): As to the announcement, I agree that immigration needs to be increased. We do have a serious labour shortage.

Did he not announce that later than June?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): No, it was just before. He came to speak to us about it.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: In that case, fill me in.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The clerk can certainly do that.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Did he indicate which policies he would implement for francophones in Winnipeg?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: It was all there, including the percentage.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It was 4.5% and everything was in order.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Perhaps it would be better to wait until April or May to introduce a motion to get an update on the situation.

Mr. Darrell Samson: For my part, I will want to know if the targets have been met.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We cannot ask for an update after four months, but we could after a year. I suggest therefore that Mr. Clarke withdraw his motion and come back to it in April or May.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, please go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): I would like us to go ahead with this motion. I remember the immigration minister's visit very well. I am sorry to say this, but what he said did not make any sense. It was nonsense. We asked him who was responsible for

francophone immigration and he said no one was. We asked him whether there was a specific strategy for immigration to minority communities, but he did not know what we were talking about. He thought there was one, but there was none in fact. We asked him to forward that information to the committee and he sent us the Action Plan. It makes no sense.

He had just become the minister. Perhaps he has more of a feel for his duties now. Francophone immigration right across the country is not going well at all. The minister has had the time to familiarize himself with his duties and get down to work. So I would like him to come and tell us what is going on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Clarke, please go ahead.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Lefebvre's charming remarks have nearly made me lose track. I am also new, but for the past month and a half, all the groups I have met have expressed serious concerns in this regard. In a completely non-partisan way, we would like the minister to come meet with us now that he is familiar with his duties and talk to us specifically about francophone immigration, the strategy, objectives and location.

The Chair: Would someone like to say something?

Mr. Lefebvre, please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have no objection to the minister appearing before the committee again, but we should wait a bit.

The Chair: No date is indicated.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes. To my mind, he will decide when he is ready to come speak to us.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That will be done and we can then mark the date on the calendar.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The fact that there is no specific date does not bother me. I do not want to hear about strategies, but about results. I think it will take at least six months for the results to be apparent.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Seeing that there is a strategy might reassure the groups who follow the committee's work and who are very worried.

The Chair: Are we agreed?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes.

The Chair: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is from Mr. Choquette and reads as follows:

That the committee write to the Minister of Canadian Heritage to ask for a written response explaining the delay in the appointment process for the Commissioner of Official Languages; and that the response be sent to the committee by the end of 2017.

I imagine you have read the newspapers in this regard.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): That can wait until Tuesday.

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

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, there are some things about this that I do not understand. When the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Mr. Mendicino, appeared before the committee, he said that the process for the appointment of the new Commissioner of Official Languages is open and transparent. This morning, however, the newspapers reported a rumour about the identity of the next Commissioner of Official Languages. I do not see transparency or openness. That is why I would like to introduce the following motion —

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Choquette. I have to deal with the motion before me before moving on to another one.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, from what I have heard, my colleagues wish to debate this on Tuesday. I agree.

The Chair: So you agree to postpone debate on this motion until next Tuesday?

Mr. François Choquette: I agree.

The Chair: That is what we will do then.

Please go ahead, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce another motion, which seems very important to me given the lack of transparency surrounding the appointment of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The motion is as follows:

That the Committee denounce the non-compliance with subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act regarding consultation with the official opposition leaders on the appointment of the new Commissioner of Official Languages; and that it report this to the House before the end of the year.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, please go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Is the meeting public at this moment?

• (1650)

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: What my colleague François Choquette said angers me. From the information I have received, the opposition parties were consulted. There was a leak. This morning, for instance, I was on a teleconference with government officials from my province and they said they had seen the name of someone who had apparently been appointed Commissioner of Official Languages. That is how I learned about this. I was not aware of this. It caused me to raise an eyebrow. I wondered what was going on.

Let me return to what our colleague François Choquette said initially. The parliamentary secretary said that the appointment

process for the Commissioner was transparent and open. The process of soliciting applications is not secret: everyone is invited to submit their name. More than 70 names—it might have been 76 names, I do not recall precisely—were selected and considered during the process. The committee selected for this purpose is of course in charge of the process.

I received the information indirectly yesterday. I was told that the leak may have come from the person's employer—the person might have notified their employer or board of directors—or from those who received the letter from the opposition parties. These are the two possibilities, but it doesn't matter.

The Chair: I would like to clarify something. The clerk has confirmed to me that no certificate has been tabled in the House as of yet. We have to be careful about what is reported in the newspapers. We will not know who has been recommended until the certificate is tabled. In light of what happened last time, I understand that the political parties have to be consulted. I do not know if they have been consulted yet. I have been asked to ensure that we serve our role as a committee as soon as the certificate is tabled, in other words, the person recommended will appear.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: I am angered by Mr. Arseneault's comments. He said that 60 or so candidates have been evaluated, yet no one on the committee was aware of that. I was just talking about secrecy and lack of transparency.

I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada who was on the selection committee. Even the opposition leaders do not know. Speaking of a lack of transparency, this is a good example.

The motion simply calls for subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act to be upheld and for the opposition leaders to be consulted, rather than being sent a letter. That's all.

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

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I also observed a great deal of secrecy. I asked just one question, and the parliamentary secretary said that we are the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I asked how far along things were, how many applications had been selected, and how many had been rejected. I wanted some details about how the process works. I wanted to know, for instance, what provinces the candidates were from and what their qualifications were. Yet we did not get any answers at all. That is why I put a question on the Order Paper, even though I won't get the information for 45 days, after it is all over. I also find that the whole process was not very open.

The Chair: Before continuing our discussion, I simply want to say that I consider Mr. Choquette's motion as a notice of motion. I have no objection should you wish to comment on the notice of motion in the time remaining.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would like to come back to that.

The Chair: We can come back to it. The clerk will distribute Mr. Choquette's motion, there will be an acceptable timeframe for introducing the motion, and then we will talk about it again next Tuesday.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That is all I have to say.

The members of the selection committee were publicly announced in June. Everyone knows that.

Mr. François Choquette: Who are the members?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson and Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): As far as I know, the opposition leaders received a letter today saying that this person will be appointed or selected, and that there will be a seven-day consultation period for the committee members to evaluate whether it is a good choice.

What is going on today is due to a media leak. I would be very surprised that Mr. Théberge—sorry, rather, that the person selected—would have told his employer that he is going to Ottawa. There is a process to be followed; as committee members, we have to meet him. Remember what happened last time. I hope he did not do that and, if the leak is from his employer, that is even worse.

I agree with my fellow committee members. Despite our experience in the spring, we have seen some of the same things this time.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

We will pick up on this again on Tuesday.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the last word.

Mr. René Arseneault: No, I would just be rambling on.

The Chair: Okay.

We will resume our discussion of this on Tuesday.

We will adjourn until next Tuesday.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

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 House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

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 de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>