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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 100**

Monday, May 20, 2024

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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





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• (1900)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 100 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is undertaking a review of a request to address the remarks made by a member of the committee.

I emphasize the fact that this is the 100th meeting. The last sitting was in fact adjourned. We are therefore starting a new sitting, because it's easier on a procedural level.

I'd like to come back to ways of avoiding acoustic incidents.

Before we begin, I ask all members and other people participating in the meeting in the room to review the card on the table. I won't repeat everything I said during the last three meetings, but it is important to consult that card, because it shows us how to avoid acoustic incidents.

Keep in mind that preventative measures were implemented to protect the health and safety of all participants, including interpreters. Use only the approved black earpiece. The old earpieces, which are grey, must not be used anymore. Always keep your earpiece away from the microphones. When you are not using it, I ask you to place it face down in the middle of the round sticker, which can usually be found to the right of your microphone.

Before going any further and officially undertaking the discussion, I want to repeat, for a fourth or fifth time, that audio injuries are not caused by the Zoom platform, as many of us believed, but by the fact that many people talk at the same time during the meeting.

I have said it often and I don't want to come back to this today, but I would like to read this excerpt from page 1058 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on the matter of disorder and misconduct:

In the event of disorder, the Chair may suspend the meeting until order can be restored or, if the situation is considered to be so serious as to prevent the committee from continuing with its work, the meeting may be adjourned.

I consider many people talking at the same time and interrupting each other to be a serious incident, because that's what causes injuries among the interpreters. And if we have no interpreters at Parliament, its proceedings will be paralyzed.

I don't want to go over this again.

Mr. Dalton and Mr. Beaulieu, I did indeed see that you raised your hands to speak. Wait until I officially open the debate.

As I was saying, I consider this to be serious. To avoid any incidents, I'm going to tell you how we will proceed.

The clerk and I see hands raised in the room and onscreen. For the moment, I don't see Ms. Ashton onscreen, but I know she did a sound check.

If you want to raise a point of order, all you have to say is "point of order" and then be silent until I give you the floor. Usually, when we raise a point of order, someone is already speaking. I will let them finish their sentence and then give you the floor. As long as I have not given you the floor, you may not turn on your microphone. I will ask the technicians to remain alert and uphold this order, because it is the only way to minimize audio injuries inflicted on interpreters.

I am now ready to hear members of the committee regarding the use of Standing Order 106(4).

Mr. Beaulieu, you were the first to request the floor. Afterwards, it will be Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Beaulieu—

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I requested the floor.

**The Chair:** Very well, Mr. Godin, but Mr. Beaulieu raised his hand before you.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I know, but you did not name me.

**The Chair:** There are two of us, here, doing this work. I am simply asking you to raise your hand if you want the floor. I understand that if you raise a point of order, then you must say so, but wait until the person who has the floor finishes their sentence and I will give you the floor afterwards.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I just wanted to check procedure.

If I raise my hand and don't get a reaction from the clerk or from you, Mr. Chair, how can I know that you have written my name down?

**The Chair:** Trust the Chair and the clerk.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I see.

**The Chair:** If needed, all you have to do is raise a point of order, Mr. Godin. To date, I've rarely missed a raised hand.

I would point out that Ms. Ashton's sound check was done.

Ms. Ashton, I don't see you onscreen, but if you want to raise your hand, all you have to do is click the "raise hand" button. For once, the committee will sit at a reasonable time for you in Manitoba.

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu, who will be followed by Mr. Dalton and then Mr. Godin.

● (1905)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** I would like to move a motion, the one included in the request to hold a meeting pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). Everyone should have a copy in both official languages. Here it is:

Given the obscene and offensive comments made by the Liberal MP for Glegg—Prescott—Russell to a witness defending the cause of the French language in Quebec, the committee report to the House:

a) that the Chief Government Whip and member of the Liberal leadership team immediately remove MP Francis Drouin from the Standing Committee on Official Languages and;

b) that MP Francis Drouin resign as the Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, allow me to make sure everyone is following you correctly. You're taking up everything written in the letter, from "the committee report to the House", including points a) and b). Is that it?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes, that's right.

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

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

**Mr. Joël Godin:** That's not what he just read. He started his statement with "Given the obscene and offensive comments". That's part of the motion as well, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's perfect.

Still on the subject of the motion, Mr. Dalton...

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** May I explain the motion?

**The Chair:** Yes, you may explain your motion.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** It's important to follow up on what happened, because it is serious. It is totally unacceptable to call a witness extremist and tell him that he is "full of shit," and to do so with a very aggressive tone. Before even getting to that point, when Mr. Lacroix asked if the word "extremist" was part of parliamentary language, Mr. Drouin answered that he wouldn't let him fool around here, at committee, because his patience had reached its limit. What the member said was tantamount to bullying, in my opinion.

What I find to be a shame is that at the start, he refused to apologize. Then, he apologized without really meaning it by saying that if the witnesses wanted an apology, all they had to do was call him to ask for it. Finally, we heard him give a quick apology here to the witnesses.

It remains that what he said was an insult to all those who defend these positions and demand fair funding for Quebec's CEGEPs and francophone universities, as we do for colleges and francophone universities outside Quebec. Mr. Drouin had no reason to be so aggressive. The witnesses were very nuanced. They did not say that

McGill University and Dawson College were causing anglicization in Quebec, as Mr. Drouin implied when he objected to what they said. The witnesses said it was one of the factors of anglicization.

Furthermore, I found the way that several Liberal MPs defended him afterwards to be just as appalling. Even after the last meeting, Mr. Serré said that it wasn't a big deal and that only separatists felt insulted. Really, that's insult to injury. It was said that the witness statements were simplistic. However, these researchers presented statistical data. As for the Minister of Official Languages, he said that he went to university in Alberta and that did not francize the province. First of all, Alberta's francophone postsecondary institutions are underfunded, like everywhere else in Canada so, of course, that won't francize Alberta. However, if funding were fair, it would significantly improve the situation, just like in Ontario.

As for the fact that the statement insulted only separatists, I must point out that in Quebec, the reaction was relatively unanimous, even among those who aren't sovereignist. Quebec's premier, François Legault, said that it reflected "a total lack of judgment." Quebec's Minister of the French language, Jean-François Roberge, said that all of the members of Mr. Justin Trudeau's liberal government had to "do some soul-searching," given that the prime minister himself refused to condemn these "utterly unworthy" statements. I remind you that Mr. Legault and Mr. Roberge are members of a federalist party. Mr. Roberge added the following about Mr. Drouin: "He was presented with a statistical, scientific and mathematical fact, and he responded with insults. Then, the Prime Minister and ministers basically defended or excused him."

There's one thing I find even more appalling, and this is not the first time it's happened. In fact, everyone here who claims to defend French or the francophonie should pay attention to this. Often, when we present a point of view and facts about the situation of French in Quebec, they use it to tell us that we don't care about francophones outside Quebec. That is serious. In this case, Mr. Trudeau said that we were attacking Mr. Drouin because he is a Franco-Ontarian and we don't like Franco-Ontarians. They're always trying to divide and conquer. That's the trap of official languages. It's a kind of fool's bargain: They sprinkle in a few little subsidies for francophones outside Quebec, who represent 10% of francophones in Canada, and then go support English where 90% of francophones in Canada reside. It's a fool's bargain and does not work.

● (1910)

Everyone loses when French loses ground, no matter where it happens. Be it in Quebec, in Manitoba, in Ontario or in Alberta, everyone loses when we play this game.

In Quebec, the National Assembly passed a motion stating “that the National Assembly reiterate[s] that the decline of French in Quebec is a reality reflected in many language indicators”. In fact, this reality is supported by all language indicators, be it mother tongue, language used at home, language of work or first official language spoken. All the indicators show French declining within Quebec and outside Quebec. The National Assembly’s motion also “condemn[s] all insults and accusations against defenders of Quebec’s only official language, French”. It also “ask[s] the federal government to increase its representatives’ awareness of the precariousness of the French language in Quebec, in particular within the international Francophonie-related institutions in which they have a presence”.

From this perspective, I think it unworthy of a president of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie to attack witnesses during a committee meeting, as well as insult them because they presented statistics showing that underfunding Quebec’s postsecondary institutions contributes to anglicization.

I don’t understand why the government is stubbornly defending this MP. The more they defend him, the deeper they sink.

Even members of the Quebec Liberal Party voted in favour of the Quebec National Assembly’s motion. I don’t know if Mr. Drouin and the Liberals think that they are bad separatists ensnared in a Parti Québécois plot, but that is not at all the case.

I really think we have to raise the bar and, above all, make sure we respect each other. As you know, this is not the first witness to make this kind of statement. In fact, this was the third time Mr. Lacroix testified before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. So, why was there such a reaction, all of a sudden? I remember noticing several times when other witnesses came to defend the French language in Quebec that my colleagues on the other side were talking amongst themselves, looking elsewhere and not listening. At some point, they woke up. The truth is shocking, I suppose. I think this makes no sense. We can’t tolerate it. It sends the message that it is okay to bully people from Quebec who defend French.

The worst part of it, in this type of fool’s bargain that is the Official Languages Act, is that the subsidies sprinkled around for francophones outside Quebec aren’t enough to counterbalance the underfunding by the provincial governments of just about every province outside Quebec. Within Quebec, the provincial government overfunds anglophone institutions.

We have to stop trying to divide people by putting Quebecers on one side and francophones outside Quebec on the other. We really have to make a point here. That is why this has to be clear. Ms. Lambropoulos had to step down simply because she questioned the “decline of French” by putting the term in air quotes. There really is a double standard. The leader of a party had to leave the House of Commons because he used the word “extremist” or “wacko”. I think it’s comparable, but I won’t venture into scatology. If I wanted to go there, I would have read Boucar Diouf’s article, which explains some of the word’s etymology. I will spare Mr. Drouin all the qualifiers used in it.

• (1915)

Worst of all, we’re told over and over that the government wants to protect French in Quebec. However, the Liberals have yet to prove it. I have raised this issue countless times, but no one has responded.

The action plan for official languages is no different. From 1995 to 2022, 94% of official languages funding in Quebec was used to support English; English-language primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions; and English-language advocacy groups. An analysis of the data in the action plan for official languages shows that 93.9% of the funding is used to support English in Quebec. We’ll see what happens in the next public accounts of Canada.

For Quebec, this is unacceptable. This can’t continue. The decline of French in Quebec is a serious matter.

The government of English Canada ultimately comes along and says that it supports English in Quebec because English is the minority language. However, even the UN has stated that English speakers in Quebec can make claims, but not as a minority group, because they’re part of the majority in Canada.

For all these reasons, I think that we should pass this motion. I have nothing against him personally, but I think that Mr. Drouin should resign.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** I’ll skip my turn. I had a question about the procedure, but it’s fine now.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the fact that you took the time to hold the meeting this evening. I think that this will help settle the matter so that we can continue our work at our next meeting on Thursday.

First, I would like to say that today is Victoria Day, National Patriots’ Day, Dollard’s Day or World Bee Day. I hope that anyone tuning in to our proceedings or attending in this room can choose whichever day they want and that they won’t be called “full of hogwash” even if it conflicts with the choice of the member for Glegg—Prescott—Russell.

The letter sent out last Friday is signed by the four Conservative members of the committee, together with the Bloc Québécois member. I think that it shows the opposition’s commitment to wrapping up this issue so that we can move on and take care of what really matters to francophones.

Since May 6, the Liberals have been pulling out the big guns. Just look at the number of Liberal members now registered to attend the special session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie next Thursday. Here's how I see it. For the Liberals, a friend is a friend. I think that the public should be warned that they will do anything to save private Drouin. I think that this shows a lack of respect for the institution and for this committee.

I think that we should have the opportunity to call the member to order and that our committee should clearly ask for a ruling on the member's legitimacy. Until May 6, I thought that he was a respectable person. However, what happened on May 6 changed our perception of him as a member of the committee. That's why I'm saying that he lost the legitimacy to sit here on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. That's why the four of us from the Conservative Party and the member from the Bloc Québécois sent a letter, pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), asking you to call this meeting.

It should be noted that we already raised this issue before. You ended the meeting quickly, Mr. Chair. You have your interpretation and we have a different one, Mr. Chair. However, I respect your decision. I have always respected your role as chair. We must respect the institution. We must respect this committee. I think that Mr. Drouin should obviously no longer sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We're here until 9 p.m. We must have the opportunity to vote on this. I'll stop for now and see what happens at this committee meeting. I hope that the Liberals won't filibuster and that we'll wrap this up so that we can get on with real business starting next Thursday.

• (1920)

**The Chair:** I'll hear from the speakers currently on the list. I'll then rule on whether Mr. Beaulieu's motion is in order, before others raise their hands to speak. Remember that we're still debating this motion.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to see you here again this evening, and all the committee members.

The comments made this evening are a bit disturbing. People are saying that we, as a government, aren't following the rules. Mr. Beaulieu referred to a number of us earlier. However, we have all clearly and publicly stated that Mr. Drouin made a mistake. I would like to remind the committee members and the public that Mr. Drouin has apologized. Mr. Beaulieu's interpretation of what happened isn't entirely accurate. Even before Mr. Drouin apologized here to the committee, he apologized publicly. When Mr. Drouin was sitting here on Thursday morning, the opposition members wouldn't even let him speak. They raised a point of order to prevent him from apologizing. Clearly, the opposition is playing politics with this matter.

It's funny to hear Mr. Godin say that we should move on to more important things. We couldn't agree more. We've been discussing this topic for three meetings now. We have studies to conduct on immigration; on the decline of French in Quebec and across Canada; on the French-language education continuum at the prima-

ry and secondary levels; and on the funding of post-secondary institutions, a topic that we were in the process of studying. We even met with the minister. The opposition members didn't ask him any questions. They just asked about Mr. Drouin, and then immediately moved a motion.

I think that people are somewhat loose with the truth. Mr. Drouin apologized. As Mr. Beaulieu pointed out, I said that it was undoubtedly a small sin. He made a mistake. Does he need absolution from the Pope? Honestly, that makes no sense. I don't know whether he'll go to confession, but he has apologized.

We could spend a long time here talking about comments made by certain opposition members. There are a number of examples, but I could point out what Rachael Thomas said to Minister St-Onge in a committee.

• (1925)

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

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

**Mr. Joël Godin:** My colleague isn't talking about the topic of the proposed motion. I would like him to get back on track. We must focus on this motion so that we can move on.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin. However, he's speaking directly about the topic of the motion and drawing parallels to make his point.

Again, I'll give the floor to the people who already raised their hands. I'll then rule on whether the motion is in order. Ms. Ashton is last on the list. We can then continue.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand why Mr. Godin is a bit annoyed, because it's hard to take. A Conservative member—

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

**The Chair:** The floor is yours, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, my colleague is trying to portray me as having certain emotions and reactions. I would like him to save his comments for the debate and to leave my reactions out of it. It isn't appropriate.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, this isn't a point of order. This doesn't fall outside the scope of what we can hear here. I can't judge people's hypersensitivity. If Mr. Serré were out of line, I would have asked him to tone it down. I think that we can let him finish his remarks, just as we respected you and heard what you had to say.

Please continue, Mr. Serré.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can understand that this is a bit hard for Mr. Godin to hear. However, I would like to remind everyone here that, in a committee, Rachael Thomas told Ms. St-Onge, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, not to speak French. Come on! She told her this in a parliamentary committee here in Ottawa. What did Ms. Thomas do after making these comments? She apologized.

This is directly related to today's discussion. She apologized only once, while Mr. Drouin has apologized five times. He even apologized to the committee here. In Ms. Thomas's case, the situation wasn't brought up in the House or anywhere else. There was no motion, no meeting called pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) and no waste of time as is the case again this evening. Right now, we aren't talking about the important topics. We should be continuing our work on regulations and various studies. We have a great deal of work to do.

I would like to remind you that Mr. Godin moved his motion before the committee last Thursday, when the minister was sitting here. We summoned him to discuss an important topic. Two opposition members even said today that underfunding was a real issue. The minister was in the room with us to talk about post-secondary institutions. What did the opposition members do? They didn't even ask a question about post-secondary education at all. They asked him only what he thought of the comment made by Mr. Drouin, who had just apologized. By the way, he apologized before that too.

We must watch what we say about lack of respect and procedure. The proposed motion cost us our hour with the minister.

Another motion on the same topic was then moved, pursuant to the procedure set out in Standing Order 106(4). Our parliamentary committee focuses on studies, not on expelling members of Parliament. This is totally out of order and outside the scope of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. The motion moved today is in part the same as the motion moved last Thursday, when the minister was here. The same topic is being brought up again today, with a request for this meeting pursuant to Standing Order 106(4).

The motion has two parts, (a) and (b). Part (a) asks "that the chief government whip and member of the Liberal leadership team immediately remove MP Francis Drouin from the committee." I don't understand what procedure a committee would use to do this. I don't even understand how the motion could be in order and why we're discussing it. I look at my colleagues across the floor and sometimes wonder about their whips' decisions. I would love to discuss this, but I don't have the authority. A committee doesn't have the authority to tell the whips of the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois or the NDP which members to choose for committees. Since when can anyone do that?

I don't know what you have been thinking lately, but the topic has nothing to do with official languages. A committee can't choose to exclude one of its members. It's against the Standing Orders. If the Liberals and all of us had the right to move motions of that nature, I could personally put forward many names of Conservative members who made mistakes in the past. The Liberals have made mistakes too, as have members of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. We've all made them. However, the whips make these decisions, not a committee. How does this relate to protecting the interests of minority communities in this country?

Part (b) of the motion asks "that MP Francis Drouin resign as the chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie." Come on, since when can a committee do that?

I'm the chair of the Canadian section of ParlAmericas, just as Mr. Drouin is the international chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. No committee here in Parliament can think of excluding anyone. No committee has that authority. Some committee members here aren't even members of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. How can anyone decide that? It doesn't make sense.

• (1930)

Again, I don't understand why we're here this Monday evening. This is our third meeting on the same topic. The member has apologized. The government has already said that Mr. Drouin made a mistake. I've said it myself, and so have other members of Parliament and even the Prime Minister. Does he need absolution from the Pope? It's ridiculous.

Again, we need to look at the motions. I didn't even get to the substance of the debate, Mr. Beaulieu. I have articles here. I have a number of them, actually. I'll wait until later to talk about them, but I have here an article from *Le Droit* dated March 28, 1970. My father was a member of Parliament at the time. Former prime minister Trudeau asked the Liberal members who spoke French to go and promote French in CEGEPs. The heading of the article says that MP Serré is promoting Canadian unity. My father emphasized the importance of Canadian unity. It should be noted that the current environment is different from the 1950s and 1960s. Without delving into the details of the article, I'll just say that Mr. Serré spoke to students here in Ottawa at the meeting of members of the Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne. He explained that, in the event of Quebec independence, the language rights of Franco-Ontarians would be threatened.

That's part of history, Mr. Beaulieu. Those are my father's words. He believed that the government's ability would no longer be the same—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** One moment, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I think that Mr. Serré is misleading us. He said that there were initiatives in CEGEPs, but there aren't any CEGEPs in Ontario.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, I'll stop you right there. That isn't a point of order.

All the members here could have said the same thing about your comments. Good or bad, we aren't criticizing that. This is Mr. Serré's position. In terms of whether the Quebec government is giving too much or too little funding to English-language post-secondary institutions—

• (1935)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** No, that isn't the issue. He talked about CEGEPs, but there aren't any in Ontario.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, I'm going to cut you off.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** I'll clarify—

**The Chair:** Wait a moment, I'm speaking.

Mr. Beaulieu, no one criticized what you said. Your comments, both positive and negative, concerned the motion. It's now Mr. Serré's turn to speak. Your comments don't constitute a point of order. If you wish to criticize Mr. Serré's comments on a statistical or scientific level, with supporting documents, you can do so at another time. Right now, Mr. Serré has the floor. Your proposal isn't a point of order.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** However, I want to raise another point of order.

**The Chair:** Do you want to raise a point of order for something else?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes.

**The Chair:** You have the floor.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I asked for the floor earlier. Will you give me the floor, for my turn?

**The Chair:** You're on the list, Mr. Beaulieu. Two of us are taking down the names.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Good.

**The Chair:** However, I told you earlier that, once Ms. Ashton had finished speaking, I would rule on whether the motion was in order. I'll now hear from everyone who raised their hand to speak about your motion, Mr. Beaulieu. Ms. Ashton is last on this list. I'll then give the floor to the other people who raised their hands.

In terms of your motion, I want to hear from everyone, just as I let you speak, Mr. Beaulieu. Mr. Dalton had his turn, and then we heard from Mr. Godin and Mr. Serré. By the way, your name is on this list, and Ms. Ashton will be last. After that, we'll see.

Mr. Samson, I can see you motioning to me. Just so you know, two of us are taking down names.

Mr. Serré, you may continue.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Beaulieu for giving me the chance to clarify my comments about CEGEPs.

Former prime minister Trudeau asked Liberal members of Parliament to visit CEGEPs in Quebec to talk to students about the importance of French. My father was one of the members who went to speak to the students. My father always used to tell me stories about the time when he visited CEGEPs. He told me about how people would comment on the fact that he came from Ontario and spoke French very well. That was in 1970. As I said at the last meeting, or perhaps in the media, my great-grandparents came to Ontario in the 1870s—

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

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify the issue of—

**The Chair:** Hold on, Mr. Serré.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Actually—

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, I haven't given you the floor yet.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** My microphone is on, in any case.

**The Chair:** I think that everyone around the table understood the explanations that I gave earlier. As I told you, if you want to raise a point of order, you say "point of order", and then you stop there. I let the person who has the floor finish their sentence, then I give the floor to the person who raised the point of order. I told everyone, on an equal basis, at the same time, at the same second, that if this instruction weren't followed, I would consider the committee in a state of disorder.

This isn't for my sake, for our sake or for yours, Mr. Godin. It's out of consideration for the interpreters. As chair, I want to stop having to explain why we should turn on only one microphone at a time. We want to avoid injuring the interpreters' ears. I hope that I won't need to say this again at a committee meeting.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for your point of order.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, a standing order—unfortunately, I don't know the exact number—states that we must stay on topic. When we start talking about Mr. Serré's father, who was also a member of Parliament, we get off track.

Can we get back to the issue at hand this evening?

**The Chair:** This is indeed a valid point of order, Mr. Godin. However, Mr. Serré touched on the heart of the matter earlier and gave examples related to the motion. I can't stop him, because his comments are relevant. He goes a bit far, gets back to the motion and gives some parallel examples. I can only listen to what Mr. Serré has to say.

This was also the case for Mr. Beaulieu. His comments were related to the motion and he gave some parallel examples. Mr. Beaulieu was about to talk about provincial funding for post-secondary institutions, but then he came back to the topic of the motion.

I use the same judgment, so to speak, for all members of Parliament, even though I don't have a tool that tells me exactly when a member is straying too far from the topic.

I'll let Mr. Serré speak.

When I find that someone has really strayed from the topic and isn't getting back to the motion, I'll stop the person. As I already explained a long time ago, I'm permissive. I give people one chance, two chances, three chances, and then that's it.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's relevant, given that the whips decide when members of Parliament will travel or which committees they will take part in. Every political party has a whip. The committees don't decide these things.



At the time, the whip asked my father, for example, to go and speak in CEGEPs. My father often said that, when he visited CEGEPs, he was called a liar and a traitor. He couldn't possibly come from Ontario and speak French. That was in 1970. This point matters, since it concerns the history of francophones.

Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Godin and Mr. Généreux, you're lucky to have been able to live in French more than I and my ancestors did in northern Ontario. In spite of everything, we have kept our language and our culture. We have primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and even universities now.

The motion asks that the chief government whip remove a member from this committee. However, this issue doesn't even fall within the purview of our committee. It would really be an abuse of power on the part of the committee. As a result, the motion is out of order.

Obviously, that's why Mr. Godin and Mr. Beaulieu are always together. They're constantly muttering about their strategy.

In terms of the motion, I find that, when it comes to francophones outside Quebec, the members across the way sometimes have a bit of trouble. I'm a bit jealous that they could work in French. I didn't have the chance to work entirely in French.

In connection with the motion, we can also talk about the court challenges program. I'm also on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We're having trouble right now, because the Conservatives don't want the court challenges program bill to go through. They have already cancelled this program twice. This program has helped us francophones. It has helped the case for our schools. Mr. Godin's father was also involved with the Montfort Hospital case and with helping primary schools.

The francophone community outside Quebec is closely tied to the motion.

I liked the comments that you made earlier, Mr. Beaulieu, about working together. I couldn't agree more. It's high time the Bloc Québécois thought about francophones outside Quebec. You can laugh about it, Mr. Beaulieu, but the comments that you made earlier were a bit insulting. You said that only 10% of francophones were outside Quebec. I hope that you weren't implying that these francophones didn't need help and that it was a waste of money.

• (1940)

**The Chair:** One moment, Mr. Serré.

I would like to remind the committee that all comments must be addressed to the chair. This will prevent tension from building up. I absolutely don't want tension to build up in the room.

Mr. Serré, again, please get back to Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just finish by saying that there are plenty of precedents here. We can talk about the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. I encourage the public to take five minutes to listen to one of this committee's meetings. The members of Parliament had to wave to vote, because people were shouting so much. It was unbelievable. Yet there weren't any consequences for the Conservatives.

In terms of this motion, the two components related to the chief government whip and the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie fall completely outside the scope of the committee's work. As other members said earlier, I also think that we should move on to important matters. We have a meeting next Thursday. Hopefully, we can focus on the issues that matter to the community. The Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario has asked us to do this, and the committee heard the same thing last Thursday. The needs are considerable across Canada, including in Quebec, where the French language is in decline. The Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario has made this clear and has implored the committee members to work together.

Mr. Godin will say that he isn't making this a personal matter. Yet, on this side of the room, when we look at motions that aren't even in order, that fall outside the scope of the committee and that aren't even committee business, it's quite hard not to take things personally. I think that it's time to start looking at what matters to francophone communities and minority language communities across the country.

Mr. Beaulieu, I could refer to many more articles of this nature. I haven't even touched on the cuts that the Conservatives want to make to Radio-Canada, which would significantly affect francophones across Canada.

• (1945)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I have a point of order.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** It's all related to the topic.

**The Chair:** One moment, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I'll refer to the same standing order again. We need to get back to the topic for which you summoned us from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. this evening. It's quite clear. I would like my colleague to get back to the topic.

**The Chair:** Mr. Serré, I think that you were just finishing your remarks, right?

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Yes. I was just about to finish my argument.

Yes. That's clear. I understand the comments made by Mr. Godin, who doesn't want to talk about how the Conservatives want to cut Radio-Canada funding across the country. However, I think that this issue is related to the topic of the motion, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Serré, let's get back to the motion. This is your second chance.

Had you finished speaking, Mr. Serré?

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Yes.

**The Chair:** I'll now give the floor to Mr. Drouin, and then to Mr. Samson.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since I'm the subject of this discussion, I'd like to look at my colleagues and, for the sixth time, offer my sincere apologies to the witnesses. We all run out of patience from time to time, but never in eight years have I behaved as I did on Monday, May 6.

That said, there seems to be a double standard. I invite my colleagues to look at the behaviour of other MPs on other committees or in the House of Commons who are, I imagine, judging me.

First, I know full well that the Leader of the Conservative Party has called the mayors of the two largest municipalities in Quebec, which are also the two largest francophone municipalities in North America, incompetent. What did the other side of the House say? It was radio silence.

With all due respect, the debate is no longer about my apologizing. Instead, this is fodder for petty politics. I'm well aware of that. I've been observing politics for a long time. I understand that people on the other side are frustrated. It's nothing against me personally, and I know that full well. The Bloc Québécois is nonetheless engaging in a misinformation campaign against me by saying that I don't support the francophonie.

I'll quote what the Deputy Whip of the Bloc Québécois said on Friday, May 10, the last day the House sat, "the Liberal member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell spent his 15 minutes of fame denying the decline of French in Quebec..." Did I actually deny the decline of French? Did I actually say so publicly? I encourage my colleagues to look at what I said.

Let us recall some of the words that have been used. Mr. Beaulieu employed in particular the words "to use". It's curious, because I clearly remember the comments made in the House on February 7, 2023, by his party's House leader, the member for La Prairie, and other comments by Mr. Beaulieu, the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île. When people say that we are using our disputes and various battles, I wonder who is really trying to divide francophones in the House or in communities that might have a different vision about how to defend their own language.

First, I want to quote Mr. Therrien, who said, "the Liberal member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell said this morning: 'The smoke show led by some of my colleagues is shameful. The Island of Montreal does not have a monopoly on linguistic policy in Canada...'" Does Mr. Beaulieu truly believe that I wasn't defending the Charter of the French Language and Quebec's Bill 96 when I made the comments reported by his House leader?

I'll now quote the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île: "Yesterday, a Franco-Ontarian member had the courage to speak out against the appalling spectacle these members were putting on and the false information they are spreading about Bill 101." Once again, I would dare say that, on February 7, 2023, my dear colleague didn't think that I was denying the decline of French in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada.

That's not all. I spoke earlier about the CEO of insults, Mr. Pierre Poilievre, who insulted two francophone mayors. Those comments by the leader of the official opposition resulted in no reaction on the opposite side of the House. Yet they're now demanding that I withdraw from the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I'll repeat what my dear colleague, the member for Portneuf—

Jacques-Cartier, for whom I still have a great deal of respect, said: just because it's legal, that does not make it ethical.

I think I understand why people want to talk about this today. I know full well that some Conservative MPs billed their expenses to attend partisan events. I could ask the Conservative members of the committee whether they did, but I know that's not the topic of today's discussion. We will have plenty of time to discuss that.

Earlier, I offered my apologies. My mother taught me that there were only two perfect people in the universe: my mother and God.

• (1950)

I also remember the teachings of my father, Yves Drouin. I'm proud to be his son. He was a founding member of the Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario, along with Jean-Marc Lalonde and Gisèle Lalonde. Gisèle Lalonde was the person who fought for the Montfort Hospital.

This brings me to a question: Who deserves to be a member of this committee? I said some offensive things and I admit it. I've apologized, six times now. I know it was beneath me to create an environment that was disrespectful to the witnesses. I fully recognize that. I don't usually do that. Nonetheless, I want to believe that my actions carry far more weight than any words or things I may have said to someone to whom I was obstinate and disrespectful.

We all fought for the enumeration of rights holders, whether it was me, my francophone community outside Quebec, or even you, Mr. Chair. Why was the enumeration of rights holders so important? It's because we knew that some questions in the long-form census estimated the number of rights holders, but that the courts didn't recognize that number. Now, those questions are also part of the short form. That means that every francophone outside Quebec is now counted and has legal weight in the fight for a francophone school, for example.

However, not all francophone communities have the means to take their fight to court. Some need to use the court challenges program. However, the Conservative Party opposes that program. I hope that Conservative MPs, including those on the Standing Committee on Official Languages, will have the courage to tell Mr. Poilievre that they disagree with him about the program. In the 1990s, specifically in 1998, a Franco-Ontarian community told Mike Harris and his Conservative government that they disagreed with the closure of Ontario's only French-language hospital. Personally, 19 years later, I used the services offered in French at the Montfort hospital when I had a child. Of course, it wasn't me who had the child, and for that I owe a debt of gratitude to my wife. That said, I was able to speak in French with hospital staff, and it's thanks to the people before me who fought for the French language.

Then they call me anti-francophone. Let me remind you of the whole issue of bilingual judges. Mona Fortier, who is sitting next to me, can attest to this. Even when my own government was against this measure, we stood up and said we didn't agree with them. Today, we're very proud that it was part of Bill C-13. We stood up, even when our own government told us it didn't support the bill at that time. To achieve this, Franco-Ontarians and other francophone communities outside Quebec had to stand up. In fact, I'd like to acknowledge Mr. Samson's efforts in this regard. Mrs. Koutrakis wasn't with us at the time, but that's okay, Mr. Serré was. We all fought for it.

The fact remains that I'm being asked to apologize and that people feel I don't deserve to be a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. The Bloc Québécois is questioning my commitment to the francophonie, and I don't accept that. It's an attack on my integrity. But I respect it and recognize that it's petty politics.

During the debate surrounding the creation of the Université de l'Ontario français, I made an announcement that was not popular within my own community. I didn't agree with the idea that the federal government should fund 100% of the Université de l'Ontario français. Why not? Because I didn't want it to encourage the provinces to withdraw from our post-secondary institutions. Today, we have an agreement that extends over eight years instead of four. By the way, I'm not the only one who made that happen; I say that very humbly. Even two years ago, we would've had to fight for funding from provincial authorities.

If I've expressed disagreement, it's not because I'm wearing red or blue or orange or pale blue. I did it because, first and foremost, I always wear green and white. I have those colours tattooed on my heart.

● (1955)

I'd now like to come back to the apology being demanded of me, and the double standard that exists.

I'm being asked to apologize, but I'd like to remind the committee that there is a French-speaking community in Canada that feels hurt by comments made by the leader of the Bloc Québécois. With all due respect for Mr. Beaulieu and the MP for La Prairie, I have yet to hear someone call for their leader to apologize. Well, that's not for me to judge. Six years ago, I adopted a personal policy of not commenting on Quebec affairs, and I'll stick to that.

That said, why the double standard? Is one francophone community more important than another? My answer is no. The Quebec nation is just as important as the Franco-Ontarian community, and the Franco-Ontarian community is just as important as the Franco-Albertan community, and so on, not to mention Acadian communities which, like yours, Mr. Chair, or like that of my friend Mr. Samson, have also suffered injustices in the past.

That's where we are at.

If I may, I'd like to express a sentiment felt by francophone communities outside Quebec. I'm going to say something positive about Bloc Québécois MPs: I applaud their efforts to defend francophone communities outside Quebec. However, whenever some of their

staff or columnists call us lame ducks, dead ducks, *cadavres chauds*, communities on life support or, as we heard recently, Cajuns who speak gibberish, the Bloc Québécois says nothing. I'd like to know why the Bloc says nothing. If we really want to unite francophone communities across Canada and francophones in Quebec, we have to listen to those who may not have the same opinion as us, but who all have an interest in defending the French language.

I've often said that, personally, I don't have the luxury of waking up in French. My wife is English-speaking; love has no language. However, every morning, I choose to speak to my son in French. My wife and I also chose to send our son to a French school. Since then, things have been going great.

It's true that I am part of the majority in my riding, but my community is part of a minority. The beauty is that more and more francophones are joining our community. Even so, we know that we need to rely on francophone immigration. For francophone communities outside Quebec, it's no longer up for debate.

I'll now come back to the apology I'm being asked to make.

I've apologized six times already. If someone wants to table a motion asking me to walk barefoot to the Vatican and be whipped, I'll do it. However, I don't accept people saying that I'm not defending the francophonie, because that's an attack on my integrity. It's an attack not only on my integrity, but also on that of the Drouins who preceded me. Incidentally, my ancestors arrived on Île d'Orléans in 1634.

I know that some members opposite don't really enjoy listening to long speeches. I'd like to remind you that we all make mistakes. I made a mistake and I've admitted it. In fact, I admitted my mistake immediately and, less than a second later, withdrew my comments.

● (2000)

This has never been my typical behaviour, unlike Mrs. Thomas, for example, who constantly insults other MPs or witnesses, including Minister St-Onge, as my colleague Mr. Serré mentioned. I would also remind the committee that the Conservative leader didn't listen to the Speaker of the House of Commons at all. The Speaker asked him to withdraw his words not once, not twice, not three times, but four times, and he never did. So who is disrespecting our parliamentary institution? That's the fundamental question.

I don't want to talk endlessly, because I know it's after 8 p.m., but I'd like to remind the committee of one thing: the little Cajun who speaks gibberish in Ontario, well, his family has been speaking gibberish in Ontario for ages, and families have been speaking gibberish in Ontario and speaking Cajun for ages too. It's extremely insulting to be called that. It's extremely insulting to be called dead ducks.

I'm reaching out to my colleagues. I'll even salute the Legault government, which has repeatedly indicated its willingness to work together to promote Canada's francophonie. I'd also like to salute my own government, which not only passed a bill to support the Canadian francophonie and defend the official languages, but also earmarked an investment of \$4.1 billion over five years for that purpose.

I remember that the last Conservative government, of which the current Conservative Party leader was a cabinet member, froze funding for 10 years. I don't need to do the math to you to explain that, with 10 years of inflation, that hurt official language minority communities.

I recognize what my colleagues are trying to do. I salute them and I still respect them. They're not making it personal, it's petty politics, I understand that full well. However, they're talking out of both sides of their mouth when it comes to what I'm saying and what some of their colleagues in their own caucus are saying.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Sampson, you have the floor. Then it will be Mr. Beaulieu's turn.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really enjoyed hearing from my fellow member Mr. Drouin. His comments clearly illustrated the work he has done and continues to do to promote French in Canada. We need people like him to carry on the battle, which is practically never-ending. Through Bill C-13, we can go further in the battle and make more gains. That said, when the Official Languages Act is reviewed in 10 years, there will still be work to do.

Where I'm from, we say that people need to be soldiers to defend the cause. You have to have a backbone and be there for your people. Mr. Drouin has just clearly explained his journey up to now. Being very young, he still has a lot to offer. I am counting on him to continue the work that will have to be done.

What I want to say this evening is that I am very disappointed in the parties that are playing cheap politics.

The show's over now. You stressed the importance of respecting witnesses, but this is an attack on a person's reputation. That is where we stand today.

I am reaching out to my opposition colleagues. Some of them have been on this committee since 2015. I believe that is the case for Mr. Généreux. Some of them may have been on it even before I arrived. I am reaching out to them. It's time to move on to committee business. I understand that their respective leaders and parties are pressuring them. I get that. All parties do it. However, it takes people with principles, people with a backbone, people who take the space they need to advance French language and culture. What I'm asking them to do is take a stand within their party. It's not easy, but I encourage them to do so. They know as well as I do that this game has run its course.

My colleague from the Bloc Québécois, for whom I have a great deal of respect, mentioned the fact that the leader of the official opposition had been expelled from the House of Commons. This is

our democratic institution, where the Speaker is responsible for ensuring democracy. However, the reason the leader of the official opposition was expelled from the House was that he did not apologize. He hasn't apologized, while my colleague Mr. Drouin has apologized six times so far. We need a soldier like him to support francophone communities and stop the decline of French.

We're all working toward the cause. It's time to stand up to your leaders and make them understand that you've made your point and it is now time to call off the hunt. Mr. Drouin has apologized. He is a soldier and he will continue to support the cause. That's where I stand. It's no longer about a motion or anything of the sort. Tell the truth: Your party does not want you to stop fighting. It wants you to continue the hunt, this attack on a soldier's reputation. I'm sorry, but it's time you looked in the mirror. I'm not pointing fingers at anyone in particular. It's everyone's responsibility.

● (2005)

I understand that it is not easy, that it can hurt and that it takes guts. That said, you were elected because you have principles. I want to appeal to your emotions. I know they're in there somewhere. I know that your leader told you to set aside your emotions and forget your dedication to the French language. He told you that it didn't matter and that you had to attack a soldier's reputation and hunt him down, even though he apologized.

However, as was mentioned earlier, when a Conservative member disrespected a minister, she apologized and everything was instantly fine. It was all over. There was no attack on her reputation, and there was no battle royal.

That's where I stand. Stop playing political games, and let's get to work. We have only a year and a half left to complete our work, including an extremely important study on the funding of post-secondary institutions, a topic that was proposed by my colleague Mr. Beaulieu. My colleague Ms. Ashton wants to talk about early childhood services, which is a crucial component of education, as education is a vital component of society.

As you know, I and a number of other people around the table want to talk about funding for school boards. In the 1990s, for the first time in Canada's history, we got the right to education in French, separate from the anglophone school boards. From that point on, we had the right to determine our own destiny.

You may be wondering why I'm talking about this. I'm actually talking about you. Stop thinking that you have to follow your party line and your leader. This is not a partisan issue. Enough with the political gamesmanship. I'm asking you to do what's right for French. You are all here to continue the battle, because, as I explained, it is always a battle. Bill C-13 is a great tool box that will help us enormously, but we can never give up the fight.

It's time to find the strength to light your own way. Remember that you are soldiers who should support the other soldiers who are defending the cause of French in Canada. Tell your party that the war on the reputation of a soldier who has been defending this cause since he was very young, like his family, is over. How many times does a person have to apologize?

I want us to stop playing political games. I know that your leader has asked you to put forward a motion to continue to criticize a soldier and attack his reputation. I am asking all members who have influence within their party to use it. I had that experience myself when I voted against my party on Bill C-13 on a number of occasions. I know it's not easy. Did I score any points? Probably not. Did I lose any? I don't think I did, because I stood by my principles. When a journalist asked me how I felt after voting against my party, I told him that I did not vote against my party, but rather, that I voted according to my principles.

● (2010)

I would like to know which soldiers on the other side are acting according to their principles. Light your own way and make decisions to support the soldiers who are defending the cause of French-speaking communities in Canada. That's all I'm asking. Rein in your motions, get out your tools and let's get to work together.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Samson.

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu, to be followed by Ms. Ashton.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** If I understand correctly, I now have the floor. You said earlier that you weren't going to give it to me, Mr. Chair, but if you're giving it to me, great, I'll take it.

**The Chair:** No, I didn't say that earlier, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That was my understanding.

I simply want to say that, as soon as our second-last meeting began, people wanted to sweep this matter under the rug. Mr. Drouin has made half-hearted apologies. Whether or not he is a defender of French in Ontario is ultimately not the main issue here.

After that, there was a filibuster for an entire meeting. We are forced to use Standing Order 106(4) to get the committee back on topic. Why is there so much filibustering? It's to prevent the committee from going to a vote. However, we are allowed to be of the opinion that Mr. Drouin has disqualified himself from his mandate to help promote the French language internationally and to showcase the vitality of French in Quebec, the heartland of the French language in the Americas.

He is not an extremist like Mr. Housefather or other members who are more... I said "extremist", but I will withdraw the word. The fact remains that some members have said certain things. For example, Mr. Rodriguez said that, in wanting to apply Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses, the Bloc Québécois was dividing people based on their skin colour. I didn't hear anyone censure him for that. I am anti-racist. When witnesses suggested that we were racist, I was the only one to speak up. No one else supported Quebec on that.

We have to consider not only what happened during the meeting itself, but also what happened afterwards. At the beginning, the member said that he wouldn't tolerate being taken for a fool and being given an argument that did not hold water. I am sorry, but it is a valid argument. The member may not agree, but when he says that people are taking him for a fool, he is still accusing people of advancing arguments that do not hold water. In my opinion, there's a difference between saying that someone is incompetent, saying that someone is taking us for fools and saying that a witness is "full of shit".

I think the member misrepresented what the witnesses said. I am happy that he has provided some clarifications, but in my opinion, it's too little, too late.

I also don't think it's appropriate to bring up the dead ducks matter again and all those things that were said 40 years ago. If we looked at all the things that have been said over the past 40 years, we could dig up a lot.

● (2015)

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

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

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, there needs to be a little decorum around the table. I see that the members opposite are talking while my colleague has the floor. I think we need to have a modicum of respect. We haven't said a word for a while now.

**The Chair:** Frankly, Mr. Godin, if the microphones had been on, I would have intervened.

I often see you turn around to talk to members of your team or not listen to a member on the other side who has the floor. These things happen frequently in committee. Frankly, you're the first to consult your assistants while someone is speaking. It goes both ways: You, as well as every other member of the committee, have the right to do so.

If other microphones had been open at the same time, I would have intervened. You don't raise a point of order because someone doesn't look the person who has the floor in the eye.

Mr. Beaulieu, you may continue.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In short, I don't consider this to be reputational damage.

We feel that Mr. Drouin went too far. I have no doubt that he is an advocate for Franco-Ontarians. But he can't say that we don't defend the francophonie. He was there, along with Mr. Serré and all the other Liberal members, when we had the clause-by-clause study of Bill C-13. They witnessed how we defended, even more than any other party, all the positions of the francophone and Acadian communities. To say that we don't defend the French language is misinformation.

Even before becoming an MP, I supported the Montfort Hospital. My colleagues and I participated in rallies for the Université de l'Ontario français.

We're not trying to tell francophones outside Quebec what to do. I've always supported their positions. Even if sometimes I think it doesn't go far enough, that's none of my business.

What Mr. Drouin has done, in my opinion, is really show contempt—

• (2020)

**Mr. Marc Serré:** On a point of order.

**The Chair:** Wait a moment, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Mr. Chair, I would like to ask Mr. Beaulieu if he can show me newspaper articles proving that he supported francophones outside Quebec.

**The Chair:** This is a point of argument; it's not a point of order.

Mr. Beaulieu, keep to the subject of your motion as much as possible.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In any case, I could demonstrate this with the help of this committee's minutes.

I would like to say that I consider the motion to be in order. It would be out of order if it proclaimed the MP's resignation. On the other hand, we have the right to believe that he must resign, if a vote held here goes in that direction. Our committee has the right to vote and to have an opinion. In the aftermath, the committee will report and it will be up to the higher authorities to decide.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We will end with Ms. Ashton—

**Mr. Marc Serré:** On a point of order.

**The Chair:** Wait a moment, Ms. Ashton.

You have the floor, Mr. Serré.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Mr. Chair, earlier I heard Mr. Beaulieu refer to another MP as an extremist. He withdrew his remarks, but did not apologize.

Can we ask Mr. Beaulieu to apologize for making this comment?

**The Chair:** As quickly as I can, I'll reiterate what I've already said. Neither the committee nor the chair can impose sanctions or disciplinary measures. All I can do is ask a member to withdraw his or her words or comments made in the heat of the moment. Mr. Beaulieu did so immediately of his own accord, as did Mr. Drouin. As chair, I can't demand anything of a committee member.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** But—

**The Chair:** Wait a moment, Mr. Beaulieu. Ms. Ashton has the floor for the moment.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Thank you very much.

First of all, I must say that I am disappointed that we have to hold a second meeting during a constituency week, especially since today is a holiday when we should be with our families. It's a very busy week for many of us. Here in western Canada, we've had some historic forest fires, including in my riding. That had to be

dealt with. Unfortunately, we have to deal again with the situation that occurred in our committee.

That said, I think it's important that we meet and take a stand, as a committee, to say that we don't accept the behaviour in question by one of our committee members, and that such behaviour isn't worthy of a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages or a president of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. I think it's important that we take this position. It doesn't just affect one member of the committee; it affects the reputation of the entire committee.

This week, I received comments from several people. I'm going to share with you a comment I heard from someone who is well respected in the francophone community outside Quebec, and whose name I'll keep anonymous. This is someone who has already testified before our committee. In a conversation on a completely different subject, this person raised the fact that they were very concerned about the behaviour of the member of our committee we are talking about today. This francophone person, who is strong and passionate about issues relating to the francophonie, raised the question: Should we expect other witnesses to experience such behaviour when they come to testify before our committee?

This person has a point of view that needs to be heard again at our committee. We need to hear the views and experiences of people like them. However, how many fear the same thing? We invite people to come and share their views, experiences and opinions with us, and we want to treat them with respect. Unfortunately, some people are already wondering if they too will be the subject of such behaviour if one of us disagrees with them.

That's why I think it's essential that, as a committee, we take a stand to say that this kind of behaviour is not worthy of a member of this committee or of a president of a parliamentary assembly that represents us internationally.

I also want to add that we in the NDP do not question Mr. Drouin's or any other member of this committee's commitment to the defence of the French language. It's unfortunate that this conversation has become so intense and that we see such a defence around this table, because I don't think that's what we're talking about. We're talking about behaviour that showed a lack of respect not only for the witnesses present, but also for this committee and for future witnesses.

Finally, as I've mentioned to other members of the committee, we've been in politics for a while. For my part, I've had the privilege of being a member of Parliament for almost 16 years. You know that, like many of you, I'm very passionate about many issues. On several occasions, I've expressed my disagreement with other members of a committee, whether it be this one or another. I've even disagreed with several witnesses who have come before us, but never like what we've seen recently.

● (2025)

You say the MP has apologized, but you want to continue without taking any further action. For example, the MP could take a break and distance himself from the committee and the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie in order to reflect on what he has done and the consequences of his action on the committee's reputation. However, this is not the case and, in my opinion, demonstrates a troubling arrogance.

Unfortunately, this isn't the first time we've seen arrogance from politicians. That said, I don't think it's representative of the spirit of our committee, a committee that worked hard on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, a committee that shows its respect for all official language minority communities, whether they're francophone or anglophone.

This is our party's position on this issue. The committee's reputation is at stake. We have to think about the message we're sending to future witnesses as well as to the Canadians and Quebeckers who follow our work. It's about the reputation of this committee.

For our part, in the NDP, we hope that the committee will be able to express an opinion on this issue. We hope to be able to continue to work with an emphasis on respect despite disagreements. This spirit of respect must be an integral part of our work as a committee, now and in the future.

It is for this reason that we support the motion that has been proposed. We hope that the committee can come to a decision on this matter as soon as possible.

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

I have now heard from everyone who wanted to speak on the motion.

I'll read the motion again. Mr. Beaulieu, you'll let me know if I'm reading it correctly, as you have—

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** I had raised my hand, but did I do so too late?

**The Chair:** It's because I want to rule on the admissibility of the motion.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** All right. I'll let you continue, Mr. Chair, but you should know that I've thought of some things I'd like to pass on to the committee in relation to this motion.

**The Chair:** Yes, but I had said earlier that after Ms. Ashton's speech, I was going to rule on the admissibility of the motion. We'll see afterwards.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** That's fine.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, your proposed motion would therefore be as follows, including the preamble:

That given the obscene and offensive comments made by the Liberal MP for Gengarry—Prescott—Russell to a witness defending the cause of the French language in Quebec, the committee report to the House:

(a) that the Chief Government Whip and member of the Liberal leadership team immediately remove MP Francis Drouin from the Standing Committee on Official Languages and;

(b) that MP Francis Drouin resign as the Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

Is that correct, Mr. Beaulieu?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Yes. I'm saying it so that it goes into the blues and transcripts.

I've thought about it, I've done some reading, and I've consulted people who know more about the procedure than we do, if I may say so.

With regard to the admissibility or inadmissibility of this motion, I repeat what I said not so long ago, that neither the chair nor even the committee can sanction or censure the remarks of a committee member. This is clearly stated in Standing Order 117 of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.

My comments concern this committee. I'll come back later to the question of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, or APF.

With respect to the committee, Chapter 20 of our Interpretation Manual on House of Commons Procedure and Practice states that “neither committees nor their chairs have the authority to censure an act of disorder or misconduct”.

Let me remind you of the facts. During Mr. Lacroix's testimony, Mr. Drouin asked him a question, and he uttered the words we know. I had already raised my mallet. Even before I used it to ask Mr. Drouin to withdraw his words, he did so of his own accord.

The chair or the committee cannot measure the degree of sincerity of Mr. Drouin's words. I'm referring to your words, Mr. Beaulieu. You said earlier that he had paid lip service to his apology. It's not our job to measure the sincerity of an apology when a person withdraws his words. So I remind you that, before I had time to do my job as chair and bang the gavel to ask him to withdraw his words, Mr. Drouin was already apologizing.

Except for the chair banging the gavel to restore order in a committee, neither the chair nor a committee has the power to do more, such as request punitive measures or measures similar to those called for in the motion. I'm talking, for example, about asking the whip to remove the member from the committee or requesting that he resign from the APF. These are affirmative steps that neither the chair nor even the committee can take.

This eventuality is provided for in our Standing Orders. I'm not interpreting the Standing Orders. It's there in black and white. We can always report to the House, but that's what the Standing Orders say.

Let's look at paragraph (a) of the motion. In this paragraph, it's as if the committee were giving itself the right to choose who became a member and who was to be excluded from the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We know it's not our job to do so. I just want to point out how inadmissible this is and how it doesn't align with the Standing Orders.

Let's also look at paragraph (b) of the motion. I'll draw a parallel. Let's imagine that MP Francis Drouin is required to resign as president of the Richelieu International organization. This organization is dedicated to youth and the French-speaking world. I don't know if this exists in Quebec, but back home, that's exactly what he's doing.

Following such a scenario, Richelieu International members would wonder why a parliamentary committee is telling them what to do, when its rules are clearly established. The organization itself decides who can become a member and whom it will exclude. The parallel is exactly the same with the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. Even Parliament can't ask the APF to decide who should or shouldn't be a member, or who should or shouldn't be excluded. That's not a matter for a committee.

I quote again from chapter 20: "However, neither committees nor their chairs have the authority to censure an act of disorder or misconduct." Now, acts of disorder and misconduct must still have occurred. They have, and were resolved when the MP apologized before he had even finished his sentence. If the disorder had continued, I, as chair, could have suspended the meeting until order had been restored. If order is not restored, I can adjourn the meeting. That's provided for in the Standing Orders.

On this point, neither the committee nor the chair needed to go that far, because, what had been said by Mr. Drouin in unparliamentary terms, was withdrawn on the spot.

• (2030)

We respect the regulatory framework imposed on us by the House of Commons. Again, I explain that I'm not interpreting a grey area. I'm not saying that's what I think it means. I'm reading to you verbatim what our rules say. We can report to the House of Commons, but we can't ask whips or anyone else to accept or exclude a member of this committee, because that's not up to the committee.

Neither can we tell an autonomous organization, with its own internal rules and regulations and absolutely not subject to the rules of this committee, who will or will not be a member of its association.

I am telling you this very seriously because I would find it embarrassing for members of the committee if the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie were to turn to us and ask, "What are you meddling with, gentlemen and ladies of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, what are you doing, who do you think you are?" That's why I'm telling you that I find the fact that I don't understand the situation a little embarrassing.

We have rules. I'm ruling on the admissibility, as expressed by Mr. Beaulieu, of this motion relating to the letter of May 17, 2024.

In my opinion, the motion is out of order. I reiterate that it is because that is how our rules are established. I'm going to suspend the meeting for just a minute while I consult with the clerk.

• (2035)

(Pause)

• (2035)

**The Chair:** I'll come back to the example I gave earlier, which may be closer to home. I was drawing a parallel with Richelieu International. It's as if the chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence were asking the president of the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to resign. I just want to let you know how embarrassing it would be for us as members of this committee if we did that.

Having said that, my ruling has been made, and I've given you the reasons for my ruling.

Next on my list I have Ms. Fortier and Mr. Godin.

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

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. The next speakers are Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Fortier and Mr. Godin.

I see that Mr. Godin has a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Actually, Mr. Chair, I think we need to debate your ruling.

Ms. Fortier had asked for the floor before you started.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu is next.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay, we'll let Mr. Beaulieu make his intervention.

However, Mr. Chair, you understand that Ms. Fortier asked to speak, so you hadn't even begun to state your decision. That's what I was trying to tell you.

**The Chair:** I agree with you, but Ms. Fortier raised her hand again afterwards. There are two of us here, just to keep track of the raised hands.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Where am I on the list?

**The Chair:** You're third.

The next speakers are Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Fortier and Mr. Godin.

Mr. Beaulieu, you were the first to raise your hand. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'm actually challenging your ruling. I don't see this as an attempt to expel the member. We're simply asking that the committee report the situation to the House. Our position is that Mr. Drouin should not be on the committee.

Furthermore, as far as the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie is concerned, members will be voting. They're going to vote, but the Liberals are recruiting a lot of members to try to prevent Mr. Drouin from being relieved of his duties as president of the APF. It's not independent of Parliament, unless I—

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, clearly, if you're asking—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I call the vote.

**The Chair:** That's what I was going to say, that there is no discussion, unless you want to add further comments on that.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** No, but if—

**The Chair:** If you challenge the chair, there's no debate.

Is that what you're doing?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes.



**The Chair:** Great. We'll go to the vote right away.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

• (2040)

**The Chair:** The ruling of the chair is therefore overturned.

The next speakers are Ms. Fortier, Mr. Godin and Mr. Serré.

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I'm going to pass because I don't know what we're going to discuss, now that your ruling has been overturned.

**The Chair:** We're back to Mr. Beaulieu's motion, which I read verbatim earlier.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** So we're discussing the motion.

**The Chair:** Yes, we're discussing the motion.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I'll wait to express my opinion. One of my colleagues is going to propose an amendment. I'll give up my time.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Godin, you now have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I wanted to comment on your ruling. Since we won the vote, I will give up my time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Parliamentary committees are masters of their own destiny. The government members are a minority, so we often lose votes, even if it's against the rules. Our chair clearly stated that a committee cannot censure a member, referring to chapter 20 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Now we're back to the motion, and I would like to move an amendment. I do so in the spirit of what we talked about earlier. Mr. Samson spoke at length, as did Mr. Beaulieu, about reaching out to see how we could try to resolve the situation.

The chair has made it clear that no committee can censure a member of Parliament or dictate the conduct of an association. The members of the association decide. They're the ones voting, not MPs who aren't members, some of whom may be here tonight.

But I think it would be important here that we still send a message. As we said, an apology needs to be made, and Mr. Drouin has agreed to that—maybe seven times including tonight.

I'm therefore making a proposal in the spirit of what Ms. Ashton said earlier, that the committee must officially pronounce on the situation, which the committee has the right to do as provided in chapter 20. I think that's an important message. As Mr. Samson and Mr. Beaulieu mentioned, I think it would be important to reach out to see how we could resolve the situation.

I'll read the amendment I'm proposing. I would ask the clerk to circulate the text. That way, we can discuss it. If necessary, we could suspend for a few minutes to make sure that everyone has read the amendment.

The amendment retains the first sentence of the motion, since we all agree on that, which reads as follows:

That given the obscene and offensive comments made by the Liberal MP for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to a witness defending the cause of the French language in Quebec,

We're amending the rest of it as follows:

the committee ask the Chair, on behalf of the committee, to apologize in writing to the witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon, regarding the events that took place on May 6.

The committee can vote on that. It has the authority to do so. Clearly, it can be done.

As for the other elements concerning the chief government whip and the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, if the committee wants to continue not to follow the Standing Orders and the chair's decision, we'll lose every vote since the Liberals are here in a minority situation. It's just a reminder that this is actually a requirement of the Standing Orders.

Anyway, I just wanted to say that what I'm proposing is something that the committee has the right to do. Why not do that? As members of a parliamentary committee, we all agree on the principle. In fact, the apology has already been made, and it has been repeated quite often.

Has everyone received the amendment, Mr. Clerk?

• (2045)

**The Chair:** Mr. Serré, I'm going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to make sure everyone has received it. I'll look at it myself.

• (2045)

(Pause)

• (2050)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Serré, I'm going to move that your amendment be reworded as follows. If you don't agree, we'll go back to your wording.

Your amendment would therefore propose that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after “committee” and replacing them with the following:

ask the chair, on behalf of the committee, to apologize in writing to the witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon for the events of May 6.

Mr. Serré, does that capture what you were saying?

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Yes.

**The Chair:** The next speakers on my list to discuss Mr. Serré's amendment are Mr. Godin and Ms. Fortier.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, since my comments won't achieve much, I'm going to give up my right to speak.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure for me to once again participate in the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Last week aside, it's been a while since I've been at a meeting. It's obviously a real pleasure to be here with you as a proud Franco-Ontarian, despite the circumstances.

I would like to thank my colleague for proposing an amendment, which I think is really reasonable. I say it's reasonable, because even though Mr. Drouin gave in to some rancour in addressing the witnesses in that way, he has apologized. What's more, he has also done so in writing, which may put an end to the debate and allow us to move on.

I don't know if you know this, but as a Franco-Ontarian, I've lived in a minority community for 51 years, and I've been working in that environment since I was in high school. I've seen a lot. Tonight I remember all the struggles I've taken part in. I even remember the ones my parents and grandparents took part in. I don't know why all these memories and emotions are coming back to me, and I certainly won't go through the chronology of events that I've experienced. However, I can tell you that my colleague Francis Drouin, who is fighting and working hard to promote and defend the francophonie, deserves to continue his work. Now that he's apologized, he deserves to continue it at this table, as well as elsewhere.

I truly believe that this amendment will allow us to move on to other topics. There are so many! If I understand correctly, you're conducting a study on federal funding for post-secondary institutions. I could go on at length about this, since I had the privilege of working at La Cité College for almost seven years. So I can tell you that funding is something I'm very familiar with. At La Cité, I was responsible for recruiting students at both the national and international levels. As you know, because of the funding formulas, there are negotiations with the provincial government, with the federal government's contribution. This enables our institutions to offer quality programs in French, both at La Cité and elsewhere. So I think this is an important study.

I listened to what my opposition colleagues had to say. It had to do with the good work that's being done here. I'm disappointed, however, that Minister Boissonnault wasn't able to speak at a meeting, but I suspect that we will eventually be able to focus on this study.

My argument today could take a long time, but I want to come back to the fact that my colleague Marc Serré has found a solution, I believe. If I understand correctly, Mr. Chair, you would send a formal letter of apology to the two witnesses. My colleague Francis Drouin has apologized for a sixth time this evening. I sincerely believe that the time has come to continue our efforts to counter the decline of French.

I agree that this concerns both Quebec and the country as a whole. That's why you've been working hard on this committee. I have also worked hard to advance the modernization of the Official Languages Act. I'm very proud to say that Treasury Board will have

a role to play. I think that's precisely a role you have assigned to it in your study on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

There's really a lot of work to be done. I sincerely believe that this amendment will help strike a balance. I hope that, in the wake of this letter, it will be possible to move on and continue the work.

So I support your amendment, colleague.

● (2055)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fortier.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Today, we talked about the importance of working together. We talked about the individuals around this table who have defended and continue to defend the cause we're talking about. We said that it was time to take it into account.

I think the proposal that the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages send a letter on behalf of the committee to offer a formal apology brings an end to the debate. This is an opportunity to move on to the very important work that is under way.

If we don't support this amendment and this motion, it means that we're chasing down individuals and that we don't want to work together or move on to other priorities. Instead, they want to toe the party line and continue the political game. That's my opinion.

I know it's not easy, but I think you can convince your respective parties that a formal letter from the chair of the committee apologizing on behalf of the committee is a door to other important steps. That's why I'll be supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

● (2100)

**The Chair:** The next speakers are Mr. Serré, Mr. Drouin and Mr. Godin.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Mr. Chair, we've been here for two hours.

As Mr. Samson and Ms. Fortier mentioned, this amendment could be resolved quickly. Committee members, through the chair, could condemn the comments made by our colleague. The amendment to the motion before us is clear. If my colleagues have suggestions for improving it, that's fine, but, as we said, we can't ask the whip or the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie for anything. This amendment is reasonable. We could adopt it and continue our work on funding post-secondary institutions.

I worked for Collège Boréal for years, and then I was a school board trustee for school boards. The education continuum is an important issue to me. All members of the committee agree that this is important. Why can't we vote on the amendment quickly? However, I don't think we're going to have time to do that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Serré.

I see that there are still people who want to speak, but we're two minutes over the two hours.

I'm going to end the meeting.

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

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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