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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 119 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. I want to welcome Mr. Bachrach, who is here to replace Ms. Ashton.

I won't read out all the usual guidelines today. Please speak one at a time, once I've given you the floor, to avoid acoustic incidents. These incidents aren't caused by the people participating remotely, but by the people around the table.

Last week, I adjourned the meeting on condition that we pick up exactly where we left off. This is what we're doing today. We had just heard from Marc Dalton, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone.

I know that we would prefer to talk about something else and hear testimony regarding the education continuum, from early childhood to post-secondary education. This study is extremely important. I also know that Mr. Beaulieu wanted to table a motion, but that he decided to wait.

However, my Liberal colleagues decided to move their motion, which amounts to an admonition or disciplinary letter. The motion asks “that the Committee expresses its disappointment at the behaviour of Conservative MPs, notably...the MP for Brantford—Brant, toward Francophone ministers and toward the entirety of the Canadian population that speaks French, an official language of Canada.” The motion also states that all members of Parliament have the right to speak in either official language, which is certainly true. The Conservative Party supports this. It also states that English and French are important in Canada, and that French is indispensable to the Canadian identity.

However, clearly the motion goes further than a simple reprimand of a Conservative member. It admonishes the Conservative Party. People think that we're against francophones and the French language, and this is further proof. The member of Parliament in question apologized to the House. However, people still think that the Conservatives don't like the French language and the Quebec nation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This is a key discussion. I won't go back to the beginning of colonization, but I would like to make a few comments on the origins of Canada as a nation. When the charter was originally created—

The Chair: Let me interrupt you, Mr. Dalton.

This marks my second time hearing the argument that an apology was made to the House of Commons. I heard it last week and this week. If so, could you tell us about it, since it concerns the crux of the motion? I don't want to influence the debate. However, if an apology really was made to the House of Commons, the time has come to make this clear and show the facts. This concerns the crux of the motion.

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

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, I'm free to speak about this motion. That's what I'll do.

The motion refers to the behaviour of a Conservative member of Parliament. My point is that Conservatives have always supported the Canadian identity, English and French.

John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, George-Étienne Cartier and other politicians held a number of discussions before coming up with the charter, the country's governing framework. Without this agreement signed in 1864, first in Charlottetown and then in Quebec City, there wouldn't be any Canadian nation. Before John A. Macdonald was elected, both he and George-Étienne Cartier wanted to create a nation.

At the time, there were a number of colonies. There were major issues in the British colonies. In those days, Quebec was a colony of Great Britain. In those days, there was a civil war in the United States. People were afraid that the Americans would force us to join the United States. This agreement and these negotiations were really important. I'll talk a bit more about this.

I'm a member of Parliament from British Columbia. I said this before, but I live near the first capital of British Columbia, Fort Langley, which was a colony. This colony was created in 1856, because people were afraid of the Americans.

At the time, the American president really wanted the border between the United States and Canada, which belonged to England, to go all the way to the 60th parallel. Major efforts were made to establish Canada's independence from the United States. This was important. Quebeckers and French-Canadians remained in British colonies, because this allowed them to speak French and practise their religion, particularly Catholicism.

Just before Confederation, the small colonies faced both military and economic pressure. George-Étienne Cartier, who led Quebec, and John A. Macdonald saw the need for Quebec in Confederation. Quebec had quite a large population. The total population of all the colonies was around 3.5 million at the time. Quebec's population was quite large and central. Quebec needed to become part of the new country of Canada. The concerns of these people, who were Conservatives, mirrored the concerns of the people of Quebec. They wanted to protect the French language and francophone culture, as well as the freedom to practise their religion. This was vital, since all the other colonies were English-speaking and Protestant. The culture was different.

• (1110)

John A. Macdonald originally wanted a stronger and more centralized government. However, Quebec and the francophones wanted control over education, for example. This was really important to them. They decided to find accommodations. There was a federal government, but the provinces were strong. The accommodations were designed to protect the Canadian identity, especially French and Catholicism. That was really important. A compromise was reached, with a view to having a strong but decentralized nation. The provinces also needed to be given enough power. There are many other federations in the world, such as Australia and the United States. I could argue that the provinces of the Canadian federation have more power than in other parts of the world.

This was a concern. Even 150 years ago, francophones were already worried that their culture and language would be marginalized or swallowed up in a sea of English. Quebec and francophones had to be part of the country. It was vital for the national identity to ensure that francophones could participate in both Quebec and Canada as a whole. At the time, it was also decided that francophones could speak in French in Parliament and that anglophones could speak in English. Since the birth of our country, in 1867, people have had the right to speak in the language of their choice.

The member of Parliament was in the wrong. We've had this right and freedom since 1867. There have been issues, as in all countries. However, our country has been a democracy for a long time. I think that there are two other independent countries that have been around as long as Canada. These countries are the United States and Great Britain.

As anglophone or francophone Canadians, we have something really important to take pride in, and that's our Parliament. This shows that the accommodation made back then forms the basis of our country's multiculturalism.

• (1115)

Since Quebec's distinct identity is accommodated, multiculturalism serves as a policy foundation and embraces diversity across Canada. This is a key factor.

I think that we can draw a valuable link here. We conservatives have been here since the start, since the founding of our country. We support the anglophone and francophone identity within one Canada. The Liberals have also been here from the start. However, I'll let a Liberal member talk about Wilfrid Laurier.

So far, I've talked about the first Conservative prime minister. I would like to talk about another prime minister, Brian Mulroney. My colleagues may wonder about the connection with the motion, but—

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Chair—

Mr. Marc Dalton: —I'll explain.

• (1120)

The Chair: Do you have a point of order, Mr. Serré?

Mr. Marc Serré: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, we're talking about Mr. Brock's apology to the House of Commons. I don't understand why Mr. Dalton is talking about the censure of Mr. Brock. I don't understand why he's talking about Confederation.

The purpose of the motion is to ask Mr. Brock to apologize to the House of Commons. However, for the past 15 minutes, I haven't heard anything on this topic from Mr. Dalton.

The Chair: I understand. However, Mr. Dalton referred earlier to the Canadian identity, which is part of the motion.

The motion also refers to disappointment with the behaviour of Conservative members. It should be noted that it refers to Conservative members, plural. I think that Mr. Dalton touched on this. He was about to make another argument regarding a different prime minister. He said that he would relate it to the motion. I'll at least listen to him. As long as he's talking about the motion, I'll allow the debate.

You have the floor, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I apologize. I forgot you.

Mr. Joël Godin: Don't worry, Mr. Chair. I'm not taking it personally.

I just want to make sure that the committee is running properly. I raised a point of order earlier, but you didn't give me the floor.

The Chair: When you didn't say anything, I assumed that it had something to do with Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I would like us to come to an agreement on the procedure. I believe that, according to the rules of procedure, any point of order must stop the debate immediately. Is that right?

You applied the rule in Mr. Serré's case. However, you didn't apply it earlier in my case. I simply want to understand and make sure that the committee is running properly. I want to follow your instructions.

The Chair: You're right, Mr. Godin.

Members who raise points of order are usually quite persistent when I don't give them the floor. Since you didn't push for the floor, I thought that my remarks to Mr. Dalton had answered your questions.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to make sure that the committee was running properly.

The Chair: No doubt, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for a point of order.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: My colleague opposite is making a presentation based on Canadian identity. At the end of the motion I presented, Canadian identity is mentioned; however, the basis or the heart of the motion is about something that happened in the House of Commons. The heart of the motion deals with a lack of respect in the House of Commons. Talking about Canadian identity and X or Y characters isn't relevant to the motion. The motion deals with something that happened on October 24. The motion is about an apology. We're asking the member who showed a lack of respect for a minister to do something; we're talking about the French language. My motion doesn't talk about prime ministers or all kinds of Canadian historical figures. The motion is very clear.

Could we make sure that we focus on the motion instead of going beyond its wording?

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, I understand your comments, except that we must consider the motion as a whole.

Mr. Dalton has the floor, and he's been explaining that he supports or agrees with one of the statements in the motion, namely that "the Committee recognises that French is just as important to Canada's bilingual status as English, and that French is indispensable to the Canadian identity." That is part of the motion and of the whole. I think that Mr. Dalton always brings us back to this point to tell us that he agrees with that.

The motion as such, in its entirety, is indeed much broader than that. However, I can't interrupt a debate when it concerns the motion directly or indirectly, if the arguments or the debate are still related to the motion.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor.

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

I'm not just talking about Canadian identity here, but also about the spirit of this motion. In this motion, I see clearly—if I read between the lines—a criticism directed at members of the Conservative Party of Canada. However, from the beginning, Conservatives have always been in favour of the right to speak French and English in Parliament. It was the Conservative Party that elected Canada's first Prime Minister and George-Étienne Cartier, who were behind the accommodation that enabled Quebec and French-speaking Canadians to be part of Canada within the federal framework we know and which is very much appreciated. Those are my comments on that.

It's true that I talked about the beginnings of our country, but I'll now take a 120-year leap back to where we are today. I'll talk a bit

about Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and his efforts to accommodate French Canadians.

As you know, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted in 1982. The Liberals, like the Conservatives, were proud of that agreement. However, it had one major flaw: Quebec had not ratified it.

Brian Mulroney, a francophone from Baie-Comeau of Irish origin—like me, a Dalton—was first elected in 1984. He had not only a passion, but a vision, a desire for Quebec to ratify the Charter. He put a lot of political capital into his efforts. Mr. Mulroney passed away last year and was very successful on a number of things, such as free trade and the end of apartheid in South Africa, where he played a leadership role and made a difference.

• (1125)

However, it was a very difficult battle for him. As Prime Minister and a member of the Conservative Party of Canada, he helped sign the Meech Lake accord. He had different objectives, but one of them, which he thought was very important, was to specify in the agreement that Quebec was a distinct society within Canada. The accord recognized Quebec as a distinct society. What happened was that all the other provinces had to sign the agreement. The majority of the provinces signed it. However, it had to be done in three years, which Brian Mulroney failed to do. So we had to start the process all over again.

We always talk about the importance of French, francophones, the Canadian identity and constitutional law.

The point I want to make is that the Conservative Party and Conservative Prime Ministers have played a leadership role in defending this freedom since the beginning of the country and even when Mr. Mulroney was in power. There was the Meech Lake Accord. Time passed and there was another accord, the Charlottetown Accord in 1992. Then there was a national referendum, and that agreement was defeated because the people rejected it. The vote was close, but the agreement was defeated because other parts of Canada had concerns about it. It was a battle, or rather the fact that we live in a very large country and that there are different points of view.

Even at the beginning of Canada, there were different points of view, and compromises had to be made. In the context of that agreement, it was a matter of making compromises, but the agreement was defeated in the referendum. Brian Mulroney went to great lengths to support French and to get Quebec to ratify the Charter.

That's what I wanted to say about Mr. Mulroney. I could go on, but I now have to talk about the last Conservative Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. He was a Prime Minister—

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much.

I apologize to my colleague for interrupting.

I believe my colleague Ms. Ashton may be arriving in the room momentarily. I wanted her to benefit from the full splendour of Mr. Dalton's history lesson, so I'm wondering if he might begin afresh, now that Ms. Ashton is in the room, and just start from the beginning. It was important, and I fear that she hasn't really benefited.

I won't be able to recount all the details because I haven't been taking notes, but I will thank the committee for allowing me to sit in. It's been edifying.

I wish you all a very good day.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach. As a matter of fact, Ms. Ashton is right here in the room.

Have a good day. You're excused.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Dalton: I thank Mr. Bachrach—

The Chair: Let me interrupt you, Mr. Dalton.

At the beginning of the meeting, I may not have specified the names on the speaking list. We also have Ms. Ashton, who will speak a little later.

Mr. Joël Godin: You didn't mention that. Could you repeat the names of the speakers on the list?

The Chair: Yes. Right now, Mr. Dalton has the floor. Then we'll have Mr. Lightbound, if he signals to me that he still wants to speak. He will be followed by Mr. Iacono, Ms. Ashton, Mr. Godin and Mr. Serré.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor.

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

I thank Mr. Bachrach for his kind words. He wanted me to repeat my entire speech, but too bad.

The Chair: This will be your third strike if you repeat your speech. I just wanted to tell you that.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I'm not going to do that. You can read the comments in the transcripts or watch the video recording.

I want to talk a bit about former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. I won't mention everything he did, only about what applies to the motion. It's about the Canadian identity and the place of francophones in Canada. My comments are very relevant. They are still about the motion.

Mr. Harper was Conservative Prime Minister from 2006 to 2015, and he took important steps to recognize Quebec's unique cultural identity and support the language rights of francophones across the country. One of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's most significant actions with respect to Quebec was taken in 2006, the year he was elected Prime Minister. That year was the first time I ran in a federal election. I didn't win, it was against Mr. Peter Julian, who is still a member of Parliament. I then worked in provincial politics for eight years.

However, Mr. Harper introduced a motion in the House of Commons that recognized Quebecers as a nation within a united

Canada, formally recognizing Quebec's distinct culture, language and identity, while affirming Canada's unity.

• (1135)

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Dalton.

[*English*]

Madame Gladu, is this a point of order—I see your hand—or do you just want to be put on the list?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): No, Chair. I'd like to be on the list. *Merci*.

The Chair: *Merci*. It's done. You're on the list.

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I'm very aware that some people are anxious to speak. I'm not going to go on for very long. I'll conclude my remarks shortly.

My goal isn't just to talk, but to talk about important things. In my opinion, it's important that this discussion on the importance of French and the fact that French is essential be recorded in the testimony. I want to focus on the Conservative Party, especially its leaders, because one can be a member of Parliament, but often it's the leader who gives the direction to follow.

I mentioned Prime Minister Macdonald and Prime Minister Mulroney. Now I'm talking about Mr. Harper. Then I'll conclude with another person, who I hope will be the next Prime Minister. There you go.

Mr. Harper recognized the importance of Quebec's distinct identity. It's interesting to note that Brian Mulroney made great efforts to have Quebec sign the Charter and be recognized as a distinct society. For his part, Mr. Harper proclaimed the distinct character of Quebec society and recognized Quebec as a nation within Canada. At that time, it was really important. Even though Mr. Harper came from a region of Ontario and later became a member of Parliament from Alberta, he knew and recognized that linguistic duality was fundamental to the Canadian identity. It has worked to ensure that federal institutions respect both official languages. He also led initiatives to support francophone communities outside Quebec, including educational programs that promote the learning of French. This was particularly important for francophone communities in Ontario, New Brunswick, Manitoba and British Columbia.

I was a teacher at the time. My students and I benefited from visits to Quebec. I talked a little bit about that. We received grants from the government through the Contribution de vie étudiante et de campus and the vision of the Canadian francophonie. That funding was very helpful to us. We saw that in the past.

Mr. Chair, I'd now like to yield the floor to the next person on the list, with your permission, of course.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Lightbound, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief.

I wasn't sure I wanted to speak, but I can't help at least point out how, in the context of our committee's work, we are witnessing a monumental waste of time, when we have an important study before us, namely the education continuum.

We don't need to go back to the days of Mathusalem. What happened is quite simple. A Conservative member, Larry Brock, made it very clear that a minister should not give a French answer to an English question. Since the minister's mother tongue is French, he has every right to express himself in French. That member, and I think we all agree that he made a mistake, should apologize to the House. It's as simple as that. That's what the motion requests.

I call on my colleagues to put an end to this circus that we've been observing here, at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, for three meetings now. This circus has gone on long enough. I say that with all due respect to Mr. Dalton. I find it fascinating to hear his comments on history, but it can be done without mobilizing the resources of the House as we are doing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

We'll have to suspend the meeting for a few minutes, because there seem to be some problems with the connection.

• (1140) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1150)

The Chair: We'll reconvene the meeting.

The mikes are working all around the table, and the next speaker is Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, first of all, I'd like to point out that this morning, and the other day as well, my colleague Mr. Dalton spoke in French. I'm not talking about his comments or their relevance, but rather about the fact that he spoke French. I'm sure that we are relieved to see that there are Conservative members who want to make an effort to learn French and to speak French. I'm sure that my colleague from the Bloc Québécois is very pleased that an anglophone member is making the effort to speak French. However, I don't see that effort or interest on the part of MP Larry Brock.

Having said that, Mr. Chair, in the interest of time, I would just ask that you call the question. You know, Canadians are watching. I tabled a motion on a relevant matter. I think we have already heard enough comments, filibusters and arguments against the motion. It's time to take action and put the motion to a vote so that we can move on to other important things that have to do with the French language.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono. Unfortunately, the rules of the House of Commons prevent me from calling the vote as long as there is a debate that respects decorum on a motion. So we'll go in the order of the—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: In that case, I'll continue speaking, because I'm not finished.

The Chair: Go ahead, I'm listening.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: I just want to check this with you. My colleague finished his speech, since he called for the vote.

The Chair: I was the one who assumed that he had finished his speech by calling for the vote. I then told him that I was unable to do so for reasons that everyone heard. He then went on to tell me that he wasn't finished and that he was going to finish his speech, that is, to continue speaking. I misinterpreted. I'm the one who said—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I called the question, but you did not put the question. I still have the right to continue my speech.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to understand better: Is calling for a vote not a signal that a member has finished his speech?

The Chair: Not in this case, no. When someone calls for a vote on an issue that cannot be debated, that request effectively ends the speech. However, in this case, we are debating a motion and people whose names are on the list can speak.

I'm going to go back to my speaking list, and Mr. Iacono is going to finish. He'll be followed by Ms. Ashton, Mr. Godin, Mr. Serré, Ms. Gladu and Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to add to that.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, you are going to generously provide us with your views on the motion.

Carry on, Mr. Iacono. The floor is yours.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, before I continue, I'd like to apologize to Canadians who are watching, because we really are wasting time. This is something that can easily be resolved. Therefore, I apologize to Canadians, but I must continue the debate.

To put things in context, I'll summarize the facts. On Thursday, October 24, Conservative MP Larry Brock criticized Minister Duclos for responding in French to a question he'd asked in English. Adding insult to injury, MP Brock said he made the comment because his earpiece was defective, and that prevented him from hearing the answer. The video recording of question period doesn't lie about genuine facts. At the 358th sitting of the House of Commons, held on October 24, 2024, at 3:03 p.m. and 54 seconds, the video clearly shows that MP Brock was not wearing his earpiece. Yet both Mr. Brock and his caucus continue to ignore the facts that are clearly illustrated by this video recording and insist that Mr. Brock was wearing a defective earpiece.

Since I spoke about it last week, I've received a number of comments from my constituents who watched the question period video of the 358th sitting. They're disgusted that a member of Parliament lied in the House of Commons. Those are the words of my constituents and I can repeat them. I'm not saying that Mr. Brock lied. I'm passing on my constituents' comments, so that Canadians can hear them and know what's going on, and so that my constituents know that I'm sharing their observations.

Why are Conservative members trying to misrepresent the facts? What do they have to gain by doing that? I don't know if they're going to answer that.

On Tuesday, October 29, I presented a motion on the subject to this committee. However, Conservative members of the committee chose to obstruct it with delaying tactics, instead of pulling their heads out of the sand, condemning their colleague's comments and agreeing to have him apologize for his lack of respect in the House of Commons, for Canada's francophones and for Minister Duclos. My colleague Mr. Beaulieu is still defending the French language, and that showed a lack of respect for the French language.

I remind my Conservative colleagues that the promotion of French is primarily a matter of respect here in Ottawa. So their fine words and grand speeches about French don't count if they gloss over the many times their Conservative colleagues have disparaged French and francophones. I counted not just one or two: there were three of them, and I listed their names last week. The Conservatives' inaction on October 24, like their leader's inaction, makes them complicit in their colleague's affronts to francophones. That shows a lack of respect for the French language.

• (1155)

Our colleagues opposite will surely make grand speeches and tell us that they're the great defenders of the French language. However, they're unable to tell their colleague, Larry Brock, today to stand up and apologize.

We spent almost all of last week's meetings being stonewalled by the Conservatives. They blame us, but they don't look at what they're doing. How much longer will the Conservatives put their friend's interests ahead of those of Canada's francophones? How much more time will they waste by refusing to comply with a simple request to apologize? It's time for the Conservatives to stop talking out of both sides of their mouths and take responsibility for their words.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank you for informing us of the letter that Mr. Brock sent to the committee asking you to convey his apologies to the minister. If I understand correctly, an MP who was disrespectful in the House of Commons sent you a letter, asking that you apologize on his behalf to a third party. I wonder where the Conservatives got that idea. It must be from the green book that my colleague opposite has on his desk. That book deals with procedure, and my colleague uses it very well. So Mr. Brock sent a letter to the committee asking the chair to convey his apology to the minister. He thinks the chair of the committee is a carrier pigeon. My simple answer is that Mr. Brock can read his letter to the House of Commons, it will only take a minute and everything will be settled. I learned all of this from reading the book on procedure, which I interpreted correctly. However, my colleague has trouble interpreting

certain things. I don't know who got creative on the other side and who was able to tell Mr. Brock that all he had to do was send a letter of apology and that everything would be resolved.

It shows a lack of respect for French Canadians to ask a committee chair to act like a carrier pigeon to convey the apology of a Conservative member from Ontario. I'm ashamed of them. The Conservative members of this committee refuse to allow their colleague to apologize in the House of Commons for his lack of respect for francophones and especially for the French language. In fact, it's primarily a lack of respect for the French language. It's not, first of all, a lack of respect for Minister Duclos or Mr. Duclos, because that's secondary. The reason we want this apology is because he showed a lack of respect for the French language, for Canadian culture, and for Canada's official languages.

• (1200)

The habit of treating francophones as second-class Canadians is deeply rooted among Conservatives.

If that were not the case, the Quebec Conservatives would have stood up on the same day and said something. After Mr. Brock was called into the lobby to be told what to do, when he returned to the House of Commons, instead of making a formal apology, he simply said that his remarks were inappropriate and that everyone has the right to speak one of the two official languages in the House of Commons. I don't think that's a proper apology. That wasn't an apology, period.

If that were not the case, today, last week, and since October 24, the Conservatives would have called their offending colleague to order. They'd have demanded an apology in the right forum. Mr. Brock indeed did have an awakening and sent a letter to the committee chair. Fine. The Conservatives surely debated the issue by consulting the green book on procedure, and then decided to send a simple letter saying that it would settle the matter.

However, where did he show this lack of respect? In the House of Commons. It wasn't on the street, in a yard or park; it was in the House of Commons. Therefore, an apology should be made in the House of Commons. It shouldn't be done through social media, as he did. It should be done in the House of Commons. Where did he show this lack of respect? It was in the House of Commons. The apology should therefore be made in the House of Commons, in proper form. The book on procedure doesn't specify how an apology can be made. Everything that happens in the House of Commons must be settled in the House of Commons.

• (1205)

[English]

It's tit for tat.

[*Translation*]

That's enough: we've wasted the time of this committee and of Canadians for countless hours so that MP Larry Brock doesn't have to make a speech in the House that would last less than a minute. This is totally unacceptable.

After my speech, my Conservative colleagues will surely continue the debate. They'll make all kinds of arguments just to avoid having to apologize. They'll try to demonstrate that what the member for Brantford—Brant did in the House of Commons was acceptable and respectable. I don't think so. This deserves a proper apology in the House of Commons.

Mr. Chair, again, I'm asking you to stop this and move to a vote. I want to do so in order to move the debate on the French language forward. I insist on it so that we can have more constructive debates instead of continuing to focus on the lack of respect of a member who doesn't even wear his earpiece to understand what his colleagues are saying when they speak French in the House of Commons. I think it's really a language issue—

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: In fact, my colleague just mentioned a few things and passed judgment on parliamentarians who decide whether or not to wear an earpiece. We are way off topic. We should be careful when we accuse parliamentarians. It's not our place to judge the behaviour of parliamentarians in the House of Commons.

The Chair: I take it in the context of debate, because it is as if we hadn't adjourned the debate. There were comments suggesting that the member for Brantford—Brant did in fact wear his earpiece but that it was defective.

In that context, I think that's what Mr. Iacono is referring to. It's as though we hadn't stopped last week's meeting. In any case, that's how I see it. In that context, I think Mr. Iacono is responding to those comments, namely that it was suggested that Mr. Brock's excuse was that he wore his earpiece, which was defective. In any case, that's how I interpret that statement.

• (1210)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I understand what you're saying, and it's perfectly legitimate. I'd like to add something to what you just said. What Mr. Iacono said a few minutes ago, before my point of order, concerns members who don't use their earpiece to listen to the translation in order to understand the speakers or members who speak French. The latter are therefore not understood by anglophones.

The Chair: I think it's a good thing to remind our colleagues, but I can't stop a member who says that.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I wasn't talking about other colleagues. I was referring to the member in question. He's the one who didn't wear his earpiece. I wasn't talking about other members. While members are making their speeches in French, anglophone members aren't wearing their earpieces, so they aren't listening. I'm saying that MP Brock doesn't wear an earpiece when his francophone colleagues are speaking.

I'm going to continue a little because it's very interesting. We're debating a lack of respect for the French language and the word used by the member in question. What we have here is another debate on the manner that member chose to apologize and the reasons why he did so. The problem is with the earpiece. After I said that the member didn't wear an earpiece, no one on the Conservative side contradicted me.

Mr. Chair, I am asking you for the third time today to stop this debate. I see that my Conservative colleague is laughing, because he finds that amusing. I don't find that amusing. Let's call the question.

The Chair: I will repeat what I said earlier, Mr. Iacono, that I can't do so, because it's clearly stated in our rules of procedure, in Standing Order 116: Debate on the motion is ongoing.

Have you completed your remarks?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes, I'm done, but I want you to add me to the speaking list.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good morning, everyone.

I shared some of my thoughts with you at our meeting last week. I would like to reiterate that the members of my party hope that this situation will be resolved by a formal apology from Mr. Brock in the House, in connection with the comment he made and his response in the House, which showed flagrant disrespect for francophones and the place of French in our Parliament and in our country.

I'm disappointed with this filibuster, which is delaying our study. This is a very important study that I was very pleased to support, because I think it really targets the crisis in French-language and early childhood education in our country. Personally, I'm experiencing this crisis, not as an educator, but as a parent. We heard from representatives of my children's school, as well as organizations and school boards across the country, that our French-language schools and child care centres need immediate assistance and a substantial partnership with the federal government.

The shortage of staff in the early childhood field and the shortage of French-language teachers in the French as a first language education system and in French immersion programs are extremely obvious, particularly in western Canada. The waiting lists are long; parents obviously want to send their children to French-language day care centres, immersion schools or even francophone schools, if they're entitled to them. In fact, we don't have enough teachers or staff to provide French-language education to our children and help us raise our children in French. Several witnesses told us about the impact of this shortage on our ability to educate the next generation in French. That contributes to the decline of French, which is now an obvious fact in Canada.

In my opinion, our study is essential. We had some serious witnesses who took the time to come here, who came out of their classrooms and set aside their very important work to give us their advice and express their hope that we'd do something to help and support them, of course, to support our children who want to learn French, and parents who want their children to learn French. There are also francophone communities that want us to attack the decline of French.

I want to tell you that a few days ago, I met with representatives of Canadian Parents for French, which is doing incredible work across the country. I personally benefited from their work. Our community and the families of immersion students owe them a great deal. They were prepared to come before the committee and make important recommendations, but unfortunately they were unable to do so because of this ongoing filibuster. Because of what's happening and because of this waste of time, we're not listening to them. I think it's troubling that the committee is sending a signal that it would rather waste its time filibustering than solving the challenges targeted by the study.

• (1215)

I would like to remind you that an anglophone member made a comment in the House that showed a lack of respect for a francophone member and minister, as well as for the use of French in the House. It's one of our official languages here on Parliament Hill. It's troubling that a real apology wasn't made in the House, especially since this wasn't the first time such a situation occurred. Of course, we all heard, on another occasion, what a Conservative member of Parliament said to a minister. These are not isolated cases. In my opinion, this clearly shows a lack of respect for the French language and francophones in this country.

However, I would add that, in this committee, a number of Conservative members, some of whom are anglophones in particular, have clearly demonstrated that they are concerned about protecting French. I don't think we're questioning that at all. That said, I think it's crucial for a committee dedicated to official languages to hold to account an MP who showed a lack of respect for French and the francophonie in the House.

I think it points to a systemic problem. Canadians who are interested in the francophonie are currently observing this willingness to accept apologies expressed through social media rather than real apologies made in the House. Not only as parliamentarians, but also as parliamentarians who are interested in these issues, we have an obligation to take official language challenges seriously. We need a real apology in the House and a clear message that French is accepted on Parliament Hill and that it's unacceptable to deny MPs the right to express themselves in French or English. We must let Canadians know and acknowledge that a mistake was made in the House and that it's necessary to get to work to truly protect French, which is in decline in our country.

I want you to know that I want this filibuster to end so that we can vote. Finally, because this is the second time a Conservative has made such a comment, I hope that the Conservative Party will work to defend French. Such situations give us reason to have doubts. Since I was a member of Parliament during Mr. Harper's reign, I saw the cuts to the CBC, the end of the court challenges

program and the cuts to funding for francophone organizations. His government didn't support the francophonie as it should have. He did not exercise leadership in francophone immigration. Francophone Canadians, particularly here in western Canada, are concerned because the Conservative leader will do what he will do as Prime Minister if he is elected.

• (1220)

I think we should call the question. The committee should make it clear that it expects a formal apology from the member in the House. Canada's francophones and Canadians who are interested in protecting French deserve it. I hope we can hear the member's apology as soon as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Where should I start?

At the outset, I'll respond to Ms. Ashton's comments about my colleague Larry Brock's apology. I'm going to wonder out loud. Coming from a member who travelled to the Quebec Winter Carnival with her children during the holidays in 2023 and who didn't apologize—

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Oh, my God, Mr. Godin! Do you really want to have that discussion? As you know, that's not at all what we're talking about today. I'm really disappointed with your attempt.

Once again, the Conservatives want to play political games instead of talking about content. I've already raised the issue of political games. As parliamentarians, we follow the rules, we do the right thing. I've already spoken about this. I'm disappointed to hear the Conservatives once again talk about something other than the case of one of their members who insulted francophones and French in the House. I hope we can get back to the substance of the debate.

The Chair: Before I address your point of order, Ms. Ashton, I'm going to listen to Mr. Lightbound's.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: I want to echo Ms. Ashton's concerns. I don't know exactly what he's referring to, but I see that Mr. Godin is engaging in personal attacks. I know Mr. Godin. I know he's better than that. I urge him to show a bit more judgment when Pierre Poilievre's office tells him what to say in committee. He's capable of much better than that.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lightbound and Ms. Ashton.

The point of order is entirely relevant. The committee is debating a motion. Ms. Ashton was referring to that motion and the fact that we were running out of time to hear from valuable witnesses for our study on the education continuum. She was suggesting that we proceed to the vote so we can get back to that study. Her comments pertained to Mr. Iacono's motion.

Please, then, Mr. Godin, stick to the debate on the motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'll do more than that, Mr. Chair. I'll withdraw my comments.

The Chair: Thank you. That is much appreciated.

Mr. Joël Godin: Earlier, Mr. Chair, the member was saying that it's important for the Standing Committee on Official Languages to hear from witnesses for its education continuum study. Obviously, we are all parliamentarians, politicians, and we engage in politics.

However, Mr. Iacono's motion victimizes organizations that work tirelessly, day in and day out, to teach young people French, and I think they deserve to be heard. He knew full well the consequences of proposing his motion, and I think he's playing a very partisan game. Unfortunately, the debate on the French language is turning into a game of partisan politics, and that is not in the interest of francophones.

Now, Mr. Chair, I want to go over the sequence of events, as my fellow member did earlier, because he said things that were not true, in my opinion. On October 24, 2024, Mr. Brock turned to the Speaker of the House of Commons and said this:

Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberals, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up, time is up and now corruption is up. GC Strategies, a two-person company working from a basement, started scooping up government contracts like candy just weeks after the Prime Minister took office: \$20 million for doing nothing on the failed arrive scam and \$100 million in total in government contracts. If that does not scream corruption, I do not know what does.

Will the Liberals get our money back?

My fellow member Mr. Iacono said that Mr. Brock was addressing Mr. Duclos, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, which is false. He was addressing the Prime Minister, but Mr. Duclos rose to answer. So far, so good.

Then the Speaker, Mr. Fergus, recognized Mr. Duclos, who said this:

Mr. Speaker, you also could have said it in French, because I am going to say something in French that my colleague has already heard several times in English.

He knows perfectly well that the Auditor General is independent, that the RCMP is also independent, that both of those organizations are doing their job, and that we will always be there to help them do it.

That brings us to the crux of the matter, when Mr. Brock said, "Mr. Speaker, my question is in English, but I digress." Never did he clearly or specifically ask the honourable member Mr. Duclos to answer in French. What he said was neither appropriate nor necessary. It was unacceptable. Like my colleagues, I've already said that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brock proceeded to make the following statement:

Mr. Speaker, Liberal corruption is on rinse and repeat. The Auditor General is investigating \$100 million in contracts awarded to GC Strategies, a two-person IT company that did no IT work....

Some heckling ensued in the House of Commons, and the Speaker of the House stepped in to call the members to order. He then pointed out that questions can be asked in English or in French and that questions can be answered in English or in French. He then asked the member to start from the top, but he did not ask the member to apologize.

Later, at about 3:15 p.m., Mr. Boissonnault said, "Mr. Speaker, I think that it is very important to note that we have seen a blatant lack of respect in the House for our—" It was presumably a point of order. Heckling again ensued. The Speaker of the House, Mr. Fergus, rose and called to order all the members in the House, saying that he had already made a statement on the matter during question period. The Speaker did not ask Mr. Brock to rise.

That tells me that the matter is settled.

• (1230)

I don't want to impute motives to Mr. Brock, but he probably realized that he had made a mistake. That is what I gathered. He rose and humbly said this:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, in relation to the introduction of my second question, the question was originally in English. I was unable to hear the minister's response because of commotion in the House. My volume was not working correctly on my earpiece. That is why I made the reference.

Clearly, I recognize that every member in this House is entitled to ask questions and respond to questions in both official languages.

That last sentence is, I think, the one that matters most to us.

The Speaker of the House said that the matter was settled. He intervened, he did not ask anyone to apologize, and Mr. Brock rose and, in my opinion, humbly apologized. That's how I took it.

The Speaker stood again and said:

The hon. member for Brantford—Brant raises a very interesting point, which is that when people take the floor, referring to the conversation that is happening right now between the member for Pickering—Uxbridge and the member for Lakeland, we cannot hear what is going on if there is too much ambient noise caused by people speaking out of turn. This is a very important point.

The member for Louis-Hébert and my riding neighbour, Mr. Lightbound, then rose and made the following remark:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The member for Brantford—Brant is clearly trying to deny what he did, but everyone in the House knew what he was trying to do. He intimated that the member for Québec should not answer in French. He should apologize. That is the kind of condescension that—

The comment ends there. That was the honourable member's assessment. I cannot say whether it's right or wrong, but I had a different take.

The Speaker of the House, Mr. Fergus, responded to Mr. Lightbound's comment as follows: "The Chair has heard enough on this matter." The issue was therefore settled.

As far as I'm concerned, the Speaker clearly saw what happened in the House. That is his role, and he enforced the rules. What's more, despite the obvious attempts by the party across the way to get an apology, the Speaker ruled. He refused to ask the member to apologize. He said that the matter was settled and that it was time to move on.

I would like to point out that, from time to time, the Speaker considers it necessary to ask a parliamentarian to apologize. If the Speaker does not ask the member to apologize, it means that the Speaker does not consider an apology to be warranted.

I would like to go back to January 30, 2024. That was the day when yours truly rose and asked the following question:

Mr. Speaker, again, this government is spreading disinformation.

The member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine is also misleading the House. She should worry about her own region. The Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands are grappling with an unprecedented housing crisis. Members do not have to take my word for it. This is coming from Ambroise Henry, the director general of the Groupe ressource en logements collectifs, the communal housing resource group in the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands.

What is she actually doing to help the people of the Magdalen Islands find a solution for housing?

The Speaker, Mr. Ferguson, then rose and said:

I often have a hard time hearing the members on the far side of the room. I would ask the member for Lac-Saint-Jean to be quiet when members are asking and answering questions.

The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

Ms. Leboutillier then rose and gave the following response:

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, I would say to my colleague across the way, who tells us to get off our islands, that we have indeed left our Magdalen Islands and that Magdalen Islanders have gone all over Canada. These are people who are involved in their community.

If he has a backbone, he will stand up and apologize to Magdalen Islanders.

I didn't understand her answer, but that's personal. In the House, the member asked me to apologize—

• (1235)

The Chair: How does this relate to the motion before the committee?

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm talking about apologies, Mr. Chair. Mr. Brock is being asked to apologize. I described everything that happened and the fact that the Speaker ruled that the matter was settled.

Now I am describing another situation in which the Speaker did ask a member to apologize. That is the idea behind my argument and the point I'm making about the Speaker and apologies. Now don't ruin the ending, because I haven't finished—

The Chair: I'm trying to see whether you're drawing a parallel with a similar situation that would have involved Ms. Leboutillier or a similar motion that would have been proposed in another committee.

Mr. Joël Godin: No. I'm talking about the House of Commons.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Joël Godin: My argument pertains to the Speaker's judgment.

I'll get back to the parallel I was making. The Speaker said this:

Members know full well that they cannot impugn the reputation of another member. I invite the minister to withdraw her comments about the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

What did Ms. Leboutillier do? She rose and said, “Mr. Speaker, I apologize.”

Therefore, this is akin to casting doubt on the Speaker's judgment, a Speaker who was selected by the Liberals, who have a majority in the House—or nearly, with the complicity of the NDP. Now they have a majority because they were able to get one of their own elected as Speaker.

Again, the Liberals are questioning the Speaker's judgment. They are bent on asking us to make one of our members, Larry Brock, apologize.

This is quite something. We're dealing with it right now in the House with respect to a question of privilege.

Mr. Marc Serré: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Godin.

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: I'm just trying to understand what Mr. Godin is saying. A Liberal minister apologized to the House. That refutes his argument that Mr. Brock doesn't want to apologize to the House. I don't see how the Speaker's judgment is relevant when a minister has already apologized.

The Chair: I understand what you're saying, Mr. Serré. I don't have to try to understand at this point, as long as Mr. Godin is debating the motion. That is what he's doing by drawing a parallel between what is happening here and another event. For that reason, I'm going to let him continue.

I won't comment or pass judgment on what you're saying, Mr. Godin. That is not my role. I'm going to let you speak, because you are debating the motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I want to say is that Ms. Leboutillier apologized because the Speaker asked her to after recognizing that there had been some impropriety in the House of Commons. The event involving Mr. Brock that we are discussing today also occurred in the House of Commons. Did the Speaker recognize the impropriety? Not at all. If he had, he would have asked Mr. Brock to apologize. That is my understanding of what happened. There has to be some consistency.

When my colleague raised a point of order, I was saying that the Liberals are once again calling into question the judgment of the Speaker of the House of Commons. We are in the same situation now as with the question of privilege raised in the House of Commons. The Speaker ruled that documents had to be tabled, but the Liberals don't want to do that. They are defying his instructions.

The Chair: Just a moment, please. Mr. Iacono has a point of order.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: What is happening in the House of Commons now has nothing to do with the motion I introduced. So I would ask you to make sure that the member opposite sticks to the motion and its contents.

The Chair: I will nonetheless let Mr. Godin speak. We do indeed have to stick to the essence of the motion, but I can very clearly see the parallel he is trying to draw with another situation.

You may continue, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It seems now that the Liberals do not recognize that Mr. Brock published apologies, in French and in English, after speaking in the House of Commons. So he did two things to acknowledge his mistake.

Nonetheless, the Liberals do not accept the member's apologies because they were not made in the House of Commons, even though the Speaker did not request that, which doesn't suit them.

On Mr. Brock's page on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, there is a message saying, "Thank you, Larry", regarding his apologies. Do you know that comment was posted at 4:49 on the very day that Mr. Brock apologized? That comment was by the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos. The person directly concerned by my colleague Larry Brock's apologies thanked him for apologizing. I want to point out that he apologized in both official languages and that Mr. Brock acknowledged the right of every member of Parliament to speak French or English during parliamentary proceedings.

Nobody is perfect. I can give you a list of what the Liberals have done to show that they have neither the willingness nor the intention to protect the French fact in Canada, that is, French and English bilingualism in Canada. We could talk about the Governor General, but I'll stop here. I think people get the idea. We can come back to that.

That said, all members of the committee have received another indication of the Conservatives' good faith on the official languages. Mr. Chair, you received two letters that the clerk distributed this morning.

● (1240)

The Chair: Indeed, for the benefit of those following our proceedings, we did receive an official letter and an email.

Mr. Joël Godin: You received correspondence from two sources. We will not talk about the one from Ms. Thomas, who duly apologized, it must be said. I think my colleagues here are more interested in the one from Mr. Brock, the Member for Brantford—Brant.

I will read out his letter. It is addressed to René Arseneault, the chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6.

Mr. Arseneault, it has come to my attention that a Liberal motion is currently blocking the important work of this committee.

It is indeed very important work. My motion was adopted here, by all political parties, for the committee to conduct a study on the education continuum, from early childhood to postsecondary education. We included postsecondary education, which we had already begun to study. It will be in the report. So this is very important work.

Mr. Chair, a few days ago, you and I attended the annual meeting of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, in

Charlottetown. People were glad that we are conducting this study and wanted to contribute. That is why we planned 12 meetings. Now we have to deal with the government's petty political games and calls for apologies that have already been made three times.

The letter goes on to say:

The motion requests my formal apology, which I have already made, for the remarks I made in the House on Thursday, October 24, 2024.

The apologies I have already given on October 24 remain the same: "I want to apologize to Minister Duclos and all my colleagues for my comments in Question Period today. Every Member of Parliament has the right to speak in the official language of their choice; my comment was inappropriate, and I am sorry."

Please convey my apologies to the minister and other members of the committee.

So my colleague apologized once again.

I want to go back to something that was said here. During the committee's discussions, we talked about the situation involving the MP Francis Drouin. I recall that the committee's work was blocked for seven meetings, if not eight, because he said a witness was "full of shit". We then requested that he no longer serve on this committee. In September, the committee resumed its proceedings and Mr. Drouin said goodbye. We welcomed Mr. Lightbound to replace him, and I am very pleased to see him here among us.

Last week, Mr. Lightbound made some remarks about the Drouin saga—let's call it that. This is what he said:

We're therefore debating it as long as [the amendment] is in order. It is quite similar to the one the committee just put to a vote, after all.

I'd like to say a few words about what the member just said [he was probably referring to Ms. Gladu]. I have enormous respect for her, and I think she is one of the voices of reason in the House and certainly at this committee.

She said it was vindictive and small-minded, but I'd like to remind her of something. Even though she and I were not on the committee, in the case of Mr. Drouin—about whom Mr. Godin spoke to us at length—after he apologized repeatedly [that isn't true: He apologized just once, here at the committee], the Conservatives practically wanted him tarred and feathered. That's barely an exaggeration.

I like the image Mr. Lightbound used. My colleague Mr. Brock did nonetheless apologize three times: once in the House of Commons, once on the platform X, where Minister Duclos thanked him, and once in the letter that was tabled today.

● (1245)

What more do the Liberals want? Do they want to play political games or do they want us to proceed with the work of the Standing Committee on Official Languages and continue our study on the education continuum?

I think it is important to draw a parallel. Are we going to hang Mr. Brock? Will he be taken to the public square and whipped? Is that what the Liberals want? My colleague has apologized three times, in a manner of his choosing, but the Liberals will not accept it. Honestly, I think they are being stubborn and it is unfortunate.

Now, I don't know if I will go there. Give me two seconds.

The Chair: While you're looking through your notes, I want to tell the committee members that I am setting aside the last two minutes of the meeting to say something. I will be interrupting the discussion, regardless of who is speaking at that time.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I want to thank you for the respect you have shown the witnesses. Since you knew what was coming, you decided to postpone their appearance and informed the vice-chairs. The witnesses who were invited last Thursday were from British Columbia. I don't know where today's witnesses were from, but I thank you for respecting them. I wanted to mention that.

That being said, the Liberal MPs claimed earlier that Conservative MPs are not sensitive to the French fact and Canadian identity. Mr. Chair, you would be surprised by the number of Conservative MPs who speak French. Let me offer some advice, to you and all your Liberal colleagues: Be careful. Even though they're not fluent in French, they can indeed speak French discreetly, but they understand it very well. That is their choice.

Mr. Iacono's motion says: "That the Committee remind all MPs of their right to speak in whichever of the two official languages at all times in Parliament".

When I say the official languages, I still have to wink. It is clear that for the Liberals or for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Canada's two official languages are not necessarily French and English. Since the Prime Minister appointed a bilingual Governor General who doesn't speak French, there is not much doubt.

Let me say again that you would be surprised that my Conservative colleagues speak more French than you think. That was the most wonderful surprise I had when I took the official languages portfolio.

Just yesterday, I met with representatives from Canadian Parents for French. The interest that Canadians have in Canada's specific identity is impressive. They want to preserve bilingualism and learn French. The problem isn't that not enough people are interested, but rather that there is insufficient access. That is a great tribute to the francophones who struggle every day.

I can understand my fellow committee members who want my colleague Larry Brock to apologize, but my colleague has apologized. It is important for francophones to continue to defend the French fact. I will always stand up for the French fact. We mustn't get carried away, though. Going back to that image of my colleague, I am wondering if Mr. Brock has to be tarred and feathered.

Mr. Chair, I don't know whether you remember that. Maybe you didn't do that in Acadia.

● (1250)

The Chair: Well, I am familiar with it from the *Lucky Luke* cartoons, with the Dalton brothers.

Mr. Joël Godin: That was not where I wanted to go, Mr. Chair. For my part, I saw that kind of thing when I was young, at bachelor parties. They used molasses and tar. Unfortunately, that practice caused suffering.

Getting back to the motion, you have to listen to reason at some point. In my opinion, insisting on this motion is unreasonable. My colleague took concrete action. Does he have to appear before the committee on his knees now and ask for absolution? I think we need to move on to something else.

Ms. Ashton, I agree with you. Once again, I withdraw my remarks and offer my sincere apologies. For my part, I have no trouble apologizing. If someone does something unacceptable, they need to apologize. I did that and so did my colleague, three times. No doubt you will say I am rambling and repeating myself, but a message has to be repeated for it to be heard. That is because people do not always pay attention.

The motion before us is not necessarily acceptable. I question the motive behind it. The Liberals are no doubt looking to score political points, which I understand because we aren't naive. In the end though, people have to listen to reason. For my part, I have extended a hand. If the Liberals see that this is a waste of time, they can simply withdraw the motion, since they are the ones who introduced it. It is up to them.

We have tools and procedures at our disposal. As parliamentarians, we use them to assert our rights. In this case, it is a question of respect for parliamentarians. I think it is very important to recognize all the rights of parliamentarians.

In my colleague's motion, it says: "That the Committee request that the MP for Brantford—Brant apologizes in the House...". In other words, they want to choose the setting where the apology is made. My colleague has apologized though, and no one here can say he has not. The key player in this saga is the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, who is the MP for Québec City. Like my colleagues Mr. Lightbound, Mr. Duclos, Mr. Deltell and Mr. Paul-Hus, I am fortunate to represent a riding in the greater Québec City area.

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos expressed his thanks on the social network where my colleague Larry Block apologized. My great friend and colleague Bernard Généreux, the Member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, is telling me that he apologized in both official languages. Here is what he said:

● (1255)

[English]

I want to apologize to Minister Duclos and all my colleagues for my comments in Question Period today.

Every Member of Parliament has the right to speak in the official language of their choice, my comment was inappropriate and I am sorry.

[*Translation*]

As you can see, his final words were “I am sorry”. Who do you think answered with “Thank you, Larry”? If someone says that on Larry Brock's page on the X platform, they are not addressing the MP Larry Maguire or defenceman Larry Robinson, unless Larry Brock's X page has been hacked. It was Jean-Yves Duclos himself who said thank you. In my opinion, that means that he accepts Mr. Brock's apology and that he also wants to move on to something else.

The Chair: I want to make sure everyone knows that this quote is from the X platform and that he did not say that in the House of Commons.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's right, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: As I told the committee, I have set aside the next two minutes to say something.

I decided to cancel the appearance of the witnesses who were supposed to be here on Thursday. The Commissioner of Official

Languages was supposed to appear in the first hour of the meeting, and witnesses from British Columbia and Saskatchewan were supposed to testify in the second hour of the meeting.

I will be adjourning the meeting shortly, even though this discussion is still ongoing.

Mr. Godin, you were speaking before I interrupted. Had you finished?

Mr. Joël Godin: I had not finished, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

According to my list, the order of speakers for the next meeting is as follows: Mr. Godin, Mr. Serré, Ms. Gladu, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Généreux and Mr. Iacono. It looks like Mr. Dalton also wishes to speak, but I will ask him to raise his hand at the next meeting.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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