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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1605)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): We are now resuming the meeting in public.

As we are all insiders here, I'm going to shorten the instructions about acoustic accidents. We did the sound test with Mr. Iacono, who is with us virtually today. I will simply suggest that you consult the small card on the table. The instructions are simple and we've been familiar with them for almost a month now. Be careful, and do your best to make sure that there is only one microphone on at a time.

We are picking up the discussion from exactly where we left off at the end of the last meeting. I'll remind you of the context. We were discussing Mr. Beaulieu's motion, and then the amendment proposed by Mr. Samson. According to the list I had in hand at the end of the last meeting, Mr. Blois, Mr. Samson and Mr. Godin wished to speak. I will now add Mr. Beaulieu to the list.

Go ahead, Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here with you again today. I came before this committee for the first time on Thursday morning. This committee is very important to all Canadians. It certainly is for francophone communities, but I believe it's also important for anglophone minority communities.

I'd like to begin by reminding all my colleagues that my French is only so-so. Today is a good opportunity for me to practise by debating the wording of the amendment proposed by Mr. Samson.

Before starting, I trust that all my colleagues spent a pleasant weekend with their families and fellow citizens. In my riding, the Annapolis Valley apple blossom festival was celebrating its 90th anniversary. It was an opportunity to celebrate our farming heritage, apples, and our connection to the land. I'd like to thank all the volunteers and others who contributed to the festival's success. It's a very important event for our communities in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley.

As a result, I was very busy over the weekend, but I took a few hours to reconsider my comments from last Thursday. I believe it's essential to add a few things to what I said on Thursday. I have something like 10 or 11 more points to make about Mr. Samson's amendment. But I want to make sure that my comments are appropriate and that the committee is made aware of all my Nova Scotian

points of view. The wording of the motion and the debate about the comments made by Mr. Drouin are important, but then the perspectives of all MPs from across the country are equally important. That being the case, the comments made by Mr. Serré, from northern Ontario, and by Mr. Samson, from Nova Scotia, are equally important.

You may perhaps recall, Mr. Chair, my family ties to the French language. My own circumstances illustrate this. When I first arrived here in Parliament, my ability to express myself in French was limited. In fact, it was very poor. But today, here I am before a parliamentary committee and actually able to deliver my comments in French.

I telephoned my uncle over the weekend to make sure that what I knew about the Blois family history was accurate. Indeed, prior to this public meeting, Mr. Chair, we had a conversation about my ties to the Vikings and to Normandy. I provided details about my family. Of course, Blois is the name of a city in France. That's where it all begins. The Vikings were in northern France. In fact, they were everywhere in Europe, not only in England and Scotland, but also in France. The first Blois in North America had connections to France and to the Norman conquest of England. You asked me whether I had any links to the Vikings, Mr. Chair. I have no idea, but I'm very proud of my ties to France and the French language.

• (1610)

The first Blois who came to North America was named Abraham Blois. He was a soldier in the British army. I've been talking about the past, but I still haven't explained how my ancestor received his lands in Nova Scotia. That's our connection to where we live here in Canada. After the American War of Independence, the King decided to give land to the soldiers and veterans—

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I understand that you have something to say, and I think I know why. Go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have nothing against our colleague telling us about his roots, but I don't see the connection between that and the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. I was about to intervene for the same reason.

At the outset, Mr. Blois, you spoke about your attachment to the French language, and I thought that this was somehow linked to the motion. After that, however, you went off the rails a bit.

I just want to remind you that we are debating the amendment introduced in the motion. Please continue.

Mr. Kody Blois: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am, of course, a replacement on this committee, but I believe Mr. Beaulieu is also fond of history in certain contexts. My history is very important to establish my ties to the French language and to Nova Scotia. But I'll return to the topic very soon.

After the American War of Independence, the first Blois to come to North America, whose name was Abraham, was given a tract of land in Nova Scotia, in the Kejimikujik Valley. The Blois family name is usually not very common, but there are many people in Nova Scotia with that name. I felt it was necessary to repeat that to ensure that all the details had been heard by the committee.

I'm returning now to Mrs. Stubbs, because I've established a link to this motion, which may initially have been introduced by Mr. Godin, but which is now in the name of Mr. Beaulieu. It's a personal attack, an argument, and it's not constructive. When parliamentarians were studying Bill C-49 in the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, the manner in which Conservatives were commenting on the bill was rather offensive to me, a Nova Scotia member of Parliament. Premier Houston was in favour of this bill, as was Premier Furey.

If Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Godin and possibly the majority of MPs got what they wanted in this motion, it would create a very dangerous precedent. I might even visit the natural resources committee to demand Ms. Stubbs' resignation, in view of the problems caused to people from the Atlantic provinces.

I fully understand that the attitude towards the issue of Quebec culture and the French language in the North American context is very different from the manner in which the objectives and economic aspirations of people in the Atlantic provinces are perceived. It may well lie at a different level, but the principle is the same.

I want to draw something else to the attention of my Conservative colleagues. They may remember how Mrs. Thomas, the Conservative Party spokesperson on heritage, reacted when journalist Laurence Martin asked her if she believed the public broadcaster was important, and she froze like a deer in the headlights. She looked as if she was in shock. She was frozen for about 20 seconds, I'd say, before answering. It's dangerous, given how important the CBC is to all of Canada's francophone communities, and to Quebec in particular. It's incredible that it took her 20 seconds before she was able to answer.

It might be a good idea for the whole group to leave the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and introduce a motion demanding Ms. Thomas's resignation from the committee, in view of her highly offensive attitude. Given this context, Mr. Poilievre should perhaps ask himself whether Ms. Thomas is still a good choice for the position of Conservative Party spokesperson on heritage.

The public broadcaster is important to francophone communities, of course, but also to anglophone communities.

• (1615)

But I'm getting back to the context of this committee. We are in the era of algorithms and artificial intelligence. According to the conclusions of a report published by a political institution, the greatest threat we will face within three, four or five years, is the

fact that it will become impossible for people to understand what's true and what's false. It's precisely for that reason that it is essential to reinvest in the public broadcaster.

Once again, I would ask my colleagues in the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party to consider the precedent that would be established, because there would be other opportunities to use tools of that kind in the wrong context to attack other parliamentary colleagues. That's something else to take into consideration.

I'd like to say something about the CBC. I'll explain why it's important to me. When I'm in Ottawa for my work, it's very easy to find news and information, but when I'm back at home in Nova Scotia, it's difficult. It's hard to find people to talk to in French, of course, but also hard to get information. But then there's the CBC, and I can listen to it in my car when I'm driving between my office and home.

I think that's something that needs to be considered. However, here we are again today debating this motion for yet another day, a motion that constitutes a personal attack on my colleague. It's a complete waste of parliamentary time. It gives me a good opportunity to discuss various important matters, but it's important for my colleagues sitting here to consider the context of other work that is important for our stakeholders.

I'm returning to the CBC issue by talking to you about the Congrès mondial acadien. You, Mr. Chair, are of course a very proud Acadian. I'd like to congratulate you on your work. I'm one of your colleagues in the Atlantic Liberal caucus. You no doubt remember when Mr. Cormier, you, I and others had to draft a letter to the president and chief executive officer of the CBC, Catherine Tait. It was tough. Thank you for having done that. It was very important for our entire region, but in particular for your riding. It was unbelievable. It was about the Congrès mondial acadien. Contrary to what had been initially decided, the CBC will now showcase the event's activities. I think it will be in Yarmouth, in our colleague Mr. d'Entremont's riding. That's a clear illustration of the need to promote and encourage the French language beyond Quebec. It's important in Quebec, to be sure, but it's important in our region too.

I wanted to provide this perspective to all my colleagues, here on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Once again, I don't want to repeat certain points of view that I presented on Thursday morning, but just add some clarity.

• (1620)

This goes back to something Ms. Kusie said. When I was explaining the history of Grand-Pré, several microphones were open at the same time and there was some noise. For the benefit of all Canadians tuned into our meeting online or on the parliamentary television channel, I'd like to point out that Grand-Pré is a very nice place. It's historically important for francophone communities.

In fact, I need to make a minor correction. I gave some details about the Acadian experience. Needless to say, the Congrès mondial acadien is important. When I was talking about the order from the Crown in 1755 to deport the Acadians, Ms. Kusie said:

[English]

“Oh, the Planters”.

[Translation]

I don't think Ms. Kusie had any ill intent. I think it was just a mistake. I wasn't in fact talking about the Planters. The Planters were people loyal to the Crown who lived in the United States. After the Seven Years' War, they were invited by the Crown to come and settle vacant land, with the Loyalists.

In my riding, there are names like St. Croix and Grand-Pré, which are old names from the francophone community. However, the Planters came after the Acadians, and it's a touchy subject for Acadian communities.

I'd like to raise another point. Mr. Beaulieu will be pleased to hear that I agree with the Bloc Québécois on at least one thing. The order to deport the Acadians was given at Fort Edward, which is today a national historic site administered by Parks Canada in Windsor, in my riding. Mr. Stéphane Bergeron wrote a letter to Minister Guilbeault, the minister responsible for Parks Canada, to encourage him to increase funding to enhance the exhibitions and other activities at Fort Edward. I am in complete agreement with Mr. Bergeron on that score. I'd also like to thank the Bloc Québécois for encouraging investment in Nova Scotia. It's very important, particularly for maintaining our ties with the French language. I'll ask Mr. Beaulieu to thank Mr. Bergeron on my behalf.

• (1625)

In 2012, I played fast pitch softball in Dominique Vien's riding. I'd like to explain the connection between my participation in the Canadian championship and the importance of investing in entirely francophone towns and regions. In Bellechasse, approximately 99% of people are francophone. I wouldn't want to forget mentioning certain very important people in this account. First of all, I'd like to talk about Mr. Jean Roy, the principal of the high school in Saint-Gervais. He's very likeable. He was a pitcher. His son, Mathieu Roy, is the only player from Quebec on Canada's national softball team. I wanted to make sure that Mathieu Roy's name was written into the story.

Because of the motion introduced by Mr. Beaulieu and the amendment proposed by Mr. Samson, it's impossible to begin any other work that our committee needs to do. Nor can we continue our study of the importance of francophone high schools and French-language universities. That's awful.

I'm going to give you more background. The motion directly mentions Quebec, but the Standing Committee on Official Languages has a very important role to play for people outside of Quebec. It's very important for the federal government to take the initiative to assist and encourage people in francophone communities, and for it to provide money and resources, but it's equally important for it to help anglophones who want to improve their French language skills.

I'm going to tell you about my own story. I attended Hants East Rural High, a small secondary school located in Milford Station, a rural region of Nova Scotia. There were several farms near the school. Two teachers were very important to me, Ms. Amy Jo Comeau and Mr. Trevor Comeau. I hope they will be able to watch the committee meeting, because they'd be very proud of my performance here and my ability to speak French.

Following the debate on this important motion, I hope that all my colleagues will take into consideration the other recommendations for the ministers responsible so that more funds will be invested in francophone community high schools across Canada.

There are, of course, some French courses given in high schools, but most are pretty basic. Afterwards, in 2019, I began to take French courses in Ottawa.

One of the positive things about the pandemic, for me at least, was that I had an additional two hours to practise French from home with a French teacher. This service was provided by the House of Commons. I am still taking these courses. I'd also like to thank Mr. François Bélanger and Ms. Élisabeth Harvey, two professors in the French department at Université Sainte-Anne, a very small institution in southwestern Nova Scotia. I applaud their work and trust that everything is going well for them.

I'd like to return to the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, which is mentioned in the motion before me. In fact, I have to return to the motion. Remember that I said I had 10 other points to raise, all of which are specifically about certain words or phrases in the motion. It so happens that the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie is mentioned several times in the wording of the motion. It's an organization that has to be given consideration because it's very important.

My colleague Mr. Drouin is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, but he's also the Chair of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, an international body.

• (1630)

I've had several opportunities to speak with Mr. Drouin about the importance of this organization, not only in terms of promoting the French language, but also in terms of relations between countries where French is spoken.

I can provide you with another bit of background. Part of the motion introduced by Mr. Beaulieu is redundant. Mr. Drouin it is not only the MP for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, but also the Chair of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, the APF. A vote was held and the members of the branch voted overwhelmingly in favour of retaining Mr. Drouin in his position as chair. The motion we are now discussing is therefore unnecessary. What is necessary is for us to continue with our other work.

I repeat that the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie is vital. I believe that all my colleagues need to know just how important this organization is, particularly in view of two factors.

The first is the war in eastern Europe between Ukraine and Russia. I know that the MPs who are members of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie have developed ties with some European representatives. That being the case, it's very important to get organized, to harmonize all the points of view, and to come up with sound positions in support of Ukraine.

The second is that the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie is a key forum for the discussion of efforts by the Russian Federation to sow confusion among Canadians, not only by creating distractions, but also through disinformation.

In March, I attended an open discussion with some citizens in my riding. I had announced that I would be there for the discussion. At the event, a number of citizens compared President Zelenskyy to the Nazis in the Second World War. It's unbelievable, and completely crazy. It is disinformation from the Russian Federation that is giving people this impression.

• (1635)

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you can probably guess where I'm headed. At a certain point, you have to stop hoodwinking the people listening to us. We should perhaps get back to the main subject of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Blois, at the beginning, you diverted your comments to Mr. Beaulieu's motion. Then you spoke at length about the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, which was consistent with the motion. Now you're talking about your open discussion and President Zelenskyy. So I'm just reminding you to please keep your comments related to the motion.

Mr. Kody Blois: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I understand that you find yourself in a difficult position. I know that because I happen to chair the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. In debates like these, things are not all black or white. There are lots of grey areas.

I apologize for my little digression. Nevertheless, there is disinformation, and the APF performs a very important role by making it possible for parliamentarians who are members of the APF to discuss and harmonize their points of view, and come up with strategies to deal with the situation. That's also important for dealing

with African issues. We've seen an increase in China's power in Asia. North Korea, Iran and other authoritarian eastern countries would like to exert influence in Africa. The APF provides a key forum for establishing bonds of communication and friendship among parliamentarians from everywhere, including America.

I am very proud of Mr. Drouin's work as the international chair of the APF. I believe that he's the first, or perhaps the second, Canadian to hold this position. It's relatively rare, all the more so as he's an MP from outside Quebec. Quebec is important, to be sure, but I'm convinced that the citizens of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell are very proud of their MP for his international work.

It's accordingly important for all MPs to understand the importance of the APF in the current geopolitical context.

I will now address the motion more specifically, point by point. To make sure that all Canadians fully understand the motion introduced by Mr. Beaulieu, I believe it's essential to reread it in its entirety:

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, 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.

Mr. Samson's amendment initially proposes deleting the words "the committee report to the House" because they are unnecessary. He then proposes to completely eliminate point a). He goes on to recommend removing the portion of point b) that asks that MP Francis Drouin resign as chair of the APF. The amended wording would suggest instead that the committee write to the clerk of the Canadian branch of the APF to call a meeting to vote on the presidency of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. Once again, this portion of the original motion is superfluous, because the APF already voted in favour of maintaining Mr. Drouin as chair. It was therefore altogether appropriate for this amendment to be proposed by my colleague from Sackville—Prescott—Chezzetcook. Mr. Samson strongly defends the people in his riding.

• (1640)

Let us consider the word "obscene", which is used in the English version of the motion. What is the definition of that word? Today, during question period, I found a definition. My colleagues might find another, of course, but according to the one I found on Google, the French word "*obscène*" generally refers to the portrayal or description of sexual subjects, offensive or disgusting by accepted standards of morality and decency. For example, we can refer to an obscene joke.

As I explained earlier, I believe Mr. Drouin's comments were not appropriate at a parliamentary committee. However, he has already apologized for it, again.

In the context of this motion, I think Mr. Drouin's words have nothing to do with the first part of the description of the word "obscene" that I found on Google, which refers to the representation or description of sexual subjects.

The definition of the word “obscene” then talks about matters that are offensive or repugnant to moral principles. As you know, I represent the riding of Kings—Hants, which consists of two counties: Kings and Hants. I reiterate: It is absolutely not proper, in a parliamentary context, to use the expression “full of shit”. However, if I am walking around the streets of my community with my friends, particularly in Hants, the expression “full of shit” might come up in the discussions. I want to point out that it is all a matter of context. I reiterate that I agree that Mr. Drouin's use of these words in Parliament is a problem. However, in a situation I might be in, in my riding, in the company of people from my community, even if that kind of language is not acceptable, it is not rare for it to be used.

I think all my colleagues have to ask themselves whether “obscene” is the appropriate word in Mr. Beaulieu's motion. In my opinion, it is too strong.

Now let us talk about the word “offensive”. Google gives three examples of the use of that word.

First, it corresponds to causing someone to feel deeply hurt, upset, or angry. For example, people might say that allegations made are deeply offensive to them. That definition may be closer to reality, as compared to the definition of “obscene”.

The second definition of “offensive” is that it means something that is actively aggressive or attacking. The example given is an offensive operation against the insurgents. That might apply to this case. It also gives the example of an offensive military campaign. That does not apply in this case; of course not.

I saw what was said between Mr. Drouin and the two witnesses, who appeared by video conference. It would certainly be reasonable to use the word “offensive” in the sense of causing someone to feel deeply hurt, upset or angry. That said, given that Mr. Drouin has apologized, we can see that this is not a personal attack. Rather, it is the witnesses' principle or point of view that was attacked. This was not appropriate on Mr. Drouin's part, and it is not necessary to protect him for that precisely. On that point, I agree with Mr. Beaulieu, that the motion talk about offensive comments in this context.

● (1645)

As we know, my mother tongue is English, so I took a look at the word “comments”, used in the plural in the English version. In French, it says “*commentaires*”. I think the committee should ask ourselves whether it is appropriate that the word be plural. I do not think so. In reality, we are talking here about only three words, which I am not going to repeat, out of respect for Ms. Kusie and the other members of the committee. I think it should use the word “comment”, in the singular. This was an inappropriate comment in the context of that exchange. I hope my colleagues will think this is an important point in this discussion.

I can continue to compliment my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. I work closely with him on other committees. Like me, Mr. Drouin represents a rural riding, as do you, Mr. Chair; you represent the riding of Madawaska—Restigouche. If this motion were adopted by a majority of the members of this committee, it would create a precedent. It would be seen as being a personal

attack against a member who is very proud to represent the people of his community.

A few important points regarding Glengarry—Prescott—Russell need to be made here, since that riding is mentioned in the motion.

What is the situation on the ground in that riding? To find out, I did a few hours' research.

The population of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is 60% francophone. I think it is where the highest concentration of French speakers in Ontario is found. I believe the people of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell are very proud of their identity.

I looked at what municipalities are in that riding. First, there is the town of Hawkesbury, which hosts the very well-known Hawks hockey team. There is also the village of Casselman, as well as Embrun, Rockland and St. Isidore. My favourite municipality, which I visited with Mr. Drouin several years ago, is St-Albert, where the St-Albert cheese co-op is located. It is a truly lovely spot. I am sure that the people who work at St-Albert Cheese know how important that institution is.

● (1650)

So we are talking here about a member who represents a rural riding in eastern Ontario that is 60% francophone, in a province where most people speak English. I think we have to give some thought to the people of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, which Mr. Drouin represents. He is very proud of always defending the French language, whether in Quebec, of course, or in his riding, in Ontario. Obviously, he is always introducing new measures to preserve and promote French in Ontario and Quebec.

There we have it for the riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

The motion also talks about the comments made to a witness. I have seen the video clip of the exchange between Mr. Drouin and the witnesses who were there via video conference, and I think I recall that there were two witnesses, not one. So that is a problematic point in this motion. If Mr. Beaulieu were very passionate about the subject of this motion, it should say “witnesses” and not “a witness”.

I would like to hear what my other colleagues have to say on this subject. I may then move a subamendment concerning this point or the others I have raised, to make sure the grammar is correct and the context is accurate. Since we have now wasted a lot of time talking about this motion, we need to make sure that the text of the amendment and the motion are completely accurate.

I would like to raise another point, and it may be the last one, or maybe not; that remains to be seen. After my turn, Mr. Samson will have the floor. We have to listen to him at the caucus of members from Nova Scotia and the other Atlantic provinces. If my colleagues think my stories and speeches are boring, things are not going well.

The motion asks that “the committee report to the House”. We have to consider all the possible ramifications if this part of the motion were to be adopted. Of course, if this motion is adopted, I expect the Bloc Québécois will rise in the House to call for another vote. That will waste even more parliamentary time in the House. Today is June 3 and there are two or three weeks left until the House rises for the summer. So allow us to consider the various bills and the various other questions in the House of Commons.

Think, for example, about Bill C-64. What does it consist of? Our friends in the NDP wanted legislation so that, for the first time in Canada, a regulatory framework could be created for prescription drug insurance funded by the government, out of public funds. This is a historic moment. It is essential that we move forward with that bill. If the process instigated by Mr. Beaulieu, and perhaps also Mr. Godin and the other Conservatives, is successful, that might mean that there will be another day of debate and a decision that it is not necessary to move forward with that other issue.

Do Mr. Godin's and Mr. Beaulieu's and the other members' constituents prefer to have prescription drug insurance or another day of debate on this motion? I think all our constituents want prescription drug insurance and do not want another political sparring match or another argument.

• (1655)

This bill is one of the examples. What are the others? Think about the objectives of the budget.

For example, we have a housing crisis in Canada. I know that Mr. Beaulieu does not like my stories, but I just want to tell you a little story in connection with the motion. In 2019, when I was elected, there was housing available in my riding. However, after the pandemic, the situation became very difficult. It has to be pointed out that more than 50,000 people in Ontario and the other parts of Canada decided to move to the Maritimes. That is the case in your province, Mr. Chair, and also in mine. We have a plan to create more housing, but in order to do that we need to adopt the measures provided in the budget.

However, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives think that we are making the best use of our time by taking a motion like this one, which is a personal attack on Mr. Drouin, to the House of Commons. They prefer to get into an argument and engage in a political game rather than discussing initiatives to improve housing. That is interesting.

Constituents in Alberta and British Columbia probably also think that action on housing is more important than this political game.

I would point out that in the context in which a committee adopts this kind of motion to report to the House, a member may then decide to raise a point of privilege or a point of order, to debate that idea.

The show is over. The Bloc wants to be able to sparkle in the sunlight, but it is over. I call on you, Mr. Chair, and on all my colleagues. We absolutely have to get back to work that is necessary.

I am going to give Mr. Samson a few more important points about this motion, but at this point, in this part of my speech, I want to reiterate to all my colleagues that we have to keep going with the

other work. However, if this personal attack continues, I am prepared to continue improving my French here, before this committee, all the way to September. I am prepared to raise a variety of points. I am a lawyer. I do not have as much experience as you, Mr. Chair, but, if I think it necessary, I can find other points to raise about this motion, and keep going like that. I am going to keep going until the Conservatives and the Bloc, and maybe also Mr. Boulerice, I hope, decide that this game is not helping their constituents. Mr. Boulerice has several years' experience as a member of Parliament. I respect my honourable opposition colleague. He is a force to be reckoned with in the House of Commons, particularly during question period. If I am not mistaken, I think he is the only NDP representative in Quebec. That is impressive. It shows that he works very hard. Personally, I find him to be a source of inspiration.

• (1700)

I think Mr. Samson is always ready to talk about French and the rights of francophone communities. He is a former school board superintendent in Acadia, in Nova Scotia, and I am very proud of his work.

So I am going to close here and give him the rest of my time today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am very happy to be with you here today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blois. I congratulate you on the quality of your French.

Mr. Samson, go ahead.

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

I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleague Mr. Blois, from Nova Scotia, who has demonstrated how important the French language is, and who wanted to tell the committee his story as it relates with the motion and, obviously, the proposed amendment to the motion.

I want to point out that we announced the tabling of the official languages bill at the historic site of Grand-Pré, in my colleague's riding. You were there with me, Mr. Chair, when Bill C-13 on the modernization of the Official Languages Act was announced. We announced it in Grand-Pré. Mr. Blois is pleased to know that we're very proud of that riding.

The comments that he made in his speech were impressive. He had done his homework on the weekend. He edited his speech. He even edited the speech that he gave a week ago. He added information to enrich the committee's discussions. He also added other information, other facts, that are essential to the discussions we've been having in the past few weeks. I want to thank him for his work and his efforts to speak French. His French continues to improve, and that makes his teachers proud of their success, which is also his, as is often the case.

I would also like to note that all of us have been sitting on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for seven, eight or nine years. I sat on the committee in the first four years. Then I temporarily left the committee to take up other duties last year during the process to modernize the Official Languages Act. I have to say that was the high point of this committee's work.

The purpose of the amendment that I have introduced is to reach out to my opposition colleagues. I have asked them to look at themselves in the mirror, to stop playing their little games and to focus on the task at hand. Obviously, they've either failed to look at themselves in the mirror, or else the mirror is broken, because so far they have failed to change their attitude.

Having said that, I know that Mr. Dalton, Mr. Généreux, Ms. Kusie and Mr. Godin want to get to work. They want to keep moving the French language file forward and to build the foundation for Bill C-13. We have the tools we need; now we need to use them.

When the Commissioner of Official Languages appeared here in committee a week ago, he explained how important it is to get to work. He explained that we needed to set aside items such as these motions, which are now truly pointless.

A few weeks ago, I spoke out about Pierre Poilievre, who had used unacceptable language in a House of Commons. What happened? He refused to apologize. The word “wacko” that he used isn't the problem; it's the fact that he refused to withdraw his remarks or to apologize for using a word that isn't acceptable in the most democratic institution in Canada, as he was asked to do by the Speaker of the House of Commons, who is responsible for enforcing the rules in the House.

● (1705)

That man, who represents Ottawa's democratic institution, asked the leader to withdraw his remarks, but, as the latter refused to do so, he was ejected from the House. My colleague Francis Drouin has apologized seven times, if I'm not mistaken. It has become a political game.

Now with regard to my amendment, in it I requested that we move on to the next phase, that we extend an olive branch and that we bring this matter to an end.

I don't know about the other parties, but while we were studying Bill C-13, Canadian organizations and associations contacted my party almost every week to express their frustration. They're very frustrated now that they see we're pointlessly wasting minutes, hours and days. If the committee could agree to get down to business, we could get things done and achieve very important objectives.

Why did we pass Bill C-13 if we aren't going to use it? Nothing makes me feel prouder than the fact that we modernized the act, 35 years after it was last reformed. In an indirect way, it's the Conservatives who reformed it. It was actually Lucien Bouchard. If you read the Debates of the House of Commons from 1988, you'll see that he wasn't satisfied and that he felt that his party was limiting the benefits that the act afforded those communities. The act actually benefited those communities, but not as much as he would have

liked. That's what led to the birth of the Bloc Québécois. The Bloc was founded because Conservatives weren't willing to move forward and give the act some teeth. If the Conservatives had been genuinely willing to support francophone communities outside Quebec, Mr. Bouchard would have stood down and gone about his business. He truly wanted to forge ahead, but it was too much for the Conservatives.

My memory may be a bit shaky here, but I think it was in 1982 that Mr. Dion established clear objectives regarding measures that would help support official language minority communities across Canada.

Today the organizations, which were so proud of all the MPs who had contributed to Bill C-13, feel that members don't want to move forward and implement the essential parts of the bill. How is that possible?

I can't cite a clearer example than Bill C-13, which, for the first time in Canada's history, acknowledges how important the education continuum is. This is the first time.

● (1710)

Consequently, this was an incredible opportunity for those community groups and associations. In the end, it's not just the primary level that will benefit from this, but, for the first time, the post-secondary and university levels will as well; Bill C-13 will help foster that. And the preschool level will benefit too. There has never been such an opportunity in the past. It's historic.

However, the Conservatives, and unfortunately the other opposition parties as well, don't actually want to implement Bill C-13. They don't want to let the post-secondary level conduct a study to ensure that programs and funding can meet existing needs and provide better service.

Then there's early childhood, which had no funding, no base and no driving force to help it along. I remember my father saying, in the 1960s, that if we had a bilingualism law, we could demand services because we'd have the necessary tools to do so. That was in 1969. The situation is exactly the same now, 63 years later.

We have Bill C-13, a tool with enormous potential that represents an opportunity to regain a lot of the ground that we have lost. But they aren't interested in that conversation. They don't want to look at themselves in the mirror. They don't want to look at their leader and tell him that enough's enough, that they were elected in their ridings to represent their people and that the people in their ridings want them to get to work, to conduct studies that will advance education, which—and I don't know how many times I've repeated this—is the key to a society's success. They don't want it. No, that isn't true. They want it, but they can't do it. They can't look their leader in the eye and say that they, the elected MPs, will control this issue, not him, and that we've already wasted enough time.

I don't understand how anyone can overlook opportunities to make major progress. It isn't as though opposition members don't consider the francophonie important. Everyone around this table thinks it's important, but biding our time to avoid implementing Bill C-13 is just another way for us to lose ground.

Lord knows the Conservatives have all the answers when they aren't in power. They do nothing to support francophone communities when they're in office. No one's in a better position than me to tell you that they cut funding. What funding will they cut if they ever get back in? They'll cut funding for minorities. It's what they do. You can't count on them when times are tough.

You know the analogy I always draw, don't you? Animals around a lake look at each other differently when the water level's low. That's exactly what's happening here. Minorities suffer when less money is on the table. And just as animals look at each other differently, people aren't treating each other as they used to do. It's unacceptable.

• (1715)

In the nine and a half years that Stephen Harper was in power, the Conservatives failed to allocate an additional penny of funding to the official languages in education program or the action plan for official languages. Not a single funding increase was granted in nine and a half years. Do you call that investing in the community and the francophonie? Is it progress? It's impossible. You know better than me that, if inflation rises by 2% a year, we'll be 20% behind 10 years later.

Look at the difference between the investments made by the Conservatives, who didn't increase funding for official language programs by a single cent, and those that the Liberals have made in eight and a half years. We've raised funding from \$2.2 billion in 2015 to \$4.1 billion; that's an increase of \$1.9 billion. We've virtually doubled government investment in eight years, whereas the Conservatives never increased anything in nine years. So you know what will happen. As my colleague Mr. Serré said, and as we've often said in the House, the Conservatives will make cut after cut, especially in support for minorities. It's terrible.

The purpose of my amendment is to get us back to work. It's simply a matter of taking action. However, the Conservatives are opposed to it. They don't even want to look at it. They aren't interested in it because they want to continue playing political games. Which is unfortunate because I think that Bill C-13 was the high point of this committee's work and that what's happening now is its lowest. We're missing a favourable opportunity to improve the situation of minority preschool and post-secondary institutions.

Incidentally, I haven't even mentioned the francophone school boards, which, for the first time in Canada's history, became masters of their own destiny in the early 1990s. Before that, they reported to anglophone school boards. They couldn't operate on their own; they had to be guided. In the end, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that we were masters of our destiny in education. That's when we saw the number of francophone school boards increase right across Canada. In Nova Scotia, in 1996, we finally had an opportunity to establish a francophone school board that is now advancing and improving education in French.

Was that necessary? When I started out, I think there were 3,900 students, and now there are more than 6,000. Like the investments that have been made, the population has virtually doubled.

• (1720)

I remember that a former deputy minister of education in New Brunswick, whose name I forget, told me that he had read an article suggesting that, if the prevailing trend continued, no one would be speaking French in Nova Scotia in the 1960s. You can see the difference between then and now.

Why am I talking about that difference? I'm talking about it because we've had the Official Languages Act, the rise of francophone school boards across Canada, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, the modernization of the Official Languages Act in 1988, and, lastly, we've passed Bill C-13, which now provides tools that we can use to move forward. We've even gone further by agreeing to review the act every 10 years. That will ensure that we move forward. I predict that we will lose ground if the Conservatives come into power.

I'm going to cite a few specific examples, including a very important one.

The first thing they'll do with regard to Bill C-13 is say they can't let us require that Supreme Court judges be bilingual. They oppose that now. They've voted against it. They're always against things and they will continue opposing things in future. They won't look at themselves in the mirror or insist that their leader enforce that requirement. This is very important, and that's why I anticipate the enormous loss they will cause.

Which other part of Bill C-13 will they withdraw? I don't know, but another way to undermine the bill would be not to fund it. As you've noticed, the bill provides for funding so it can evolve.

Even when my colleagues discuss Bill C-13, they say Treasury Board will take the necessary steps and ensure that everything's confirmed. However, if the Conservatives are elected, they will refuse to grant funding to Treasury Board, thus preventing it from doing its job. There will be no more responsibility, no more progress. We will lose ground. That's what troubles me.

Every week, Canada's school boards ask me to encourage the committee to begin studying them, the school boards. Earlier I told you that the boards were created in the early 1990s. So they were established 34 or 35 years ago, but they're facing problems today. You tend to notice problems over time. The boards now have an opportunity to talk to the people, the committee, the experts—

• (1725)

Mr. Joël Godin: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Samson.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we've been listening to the Liberals filibuster for long enough. I'd really like someone to connect it all to the main motion. I'm lost now. I'd like to get back to the matter before us.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I hear your request, but, as you know, I have to interpret the remarks that speakers make as broadly as possible. In this instance, I understand that our colleague Mr. Samson is following on from what Mr. Blois said about reporting to the House of Commons and about what we won't be discussing when we report to the House.

My understanding is that he wants to talk about what we won't be discussing in relation to that.

However, if I'm mistaken in my interpretation, Mr. Samson, I'll ask you return to the motion. That's my interpretation of your comment.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): On a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, can we go back to the study on funding for post-secondary educational institutions and economic development?

We still have a report to prepare. We were also supposed to receive senior officials and the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada.

Can we get back to that study?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Serré, but that's not a point of order.

We'd be in a lot of trouble if I had to ask members to cite the number of the clause they're referring to. I can say in good faith that's not a point of order.

The meeting is coming to an end. As I've done recently, I'm going to adjourn this meeting. We will continue our business at the next meeting, which will be subject to what we discussed in camera. That's all I have to say.

At the next meeting, we will debate the proposed amendment to Mr. Beaulieu's motion. The speaking order will be as follows: Mr. Samson, Mr. Godin, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Drouin and Mr. Serré. I believe no one else raised a hand indicating a wish to speak.

• (1730)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I raised my hand, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: As I said, you will be the third person to speak, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I didn't understand, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: No, Mr. Chair, I just didn't hear my name.

The Chair: I'll repeat the speaking order: Mr. Samson, Mr. Godin, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Drouin and Mr. Serré.

Good day to you all.

We are adjourned.

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