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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1610)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Madam Clerk, do we have replacements, please?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Josée Ménard): We have Mr. Mazier replacing Mr. Williamson today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Welcome, Mr. Mazier.

The committee is meeting for the purpose of committee business. With regard to the speakers list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Just a second—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I wanted to tell you that the interpretation does not seem to be working.

The Chair: Okay, thank you. We will check.

The Clerk: Could you say something in English and French so that we can test it?

The Chair: Yes. Good afternoon, everyone.

[*English*]

I just called the meeting to order.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: That's good. Could you speak in English now?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, I was just saying that we're going to start our fourth meeting of the House of Commons—

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: The check is complete and everything seems to be working well. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Beaulieu, is it working for you?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I don't know why, but I am not hearing the interpretation. In my system, it says:

[*English*]

French or English.

[*Translation*]

I clicked on “French”.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): It's the same for me. I'm on the French channel, but, when Mr. Dubourg speaks in English, I do not hear the French.

The Chair: We will check that. Thank you.

The Clerk: Mr. Dubourg, can we suspend the meeting for a moment, to give us time to solve the problem with the interpretation?

The Chair: Certainly, yes.

Colleagues, we are going to suspend the meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let me try for Mr. Dalton.

Do you hear me when I'm speaking English?

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, I hear you in English, but there's no translation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: At the moment, I am speaking in French. Tell me if you can hear the interpretation.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I am already on the French channel. There shouldn't be any interpretation.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Marc Dalton: It isn't for me.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Chair, it's working for me. We're good here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I can hear the interpretation in English when Mr. Dalton is speaking.

Could you say something again, Mr. Dubourg?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to try again in English.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Speak in French and I will tell you whether I can hear the interpretation.

• (1630)

The Chair: Let us start the meeting again. As I was saying, this is now the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We also have one replacement.

The clerk and I will do our best to make sure that everyone can speak. Those participating by videoconference must click on “participant” and those in the room must signal the clerk.

Last week, we talked about inviting the Commissioner of Official Languages during the break week, on Friday, November 13. The committee wanted to meet with the commissioner at 2 p.m. But the time available in the House of Commons is from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The commissioner has agreed to meet with us at 11 a.m. So you will be receiving a notice for a meeting on November 13, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Let me remind you that Mr. Blaney's motion to invite the commissioner was carried. The motion simply mentioned the commissioner's most recent annual report. We have a two-hour meeting with him and we know that the estimates have to be passed before November 27. Mr. Blaney has introduced a motion to that effect too.

I'd like to ask Mr. Blaney if he wants to introduce that motion first, so that the commissioner can be prepared to speak about the estimates for one hour and then about the annual report for the other hour.

If the members of the committee are in agreement, I would ask Mr. Blaney to introduce that motion so that we can discuss it.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Chair, I agree to move that we invite the Commissioner of Official Languages on November 13, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., in two separate blocks, to discuss the estimates and his report.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Beaulieu now has the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I just want to mention that our subcommittee has met. We did not talk about the WE Charity proposal because it's more specifically a negotiation between the parties. As that is still not settled, my position is that we must continue to work on that proposal.

• (1635)

The Chair: Fine, but we have a meeting with the commissioner next week and Mr. Blaney has just introduced his motion. I know that Mr. Beaulieu was speaking at the last meeting, but I would ask the committee to decide on Mr. Blaney's motion, so that, next week, the commissioner will be speaking about his report for an hour and the estimates for an hour.

Do any committee members disagree with that proposal? Raise your hand if that is the case.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Will we continue to study my motion afterwards?

The Chair: Exactly. You will have the floor next.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, are any members in the room opposed to my proposal?

The Clerk: I see no opposition.

The Chair: Then we will vote on Mr. Blaney's motion.

It reads as follows:

That the committee invite the Commissioner of Official Languages to appear as part of the study on the 2020-2021 Main Estimates by November 27, 2020.

Madam Clerk, the other motion has already been agreed to. Do we have to combine both motions so that the commissioner can deal with two subjects in the same meeting, or will passing this motion be enough?

The Clerk: Passing this motion will be enough.

The Chair: So let us vote on Mr. Blaney's motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Blaney's motion has been agreed to and therefore, the clerk can officially invite the commissioner to come and deal with those two subjects. Committee members will receive a notice of the meeting for next Friday, November 13, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

I would just like to tell committee members in passing that there was no official meeting of the subcommittee. We had an informal meeting between ourselves. So there is no report to submit to the committee.

I have three people on the list. First, Mr. Beaulieu, then Ms. Lattanzio and Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have introduced this motion a number of times already.

Essentially, it says that the committee recommends that the House create a special committee to hold hearings on the commitments of WE Charity and on the fact that it is an anglophone organization, although it has done some francophone events.

My impression is that all opposition parties want this matter to be studied. All the committees were studying it. Then we had the prorogation and now things are starting up again. I think that all the opposition parties, at least, will be in agreement.

So if people want to save time, I would suggest moving to a vote as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Lattanzio, the floor is yours.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, colleagues.

I confess that I am actually a little disappointed that we are continuing to talk about this motion. It seems to me that we have other motions that are very interesting, not to say important, and that the committee should study them as quickly as possible.

Today, here we are again, somewhat in suspense. As I mentioned the last time we met, we are spending time on a motion that is identical to those that have gone around almost all the standing committees. The only thing different is the preamble, which is tailored for each committee.

It is a great shame, I feel, to see that we want to continue along these lines. Last time, my colleagues clearly indicated that they did not want to pass this motion. In fact, I myself introduced a motion that questioned whether this motion was in order. The Chair made his decision and committee members appealed it. I find that to be a great shame. If the members of the committee intend to act in that way, I must remind them that they have until 5:45 p.m., which does not leave us a lot of time.

It looks to me like we are going to be spending all our time debating this motion. As I said at the beginning of my comments, we have other important motions, germane to the committee's mandate, that we have to deal with.

I must remind my colleagues that the motion has no place in our committee. I can never repeat it enough: this is not part of our committee's mandate.

I also recall that I had asked my colleague to show us which paragraphs in his motion were relevant to our committee's mandate. I never received an answer to that. My colleague has never explained to me how the wording of the motion reflects the committee's mandate. In my opinion, having that information is very important before we deal with the motion.

We met to discuss this motion in August. Let me deal with the situation from a legal standpoint. I actually dug out the signed contract. There is an English version and a French version. If I may, Mr. Chair, I will find that contract and quote some sections of it. I hope that it will enlighten my colleagues. I repeat that the contract was prepared in English and in French in order to reflect the fact that the service had to be provided in both official languages.

Mr. Chair, give me a moment to find it. I really was not expecting us to be talking about this motion again.

• (1640)

[*English*]

I ask you to indulge me, and give me time to look at this contract again.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, respectfully, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I understand that we are debating a motion. My point of order deals with procedure.

There was an informal meeting of our committee's subcommittee on agenda and procedure and there was consensus on some points.

Let me turn to the members, specifically Mr. Beaulieu, to see whether there might be a way to allow the Chair to report on that informal meeting and to see whether any of the points on which we agreed would also be agreeable to all members. Then we would perhaps be able to debate the motions that seem more contentious, while clearly respecting each member's rights to introduce motions. It might allow the committee to move forward with the issues on which we think there may be points of consensus.

Mr. Chair, with the members' permission, could you inform all members of the suggestions that were made? I go back to what Ms. Lambropoulos in Ottawa—and good afternoon to her—was saying. The committee is sovereign, and the subcommittee, in seeking consensus or

In other words, could we establish the issues on which there is consensus, and then afterwards, spend more time on those that are more contentious?

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: My apologies, Mr. Vice-Chair. I let you continue but that is not a point of order, as you thought.

I'm sorry, we must move on.

Mrs. Lalonde, did you have a point of order?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yes.

We could perhaps have a motion to adjourn this debate. As a member, I would really like to know what was discussed at that informal meeting, or at least have your view on what was understood there. So I would like to ask us to adjourn the debate, so that you can take the floor, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You raised a point of order as a way of asking us to adjourn the debate. Let me consult the clerk about that for 30 seconds.

The Clerk: Mrs. Lalonde's motion cannot be debated and we must proceed to a vote immediately.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

We have a motion to adjourn. We must proceed to a vote immediately.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I am sorry, Mr. Mazier. The question has been called, so I will go back to your point of order...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: A point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: We have a member who needs in, Mr. Dalton.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I just said the same thing to Mr. Mazier. We have to vote on the motion to adjourn.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I do not understand why we are not able to ask for a vote on the motion but now someone can ask for a vote and no one can comment.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, let me clarify that this is a point of order and that, as the clerk has said, a motion to adjourn is not debatable. However, when a motion is on the table, as long as hands are raised, we must continue to debate that motion. That is the reason that the motion to adjourn cannot be debated and we have to call the question.

So I will ask Madam Clerk to call for a roll-call vote on the motion to adjourn.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5.)

• (1650)

The Chair: So we now continue the debate.

Ms. Lattanzio had the floor and, on the list—

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Let me finish, Mr. Arseneault. I just wanted to say that, on the list, we have Ms. Lattanzio, Ms. Ashton, Ms. Lambropoulos, Mr. Duguid, Mr. Beaulieu, and Mrs. Lalonde.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It seems to me that, two meetings ago, we talked about the method of conducting votes. Are we voting in alphabetical order or by order of political parties? I felt that it was in alphabetical order. What is the requirement or the suggestion?

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, as I understand the housekeeping regulations, that procedure has not been established.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if I may, I would like to make a comment.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk: We vote in alphabetical order, by party. Because Mr. Mazier is replacing Mr. Williamson, the alphabetical order is affected a little, but it is because Mr. Williamson is the last on the Conservative Party list. I hope that answers your question.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you very much for that answer, Madam Clerk.

It seems to me that Mr. Mazier wanted to raise a point of order. You have the floor, Mr. Mazier.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: I'm trying to get Marc Dalton back in. He was out, so I was trying to get the clerk's attention. It's all good now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Mazier.

Let us go back to the list. You have the floor, Ms. Lattanzio. Go ahead.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, I was just about to refer to the provisions of the contract signed between the parties.

I would like to make a comment first. I am sorry to see that we want to waste time with this kind of motion. After all, the same member has another, very interesting motion dealing with an issue of minority language rights that has implications all across the country. I find it's a shame that we are squandering our time—and, yes, “squandering” is the right word—on this motion today.

Some motions also deal with problems and shortcomings in the right to receive services during the pandemic. Others genuinely deal with basic issues for Canadians, but we are spending our time on this motion.

I am going to share with you the paragraphs that describe the organization's commitment. It wanted to make sure that the projects were in fact created in both official languages.

[English]

In the contract, in paragraph 37.1, under official languages, it is well stipulated that, “Where the Project is to be delivered to members of either language community, the Recipient shall”—so the WE Charity should—“(a) make Project-related documentation and announcements (for the public and prospective Project Participants, if any) in both official languages where applicable; (b) actively offer and provide in both official languages any Project-related services to be provided or made available to members of the public, where applicable; and, (c) organize activities and provide its services, where appropriate, in such a manner as to address the needs of both official language communities.”

Mr. Chair, you see that it's in black and white, it's crystal clear on the contract, and it was signed and both participants knew full well that the services needed to be in French and English.

We can find some of those activities where some of those projects needed to be done in both official languages throughout the contract, and more specifically in clauses that pertain to such activities. I'm going to draw your attention to some of those.

When we look at schedule A, we see that the specific objectives of the project are to “[P]lace up to 40,000 students in WE volunteer service opportunities across Canada, including those from vulnerable or underrepresented groups and official language minority communities (OLMC), through the 'I Want to Help' platform;”

It continues: “Ongoing from May to September 2020 [V]alidate and post volunteer service opportunities in bilingual format from Not-For-Profit partners and for Not-For-Profits through web-based input modules, electronic feed, to ESDC's 'I Want to Help' platform”.

• (1655)

Further on we read, “Provide bilingual supports to Not-for-Profit partners to ensure they have the capacity to train and safely onboard volunteers to WE service opportunities”. Furthermore, “Provide bilingual supports, youth skills training, and COVID-19 training to volunteers in WE service opportunities”.

We can go on and on, Mr. Chair. For instance, under June 2020, we also see, “Launch a bilingual online WE Platform to register and intake volunteers for WE opportunities”.

To say that the contract that was signed did not foresee that there was a basis and an emphasis making sure that both official languages...in services to be rendered by this organization is very far from the truth.

I honestly do not see the relevance of this motion we have before us. I think we need to move beyond this motion, Mr. Chairman, and get to the serious business of impending issues that are affecting the linguistic minority communities day to day across the nation.

What is unfortunate with this whole process is quite simple: the large scale of this program never came to be; and at the end of the day, it was the students who suffered.

They were the organization that was recognized to be able to take on such a huge undertaking with this project. They had the know-how, they had the expertise and they knew from the onset that they needed to provide services in both official languages.

Why we are dragging this into this committee is beyond my comprehension.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to yield the floor to my colleagues, who I'm sure have a mouthful to say on this issue today. However, I'm going to remind you, Mr. Chairman, that I seek clarification from the member who is proposing this today, so that we can have a clearer understanding of how his motion responds to the mandate of this committee. I would like to have an answer on that, and I'm going to reserve my right to come back to speak.

Thank you.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

The next speaker is Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I am quite worried that, once again, we are wasting our time instead of moving forward productively. We could be talking about what we decided at the subcommittee, and that concerns me. It is a plan that everyone would find acceptable.

Honestly, I must say that I have spent a lot of my time for a number of years sitting on different committees. What's happening here is quite troubling.

So I would like us to vote on the motion so that we can move forward and perhaps deal with something else.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

As I said, I cannot call the question while others want to speak.

We now have Ms.—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Ms. Ashton asked that we vote. You say that you do not agree with that, so I am challenging your decision.

The Chair: Let me check that with the clerk, but we are debating a motion.

[*English*]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We have a number of hands raised.

With regard to the other point of order, an urgent motion was introduced and, that being the case, the motion cannot even be debated.

The motion you are proposing is one to which committee members want to speak. So I cannot call the question as long as committee members want to speak to the motion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Clearly, committee members are just letting the time run out, however much they say they want to save time. That's why I am challenging your decision.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Lambropoulos, the floor is yours.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Do I have the floor because I was on the list or because I raised a point of order?

The Chair: You have the floor because you were on the list.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I don't know exactly what happened at the subcommittee because I am not on it. However, I have heard from the Liberals on the subcommittee that we were going to discuss Mr. Beaulieu's second motion today. It deals with the official languages, which is what the committee is supposed to study. I feel that we were all in favour of moving that motion forward, perhaps with an amendment.

[*English*]

For the most part, we were very much in favour of going forward with it, because we think it's a very important motion to go ahead with. It's very much along the lines of what we aim to do in this committee and what the role of this committee is. We also have a few motions that we've already tabled and accepted to study and go ahead with. It's unfortunate that we're spending so much time debating a motion that clearly doesn't have much consensus and that has absolutely nothing to do with official languages and with the committee and our mandate on this committee. I think that's really unfortunate.

I definitely think that education is very vulnerable. I know we already passed the motion and I'm happy that everybody was in favour of studying the motion on education, which was one I put forward, because of the vulnerability of people receiving education in the language of their choice, and specifically speaking of minority communities in this case. We know, and we heard a question from the NDP today, that the French university or Campus Saint-Jean was not an option anymore unless other decisions are made. We want to find ways to help French-speaking non-Quebeckers access education in French, and we want anglophones in Quebec to be able to access education in English. I think this is extremely important and vulnerable, as I said.

Every year, we see an example of how this right is taken for granted, not taken for granted, but is not necessarily respected by the provinces. The federal government does have a role to play in protecting this right, and therefore, it's extremely important that we go ahead with this and we start at least to study.... I think this one would be an important one to study first, just because we know that in March, these new decisions on closures of schools are going to be made. I think it's a shame we're still talking about something that has nothing to do with the committee, when we're dealing with a pandemic where people aren't receiving services in both official languages at this point, as my colleague Ms. Lattanzio proposed in her motion.

We have so many great studies on the floor. Monsieur Beaulieu, you're proposing another one that we haven't passed yet and that I think would pass unanimously. I would strongly suggest we move ahead and at least get that one out of the way, because I think that would definitely get unanimous consent quickly. Those are my thoughts thus far.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Mr. Duguid, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As they say in French, déjà vu all over again.

I'm very disappointed. I think our honourable opposition members know how this ends, yet they continue on this tack when there are very important issues that we have to deal with that they, in fact, have put forward through some excellent motions. They will help our country move forward on official languages.

Mr. Chair, I am relatively new to this issue. I was raised in a unilingual household, but I ensured that both my children went through French immersion. There were resources available at the time when they grew up in eastern north Kildonan. Today, I'm very proud of my daughters, who are bilingual, and it's because of investments that we have made and because we place importance on our two official languages.

Mr. Blaney was warming my heart for a while there because he was on a path, I thought, to consensus so that we could move for-

ward in unison as a committee, but Mr. Blaney obviously had a change of heart, and I find that disappointing.

As I said last time, Mr. Chair, French is in decline, particularly in western Canada where I live, and that is very concerning. We've heard all about the Campus Saint-Jean issue. I would think my Conservative colleagues would be very concerned, would want to discuss that issue, would want to, again, come together, come to some sort of consensus so that we could work together to ensure that the issue is successfully resolved. Alas, we continue on this path that we are not going to move forward on in a good way.

I mentioned as well last time, Mr. Chair, that I'm very proud to be the Member of Parliament for Winnipeg South. Some 5% of my population's first language is French; 17% of my community is bilingual, and, of course, many other languages are spoken in this very diverse suburb that I represent.

Mr. Chair, there's a shortage of services and there's a shortage of teachers, particularly during this time of COVID, and so we need to discuss those very important issues that Ms. Lambropoulos has brought forward. It's an excellent motion on education and how we can up our game to ensure that students, wherever they live, Quebec or western Canada, have access to education in the language of their choice.

I heard Ms. Ashton speak. I've known her family for a very long time. She's a hard-working Parliamentarian for the people of northern Manitoba. I respect her very much. She mentioned, and I agree with her, that we are wasting our time here, and, Mr. Chair, she can do something about that. She can do something for the people of Manitoba. She can do something for the people of this country who want access to the languages of their choice.

Let me just finish off with some praise for my good friend Mr. Arseneault. Mr. Arseneault was a champion for changing our census and ensuring that very deep questions were asked on the short-form census so we could get a very accurate count of those who need French-language services, particularly schools and educational services. Mr. Arseneault, I think, deserves praise from all sides of the House.

• (1710)

That change has been announced. I sure hope it is, or I might be in big trouble. That is going to be very important. What it'll draw to our attention is that we're even more in need of French-language services in western Canada, where I live, not less but more. I hope honourable members will let us get on with it, and deal with the most important motions we have before us.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize my colleague, Mr. Mazier, from the most beautiful part of Manitoba, at least one of the most beautiful. I'm softening you up, Dan. He has French-speaking communities in his riding, and they don't have access to the kinds of services they need.

I particularly want to implore my Manitoba colleagues to have a little solidarity here. Let us get on with it, and deliver these important services for the people of Manitoba, for the people of Quebec, for the people of Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duguid.

On the list at the moment, we have Mr. Beaulieu, Mrs. Lalonde, Mr. Blaney, Ms. Lattanzio, then Ms. Lambropoulos and Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier, I raised a point of order because I wanted to ask the clerk a question. I asked for a vote, you did not agree, and I challenged your ruling. Do I not have the right to challenge your ruling?

The Chair: Let me consult with the clerk on that. I will need to pause for a few seconds to follow up on your comment.

• (1710) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1716)

The Chair: We will now resume.

In response to Mr. Beaulieu's question, and after consultation with the clerk, I can say that, according to the House of Commons Standing Order 116, and as I said with respect to the proposed motion, as long as members of the committee want to speak, I cannot interrupt the debate. However, when we have a dilatory motion, for example, to adjourn debate, it takes precedence over any other motion we are discussing. By the same token, this dilatory motion cannot be debated or amended; it must be put to a vote right away.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Actually, we had proposed a motion to have a central committee to avoid disrupting the work of the various committees, and it will be—

The Clerk: Excuse me, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. René Arseneault: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Arseneault has a point of order.

Mr. René Arseneault: I could not understand my colleague Mr. Beaulieu. The sound was like a robot, with a very distant echo.

The Chair: Yes, that's true, we heard that. I would ask Mr. Beaulieu to continue—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Do you want me to slow down?

The Chair: —but just to turn off his video. That way, we will hear him even more clearly. It will be good for the interpretation as well.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I will slow down, and I can also turn off the video. I'm not even on a laptop, I'm on the Parliament's computer.

I was saying that, basically, if we don't want to waste time, instead of repeating the same arguments, we should proceed with the vote. Then we can move on. It's like the chicken or the egg. I have the impression that no matter what we say, the outcome of the vote will remain the same. It would be better to proceed with the vote now.

The Chair: Thank you—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I apologize, Mr. Chair. I don't mean to cut you off.

In response to Ms. Lattanzio, the committee was already debating an almost identical motion on the WE Charity before Parliament was prorogued. With respect to the mandate of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the objective was precisely to determine whether the WE Charity was capable of providing services in French in Quebec and in francophone and Acadian communities. I do not see why there should not be a debate on that.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

• (1720)

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I understand that my colleague is referring to a few paragraphs of his motion. Am I to understand that we have to remove the paragraphs that have nothing to do with language, in terms of awarding the contract to the WE Charity? If that is the case—

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, I apologize, but this is more a matter of debate than a point of order, where one does not respond to another member.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay. I didn't want to turn it into a debate. I just wanted to understand. I have his answer now. I will talk more about it when it's my turn to speak.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

We will now go to Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to clarify the request I made to Mr. Blaney. I had asked that the debate be adjourned. When members move to adjourn a debate, they wish to temporarily stop debate on a motion or a study in progress.

If the committee had agreed to the adjournment, we could have given the floor to our chair, who would have shared with us what was said at the subcommittee, which Mr. Arseneault talked to me about. We are responsible adults, and we desperately need to move the work of this committee forward. Once again, I'm really disappointed to have to discuss this issue with you.

That said, I want to say one thing. Mr. Beaulieu, your notice of motion was given on October 13, 2020. I have always had a great deal of respect for my colleagues on this committee, because I believe that we care about the French fact and about minority languages, which are in peril.

I'm not sure whether you know this, but before entering federal politics, I had the immense pleasure of representing the same riding of Orleans as a member of the provincial legislature. As a former Ontario Minister of Francophone Affairs, I was able to attend various meetings with Minister Joly. We talked together about education and the very worrisome danger facing our education system. I feel that this is why we unanimously adopted the motion by my colleague Ms. Lambropoulos in the previous session.

I'm not sure whether you remember the dark day in Ontario when Mr. Ford's provincial government withdrew its funding from the proposed Université de l'Ontario français, a project that was close to my heart, to all our hearts, I believe. It was very disappointing, but I must say that the outpouring of love from all the provinces in support of that project was extraordinary. Once again, let me thank Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and all the countries, including France, that also took action to support this project. Education is the foundation of our language. I was extremely proud to see all that support, but it was a dark day.

The Ontario provincial budget was tabled today at 4:00 p.m. I very much look forward to hearing from Franco-Ontarian members about their expectations from this budget. I think there was some apprehension, once again. As I have said publicly, we need to thank the Liberal government, Minister Joly and all parliamentarians like you, because we were truly able to save the Université de l'Ontario français. We know that in education, thanks to the work of this committee and out of respect for the official languages, the federal government has a mandate to help us.

This evening, we spoke very briefly about the Campus Saint-Jean again. I also hope to have the support of my Conservative colleagues, who will be speaking with their good friend, Mr. O'Toole. When he spoke about COVID-19, he seemed very proud to talk about his commitment, his close relationship with Mr. Kenny and how well the latter was protecting his community from the virus.

● (1725)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

Although I agree with what my colleague is saying, it is not related to the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I hear your point, but the motion itself is very broad. As long as a member is going to speak about the official languages, either French or English, the member can continue to comment.

Mrs. Lalonde, we are listening.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps I can refresh my colleague's memory.

So let me read your own motion again, Mr. Beaulieu. Its scope is very broad. However, let me make one comment first: the committee should be debating many things this evening other than this one. But this is the battle you chose. So let me read your motion again:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages report to the House of Commons the following recommendation:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages recommend to the House the creation of a special committee to hold hearings to examine all aspects of the design and creation of the Canada Student Service Grant...

The motion says "student" and I am talking about teaching and education. So it is relevant. Let me continue.

...including those relating to the study to review the safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest in federal government expenditure policies;...

As you all know full well, dear friends, the program was unfortunately scrapped. With all the foofaraw they were trying to justify, some articles tried to make the point that Canadian charitable organizations were being put at risk. As for expenditures, there weren't any. Let me stop there and continue reading Mr. Beaulieu's motion:

...government spending, WE Charity and the Canada Student Service Grant; the government's decision to select WE Charity, an anglophone organization, to implement the Canada Student Service Grant (CSSG); and the administration of the Canada Student Service Grant and WE Charity;

1. That the committee be composed of 11 members, of which five shall be government members, four shall be from the official opposition, one shall be from the Bloc Québécois and one from the New Democratic Party;

2. That changes in the membership of the committee shall be effective immediately after notification by the whip has been filed with the Clerk of the House;

3. That membership substitutions be permitted, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2);

4. That the members shall be named by their respective whip by depositing with the Clerk of the House the list of their members to serve on the committee no later than 3 days following the adoption of this motion by the House;

5. That the Clerk of the House shall convene an organization meeting of the said committee no later than 5 days following the adoption of this motion by the House;

6. That the committee be chaired by a member of the official opposition;

7. That notwithstanding Standing Order 106(2), in addition to the Chair, there be one vice-chair from the official opposition, one vice-chair from the Bloc Québécois and one vice-chair from the New Democratic Party;

8. That quorum of the committee be as provided for in Standing Order 118 and that the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government;

9. That the committee be granted all of the powers of a standing committee, as provided in the Standing Orders, as well as the power to travel, accompanied by the necessary staff, inside and outside of Canada;

10. That the committee have the power to authorize video and audio broadcasting of any or all of its proceedings;

11. That the committee continue all of the business of the following committees: the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics; the Standing Committee on Finance; the Standing Committee on Official Languages; and the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates; and that...

● (1730)

Mr. Marc Dalton: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wonder whether Mr. Beaulieu would agree to our suspending the debate for a few moments so that we can deal with the other motions. Then we could come back to this. Time is running out and we have other things to do. Would it be possible to suspend the debate, dispose of the motions and then come back to the debate, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Thank you for that statement, Mr. Dalton.

The only way is to have Mr. Beaulieu request unanimous consent to withdraw his motion. Otherwise, we will have to continue hearing members speak to the motion. Mr. Beaulieu could raise a point of order if he wishes to speak. Mrs. Lalonde has the floor and, as I said, we must continue to hear what committee members have to say.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Dalton, but I still have a lot more to say.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I have a point of order, but first, I'd like to know whether it really is a point of order.

If we adjourn debate on the motion, it will only be for the day, right? It means that Mr. Beaulieu could present it again at an upcoming meeting. Adjournment would only apply to today, and we could work on the other motions. Is that correct?

The Chair: If we have unanimous consent, we could adjourn debate on this motion and come back to it later. The motion will remain at the notice stage.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Blaney had asked whether adjourning the debate meant we could not come back to it. But we can. If we voted on the other motions today, we could begin the next meeting with Mr. Beaulieu's motion, right?

The Chair: I did not understand the last part of your question. If we have unanimous consent, according to the clerk, we can adjourn debate and come back to the motion later.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I thought that a majority vote would suffice.

The Chair: No, we need unanimous consent.

Thank you for your comment.

Mrs. Lalonde, you still have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I will continue:

[...] the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Official Languages and the Standing Committee on Government Operations—

Hon. Steven Blaney: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Pardon me, Mrs. Lalonde, Mr. Blaney has a point of order.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I am sorry to interrupt you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mr. Chair, you are talking about unanimous consent. I wonder if the committee members would give unanimous consent to temporarily adjourning debate on the motion currently on the floor so that you can present the informal subcommittee report. On a point of order, may I seek unanimous consent to adjourn debate on the motion currently on the floor until you have presented your subcommittee report, and then come back to the motion?

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, point of order.

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

Mr. René Arseneault: I know that my colleague Mr. Blaney is referring to an informal subcommittee meeting. It is important to point that out. I was naive enough to go down a path I would not have gone down had I known it would lead nowhere.

Ms. Ashton, Mr. Blaney, Mr. Beaulieu and I sat together on a subcommittee. What is happening today should not happen without the unanimous consent of adults and elected members. If I understand what Mr. Blaney means, the committee would immediately adjourn debate to come back to what it wanted to do, but did not do.

Mr. Blaney, maybe we should talk later, but if we require unanimous consent, please know that I will oppose it. I am letting you know right now. We had the opportunity in subcommittee to do things right, and look each other in the eye, on Zoom, of course. I don't understand what is going on. I'm quite disappointed, but I would like to continue. I'm interested in hearing Mrs. Lalonde's motion.

● (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm talking about the statement, not the motion.

The Chair: I will respond to the last two statements, but first, I need to suspend to discuss them with the clerk.

● (1735)

(Pause)

● (1740)

The Chair: We are back.

So, first, we have nothing to report to the committee about the informal discussion that took place.

Second, I propose the following: if we have the committee's unanimous consent to set this discussion aside, we could continue trying to set the agenda. I see hands going up to say otherwise. I would also like to advise you that, although the meeting started about 50 minutes late, the staff here with us have other commitments. We have no choice but to end the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

Mrs. Lalonde, were you finished?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: No.

The Chair: On the list we have Mr. Blaney, Mr. Arseneault, Ms. Lattanzio and Ms. Lambropoulos.

You may continue, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

I will continue, because I still have to read point 12 of my colleague Mr. Beaulieu's motion, which reads as follows:

12. That the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, be among the witnesses ordered to appear from time to time as the committee sees fit.

We can all agree that we have already done this. Colleagues, if you were here this past summer, you know that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth appeared before the committee. The Prime Minister even assured us that he would talk about the situation with respect to WE Charity.

I would just like to—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You said that, if we had unanimous consent, we could adjourn this debate and come back to it at the next meeting. We voted in favour of the Commissioner appearing at the next meeting. I have no objection to coming back to the motion about WE Charity at the next meeting.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I have an objection.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It may be sorted out by then. Right now, the Liberals do not want it.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Come on, now!

The Chair: Pardon me, Mrs. Lalonde, I will respond to Mr. Beaulieu.

I did indeed say that if we had unanimous consent to proceed with discussion on the calendar, your motion would be on notice and could be put forward at any time. It does not necessarily mean that it will be at the next meeting, but your motion would be on notice.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

I completely understand what my colleagues are saying. I feel bad for the others who wanted to speak. At the next meeting, we will pick up this lovely debate on Mr. Beaulieu's motion, which seems to be very important to him. I would like to specify that this point of order is not about how long Mr. Beaulieu's motion is.

I would like to speak about the Commissioner. For several years, the Commissioner has been committed to supporting the official languages, our two beautiful languages, French outside Quebec and English in Quebec. I want to talk about the Commissioner's role, and what is in his report, which is really incredible—

● (1745)

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, I must interrupt you. It is 5:45 p.m.

I want to tell committee members that the Commissioner will be here next Friday for two hours to talk about his report and about the estimates.

In the meantime, if the House of Commons has not decided on a date for the subcommittees to meet, our next meeting will be about committee business again.

Thank you for your hard work. A very good evening to you all.

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