



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 041

Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Tuesday, November 29, 2022

• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 41 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

As part of our work today, we are resuming debate on Mr. Serré's motion, Mr. Godin's amendments and Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments.

I remind you that the committee will proceed in the following order: first we must dispose of Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments, then Mr. Godin's amendment and, lastly, Mr. Serré's main motion.

At our last meeting, I told you that we had to adjourn the meeting for technical reasons and that, at our next meeting, as long as we debated the motion, the amendment and sub-amendments, we would resume our work as though we had merely suspended the meeting.

We were about to dispose of Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu has a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like to ensure that all the checks have been done.

The Chair: That's true; I always forget to ask if the sound checks have been done for those participating online.

They're done. Thank you for that reminder, Mr. Beaulieu, because the sound checks are very important in preventing injuries to the interpreters.

As we agreed, we are resuming our proceedings exactly as if we had suspended the meeting. We were dealing with Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments.

I'll recap our previous proceedings so we can find our bearings.

Ms. Ashton moved the first sub-amendment, which was adopted and which amended the first paragraph of Mr. Godin's amendment.

Ms. Ashton had introduced a second sub-amendment, which would amend the second paragraph of Mr. Godin's amendment.

I ask you please to pay attention to what I'm about to say: the third sub-amendment suggested by Ms. Ashton was to amend the fourth paragraph of Mr. Godin's amendment. That's where we now stand.

Just as a reminder...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Perhaps we should read it. I have it in front of me.

The Chair: ...I would point out that the sub-amendment provides that the committee proceed with clause-by clause consideration of the bill no later than Tuesday, December 6, 2022 at 11:00 p.m. ET.

When we suspended the meeting, we were considering Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments. I believe we were debating those sub-amendments. Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I had requested the right to speak.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you will be the second speaker.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: First of all, if we proceed with consideration on December 6, we obviously won't have time to hear testimony from the four ministers, unless they each have half an hour for their presentations. I think it's critical that we hear the ministers' testimony. I also would have liked to hear the comments of the Minister of Official Languages on the official languages health program.

There was an article in the *Journal de Montréal* on the weekend about how hard it is to get care in French at a hospital. We already knew that: there are always a host of examples of people who have had trouble being served in French. That's the case at many hospitals recognized under section 29.1 of the Charter of the French language, which provides status.

An important reminder to everyone that the situation is completely different for institutions designated or referred to under the Official Languages Act, which are asked to provide certain services in French where numbers warrant.

Section 29.1 confers a status which enables institutions to operate entirely in English with regard to signage, communications and even staff hiring. This enables recognized institutions to hire people who don't speak French.

This spreading of English throughout health services in Quebec has mainly been caused by the Official Language Act and the federal government, which, incredibly, funds organizations to promote English throughout Quebec.

Alliance Québec initially received \$1 million—

• (1110)

The Chair: Pardon me, Mr. Beaulieu.

I'd like you to tell us where we stand with regard to Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right.

In her sub-amendment, Ms. Ashton proposes that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill no later than Tuesday, December 6, which would vastly limit our ability to receive the ministers and get some answers to our questions.

I'll explain why it's important that we be able to question the four ministers, particularly the Minister of Official Languages, so we can get some answers to our questions.

If we believe we're living in a democracy and that it's important to conduct parliamentary debates and to base our decisions on objective information so we can make decisions that are as informed as possible, I think it's essential that we have the time to conduct debate properly. That's the general aim, but, in this particular case, terminating our debates before December 6 would leave us virtually no time to hear from the ministers.

So as—

The Chair: Allow me to interrupt you for a moment.

I understand what you're telling us, but we previously did that when we considered the first sub-amendment, which concerned ministers, required time and dates. We've already debated it, and we've already voted on it. That amended the first paragraph of Mr. Godin's amendment, which we'll have to consider later. It's already been done.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We've had one meeting since then. The December 6 date is now invalid because we won't have time to hold the necessary meetings.

Furthermore, if I correctly understand the rules, you can't prevent a member from speaking if what he or she says is related, even remotely, to the matter at issue.

The matter here concerns the Official Languages Act, the debates, but also a deadline for hearing from the ministers and asking them to answer my questions.

So I think it's important—

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I don't want to interrupt you. You have the floor, but I just want us to understand each other. I'm not sure we're talking about the same thing.

I agree that, under parliamentary rules, you have a right to speak in a debate. However, what you say must relate to what is being discussed, no matter how tenuously.

You're arguing that there wouldn't be enough time to hear from the ministers.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: December 6 doesn't leave us enough time.

The Chair: Regardless of what you are going to tell us—and we accept that—I'm telling you that all that was disposed of in the first vote on Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment.

So now we are considering the sub-amendment concerning clause-by-clause consideration.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The sub-amendment states that we will proceed with clause-by-clause consideration no later than Tuesday, December 6.

I'm going to explain why we should have more time to hear from the ministers and to get to the clause-by-clause consideration.

As regards clause-by-clause consideration, I hope that it isn't all determined in advance, that there'll be a little goodwill on both sides and that we can debate in such a way that our remarks carry a certain weight. This is a public debate. We're informing the public.

I'm satisfied that, if the majority of Quebecers and francophones outside Quebec grasped the importance of this study, they'd understand that it's important that we have time to conduct a thorough debate before proceeding with clause-by-clause consideration. It's important to do things right.

Getting back to what I was saying and to the official languages health program, I think the way that's presented is hypocritical. We always talk about minority language communities, but, in Quebec, that means we talk about anglophones.

Ultimately, since anglophones form the majority in Canada, the government is the government of the Canadian anglophone majority. That majority decides unilaterally that Quebec anglophones must receive assistance from the federal government. I consider that indecent since, in the 1960s, Quebec anglophones constituted the English Canadian elite. They had overfunded institutions.

The situation regarding health services has become so serious that it's hard to be served in French in Montréal. That happened to me when I went to see an ophthalmologist at Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital. I was waiting for my eye exam, and, when the nurse came, she didn't speak a word of French. She didn't even say "oui" or "bonjour". She asked me to read the letters in English. I was able to do it, but, since I found that unacceptable, I waited.

So I waited much longer. The ophthalmologist had to take the time to conduct my eye exam. I asked him if it was normal for an employee to speak English only, and she answered that she wasn't an employee, but rather an intern. Even if she was an intern, she was the one who did by eye exam. That happened about a month ago.

Far more serious examples than that have been reported in the *Journal de Montréal*. For example, one woman entered an emergency department with her son, but the emergency doctor didn't speak French. He only spoke English, and he wanted to send them home. She was convinced he hadn't understood the intense pain that her son was suffering. They therefore waited for the next shift to come on so they could complain and say they wanted to be served in French. Then her son was assessed by a francophone emergency doctor, who immediately referred him for surgery. The boy had a ruptured appendix and he was really an emergency case.

We have nothing against the fact that Quebec anglophones have access to services in English, just as francophones outside Quebec should have access to services in French. What Quebec wants, and I hope we can address this topic during clause-by-clause consideration, is to be consulted and to have a final say, including on so-called positive measures. I think those measures have a negative effect on the French language and have had for the past 52 years.

• (1115)

What I want to discuss during clause-by-clause consideration is the issue of funding. I also want the ministers to answer our questions and to explain it to us.

I have some figures here on the official languages health program. The health and French aspect is just a minor part of this picture.

We have nothing against the fact that an English-language organization such as AMI-Quebec Action on Mental Illness get grants for mental health. However, why would there be privileged funding solely for anglophones? It's outrageous.

The Community Health and Social Services Network has received \$65 million, a significant sum, since 2010.

Since the program has been in effect, the Community Health and Social Services Network has received \$65 million. That's a lot of money. Why?

In that time, we've found it increasingly difficult to be served in French. Remember the situation of Quebec hospitals. Vincent Marissal, a Québec Solidaire MNA, has condemned the fact that a member of his family was unable to obtain service in French at Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital.

Having said that, I want us to discuss funding during clause-by-clause consideration...

• (1120)

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: ... We won't have time to do so if we have three or four—

The Chair: I have to interrupt you, Mr. Beaulieu, because Mr. Serré has a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure I understand where my colleague is headed. Health is a provincial jurisdiction and has nothing to do with the amendment.

Last Friday, the Bloc Québécois member for Joliette said that the Bloc was just filibustering the Official Languages Committee to delay passage of the bill.

I wonder if that's what my colleague is doing because he isn't speaking to the amendments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

I was just about to make the following comment. Quebec's health minister would probably be more interested in what you're telling us, Mr. Beaulieu. Your personal testimony—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll explain why—

The Chair: Allow me to finish, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All I was talking about—

The Chair: I won't conceal the fact that I was surprised to hear your personal experience.

In her sub-amendment, Ms. Ashton proposes that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause, but I wonder what the connection is with a provincial jurisdiction.

I was going to discuss that with you, but Mr. Serré beat me to it. I think Quebec's health minister is in a better position to respond to that.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's an excellent question and...

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I'm listening to you, but you have to make the connection.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: ...it goes to show you how necessary it is to conduct a more thorough debate.

Everything I've told you concerns grants from the federal government, not Quebec. This constitutes federal interference in what's supposed to be a Quebec jurisdiction.

I found these amounts in the Public Accounts of Canada, not those of Quebec. This \$65 million comes from the direct and indirect taxes of Quebecers, and that money is returned to them for the sole purpose of strengthening English in Quebec, whereas it's French that's threatened and always has been.

As we've repeatedly said for years now, this makes no sense.

There's a wall. It used to be even harder. No one wanted to hear from French-language defence groups because, under the Official Languages Act, anglophones were considered to be in the minority. They said that francophones were in the majority.

We aren't a majority. We would be a majority if we were independent. That's why many people would like Quebec to be independent: we'd be a majority. I also think we'd respect our minorities far more than the federal government respects its francophone minorities, including French-speaking Quebec, which is a minority in Canada.

Recent federal government actions are the best example of this. McGill University received \$57 million to promote English in the health system, which is a provincial jurisdiction. The federal government didn't request the Quebec government's permission. The Canada-Quebec Accord is designed to subsidize the English-language education system in Quebec. I won't debate that issue because I don't engage on Quebec issues here.

If the federal government gives Quebec no choice by saying it will grant the province \$68 million provided it contributes the same amount or else it'll get nothing, and if we're stifled by a system that cuts our health transfers, for example, considerable pressure will be brought to bear on us to say yes. Some provinces in English Canada balk at this, but I think they're people who are actually opposed to French.

Not only does the government not want to provide services in French or fund French-language schools, but francophone and Acadian communities are also constantly forced to sue under the court challenges program, which was established to oppose Bill 101. That attempt fortunately backfired, and the francophone and Acadian communities were able to use it as well. At any event, this is truly indecent, and it further facilitates federal government interference in health and all sectors of Quebec's public service.

It's plain as day in the positive measures provided for under the Official Languages Act that every federal department must support anglophone minorities in the provision of provincial and municipal services and in civil society. It's incredible. If you look at the situation on the other side, you can see that French-language defence groups in Quebec don't have the same resources or access to lawyers.

I know people who have applied under the court challenges program to dispute the Official Languages Act, and all the measures that undermine French and Quebec, but who were denied because they had to do so under the Official Languages Act, which provided that Quebec isn't a minority.

This is the principle that the Quebec government mainly attacks. When Sonia Lebel said that her first condition was that only one of the two official languages in Canada was in the minority, that only one was threatened, the federal government pretended to cooperate.

The government acknowledged in one throne speech that there had been a decline in the use of French. After 50 years of decline, that's quite incredible. Then it released a white paper in which the matter was virtually dismissed. It couldn't really see what might change. It didn't say that there was only one minority language but constantly referred to French outside Quebec and English in Quebec as minority languages.

• (1125)

I want to address the fact that the federal government exercises considerable pressure.

I know an activist who was the director of a CLSC. When I discussed this with him, he told me he was very familiar with Alliance Québec and the Quebec Community Groups Network, or QCGN, because those organizations called him every year to ask him if his institution offered services in English.

What I was going to say earlier is that Alliance Québec was established in part by the federal government. I'm going to show you how. It's in their documentation. After the Parti Québécois was re-elected, the federal government helped the organization bring together all the English-language organizations and pressure groups in Quebec. Remember that Alliance Québec, with Brent Tyler and Bill Johnson, spent their time calling Quebecers racists because they wanted to defend the French language. That has an impact.

The comments of those organizations were broadcast by the anglophone, American and other media, and that brought some significant political pressure to bear. Even the Quebec government is currently feeling it. We've seen how Mr. Legault has been forced to shed some light on the disinformation that's being spread. One of the main arguments that these groups advance against Bill 96 is that it will block anglophones' access to health services in English.

What's even more serious is that the federal government is on the side of those organizations, including McGill University. I think the chancellor of that institution took part in a protest against Bill 96, saying that it would undermine the doctor-patient relationship. I don't know how many times more services there are for anglophones in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada. We've reached a point where it's now difficult to access French-language services in the health system in Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

You had a point of order, Ms. Lattanzio?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Yes, I did.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You know, I'm listening to my colleague and I'm sorry, but I think his remarks are off topic.

I think that the testimony that's being given, and that provided at previous meetings, goes a little too far. We're discussing matters that fall under provincial jurisdiction. Mr. Chair, I would like you to ask our colleague to stick to the amendment we're considering.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

Your point of order is in order and is indeed a point of order.

However, what Mr. Beaulieu is telling us is that the December 6 date doesn't allow enough time to question the ministers or to advance his arguments. I think there's a very fine line here because we've already dealt with the first two sub-amendments to Mr. Godin's motion.

My interpretation of the rules is perhaps more permissive than restrictive in this kind of debate. However, Mr. Beaulieu, I will stop you unless you stop going back to the areas of provincial jurisdiction or the lack of time in which to question the minister.

• (1130)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have no problem with that. I think my colleague is finding it hard to hear what we have to say and that that's more the problem.

The Chair: Continue with the third sub-amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm coming back to the third sub-amendment and to the importance of proceeding with clause-by-clause consideration.

For a while now, I've been discussing federal jurisdiction, that is to say the federal government's interference in Quebec's health system. I think this is a major argument and, as it happens, something that's also in the news.

I've asked the minister on many occasions if the government was going to present positive measures with regard to French, but I've never received an answer from her. All I'm told is that the Liberal government was the first to recognize the decline of French.

Jean-Pierre Corbeil, the former head of Statistics Canada, often tries to deny in the media that French is declining. He has also said it directly. You'd think his mandate over much of his career was to deny the decline of French.

According to an article published today, French is declining in all regions of Quebec, not French as a mother tongue or language used in the home, but as a first official language spoken.

Even Mr. Micone, who called me a linguistic racist in *Le Devoir*, seemed to say we shouldn't discuss French as a mother tongue. However, my open letter, cosigned by a dozen individuals, made no mention of French as a mother tongue.

In an article published on the weekend, Michel Paillé claimed that Mr. Micone had made a reading error because the figures that I discussed concerned the language spoken in the home. It would have been even more tragic if I'd been referring to the mother tongue.

Statistics Canada is an organization controlled by the federal government and has confused the issue for years. It seems to be more open now, but it will be difficult to deny reality at some point. And I think reality is catching up. It will be unfortunate if Quebec doesn't wake up and realize the situation.

Everyone knows the story of the frog: if you put it in boiling water, it has a chance to react, but if you put it in a bucket of cold water and then slowly raise the temperature, the frog is gradually numbed and paralyzed. We don't want that to happen to Quebec.

The Chair: Is the frog related to a historical event?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: One day, a Franco-Ontarian woman called in to an open-line show to say what had happened to her fellow citizens. Fortunately, Franco-Ontarians and Acadians, among others, don't give up and keep on fighting for the French language.

Getting back to the sub-amendment.

The grants that are given to all kinds of organizations are funded under the official languages support program, the access to justice in both official languages support fund and the health care policy contribution program. These grants are even distributed to the Que-

bec Community Groups Network, the QCGN, which has testified here and feels no compunction in calling us racist. It has received \$3 million and that's in addition to the millions of dollars it receives every year.

The federal government intervenes massively against French and Quebec, and that's what Quebecers must understand. Furthermore, its language planning model calls for institutional bilingualism where numbers warrant. As we've seen, that model hasn't worked anywhere in the world.

The Quebec government's requests, which I was discussing before I was interrupted, concerned the federal government, and, more specifically, the Official Languages Act. We've received no response to those demands. The Quebec government didn't want to appear before the committee, but it transmitted its proposed amendments and had previously forwarded a document outlining its main policy directions. The ministers must respond and we must have the time to discuss this with them during clause-by-clause consideration, if the debate we're having is worth anything.

I think the truth will overcome. The right to survival of francophones everywhere is a matter of linguistic diversity around the world. I think it's essential, and we've seen that. That's what I wanted to say earlier, before I was cut off. I would like the minister to answer our questions and for us to debate all these examples during clause-by-clause consideration.

• (1135)

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, the matter of the minister is already been resolved.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm talking about the Minister of Official Languages.

The Chair: The matter of the ministers named in the first paragraph, as amended by Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, has also been dealt with.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right. Let's go to the clause-by-clause consideration.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I warn you that, if you come back to this subject, I will give the floor to Mr. Godin, who is next.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's fine.

I would remind you that we had a debate on the UNIS organization at one point. In four meetings on that subject, the discussion focused on procedure, never on substance. On that occasion, the opposition, the Liberal Party, absolutely didn't want to discuss substance and focused solely on procedure. It really was filibustering. On the other hand, they intend to gag us and to limit debate, but I think the debate has to be held.

Mr. Marc Serré: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: I hear Mr. Beaulieu talking about gagging. As I mentioned earlier, the member for Joliette and Mr. Beaulieu confirmed today...

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Marc Serré: ...that they're filibustering to prevent the minister from appearing. The minister can come and wants to come—

The Chair: I've noted that this is in the first paragraph as amended by Ms. Ashton.

What you're saying isn't a point of order. However, that's part of the first paragraph.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I want to go back to Mr. Serré's comment.

When Mr. Serré raises a point of order, he may not cite people or members who have spoken in the House of Commons. That's not a point of order; it's part of a debate. So I would simply like to note that.

The Chair: You are correct. However, you have to hear the rest of the sentence in order to know what a member is going to say. You guessed where he was headed. As chair, however, I can't take the liberty of guessing.

I want us to get along. I am very permissive. At any event, according to the usual rule, debates are better when they are more permissive than restrictive. Once again, if we repeat ourselves, that will be a first strike, a second strike, but there won't be a third straight. We after stick to the amendment we're debating.

That being said, if someone raises a point of order, he or she may begin with an incidental remark before returning to the actual point of order. I nevertheless have to let that person speak so I can guess what will follow.

As one of my teachers once said, sometimes I have rambunctious classes, but we always love our rambunctious students. However, I'm not singling out anyone in particular.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's excellent, Mr. Chair.

Sometimes it's hard to stay on track when you're being interrupted.

The rule that debates should be more permissive than restrictive is one of the parliamentary rules and allows for more democracy. It affords a tool for the opposition parties in getting themselves heard and expressing a point of view. However, Quebec's point of view hasn't been heard for 52 years. During clause-by-clause consideration, it will be critical that we conduct a thorough debate. If we adopt the date of December 6, 2022, we will only have a few minutes in which to proceed with clause-by-clause consideration. We won't have the time to explain it.

We noted that health was a provincial jurisdiction, and that's highly relevant. However, what I'm talking about are the measures that the federal government has taken under the Official Languages Act. So that's absolutely relevant to the debate. We'll have to discuss it during clause-by-clause consideration.

Now turning from the health sector to access to justice, I don't think the Minister of Justice was even one of the four ministers we had to consult at the Treasury Board. Once again, there are some major problems there, and, once again, it's the federal government

that's funding groups. I'd like to hear the answers and the Minister of Canadian Heritage on the fact that these groups are using a whole—

• (1140)

The Chair: I will stop you there, Mr. Beaulieu. That has been dealt with; it was voted upon. According to Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, we know exactly which ministers will be appearing and for how many hours. That's more than three strikes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd just ask you to let me finish my sentence.

The Chair: No, not this time.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We have to be able to address this aspect in the clause-by-clause consideration.

The Chair: No, I won't give you the floor.

I give the floor to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm going to request the right to speak later.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Actually, so that we can find our bearings, I'm going to repeat an expression that was previously used: "We can't make heads or tails out of this."

I want everybody to be on the same page. We have to understand that we're considering Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments, under which one-hour meetings would be held with four ministers before December 1.

I remind committee members that today is November 29, which means that we would be having four ministers and their officials appear this Thursday for one hour each. That's impossible.

It's also proposed that the amendments be submitted before December 2. However, we haven't heard from the ministers yet. Once again, this is unrealistic.

I'm still referring to Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments, which propose that we proceed with clause-by-clause consideration on December 6.

On November 1, I submitted an amendment in response to the motion by Mr. Serré, who had submitted it on November 1.

We are currently dealing with Mr. Serré's motion. As you know, we are considering Mr. Godin's amendments, Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments and Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment.

In point 2 of his motion, Mr. Serré proposes that amendments to Bill C-13 be submitted to the clerk no later than November 17 at 5:00 p.m. and that the clerk distribute the amendments to us by noon on November 18.

In point 4 of his motion, Mr. Serré also proposes that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill no later than Tuesday, November 22.

I remind you once again that today is November 29.

In point 5 of his motion, Mr. Serré proposes that if the committee has not completed the by clause-by-clause consideration by noon on December 1, we will simply stop debate and proceed to a vote amendment by amendment without further debate.

I'm reaching out to the members of the committee: I request unanimous consent to withdraw my amendments so we can move this matter forward.

Once again, what's going on here is partisanship on both sides, and we're all accusing each other of obstruction and so on.

We aren't moving forward. It's absolutely senseless that we're still dealing with these amendments today. This is the seventh meeting that we've held since Mr. Serré introduced his motion.

I actually have two requests to make of the committee.

First, I request unanimous consent to withdraw my amendments.

I am being transparent here. I said so last week. I reached out. I want to resolve this situation because we aren't working efficiently.

Second, I request unanimous consent for us to work in subcommittee.

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin. I was discussing your first request, but we have technical issues. So I'll come back to that later.

What is your second request, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Joël Godin: My second request is that I be granted the unanimous consent of the committee for us to meet in subcommittee, that is to say with a representative of each of the parties. I mentioned this at the last meeting. This would enable us to work together toward a resolution so we can find common ground on which to score a win for the French language.

So those are my two requests to the committee for unanimous consent.

• (1145)

The Chair: There is a technical problem with your first request.

We are going to ask for the unanimous consent of the committee, even though it's a bit of a grey area, because an amendment to which subamendments have already been moved and voted on is being withdrawn.

I see Ms. Ashton's hand is up on this point. I would like to hear Ms. Ashton's comments on this.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): First, I would like to say I am happy to be here and see you in person again.

We would like to continue studying the amendments. I would like to reiterate that we still support all the subamendments we have made. As I said, our message is clear: we want to move forward on this and we want to improve Bill C-13.

I am concerned about the fact that we were closing the door to certain proposals when we still recognize everyone's right to express their views.

The subamendments we proposed are intended to move the bill forward and improve it as soon as possible.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to say something else about your first request, Mr. Godin.

That makes twice that a request for unanimous consent has been made. Unanimous consent was refused at the last meeting. So it is kind of out of order.

However, since you are talking about unanimous consent and your second point dealt with the committee meeting as a subcommittee, that is, the official subcommittee of this committee, I would ask whether there is consent...

Mr. Joël Godin: Before doing that, Mr. Chair, I would like to say that I understand my colleague's comment and that I have the same objective as she has, to move the matter forward.

However, in Ms. Ashton's amendment that we approved, that we voted against but the Liberals and New Democrats voted for, it says December 1. Mathematically, that doesn't work.

We can't do what that motion says. It's a matter of common sense. So I am asking all committee members. Forget partisanship. Can we find common ground?

As I have done several times, I am reaching out to committee members. I also proposed, referring to my notice of motion on November 10 regarding meetings, that we wipe the slate clean and start over, because at this point the dates are the stumbling block. We're working, but we're going in circles. It isn't moving forward. Whom is this serving? I ask.

Mr. Chair, I urge you to put the question to the members of the committee to ascertain whether we can get unanimous consent.

Can we get unanimous consent, either on that or on going to work in subcommittee or on any other productive proposal, to make some progress on the cause of French and improve Bill C-13, without being gagged?

I think that's what is most important. It's the only sticking point.

We moderated our approach. We wanted to reduce the list of our witnesses. We wanted to shorten the window for testimony.

We did win something: the testimony of the Minister of Heritage. However, he will not be able to come because it will be over on December 1.

We have two hours left at the next meeting, and it will certainly not be today, because the Minister was not on the calendar. The officials are not in the room. We are going in circles.

I am therefore calling on all committee members for us to be able to find a solution, resolve the situation and start working on improving Bill C-13.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I won't repeat what I said to you concerning your first suggestion.

However, with respect to the second one, there is a request for unanimous consent for us to return to subcommittee.

That is what I have understood.

Just before doing that, I see that Mr. Drouin wants to speak.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I would just like to make sure I understand what my colleague is saying correctly.

If we take away all our amendments and we have unanimous consent, he is suggesting that we return to subcommittee.

The only thing I would like to say is that there is nothing to prevent members from working outside this formal place and presenting that.

At the moment, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage are being obstructed.

I am not doubting my colleague, but there is certainly an order from on high for there to be obstruction in all parliamentary committees. Nothing is moving at the moment...

• (1150)

Mr. Joël Godin: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Francis Drouin: ...in Parliament. I simply do not want us to return to subcommittee to waste our time. If we want to listen to one another, we can listen to one another.

What I am suggesting is to make a collaboration motion even before suspending the amendments. Then we can go back to common ground. So Ms. Ashton might agree to withdraw her subamendments and Mr. Serré might agree to withdraw his own motion.

Otherwise, we are going to go in circles, whether here or in subcommittee.

The Chair: I need to understand what you have just said, Mr. Drouin.

I think it's important.

Mr. Godin, it does seem to be related to what you are asking us to do.

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to say something, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Before giving you the floor, I want to understand what Mr. Drouin has just explained.

Mr. Drouin, are you saying that we should meet again, this committee, outside the official committee, that is, outside this place?

Mr. Francis Drouin: There is nothing to prevent Mr. Serré and Mr. Godin from having discussions without the formality of the committee.

It is simply a matter of sitting down around the table to talk and being able to come to an unofficial agreement even before coming back to this committee and its formality.

If everyone reaches out, including Mr. Beaulieu and Ms. Ashton, to move things forward, there might be common ground.

For us, the concern is not necessarily associated with what goes on here, rather with what goes on elsewhere.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I have a lot of respect for my colleague, who is the chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. He is a man whom I admire greatly, but I do not agree with his comments. He is trying to ascribe motives to the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I have always been committed to advancing the cause. I cannot agree to him accusing the representatives of the Conservative Party of Canada of receiving instructions from on high. I could say the same thing about the members of his party, but I don't want to play that game. My objective is to find a solution.

I think Mr. Drouin's suggestion may be useful. However, I believe we have to do it in subcommittee, so it is recorded in evidence.

Mr. Drouin, Mr. Serré, Ms. Kayabaga, Mr. Iacono and Ms. Lattanzio, I can assure you that I am not acting in bad faith. We have not received any instructions.

I have the privilege of being the Conservative Party's official languages critic and I want to assure my colleagues of my complete attention. I have not received an order to make inappropriate remarks.

Mr. Chair, my invitation still stands.

The Chair: I'm going to listen to comments from Ms. Ashton and Mr. Beaulieu. I will then say what I think and we can find some potential solutions.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I thought Mr. Beaulieu was to speak before me.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, do you want to speak on this subject?

You told me earlier that you wanted to speak again, so I put your name at the end of the list.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I want to speak again later, but I also want to speak on this question.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I am having trouble understanding what Mr. Drouin has proposed. He has proposed an informal discussion among committee members to find a solution. He is afraid it will not work out if we discuss it in subcommittee.

Is he talking about informal in camera discussions?

I didn't understand his intention.

The Chair: If I understand Mr. Drouin's comments correctly, he wants these discussions to be held outside the four walls of the committee.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So he doesn't want us to talk about it here. Is that right?

The Chair: No, he wants to hold these discussions outside the four walls of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Is that for the entire committee?

Does he want to hold a subcommittee with everyone?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, can I clarify my intention, please?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We often do it in other committees. We have two-hour meetings during which we sometimes just keep arguing about some comma or other. There is plainly some openness, and Mr. Serré and Mr. Godin seem to be reaching out.

I won't participate in these discussions; I am going to let Mr. Serré handle it. This may be a good way of finding a solution. When we have the unanimous consent to withdraw amendments, then we will already be getting along. If we withdraw all the motions and go back to subcommittee to do the same thing, we will be no further ahead. Instead of starting over at zero, we should continue here.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Both sides have the answer.

It bothers me to limit this debate, since I think it is essential.

We held an initial meeting in camera. During that meeting, we decided on a number of meetings. I think that brought us to February, because of the break for a month over Easter. We agreed to change the date to December 6. And then there was a motion to change that agreement.

The last time, we reached out to the government party to have members come and see us outside committee hours, but that didn't happen.

If they don't intend to give some space and allow a clause by clause debate that makes sense, it will be very difficult, regardless of the format. If there is a desire to have discussions and expand the subject, that would be fine.

I would also like to raise a point of order and come back to...

● (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, your name is on the list, but I want us to finish the discussions before giving you the floor.

Last week, we talked about the possibility of holding a meeting of the subcommittee. I took steps to see whether it was possible to hold an official meeting of the subcommittee, that is, with the clerks, the analysts and the interpreters. However, it was not possible to do that before the holidays, given the lack of resources.

Since it will soon be noon, the committee could use the time to meet officially in subcommittee. I propose that idea.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: That is what I was going to ask.

Is it realistic for it to be possible to organize a subcommittee meeting?

For months, we have been trying to find times so we can meet more often. In theory, it's a good idea. We have subamendments to examine in connection with what we have done, to be able to find a way of doing the work that is needed before the holidays. I would like us to be able to vote on the subamendments. I don't know whether we are going to have time today. I am also open to a meeting of the subcommittee.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you seem to want to add something.

Mr. Joël Godin: In fact, Mr. Chair, I am going to withdraw my first proposal. Let's suspend all the subamendments, the amendments, and the motion. I am asking for unanimous consent so we can meet in subcommittee and work on sorting it all out. We are going to waste this meeting, that much is obvious.

I am not judging anyone. I think that if we all want to be good sports, we have to be able to adjourn the meeting and go to subcommittee. Unfortunately, we are going to release our colleagues who are not on the subcommittee, but that is in the interests of parliamentary law and Bill C-13.

The Chair: Yes, that is exactly why the subcommittee exists. I simply want to remind the members of the public listening to us that I went ahead last week to see whether it was possible for the Standing Committee on Official Languages to meet outside the calendar arranged. There is little hope, not to say no hope, of it being possible, given the limited resources.

If there is unanimous consent from the group, I am prepared to propose that we meet in subcommittee immediately.

Did you want to speak to that, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think it is a good proposal. I imagine that if the meeting is held informally, it may even be more efficient that way. It is a possible solution.

Whether the subcommittee meeting is held informally or officially, I don't see a big difference.

The Chair: There is a huge difference in that...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: There will be no minutes, but that is not important unless our goal is to catch one another out. If our goal is to reach an agreement, I don't think it is essential.

What you have proposed is another possible way of working.

The Chair: So having heard all that...

Ms. Lattanzio, did you want to say something?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would simply like to know whether there is a suggested date for holding this meeting, if it takes place.

● (1200)

The Chair: We would hold it right away after adjourning this meeting.

From what I understand, there seems to be nearly unanimous consent to adjourning the meeting immediately and spending the last hour of the meeting in subcommittee.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: So this committee would then turn into the subcommittee.

Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, it would be the subcommittee composed of the official members—the predetermined representatives of each party—along with the chair, that is, myself.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you.

The Chair: I suggest that we adjourn this meeting.

Mr. Marc Serré: I think we are going to suspend the meeting, not adjourn it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We are going to have technical problems in that case.

The Chair: It comes down to what I was saying last week. We are going to adjourn the meeting and I will immediately take into account where we had got to before adjourning the meeting to go into subcommittee. So I am going to give Mr. Beaulieu the floor.

Mr. Marc Serré: Could you confirm with the clerk again what the difference is between suspending and adjourning the meeting?

The Chair: If we suspend the meeting rather than adjourning, we have the same technical problems we have been having for two weeks. That is why we are adjourning the meeting now, but I will resume it as if we had simply suspended.

It's a question of the length of the video, and changing rooms and Zoom. For members of the public listening to us, we are doing this

simply for practical reasons. For us, it really changes nothing in practical terms.

Mr. Marc Serré: So we are going to resume the discussion where we were.

The Chair: If there is no agreement, we are going to resume exactly where we had got to. Mr. Beaulieu had the floor on Ms. Ashton's third subamendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, it is also possible that the subcommittee report could provide an efficient plan and calendar of activities.

The Chair: There is always hope.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I suggest that we add a term to the parliamentary lexicon: "technical adjournment".

The Chair: Exactly.

I think no one objects to the idea of going into subcommittee.

Those opposed please raise your hands.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What does "technical adjournment" mean?

The Chair: I'm going to adjourn this meeting on the same terms as last time, that is, the next meeting will resume as if it had simply been suspended. We are doing this for technical reasons.

The meeting is adjourned so that the committee can meet in subcommittee.

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: <https://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 des communes.

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 :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>