



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 101

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (0825)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): We are starting the public part of our meeting.

From the outset, I want to tell you that a minor correction must be made to the amendment Mr. Serré proposed for Mr. Beaulieu's motion during the last meeting. In the text of the amendment, a witness is referred to by the name of "Gabriel Bourdon," but his first name is actually Nicolas.

Mr. Beaulieu, I see you raised your hand; you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Basically, we are continuing debate on the motion discussed during the last meeting. Did I understand correctly, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: When we adjourn with no conditions, the motions belong to the entire committee. Lately, there've been several motions: one during the 99th meeting, and Mr. Généreux adjourned the debate on it. One was debated on Monday, and we adjourned the debate on it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I move that the committee continue discussing the motion it was dealing with during the last meeting.

The Chair: Very well.

Since no debate is possible, we will move on to the vote.

Mr. Beaulieu moves that we resume exactly where we left things during the last meeting, which was requested pursuant to Standing Order 106(4).

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

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Actually, it is not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make sure I'm understanding correctly. To be clear, we want the committee to discuss Mr. Serré's motion. Is that right?

The Chair: That's right.

Since everything is clear, we will vote on Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0. [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We are therefore coming back to the amendment moved by Mr. Serré last Monday evening.

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

• (0830)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I don't agree with the amendment. In my opinion, it's not the chair of the committee who should apologize, but the member. I think it distorts the meaning of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Did you want to add something?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Basically, we're now getting bogged down in a debate because of filibustering. Indeed, the Liberal members absolutely do not want the majority to vote. That said, the majority will vote.

What we are asking is that the member resign from the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

Both parts of the motion aren't in the amendment, which distorts the meaning of the motion. I think it's not up to the committee to apologize through its chair; rather, it's up to the member who used offensive language regarding the witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You understand that I cannot agree with Mr. Serré's amendment because it completely changes the meaning of the initial motion.

It's also important to understand that as a member of the committee, I personally do not have to apologize. I will not ask my chair to apologize on behalf of all members of the committee.

Furthermore, I think this amendment is not in order, because it is far from the main idea behind the motion. I ask you to think about it and analyze the situation.

Before continuing the debate, I ask you to rule on the amendment's admissibility, because we're going to waste our time.

I think we have to speed up the debate. On the opposition parties' side, we want to move proceedings forward. We want to move on to something else in the interests of official language minority communities. We have a lot of files to discuss. On our side, we did not spend two and a half meetings filibustering. We want to move on to a vote as quickly as possible to resolve the situation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

You are putting me in a somewhat awkward situation. You're asking me to rule on the motion's admissibility. However, I already ruled that the motion as such was out of order. It's written in black and white that neither this committee, nor even the chair, who has a great deal of leeway and a lot of flexibility within a committee, can reprimand, sanction or censure a member of the committee. That happens elsewhere than at this committee.

I already ruled that the motion was out of order. By majority vote, the committee opposed the chair's decision. I do not feel targeted. It's clearly written in the Standing Orders. It's not a lack of trust in the chair.

You're asking me to rule on the motion's admissibility. As the chair—I repeat, as the chair—I will explain my understanding of this amendment to you.

In a certain sense, this amendment “softens” the motion to put it in order. If you ask me whether the amendment is in order, I will say that it is entirely in order, because it incorporates or transforms the motion's intention in such a way that it becomes admissible as per the committee's procedural rules. If you ask me to decide on the motion's admissibility, I will tell you that it is entirely in order, for the reasons I just explained.

Mr. Godin, I see you raised your hand again. You have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you are reversing the committee's decision. You said that the initial motion was out of order. The committee decided that it was in order. As of now, it is.

• (0835)

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin.

The chair's decision was challenged. That does not put the initial motion in order. It remains out of order, but because the chair's ruling was challenged, we will continue to debate it. As per our procedural rules, the rules for committees, the motion is out of order for the reasons I will not repeat again.

You asked me to rule on the amendment's admissibility. That is what I explained to you.

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, Mr. Chair, if you decide that this amendment is in order, I request a vote to challenge your decision.

The Chair: If you request a vote, there's no discussion. I just want to make sure that everyone understands—

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I raise a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There are people who want to speak and their names are on the list. A vote cannot be requested when there are still names on the list to discuss the amendment.

The Chair: According to the rules of procedure, because the chair's decision is being challenged, we must immediately proceed to a vote.

Mr. Francis Drouin: For our information, Mr. Chair, of what use is the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, our green Bible, to us? Procedure exists, but it's chaos. What good comes of having this green book if the chair's decisions are constantly being challenged?

We have rules to follow, and the opposition is systematically breaching the rules for its own ends. That's what's going on.

The Chair: I cannot judge what you said. All I can tell you is that our book of procedure allows for challenging the chair's decision on an amendment's admissibility, and that process is now in motion. I am not telling you whether I like or dislike it. I'm telling you that the process is now in motion. We now have to vote on my decision regarding the amendment's admissibility.

At the same time, I want to point out to members of the committee that, when contesting the admissibility of an amendment from the jump, before even debating it, we are starting down a slippery slope. I'm not saying it's antidemocratic, but it's close. That is just my opinion as chair. We can propose amendments, debate them and see where that leads us, but I find it somewhat dangerous to challenge the admissibility of an amendment before we've even debated it.

That said, a vote was requested.

Is the chair's ruling sustained?

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

You made a decision regarding the original motion's admissibility. Since our government is a minority, we will lose every one of these votes, that's certain.

We submitted an amendment to put the motion in order, as per the green book and the rules regarding what the committee has a right to do, and they already want to declare it out of order—

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

Mr. Marc Serré: —when we haven't even debated it. They want to vote to overturn your decision, when you clearly explained that this amendment puts the motion in order and in line with the committee's mandate. It does not have the power to instruct the Chief Government Whip. What is happening today is really not acceptable.

The Chair: I appreciate your comment, but the process is in motion.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: I raised a point of order, Mr. Chair, because we are on debate, while the green book referred to earlier clearly states that when a chair's decision is challenged, we proceed immediately to a vote.

I therefore request the vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That is the case, except when points of order are raised regarding the process. I will therefore hear them, as the chair.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

• (0840)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It seems to me that the basic rule in democracy is that the majority rules. You declared the motion out of order and we did not agree, because we had a different interpretation. No one has a lock on the absolute truth. We therefore voted to overturn your ruling and, as it turns out, you're still saying that it's out of order, even though the majority voted against your ruling. On a democratic level, we can call that into question.

I think the majority rules, even when the result of the vote is not to our liking. We can't just agree only when it suits us. That's not how works.

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

Mr. Francis Drouin: Unfortunately for Mr. Beaulieu, on the subject of the majority, our Constitution protects the francophone minority.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Except in Quebec.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We are referring to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, our green book, but we're breaching it at the same time. I find that ironic.

We can now move on to the vote and respect the process, but I find it ironic to refer to the green book while breaching it.

The Chair: Very well.

Before moving on to the vote, I will remind you of what we are voting on. It is on the amendment proposed by Mr. Serré regarding Mr. Beaulieu's motion. The motion, as amended by the amendment, would read as follows:

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 and Québec, the committee asks 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.

Mr. Marc Serré: I raise a point of order, Mr. Chair.

If I understand correctly, every amendment submitted to us that the opposition doesn't like will be considered out of order because we are a minority. We're not even being given the chance to debate the proposed amendment because the opposition only wants its own amendment. I really don't understand it. What is happening again this morning is not acceptable.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I give you the floor.

When you are finished, I will suspend sitting for a moment to consult the committee's assigned personnel.

Mr. Joël Godin: I just wanted to say that it's not a point of order, as you often say in similar cases, and I respect your decision.

The Chair: I will suspend the meeting for a moment.

• (0840)

(Pause)

• (0845)

The Chair: We will now resume the sitting.

Mr. Godin, you asked me to rule on an amendment's admissibility. I did so. You asked to vote on whether to uphold the chair's ruling. We will now do so, but I will first explain to you the reasons why I've come to this conclusion.

I am referring to page 541 of our famous green book, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Third Edition, 2017.

I'm referring to an amendment because that is indeed what is at issue. All right? In the quoted text, it refers to the House of Commons, but committees follow the same procedure.

An amendment should be so framed that, if agreed to, it will leave the main motion intelligible and internally consistent.

An amendment is out of order, procedurally, if:

it is irrelevant to the main motion (i.e., it deals with a matter foreign to the main motion, exceeds its scope, or introduces a new proposition which should properly be the subject of a separate substantial motion with notice);

it raises a question substantially the same as one which the House has decided in the same session or conflicts with an amendment already agreed to;

it is completely contrary to the main motion and would produce the same result as the defeat of the main motion;...

That is what guides us when presiding over a committee meeting dealing with an amendment's admissibility.

I therefore repeat that the amendment moved by Mr. Serré to amend Mr. Beaulieu's motion is in order. The vote was requested. I will not backtrack any further. We are moving on to the vote.

Madam Clerk, you have the floor.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Audrée Dallaire): We are now voting on the following question: "Is the Chair's ruling sustained?"

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Sorry, I'm a bit confused about the voting process and the impact of voting yes or no.

Mr. Chair, could you explain this to me?

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, at Mr. Godin's request, I ruled on whether Mr. Serré's amendment is in order. We aren't discussing Mr. Beaulieu's motion. I ruled that Mr. Serré's amendment is in order, for the reasons that I just explained.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: So yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

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

The Chair: The ruling is in dispute.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: We can't see the picture in ParlVU. Can this situation be resolved?

The Chair: I'm told that the audio works, but that they're trying to fix the picture issue.

We'll suspend the meeting.

• (0845)

(Pause)

• (0850)

The Chair: We'll resume the meeting.

I'm learning at about the same time as you that it apparently isn't unusual to hold public meetings where only the audio is available. I'm told that, in any case, some meeting rooms don't have cameras. This isn't unusual. It's a technical issue that we're trying to resolve this morning. It may be resolved while we hold our meeting. Until then, only the audio will be available.

Remember that the chair's ruling on the admissibility of Mr. Serré's amendment was overturned. Most of the committee considered the amendment out of order and voted accordingly.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

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

As I already said, I'm disappointed that there isn't any video recording. I dare you to watch a television program without video. That would be radio, which isn't the same thing at all. I object to this situation.

I would like to move another amendment, which I believe could help move the matter forward and improve Mr. Beaulieu's motion. I think that it's being passed around.

Have you received it?

• (0855)

The Chair: No. I haven't received it yet.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's in both official languages.

The Chair: The clerk is currently working on this. It will be done shortly.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Let me know when I can read it.

The Chair: Okay.

Fortunately, the staff around us are extremely efficient and the work is getting done.

In the meantime, we'll take a short break.

• (0855)

(Pause)

• (0900)

The Chair: We'll resume the meeting.

Please take your seats.

Mr. Beaulieu, I believe that you had a point of order.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In my opinion, the amendment moved by my colleague is no more in order than the previous one. It completely changes the meaning of the motion.

You can tell us whether it's in order.

The Chair: Mr. Samson can move his amendment in the usual way.

First, I want to inform Mr. Godin and Mr. Samson that the cameras are back up front. I also want to say that the well-known expression “in camera” is Latin. It has nothing to do with the camera itself. It means “in chambers”, or “behind closed doors”. Let's not draw the wrong parallel between “the camera” and “in camera”.

We're back in public, with both picture and sound.

Mr. Samson, everyone has received your proposed amendment. The floor is yours.

Mr. Darrell Samson: First, I'm pleased that our meeting is back to being broadcast on video, and not just with audio. It was really necessary to continue our work.

That the motion be amended:

a. by deleting the words “report to the House”, and point a).

b. by replacing the words “that MP Francis Drouin resign as the Chair of the” with the words “write to the clerk of the”.

c. by adding after the words “l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie”, the following “—section canadienne to call a meeting to vote on the presidency of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie—section canadienne”.

I think that this strengthens the motion moved by my colleague, Mr. Beaulieu. As you can see, we're trying to give the committee the tools needed to solve this problem. For almost nine years, this committee has been working closely with the political parties to advance the francophonie.

I think that this amendment improves the motion. That's why I'm moving it.

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

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, regarding my colleague's amendment, we know quite well that the Standing Committee on Official Languages has no authority over parliamentary associations. This includes the Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association, to which the Bloc Québécois belongs, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, to which it also belongs. Incidentally, I find this a bit odd, because it relates to the King. However, that's the Bloc Québécois' issue, not mine.

I'll get back to the amendment. A committee doesn't vote on the workings of parliamentary associations. The Standing Committee on National Defence, for example, never votes on the workings or membership of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly or any other association. The same applies to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Committees don't vote on the workings of parliamentary associations. The members of these associations do so.

When this motion was moved, some members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages weren't even members of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. They wanted to vote on the workings of an association to which they didn't even belong. You know that, at the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, the members can vote. Parliamentarians are free to decide whether to join the association.

Mr. Samson's amendment strikes me as reasonable. It makes the motion admissible, since the committee and you, Mr. Chair, don't have any authority over parliamentary associations. Mr. Samson's amendment addresses the inadmissible points that remain the subject of debate, since the opposition challenged your ruling that the motion was out of order.

In addition, the members of the Canadian section of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie will be voting on the issue this evening. If the Standing Committee on Official Languages wanted to vote on this issue, you could write to the clerk or the vice-chair seated to my right. I think that this would be more reasonable than moving an inadmissible motion.

Lastly, I have a question. Is it reasonable to invite former federal election candidates to appear before parliamentary committees? I know that this isn't related to the amendment. However, it strikes me as a bit odd that this was done and that there wasn't any transparency.

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

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague, Mr. Samson, for his amendment. It was drafted according to the rules, based on the committee's authority to vote. We all agree that Mr. Drouin's comments were unacceptable. We have all said so. Mr. Drouin apologized to both witnesses seven times. I don't know what more the opposition wants.

Today, I thought that we would... Mr. Chair, you put the study of the economic development of official language minority communities on the agenda.

I'll try to keep my comments positive. I find it a bit odd that the opposition says that the way forward is to hold meetings. We need to prepare amendments. We also met with the minister for a study on the funding of post-secondary institutions. However, the Conservatives asked him only one question.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I want to ask my colleague to stick to the topic of the amendment.

The Chair: I was just about to, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Serré, the committee is discussing Mr. Samson's amendment.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand why Mr. Godin is a bit uncomfortable. We're talking about the reason for Mr. Samson's amendment. It's specifically to determine our authority here in the committee. On two separate occasions, the chair's decisions have been challenged. Given our minority position, the votes have been against us every time.

I believe that Mr. Samson's amendment clearly proposes ways to end the debate and move on to the topic of francophone immigration, which has become a constant in rural areas. We have talked about this and reported on it. The amendment affects the whip, who can't make any decisions on committee membership. I'm the chair of the Canadian section of ParlAmericas, and some members belong to the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association. Mr. Samson's amendment addresses certain aspects of our authority in the committee.

Clearly, any discussion on how to talk about French involves political games to win seats in Quebec. Remember that Mr. Drouin described the comments of the two witnesses as extremist. However, this week I asked another committee member to publicly apologize, but he didn't do so. Mr. Beaulieu described a member of the House of Commons as an extremist because the member is an anglophone. That's really unacceptable. That isn't even half of what Mr. Drouin did. Mr. Drouin said that, for a francophone, the comments were extremist.

That's why Mr. Samson's amendment matters. Quebec separatists or elitists have often made comments offensive to francophones, especially regarding northern Ontario. This has been said a number of times. We're talking here about measures that we can take as a committee. Mr. Samson's amendment addresses the steps that the committee can take. The committee can, through the chair, write a letter to an association. Mr. Godin's motion....

The committee doesn't have the right to ask for Mr. Drouin's resignation. This is purely political. The goal is to obtain votes in certain constituencies. I think that the Bloc Québécois isn't satisfied with its 32 seats and that it wants more. This is one way to do it. The Bloc will stir up nationalist sentiment. Why can't we work together? Francophones in Quebec and committee members have sent their children to English schools. Party leaders in Quebec's national assembly have attended anglophone institutions in Quebec.

Why can't we keep working together? This morning, a Radio-Canada article talked about issues with post-secondary education in French across the country. There are problems and studies to conduct, but here we are again.

We met during a break week and on a holiday Monday to discuss a purely political motion designed to help the Bloc Québécois win new seats in Quebec. For the Conservatives and their leader, this means burning everything. After all, there are about ten Conservative members of Parliament in Quebec.

However, as I said, you're spoiled in Quebec. You could pursue your studies in French. Mr. Samson's motion is a way to stop the debate here. The sole purpose of this debate is to obtain votes in Quebec, at the expense, again, of francophones outside Quebec.

We received a letter from a Franco-Ontarian association, which clearly reflects the spirit of Mr. Samson's motion.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Marc Serré: This letter asks the committee to move on to other matters. All the members here are saying this, but then some move motions and amendments—

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Serré.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In my opinion, the Liberals are once again filibustering.

Honestly, as a person from outside Quebec who speaks French, I'm tired of this generalization regarding people who speak French outside Quebec. I wish that we could get back to debating the motion. I honestly hope that we can vote in order to clearly state our position and move on to committee work.

I think that we're all tired of talking about the same things. Let's respect everyone's time and come to a vote, without filibustering.

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, unfortunately, that isn't a point of order.

Our rules of procedure require me, as chair, to do certain things. We all know that. All the members around the table have been in Parliament long enough and have enough experience to understand that I can't interrupt members if their comments are relevant or connected, even tenuously, to an amendment. Right now, we're talking about Mr. Samson's amendment to Mr. Beaulieu's motion.

If our rules of procedure are a bit too lenient, maybe we in the House of Commons will need to ensure that our rules suit us. However, for now, I must chair the meetings according to the current rules, which we all know.

As a result, I must say that Mr. Serré's comments completely relate to Mr. Samson's amendment. I don't see how I could rule otherwise. In any case, you have already seen me, in other debates and at other meetings, politely remind people to stick to the motion when I think that they're straying too far off topic, while also giving them the chance to get back on track. That's how I operate. Our rules say that we should be more permissive than restrictive. That's how I interpret our rules. Whether people like it or not, that's unfortunately my role. In this case, I find Mr. Serré's comments quite appropriate and relevant to Mr. Samson's amendment.

Mr. Serré, you may continue.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank Ms. Ashton for her comments. I am reaching out to her. That is precisely our goal: to move forward with our work. We want to go back to the discussion we were having as part of the study on post-secondary institutions, when Minister Boissonnault appeared before the committee.

Allow me to contradict Ms. Ashton, in that Mr. Godin filibustered when he moved his motion two weeks ago, on Thursday, when the minister came before the committee for the study on post-secondary institutions. His motion was out of order, by the way.

On today's agenda is the study on the economic development of official language minority communities. We also have to consider a report. I would like to reach out to the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party. We keep talking about filibusters. We need to conduct the work of the committee, rather than make personal attacks on a committee member, which the committee is not allowed to do. That's what Mr. Samson is trying to get at with his amendment. A parliamentary committee does not have the right to do that. That has never been done.

I am reaching out to Ms. Ashton from the NDP. I am reaching out to the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives so that we can just move on. We have the opportunity as a group to say that we do not agree with what Mr. Drouin said and then continue on with our work. That's the purpose of the amendment. That's what Mr. Samson is trying to do. Again, this is a real abuse of power by the committee. It's an abuse of power by three political parties against the Liberal minority. Through his amendment, Mr. Samson is trying to resolve the situation so that we can move forward, as I tried to do earlier with my motion. The other three parties said that they were challenging the chair's ruling again. This is really an abuse by the committee majority, which seems to be disregarding parliamentary rules.

The chair is constantly referring to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the green book, which is the committee's bible. However, the representatives of the three opposition parties on the committee have spoken twice, if not three times, against the chair's decision and the green book. That is why Mr. Samson wanted to put forward an amendment. It proposes that the committee be given the opportunity to write to the members of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, or APF, to tell them that we do not agree with what Mr. Drouin said. There have been no further conversations on this within the other 18 international branches. There has been no mention of it. Mr. Drouin is a highly respected member of the Canadian branch of the APF.

At stake, on the one hand, is Mr. Samson's amendment and, on the other hand, are Mr. Drouin's allegedly extremist comments towards witnesses who are researchers at post-secondary institutions. Politicians do not decide which institutions receive money; a group of scientists does. That is not a decision for politicians to make. Mr. Bourdon's and Mr. Lacroix's comments were not really appropriate. Many francophones agree with Mr. Drouin's objection and comments. Mr. Bourdon and Mr. Lacroix are entitled to their opinion. I think Mr. Lacroix has made it clear that he is not in favour of immigration either. That's his opinion.

That is why Mr. Samson put forward his amendment. The comments made earlier by Ms. Ashton, Mr. Godin and Mr. Beaulieu.... We really need to start talking about the important things. Minister Boissonnault appeared before the committee. This morning, we were supposed to study the draft report on the economic development of official language minority communities. However, some people have decided, once again, to play cheap politics and cause havoc in the committee.

That is in fact why Mr. Samson moved his motion. Mr. Godin said that his motion was nothing personal, but it is very personal. The motion calls on the committee to remove one of its members, who made a mistake, has been very respectful and has apologized for it seven times. Mr. Samson's amendment offers a solution to the problem we have. We are ready to take responsibility, but once again, the opposition is just trying to play political games to get votes in Quebec, to the detriment of francophones outside Quebec.

Mr. Samson's amendment is a genuine attempt to solve the problem. The way the opposition wants to deal with Mr. Drouin's comments is unacceptable. He has apologized, and the matter is closed. Everyone, even Franco-Manitobans, wants us to get down to work.

In addition, Minister Roberge commented on the decline of French and the issue of social media. Who brought that up to the committee in front of the separatist witnesses who appeared? Mr. Drouin mentioned that English social media represented an international problem that the francophonie had to address. This is a really important issue that we have to examine. It is with that in mind that Mr. Samson is trying to find a solution, Mr. Chair.

We need to work toward solutions. We need to make recommendations and move on to our studies, not attack another member of the committee. The motion that was put forward is very personal. The motion says we should ask the whip to do something that has never been done before. In fact, as I mentioned at the last meeting, we could move our own motions.

Mrs. Thomas, from the Conservative Party, made a comment to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that should bar her from sitting on the committee. She should be removed from the committee because she told a minister to speak English. Come on. What did she do afterwards? She apologized. She made a mistake and she apologized. She apologized once before the committee, but she did not do so publicly, as Mr. Drouin did. At the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, a Conservative member asked someone to speak English, and there were no repercussions.

What are we doing in the case of Mr. Drouin, who described comments as "extremist"? Some members want him removed from the committee. What is happening today is unacceptable, Mr. Chair. That is why Mr. Samson is trying to find a solution through his amendment. This is quite simply a personal attack on a great defender of francophones in Canada and around the world, purely to make political gains and get votes. Bloc members don't think 32 seats in Quebec is enough. They want more.

On the Conservative side, Mr. Poilievre wants to change everything. He feels that Parliament is broken and all the committees are in chaos. I am currently sitting on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, where we are trying to make the court challenges program permanent, but the Conservatives don't want that.

Mr. Samson's motion is really important because, once again, it seeks to prevent the committee from attacking a proud francophone and causing delays on important issues. On a number of occasions, Mr. Godin referred to "a friend". What does he mean by that? Mr. Drouin is a defender of francophone communities, and these are personal attacks on a member of Parliament. It is unacceptable.

You may all laugh, but the motion that was put forward by the Conservatives and the Bloc to attack an individual who has apologized seven times is not acceptable. In fact, the opposition didn't even give Mr. Drouin a chance to apologize.

Mr. Samson moved an amendment because the opposition didn't even want the member to apologize to the committee. Political games were being played right from the get-go.

First of all, there was an attempt to prevent Mr. Drouin from apologizing. Second, Minister Boissonnault was here, and we didn't even....

It was absolutely a political game. I will support Mr. Samson's amendment, because we have to put an end to this debate and the personal attacks. We need to look at what the committee is allowed to do. The motion is out of order, inadmissible, and amounts to an abuse of the power by the opposition majority. This is not acceptable and it has to stop.

For these reasons, we should vote on Mr. Samson's motion and get back to what we had planned. This morning, we were supposed to consider our report on the economic development of official language minority communities. We should also look at post-secondary education, immigration and the decline of French.

We need to work together. I am starting to lose faith in this committee. We have worked together, but now we are playing political games and attacking a person, which is unacceptable.

Obviously, I will have more to say later. I would like to remain positive and reach out to the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives. We have important things to talk about. We had a witness appear who was actually a Bloc candidate. We really have to think about credibility. However, he has the right to come and give his opinion.

Finally, I would like to add that I have mentioned twice now that a member of the committee has referred to another member as an "extremist". That member had three days to apologize, but he didn't. Even Mr. Drouin didn't wait that long. Last week, I asked the member in question to apologize, but he has not yet done so, which is unacceptable. There is definitely a double standard at this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ashton and Mr. Samson. Mr. Beaulieu, you indicated to me that you wanted the floor, so I am adding your name to the list of speakers.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor first, since you raised your hand before the point of order.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll keep my remarks brief, because I'd like us to vote on the amendment without further delay.

First, we oppose the amendment because it strays from the spirit of the motion. It's as though the committee has turned into a circus. The committee has the power to take a stand on the conduct of one of its members, but we are hoping that the chief government whip will act on her own or that the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* will act on its own. What's more, we hope those actions will reflect the committee's will, which is to ensure that the unacceptable comments of one of its members meet with appropriate consequences.

Second, I want to say something about the arrogance of politicians. I don't think it's enough for someone to acknowledge their mistake, apologize, forget about it and move on. That's not how you deal with the situation we all witnessed a few weeks ago.

Today, I want to talk about the Liberals' arrogance, which has been on display for a while now. The Liberals are protecting one of their own, someone who not only tarnished the committee's reputation, but also inflamed the debate around a dangerous trend affecting the country, the decline of French. We are trying to reverse the trend on three simultaneous fronts: the modernization of the Official Languages Act, the updating of the action plan for official languages and the work of the committee. Let's face it. The committee member in question minimized the serious concerns raised by witnesses regarding the decline of French in Quebec, the most French-speaking province in the country. We can't act as though he said something in the heat of the moment or showed a lapse in judgment, or accept some other excuse.

The truth is that Canada, a country proud to call itself bilingual, is facing a big problem. French is declining, a trend that has continued since the Liberals came to power nearly 10 years ago. Rather than take the situation seriously and say it's unacceptable to insult witnesses who tell us they are extremely worried about the situation in Quebec, we are here, talking about whatever.

As I said the first time, we don't doubt whatsoever how the member in question stands up for Franco-Ontarians. I nevertheless think it is extremely offensive to say that what's going on is an insult to francophones outside Quebec.

A highly regarded witness, a francophone outside Quebec who wanted to remain anonymous, told me he was considering never appearing before the committee's current members because of their behaviour. It wasn't a Quebecker who said that. It was a francophone outside Quebec, a well-respected member of their community.

I want to tell the Liberal members that they are again displaying arrogance. They don't have a monopoly on the views of francophones outside Quebec. Furthermore, the committee has turned into a circus if it overlooks the fact that witnesses who spoke about the decline of French and the challenges facing Quebeckers were insulted.

I've seen the Liberals' arrogance on display a number of times. It's harmful to our national unity and our well-being as Canadians. Frankly, when all of us here should be focused on the decline of French in our communities, our provinces and our country, we are having to watch this circus.

This is what I want to know. Does the member really want to stay on as chair of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie*? Let him run again as chair, then. Good for him.

I do not know how someone who behaved the way he did can represent Canada on the world stage after minimizing the testimony of French-speaking Quebeckers who said that their province was facing a serious problem that needed to be taken seriously. I don't know how he can do that with any integrity.

As committee members, we all want to be here, but it's up to the Liberals to make that decision. I was here when Ms. Lambropoulos had to be moved to another committee after she made remarks that were much less serious. I don't know whether sexism or other factors are at play, but honestly, what I see is the Liberals continuing to protect one of their own who has sullied the committee's reputation. Worse still, he insulted witnesses with whom he disagreed on a number of points while discussing the main issue of concern to the committee, how to counter the decline of French.

The Liberal arrogance we've been seeing for weeks is shocking. I hope we can move to a vote on the amendment and the motion as soon as possible and thus take a stand, knowing that others must do so as well.

I am telling you that I will not accept the Liberal arrogance on display again today. I hope that, for our future, for the sake of our communities—which don't have enough schoolteachers, child care workers or French service providers—we can move on to the issues that matter.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

We now go to Mr. Samson, followed by Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the NDP member for her comments on the importance of advancing the committee's essential work. That's exactly what we are trying to do with my amendment. We are trying to reach out to our fellow members and get back to work.

I'm wondering about some things. I come to this committee, and we aren't talking about the thing I've dedicated my life to, standing up for the rights of francophones outside Quebec. After Bill C-13, nothing is more important than education, in my view. It is paramount.

If memory serves me correctly, the NDP member has a motion calling on the committee to address early childhood education, but we won't be able to do that in June if the opposition members aren't willing to reach out to us. What does that mean? We are a minority government, after all. We don't know what's going to happen. Those of us on this side want answers, we want reports so that the government has useful recommendations to consider. Through my amendment, I'm trying to break this impasse.

At Monday's meeting, I asked the opposition members to light their own way so we can move forward to help our communities succeed. They didn't do it, but perhaps they can use the flashlights on their cellphones. That might help.

I have the utmost respect for the people at this table. Mr. Généreux is a proud Quebecker and champion for minority communities. Since 2015—or 2009, rather—he has poured tremendous energy into the cause of defending the rights of francophones. That means he's been here longer than all of us. He is here for the right reasons, defending the French language and reversing the decline of French in Quebec. He's very familiar with the situation of minority communities across Canada. Why, then, is he choosing not to light the way forward and not to continue with that work? That is my question. I know that his heart is in the right place, but the position of his party, his leader or whatever else, is involved. Perhaps he can enlighten us if he plans to comment on my amendment.

I am trying to understand how someone can spend 15 years fighting for a cause, and then turn around and say they aren't interested in supporting French-speaking communities across the country right now because there's something more important going on. The most important thing is to fight what I described the other day when I spoke about being a soldier. I'm shocked.

Mr. Beaulieu also believes in the importance of education. He's the one who flagged the importance of doing a study on the post-secondary education sector. Heaven knows how the sector has been struggling for years. Post-secondary education hasn't been considered part of the continuum. Only the system for five to 18-year-olds has. We are losing an opportunity to move the needle on the issue.

I'm just trying to find a way out, so we can get back to the work we can be proud of. I've spoken to people at organizations that serve francophone and Acadian communities, and they're disappointed with what's going on. I can't even tell you how many people have called me this year, pushing us to continue our study on post-secondary institutions and to take up Ms. Ashton's study on early childhood education.

As you know, our government has made huge investments to support families and young people. In Nova Scotia last week, we announced \$19.8 million in additional funding to create 9,500 child care spaces. Imagine what that means for our small province. It makes a very big difference, but it's also important to ensure that a percentage of those spaces is set aside for francophones. You know as well as I do that it's much harder for French-speaking children to keep their mother tongue when they attend English-language child care centres. They make friends there that they want to keep, so they usually go on to do their schooling in the English system. That's why this is so important.

The member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier has been working with us since 2019, and I know his heart is in the right place. I know that he wants to help us and that he understands what an important role education plays in society. He often talks to me about early childhood education, and if I understand correctly, that's what our next study will focus on—the study Ms. Ashton proposed. Through my amendment, I'm trying to reach out to my fellow members to find a solution. Some say that it's not a very important amendment, but it is, because, at the very least, it calls on the committee to act within the limits of its authority by writing to the clerk to request something.

The committee cannot ask the chief government whip to remove a member from a committee, but that's what Mr. Beaulieu's motion

seeks to do. I'm shocked. We don't have the power to do that. It's not within our authority. However, what I'm proposing through my amendment is within the committee's authority. Despite being very practical, the amendment put forward by my fellow member, which we voted on earlier, wasn't really of interest to the committee members, yet again. They are more interested in sully the reputation of a member who has been doing an exceptional job for years.

Earlier, a member asked whether it was normal to invite former party candidates to appear before the committee, given that one of the witnesses we heard from a few weeks ago had run for the Bloc Québécois in 2015, if I'm not mistaken. I won't go too far down that road, but I do want the record to reflect that the individual is surely sympathetic to Bloc ideology.

Mr. Beaulieu may want the floor next to apologize for calling our Liberal colleague an extremist. If Mr. Beaulieu apologizes, great. I'm sure that the member would gladly accept the apology and listen to what he has to say. That is how we should work. Ms. Ashton referred to a monopoly, but I'm wondering whether the opposition members aren't simply playing politics.

We invited Mr. Boissonnault, and I believe he was here for an hour. Members of the minister's team were also here to answer committee members' questions. Had the committee spent the first hour of the meeting hearing from the minister, I could rest assured that, at least, the committee members weren't playing politics. Had they taken up political games afterwards, I could rest assured that they had at least listened to the information that mattered.

Minister Boissonnault doesn't have time in his schedule to come before the committee again. I believe the clerk told us that after receiving a note from the minister's office. I wonder whether the minister might come back if he knew that we were dealing with this matter. It's hard to understand why opposition members would not want to support my amendment.

If I'm not mistaken, the member has apologized seven times, and I know that Mr. Beaulieu, too, wants to apologize for his comments. However, everyone here was in the House and knows that the Leader of the Opposition has yet to apologize for what he said. He was kicked out of the House because he did not apologize. Actually, he was kicked out not because of what he said, but because he refused to do what the Speaker of the House was asking of him. According to the Speaker, the opposition leader used language that was unacceptable. I'm going to need someone to explain something to me that I don't understand. In one case, the member in question apologized seven times, and in the other case, the member refused to apologize. Everyone needs to look in the mirror, so we can turn the page.

I was enthusiastic at the prospect of joining the committee. It was my choice. I don't know whether the members opposite were given the choice or were forced to join. I chose to be here. The work we've done has led to significant changes. If I retire before we've finished our study on early childhood education or the study on the funding of post-secondary institutions, an issue I am deeply concerned about.... Francophones outside Quebec have had the right to manage their schools for about 34 years now.

That was in the early 1990s. It was one of the greatest victories for francophones outside Quebec.

As I've told you before, I believe education is the key to a prosperous society. It's patently obvious that, more than 35 years on, francophone school boards outside Quebec are often underfunded. I was a school board superintendent for 10 years. I can tell you that it wasn't easy being the only francophone superintendent in an anglophone school board. This is the case in many provinces. It wasn't easy advocating for the rights of our young francophones and safeguarding their prosperity and their future.

Someday, 15 or 20 years from now, I'm going to retire. If we haven't conducted a study of funding for preschool and elementary educational institutions by then, I may have a very hard time accepting that. To think we came so close, only to have our cause derailed by petty political games, will be unbearable.

Like Mr. Généreux, our analyst has been supporting this committee and has been our guide since 2010. She understands the importance of the studies we have to carry out.

When do my opposition colleagues suppose we'll carry out this study? At the end of June? Are we going to hold emergency meetings? Maybe that's what we should do. Maybe we should work all summer to make up for lost time.

Community groups and school boards across Canada are waiting. This study is important to them. They had almost made it to the table. They were on the verge of appearing before the committee to talk about their challenges as well as their strengths. They've been very successful in many ways. If they get a chance to tell us about what they've achieved, we can make headway on our report on best practices. Plus, if we know about the massive challenges they have to overcome and which sectors are largely underfunded, we can make recommendations that will help those boards make progress. The trouble is, they don't want to talk about it.

So, if we don't work on the study between now and June, and if we don't hold emergency meetings over the summer, when will we do it? In September? As you know, we have a minority government, and that means there are no guarantees. We've stayed in power for more than two and a half years. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe three years is the longest any minority government has ever lasted.

That's where we're at. The other day, I talked about a candle. This morning, I talked about your cell phone, which has a flashlight to guide you. I use mine every now and then when I'm out walking at night.

This is serious. When will we meet with preschool organizations? When will they have a chance to tell us about the challenges they face? Let's bear in mind that they were never included in the continuum. At long last, we gave them a way forward, a guiding light. They're so, so happy to have a chance to plead their case. They're not afraid, because they know how the process works. If they can come here and plead their case, their testimony will shape a report and recommendations. It will inform governments' search for solutions. That's what I'm talking about. How can we reach out to them? My colleague tried to do it via an amendment today, but the opposition rejected the idea.

I then proposed another amendment that is consistent with our mandate. Once again, the opposition rejected it. I don't understand. Then they turn around and expect us to support their motion? How can I ask an individual or a group to do something that I don't have the authority to do?

That's like telling someone to go play in my neighbour's yard. Do I really have the right to do that? Absolutely not. I can let someone play in my yard, but not in my neighbour's yard. That's what they're asking us to do. How can we support a motion that has nothing to do with our mandate?

Mr. Chair, I have to congratulate you, too, because you assessed the situation and rejected the motion on the grounds that nobody can transfer authority to someone else if it's not within their jurisdiction.

It's odd that Mr. Beaulieu would propose this motion, considering that nobody at this table talks about jurisdiction as much as the Bloc Québécois. Every day in the House of Commons, the Bloc reminds us not to encroach on Quebec's jurisdiction. Obviously, I disagree, as you might imagine. As much as I respect provincial and territorial jurisdiction—and I certainly want to respect it—a Canadian is a Canadian no matter where they are. We have to make sure they all have the same rights.

When the government invests in doctors and health support offices and says it wants to boost support for doctors by 25% in one province, it also wants to make sure that every province and territory, including Quebec, contributes its own 25%. Do you see what I'm getting at, Mr. Chair?

That's very important, because Quebecers have the right to access more doctors, too. However, if the government says it's going to hand over millions or even billions of dollars and let the provinces and territories do whatever they want with that money, that's not leadership on the federal government's part.

The federal government has a responsibility to people in Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba, and to people on Isle Madame, a little island near Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Ninety-eight percent of the people there are very proud Acadians, and they've overcome challenges relating to anglophone preschool organizations and school boards.

You need to understand that I went through that. All of my schooling was in English from kindergarten to grade 12. You may be wondering why I did my schooling in English. The answer is simple. I didn't have a choice. You may be wondering what I mean when I say I didn't have a choice. We have choices in life, but our rights weren't being respected. Had militant defenders of the French language not waged that war, my children and grandchildren wouldn't have had the choice either. Fortunately, there are people at this table and people who preceded us, such as my colleague Mr. Serré's father, who were involved in that battle. They worked with organizations to advance the cause of the francophonie and get French schools. This is personal for me. I couldn't attend a French school because there wasn't one on Isle Madame. It was terrible.

All of my schooling was in English from kindergarten to grade 12. Then I realized I had a choice to make. I could pursue my studies in English, or I could choose a French-language university. I opted for French. That's exactly what I did. I didn't have a lot of options, as my colleague, Mr. Beaulieu, knows. There weren't enough francophone universities in Canada. There were two options relatively close to home, but there were other universities elsewhere. My first choice would have been Université Sainte-Anne, where I later did a master's degree, but, at the time, I didn't go there because it was a seven-hour drive to get there and seven hours to get back. I chose Université de Moncton, which was a four-hour drive away.

Mr. Chair, I believe you studied at Université de Moncton as well. Its reputation within the francophonie is stellar. I would add that, while I was there, 40% of the student body was made up of Quebecers. You may be wondering why. It was because they had a choice. For one thing, they could do one less year of post-secondary studies by skipping the two years of CEGEP. Everyone has to make choices.

Speaking of choice, the Conservatives can choose to support my amendment. In my case, I couldn't choose education in French. However, thanks to my father and many people in the province of Nova Scotia who fought for this cause, 1996 was a milestone year, an extremely important year for Acadians and Nova Scotia francophones. At long last, a light appeared, and the government—I just want to point out that it was a Liberal government again, even though the Conservatives did do right by the Acadians—the government gave Acadians the power to shape their educational destiny. For the first time, they were in charge of running schools and education in French across the province. That was powerful.

As you know, it's kind of like the provinces. Anglophone school boards got the money, and they could toss a few crumbs to the francophones to set up a few scattered classes.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I may not have been clear enough last time, but I would like to sincerely apologize to Mr. Housefather.

I'd like my colleague to get back to the subject of the motion.

The Chair: That's not a point of order, but, as chair, I do appreciate your apology, as do all committee members, I'm sure.

Mr. Samson is explaining choice and the absence of choice in the context of the choice we'll be making about the motion. You may

not see the connection, but I certainly do. I will therefore allow Mr. Samson's comments on his own amendment.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The connection is extremely clear.

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

Mr. Godin clearly explained that we cannot apologize when rising on a point of order. I'd like to know if that's allowed or if my colleague should wait his turn.

The Chair: I'll repeat what I said. As chair and as a member of the committee, I appreciate Mr. Beaulieu's apology, but it wasn't a point of order. I think that was clear, but thank you for bringing it to our attention, Mr. Serré.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

I'd like to keep listening to our colleague, Mr. Samson, who was making the connection between the choices we can make in life and the choice we have to accept or reject his amendment.

Please go on, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

That's the connection: choice. Opposition party members now have the choice to get busy and support francophone communities in Canada.

As I said, when I was young, I couldn't choose to be educated in French. The good news, though, is that my three kids got all of their education in French from kindergarten to grade 12, because they had the choice. It may have been a difficult choice, and sometimes we had to have tough conversations. In grades 9, 10 and 11, they wanted to go to the same school as their friends. In the end, I told them that they could study wherever they wanted after grade 12, but that they were currently getting a quality education in French. Not many kids were at the time, and they benefitted tremendously.

When I think about choice, I think about my five grandchildren. Imagine that. Do I seem old enough to have five grandchildren?

The Chair: Mr. Samson, allow me to interrupt because we're running out of time.

As a reminder, our meeting is being broadcast, so for everyone tuning in, I have something to say before adjourning the meeting. I want this to be on the record.

After consulting colleagues, I made a decision for administrative and technical reasons that don't concern committee members but that are related to everything going on behind the scenes, which people don't see. When we suspend a meeting instead of adjourning, that causes problems that are tricky to resolve, so I'm going to adjourn this meeting. However, before I do so, I want to say that I'll maintain the speaking order, which is as follows: Mr. Samson, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Iacono and Mr. Serré.

After I adjourn the meeting, I'll prepare the notice of meeting for the next meeting, which will take place next Monday. We'll have the Commissioner of Official Languages with us. I would like to remind everyone about what we discussed a few meetings ago.

The commissioner will be here for an hour and a half because one hour might not be long enough and two hours might be too long. We agreed that the rest of the meeting would be spent working on the report, but we could resume this debate instead. If the committee decides to do things otherwise at that point, we'll do what has to be done in accordance with the procedural rules.

I want this to be transparent. For technical reasons, I don't want to suspend the meeting, period. I want to adjourn debate, but I want to do so in a way that satisfies all the committee administration people behind us. I will therefore adjourn the meeting.

I'm announcing that, at the next meeting, we'll have the commissioner and his usual officials, Mr. Leduc and Mr. Wolfe. If it turns

out that one hour with the commissioner is enough, we'll thank them for coming and pick up exactly where we left off today.

Again, the speaking order will be: Mr. Samson, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Iacono and Mr. Serré.

Mr. Darrell Samson: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm listening, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Can the opposition now confirm that the commissioner will be testifying?

I would really like for us to hear from him.

The Chair: I do believe there's unanimous consent for that.

We discussed it earlier in camera. I wanted the people listening to know what's going to happen.

This meeting is adjourned.

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