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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (0925)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 106 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 20, 2023, the committee is resuming its study of federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions. In fact, we will be concluding this study today with the witnesses we have before us.

Before beginning, I want to briefly discuss how to avoid acoustic accidents. We are all insiders, and most people are here in person. I will simply suggest that you consult the small card on the table. When you are speaking into the microphone, place your earpiece face down on the sticker placed on the table. To prevent any feedback, speak to only one person at a time where possible. Be careful, and do your best to make sure that there is only one microphone on at a time. Wait for the chair to allow you to speak to avoid any sound problems and thus prevent any injuries to our valued interpreters.

I'd like to welcome those who are here less often, and whom we are always pleased to see once again.

We are welcoming Ms. Julie Boyer, assistant deputy minister, official languages, heritage and regions, and Mr. Timothée Labelle, director, intergovernmental policy and programs, official languages, both from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

In fact, today's visit by the representatives of the Department of Canadian Heritage will conclude our study of post-secondary funding, which began further to a motion introduced by Mr. Beaulieu.

I'd like to welcome our friends from Canadian Heritage.

Ms. Boyer, as you know, you have the floor for five minutes, after which there will be questions for you and your colleagues. Go ahead please.

Ms. Julie Boyer (Assistant Deputy Minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to the committee members. I'm pleased to be here with you today.

I'd like to begin by underscoring the fact that we are meeting today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

With me today is Timothée Labelle, the director of intergovernmental policy and programs at the official languages branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage. He's the director responsible for negotiating education agreements with the provinces, as well as funding to provide assistance in minority-language and second-language learning.

Thank you for inviting us to appear further to the appearance of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Mr. Randy Boissonnault, just over a month ago in connection with the study of federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

You are already perfectly well aware of the fact that ensuring access to quality post-secondary education in the minority language is a crucial issue for our communities. Beyond instruction and teaching as such, post-secondary funding has even broader positive outcomes, including community development and better employment prospects, which of course help to offset the workforce shortage.

But you know as well as I do that many Canadian minority-language post-secondary institutions are experiencing funding problems. This issue was referred to in the media by stakeholders during the 2022 cross-Canada official languages consultations in connection with our action plan, and during the estates general on francophone minority post-secondary education.

That's also why the federal government supports the post-secondary sector in various ways, and will continue to do so. For example, there is the funding of up to \$128 million over four years, starting this year, to support minority-language post-secondary education. Under the action plan for official languages, funding for the 2023 to 2028 period was announced at the end of last year. These investments, it shouldn't be forgotten, are in addition to the \$30.4 million that had been announced in the 2021 budget for the 2023–2024 period.

Furthermore, the federal government is working very closely with provincial and territorial governments, even though education falls under their jurisdiction, and they play a leading role in creating vital and stimulating places to live in minority-language communities.

[*English*]

Furthermore, the federal government is currently negotiating new bilateral agreements, as well as the protocol for agreements for minority-language education and second-language instruction, with the provincial and territorial governments to support our official language minority communities.

Thank you for having us today. We look forward to answering your questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boyer. That took you barely three minutes and 12 seconds.

We will now begin, as you know, with the first interactive round of six-minute questions with each of the political parties.

Mr. Joël Godin, the first vice-chair of this committee, will begin.

You have the floor for six minutes, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses, Ms. Boyer, whom we see regularly, and Mr. Labelle, whom we've met on a few occasions.

Thank you for being here this morning, and for having travelled from Montreal to Ottawa. I make the trip between Quebec City and Ottawa every week, so I understand what you've been through. Your trip is a little shorter, but I'd like to thank you for being here this morning.

As it happens, my first question is for you, and for the clerk. Ms. Mondou, a deputy minister at the Department of Canadian Heritage, is responsible for official languages. She is usually here.

Was she invited?

The Chair: Apparently not.

Nevertheless, we are happy to have our witnesses here today. The clerk has informed me that we invited the officials. It's at the request of committee members that officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage appear. We were told that Ms. Mondou was unavailable, but that they would send people who could give precise answers to our questions.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay.

I'm going to take advantage of your presence to ask you some questions, because I'd like to understand how things work at the Department of Canadian Heritage. There's no department of official languages. What I understand is that official languages falls under the authority of Canadian Heritage, and that officials like Ms. Labelle handle official languages.

So official languages has no portfolio or money. Mr. Boissonnault has to consult the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Can you help me figure that out?

• (0930)

Ms. Julie Boyer: I'd be happy to.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage is Ms. Pascale St-Onge. Authority with respect to official languages, which had been with Minister St-Onge, were transferred by decree to Minister Boissonnault.

That means that all funds administered for official languages or to be used for the promotion of bilingualism, such as the official languages support programs, are now managed and signed by Minister Boissonnault. He does not need to go through Minister St-Onge.

My department handles official languages and heritage. For heritage, meaning museums, I report to Minister St-Onge; for everything pertaining to official languages, I report to Minister Boissonnault.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do you have the decree that describes this delegation of powers?

Ms. Julie Boyer: I don't think I have it with me.

Do you have it, Mr. Labelle? I believe it was sent to the committee chair.

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

A letter was sent to all the committee members. We received it. The Prime Minister issued a decree to assign full responsibility for official languages to Mr. Boissonnault. If the letter was sent a month ago, we could always have it circulated again if Mr. Godin hasn't read it. What Ms. Boyer said is clear, and the letter was sent to everyone, I understand.

The Chair: The document confirming that was indeed sent.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm not asking you for confirmation, Mr. Chair.

I want to be very clear. What I'm asking is whether we have the wording of the delegation of powers from the minister to the official languages minister.

Mr. Chair, could you give me an update on my speaking time—

The Chair: I had deducted 20 seconds. Let's say that you still have just over two minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Two minutes?

The Chair: My clock shows that four minutes and 20 seconds have gone by.

Mr. Joël Godin: You interrupted me to ask the clerk a question. Then Mr. Serré had a point of order.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

The Chair: There is a point of order. I didn't have time to say so, because my microphone wasn't working.

I'll take this moment to inform you that we are going to circulate the document, which we received in April, to all members of the committee.

Mr. Joël Godin: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have two minutes more.

Mr. Joël Godin: That means I have four minutes left.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Joël Godin: Well, two minutes—

The Chair: Let's clear that up right now.

Mr. Joël Godin: Tell me how much time I have left.

The Chair: My clock says four minutes and 54 seconds.

Mr. Joël Godin: Is that the number of minutes I've used or the number remaining?

The Chair: Those are the minutes expired. Time flies. I'll take off 20 seconds from earlier.

There was a point of order, but I had to consult the clerk on your question, so I'll give you two more minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have two full minutes left.

The Chair: I'm generous, like your neighbour on the right.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

As you are familiar with what happened in committee, do you find it acceptable for members of the government party to have treated witnesses in an unacceptable manner? I'd like to hear what you have to say on that.

Ms. Julie Boyer: I'd like to thank the member for his question, Mr. Chair, but I don't feel that I can reply.

He's asking for my opinion. We officials come here to present facts.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Boyer.

I wasn't expecting another answer from you, but that's all right. You're complying with your code of ethics, which is to your credit.

Mr. Chair, I would now like to move a motion that was sent to all the committee members. It is admissible, and will, I believe, demonstrate the Conservative Party of Canada's intent to recover the time that was lost.

I believe that everyone is aware of what happened on May 6, when a member of the committee who is here this morning dealt in an unacceptable manner with witnesses who had generously and freely come to share their knowledge and information, to enable us to be better legislators and do our work properly, specifically in the area of post-secondary education.

The process used by my colleague, who in our opinion treated witnesses in a rather coarse and unparliamentary manner, demonstrates that the situation was trivialized. It took four days before he apologized and only after rising on a point of order, which you, Mr. Chair allowed. A point of order ought not to be used for an apology.

I'd like to remind everyone that on May 6, he said that witnesses were “full of...” and I'll say no more. On Tuesday, he told a journalist, who was here in the room, that he would not apologize. On Wednesday, while leaving the Liberal caucus in the middle of a media scrum, he said that if he had offended or harmed anyone—that's

not the exact wording, but that's what he meant—he would apologize. The following day in committee, while the minister—

• (0935)

The Chair: One moment. Mr. Godin. Technically speaking, are you moving a motion?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes.

The Chair: What is it?

Mr. Joël Godin: I only have one. I'll read it and then get back to my comments.

The Chair: Yes, if you could. It has to be done officially.

Go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: I always try to follow the rules. It's important to respect our institutions.

The Chair: Indeed.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, this motion was sent to the committee members on June 10:

That considering that the committee has accumulated lost working hours due to the obstruction by Liberal MPs who are trying to protect MP Francis Drouin and prevent his removal from the committee, it is resolved that the committee requests the Chair to hold at least five meetings between July 8, 2024, and September 13, 2024, to address the study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions as well as to finalize the report on economic development of official language minority communities and the report on language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions.

I'm going to continue on the assumption that you know what happened. We lost seven meetings because the Liberals didn't want us to vote on the motion moved by my Bloc Québécois colleague, Mr. Beaulieu.

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

I just want to ask Mr. Godin whether this is the same motion as the one that requested holding five committee meetings between July 8 and September 13, a motion that was presented in the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and the 24 other committees. The same motion was presented in all the other committees.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, what is the point of order?

The Chair: One moment, please.

Mr. Marc Serré: I simply want to know whether it's the same wording, because what I have in front of me is...

The Chair: There can be a point of order if an identical or substantively identical motion was proposed.

Mr. Joël Godin: Is there such a standing order?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: No, it's not a point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: No.

The Chair: Okay, I might have misunderstood.

Was it in this committee or other committees?

Mr. Marc Serré: In the 24 other committees.

The Chair: Does that include this committee?

Mr. Marc Serré: Yes.

The Chair: Was a similar motion proposed in this committee?

Mr. Marc Serré: No, but in all the other committees...

The Chair: In that case, the point of order would have been admissible if proposed in this committee.

I think this procedure was previously used, not so long ago. I'm talking about when a motion is substantively similar to another. I understood that it had been proposed both here and in other committees. I am less interested in the other committees, but it would be another matter if it had been done here. Since that's not the case, a point of order is inadmissible.

Thank you. It was legitimate, but since no similar motion was presented here in this committee, it doesn't work.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You're saying that his point of order is admissible. I don't think it is, but it's a matter of interpretation.

The Chair: Since we are talking about it, there really is a standing order that may require the chair's decision when a similar motion has already been proposed.

Mr. Joël Godin: Here?

The Chair: Yes, if it had been done here. However, in his point of order, I thought the reference was to a motion proposed here which had also been proposed in other committees. That's what I understood, but that wasn't the case.

Please continue.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, Mr. Chair. I respect your decision. I know that you're a legal expert.

I think it's important to keep the population informed of the fact that there is systematic obstruction on the part of the Liberals to prevent a vote on the motion that has been moved.

I believe that as parliamentarians, the least we can do is respect the vote. Last week, there was a vote to.... I'm going to digress and return to another exemption that was accepted.

Last week, we agreed to vote on something that would allow the committee to make progress with respect to post-secondary education so that our analyst could work during the summer.

We believe, based on our values, principles and convictions, that there shouldn't be an interruption for as long as this MP sits around the table. He does not, in our opinion, possess the legitimacy needed to sit on this committee. On that basis, I think it's important to comply with our principles and our values.

The three opposition parties—all three of them—agree. We respect this person, but not what he did. We don't believe that his excuses are acceptable, given the form they took, his actions, and in particular, based on my interpretation of what happened, his beliefs and the insincerity of his apologies.

That's as far as I'll go; It's my opinion, and I had to say so. Nevertheless, I don't think we should pursue an interruption. We did so for the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Did you want to say something?

• (0940)

The Chair: Since you've been talking about it, when you mention the word “interruption”, I don't know if you are alluding to the fact that the committee agreed, first of all, to hold a meeting of the subcommittee in the first hour, and secondly to receive—at least that's what I understood as chair—the Canadian Heritage officials to complete Mr. Beaulieu's study. That was why we digressed from the main topic, or interrupted, as you put it. Let's call it a digression for those who are listening and following the proceedings.

Without this digression, I have to confirm—and everyone around the table is aware of this—that the floor is Mr. Drouin's. When we adjourned last Monday, we said that Mr. Drouin would have the floor at the next meeting. I'm not sure whether it was Mr. Godin or Mr. Serré. It's not important for the time being. We launched this digression, and at some point I have to rule on it. I don't know where we're headed with all this, but I'm with you.

But today's meeting is, at the committee's request, with the officials to complete Mr. Beaulieu's study before the end of the June session. This meeting is to complete the study.

But then we began this digression. When I say “we”, I mean the committee, Mr. Godin. I understand, and I'll allow you to continue. However, at some point I'm going to have to reach a decision on what is going to happen next Monday when we resume the meeting. By opening this digression, we have set aside a debate on a motion that was in progress. The entire committee is well aware of this.

I'm going to allow you to continue with your motion. I'm listening, but remember that we are right now dealing with a motion during a digression we began by adjourning a debate which we had decided to resume at the next meeting.

That's why, at the committee's request, we had the Canadian Heritage officials come here today. You decided, and you are entitled to do so, to move a motion. Do the math. At some point, the chair is going to have to rule with respect to how we adjourned last Monday, meaning to pick up the debate where we had left off. People who were on the list were stopped from speaking, beginning with Mr. Drouin, in order to do what we are doing today.

So I'll let you continue with your motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you have indeed summarized the situation very well, but what I want to say is that we digressed for the official languages commissioner.

We respect democratic parliamentary institutions. It's a House of Commons officer, and I think it was altogether legitimate, further to the tabling of his report, to discuss and hear the report in this committee. Now, last week—you are entirely correct, Mr. Chair, and you've summarized the situation very well—we held a discussion. You agreed to a vote. The Liberals agreed to vote on a specific request to move forward. We, the Conservatives, voted against it. We have principles, we have values, and we are consistent. But as long as the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is sitting on the committee, I have to inform you that we, the Conservatives—and it's unfortunate for the official language minority communities—we cannot accept this person's presence. Unfortunately, we will continue to intervene with that in mind.

My motion is clear. As of Monday, we have lost seven meetings. Seven meetings means that the official language minority communities have lost out. It's not us, the three opposition parties, that decided to waste these meetings; it's the Liberals, because they won't allow us to vote. Under the circumstances, I must move the motion so that we can make up for lost time in the interest of our mission here at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. That's it in a nutshell.

Now I find it unacceptable that we should be in this situation, which came about because of obstinacy. The Liberals will say that it's the opposition parties being stubborn, but who caused this situation? It wasn't the NDP, it wasn't the Bloc, it wasn't the Conservative Party; it was an MP for the Liberal Party of Canada, the party in power, who treated witnesses in an unacceptable manner. Our institution deserves respect. We challenged your decision, Mr. Chair, to the effect that it was inadmissible. We won, and so the committee's decision must be complied with, just as I complied with its decision last week. The time has to be recovered. I think it's important for us to consider that issue.

I'm going to stop there and wait to hear what the people around the table have to say. There are, as I mentioned, three studies. There's the report on post-secondary institutions, the report on linguistic obligations and the report on economic development, which we could do this summer. I understand that no one around the table would be happy about having to come back. But who caused this situation? It was the people opposite who were being obstructive. We want to move forward. The solution is simple. The government MPs need to allow us to vote, and that would settle matters. It's simple. Abide by the committee's decision. If the committee decides that yes, Mr. Drouin should remain, that will be an end of it. If it decides that, in accordance with Mr. Beaulieu's motion, a report to the Speaker of the House is required, then you will provide a report to the Speaker. We would then have to await the Speaker's decision.

Right now, there's a deadlock. I'll repeat once more that the three opposition parties are in agreement. I'm reaching out, to use an expression we heard as my colleagues were being obstructive. I am reaching out to break this deadlock so that we can start on the right foot in the next session, because there are only one or two meetings left in our spring session. I think telling Quebeckers that we will never raise this matter again would be a wonderful Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day present to them on June 24. We could then move on to something else.

We could then work hard in September on behalf of all francophones, everywhere in Canada, even in Quebec.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I have the duty and the important privilege, if you will, of abiding by the procedural rules and regulations of the House of Commons. That is what we are doing. It governs everything that happens, everything you have said and everything that may be said. We have to abide by the rules of procedure. I have to make sure that is done. So far, all sides seem to have abided by the rules of procedure.

In the list of people who want to speak, I see Mr. Généreux's name first, with Mr. Dalton second and Mrs. Kusie third.

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

The Chair: The floor is yours, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We have witnesses here with us. I just want to know what the members on the other side are intending to do. We should release Ms. Boyer and Mr. Labelle, if there is a list of people who want to speak.

I ask this question with all due respect, because it is 9:49. We have 25 minutes left.

So I am asking the question. Do they intend to talk and, again, not have a chance to hear the witnesses who are appearing before us for the second time? I repeat: It would be the second time. I am asking out of respect for our witnesses.

The Chair: Does the committee agree that we release today's witnesses? There are five people wanting to speak.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I can't answer that.

The Chair: I am not asking you personally. I am asking the committee.

Shall we release our witnesses, or do you want our witnesses to stay here? At this point, the names on the list are Mr. Généreux, Mr. Dalton, Mrs. Kusie, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Drouin.

• (0950)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I am going to speak for 30 seconds. That is easy; I am going to speak for 30 seconds. We do the math. If we go over 25 minutes, fine, we will let the witnesses go.

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

I am asking something, diplomatically. Does the committee want to release our witnesses for the rest of the meeting? I will give you five seconds to see you nod yes or no.

Yes, the floor is yours, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, my colleague just said we have to be consistent. If everyone—

The Chair: No, I am going to interrupt you.

Mr. Joël Godin: No, wait, I am replying to—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I am going to interrupt you. The chair is asking you.

If, in the next 10 seconds, there is no objection to releasing our witnesses, I will release them, and I—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I am not releasing them, and we are moving on to the members.

Mr. Joël Godin: No, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I am not giving you the floor. The next speaker is Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you are asking committee members a question. So I want to answer you, Mr. Chair. He calculated 30 seconds. If we calculate 30 seconds for all the speakers, the witnesses will be able to answer. We cannot bully our colleagues based on deducing that it is going to take 25 minutes. They have spent seven weeks—

The Chair: Exactly. Mr. Godin, I am immediately taking away your right to speak.

Mr. Joël Godin: Right.

The Chair: I was doing it politely and diplomatically, for the benefit of the witnesses who are here. I see there is no unanimous consent to release our witnesses. We will ask them to stay here, at the table. I thank them for being here.

We are going to hear the next ones on the list of people who want to speak to us. The next three are Mr. Généreux, Mr. Dalton and Mrs. Kusie.

Mr. Généreux, the floor is yours.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Unless I am mistaken, our witnesses are being compensated, whether they are here or in their offices. I don't think there is any problem in that regard.

I have been relatively discreet, if I may say so, since the start of the mess that has plagued the committee for several weeks now. I did so voluntarily, thinking that the Liberals might ultimately understand the will of the committee. When I talk about the will of the committee, I am referring to the fact that the three opposition parties have introduced a motion and are hoping to be able to vote on that motion and the Liberals have engaged in parliamentary obstruction to prevent that vote.

I would like to remind all members of the committee that we have been told since the Liberals came to power, that is, since 2015, that committees are independent. I believe we can always doubt the accuracy of that claim, since committees are inevitably a reflection of the political parties they are made up of.

In saying that, I would point out that we do want to give all the freedom and all the choices that a committee may make; people can act voluntarily or involuntarily. However, one thing for sure is that in politics, and especially in our parliamentary system, there is a direction, a path that is, to some extent, laid out by a party, toward the things that have to be done, that have to be brought to committee, prioritized, and so on. The evidence is that there are employees here, behind us, who are in constant communication with other levels within our respective parties, and not just on the Liberal side,

but in all our parties; obviously, we include ourselves in that. It is true for all parties.

As well, since several weeks ago, since the beginning of May, here we are at the end of June, the end of the parliamentary session, facing obstruction in response to a decision about the independence of the committee. If the committee were truly independent, as the Liberals have been saying for several years, we should immediately call the vote on the motion we introduced to have Mr. Drouin removed from the committee.

There is therefore no reason why we should still be discussing this today. If the Liberals really think, in their heart of hearts, that committees are independent, then, ordinarily, we should be able to decide, if the decisions we make here really are independent of the party in power. We should be able to take action and vote on this motion.

I do not want to make a lengthy speech, but I have wondered for a long time whether the independence of committees was truly something dear to the Liberals' heart. Obviously, today, I have to acknowledge the evidence and conclude that it is not, since people other than the ones who are here around the table, and who are not necessarily employees, are running it. In fact, I want to recognize, in passing, all the employees who support us in our deliberations. I tip my hat to them. They do exceptional work and it is important that they be here.

To all appearances, the whip's office and certain individuals are running the committee. That is it in a nutshell. They are running the committee.

• (0955)

The Chair: Forgive me for interrupting you, Mr. Généreux, but you should be addressing the substance of the motion that has been made.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Essentially, I think we should move on to the vote as quickly as possible, but also continue or get back the time that has been wasted for francophones and all minority communities, in Canada and Quebec. I think we should meet this summer to be able to get back the time wasted.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Dalton, the floor is yours.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): I would like to say a few words about Mr. Godin's motion.

We have wasted seven weeks. I think we can easily agree to five more meetings during the summer to do our work, because it is important to official language minority communities.

We have heard long tales from Mr. Blois, about his ancestors in France and chateaus, and from Mr. Serré. We spent a lot of time on them. It was somewhat entertaining, but we really wasted time. We learned a lot about them. Our lineage is important, but we really need to do our work.

We all know that we have wasted time. We are here to hold the vote, and I want us to think about that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

Mrs. Kusie, we are listening.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you.

As I think you can imagine, I agree with my colleague Mr. Godin. Right now, I sit on two committees, the Standing Committee on Official Languages, obviously, and the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

We have a lot of meetings during break weeks or when we are in our ridings. I think it is reasonable to do the work that is needed in order to achieve the objectives that committees have. As my colleagues said, we have wasted seven meetings.

In my opinion, asking for five meetings is very reasonable, given the time we wasted on Mr. Blois' story, for example. I did my best to share a small part of my history too, in making my remarks, here at the committee.

I think five meetings is very reasonable. It is what was done at another committee. It has worked well, to do the necessary work at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. I think it would work here too.

I therefore support Mr. Godin's motion and I hope all members of the committee will agree to take a bit of time this summer to do the work that was supposed to be done before this unfortunate situation started.

To conclude, I am asking for a vote, Mr. Chair.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you.

So we are going to continue to follow the list already made.

Mr. Beaulieu, you are the next speaker. You have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): We agree that a lot of time has been wasted, because the Liberals do not accept the majority vote. That is deplorable. However, we will not support the Conservatives' motion to make people travel during the summer, when we are not sure whether the systematic obstruction will continue. I think there is surely a way to make up the lost time once we come back.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Drouin has the floor, and then it will be Ms. Ashton and Mr. Serré.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

On the motion itself, I find it a little bizarre that for the two dates, July 8 and September 13, identical motions were made in the other committees.

I am talking about the motion. I find that bizarre.

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

The Chair: I am listening, Mr. Godin.

A voice: Oh, oh!

Mr. Joël Godin: Let me speak, Mr. Serré. You will see, because we are going to do the same thing as you.

Mr. Chair, they are referring to motions made in other committees. I would like us to talk about our committee. That is all I wanted to remind you of, so you could give members the necessary instructions.

The Chair: Since we are all sensitive about points of order, I will say that this is not necessarily a point of order. If someone has knowledge of what goes on somewhere else and there is a coincidence, it may be important that the person report it. I am not saying that this is important to the chair or to other members, but this is not a point of order, unfortunately.

Continue, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I find it bizarre. I am referring to this motion, because the Conservative Party wants to publish a press release in the next few days saying that the members of the committee do not want to work this summer. That is clear. It is a strategy that has been used in the past. I am not impressed by it. We will be voting against it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Briefly, I would like to say that we all agree that the member's conduct toward the witnesses at this committee was very problematic. We will not be changing our minds on that.

However, we do not agree on the motion that has been put forward. We know that urgent meetings must be held in the case of a public emergency, a national security problem, for example, but that is not the case at present.

That said, I hope we can move forward with the committee's work as soon as possible, but we will not be supporting this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Serré, the floor is yours.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to be brief, because I have a lot of other things to say.

I represent a large 32,000 km riding. In the summer, we use the time to meet with our constituents. I think it is important to do that.

As I said, this same motion has been put forward at 24 parliamentary committees. The dates were the same. We work from September to June to do committee work. We are independent. We do our studies. When we talk about committees' independence, we are talking about the four parties around the table. As Ms. Ashton said, this is not a national security problem.

Coming back to Mr. Godin's motion, he wants us to adopt his motion, but he has clearly said that they would continue to engage in obstruction until we vote on the motion. In the motion, we are asked to sit this summer. It is important that Canadians understand that. Mr. Godin's motion cannot even be considered by the committee, because a committee is not entitled to tell a whip—

Mr. Joël Godin: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Marc Serré: That is a fact.

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Serré.

We can have only one microphone open at a time.

Mr. Godin, we are listening.

Mr. Joël Godin: My colleague says it cannot be considered. We voted and we defied your ruling. It can therefore now be considered.

• (1005)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, that is not a point of order. It is a statement of fact. We are going to allow Mr. Serré to finish.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Godin claims to follow the rules at all times, but in the article in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which we follow, it clearly states that a committee may not tell a whip who can sit as members of a committee. We would like to do that, if there were a precedent. We have a big list of Conservative Party members who have done things on other committees, and to other witnesses, as well, whom we would suggest not participate. That is not the role of the committee.

Coming back to the Canadians who are listening to us right now: We are being asked to vote on the motion that Mr. Godin has submitted twice and we are discussing this morning, which proposes that we hold meetings this summer. That part is important. Why do they want us to sit this summer? It is no longer even about Mr. Drouin. If we adopt this motion, we may have to hold meetings this summer. What does that tell Canadians? The Conservatives are doing this every week, right now. They are talking about adopting reports to the House. If we adopt this motion, we will have to report it to the House. That is important.

Mr. Godin should be quiet, because I have the floor, Mr. Chair. I know he is not used to listening to other people, but it is high time for him to listen.

If this is sent to the House, it will delay all of the business in the House. Certainly, that is what Mr. Blanchet and Mr. Poilievre want. They do not want the budget to be adopted. They do not want the economic statement to be approved. There are a lot of good bills in the House, so if the motion against Mr. Drouin that has been moved here at the Standing Committee on Official Languages goes back to the House, that will call for days and hours in the House.

Mr. Joël Godin: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

There is an article that says we have to stick to the subject of the motion. This is not the motion we are talking about. We are talking about the motion I moved a few minutes ago. If he had listened, he might be talking about the real motion.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, the remarks by your colleague on the right were 95% about what Mr. Serré is talking about. I let him continue and I reminded him a few minutes later about the substance of your motion. As chair, I have to make sure I am being fair to everyone. I assume that all members here want the same thing.

So I am going to let Mr. Serré speak, as I let your colleague Mr. Généreux. However, if I see that it is dragging on and we are

not talking about the substance of the motion at hand, I am going to let him know, as I let your colleague know.

Mr. Serré, the floor is yours.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, as I said, I am going to be brief.

If the motion is adopted as the opposition members want, it will be sent to the House. That is in the preamble of the motion from this morning, so it is very relevant. It will be sent to the House, and this will delay all the business of the House, including the budget, the economic statement and all bills in the House. This is obstruction, which is what Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Blanchet have confirmed they want to do. We have heard from the Minister of Official Languages, we have heard from the officials. Today, again, we ask the officials to come back, with the agreement of the committee, and Mr. Godin did not ask one question about post-secondary education during his six minutes' speaking time, not one. He talked about the order in council; he asked questions about Mr. Drouin's comments to the officials. This was really inappropriate.

To me, since we are talking about respect, I think we have to move on to the next stage. We have to vote on this morning's motion, without a doubt.

Clearly, we have a lot of work to do, and it is obvious that Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Blanchet have to stop playing games, because Canadians need a bill passed in the House of Commons, not things that have already been discussed here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: If there is no further discussion, we will call the vote.

There are no objections.

Mr. Généreux?

I will ask the clerk to call the vote on the present motion made today by Mr. Godin.

I will read it to make sure we know what we are voting on:

That considering that the committee has accumulated lost working hours due to the obstruction by Liberal MPs who are trying to protect MP Francis Drouin and prevent his removal from the committee, it is resolved that the committee requests the Chair to hold at least five meetings between July 8, 2024, and September 13, 2024, to address the study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions as well as to finalize the report on economic development of official language minority communities and the report on language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

Mr. Godin, you have approximately one minute.

• (1010)

Mr. Joël Godin: In fact, Mr. Chair, I am going to come back to the initial question.

Could someone explain for me how it is that the Minister of Official Languages reports to the Minister of Canadian Heritage?

Do you think, given that, as far as the Official Languages Act is concerned, the Minister of Official Languages does not exist, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who is one of the people in charge, with the President of the Treasury Board, should testify before the committee?

Ms. Julie Boyer: It is really up to the committee, depending on the witnesses you want to invite.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do you think it is reasonable that in response to the committee's invitation to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, she did not agree to testify here?

The Chair: That is an excellent question, but your time is up; it was extended. There is no more time for questions, because we have reached the finish line.

Before I adjourn, I want to point out that we met as a subcommittee, at the request of the committee, in order to submit a report on Monday. Do you prefer to do it in camera? It relates to the education continuum. Do you want to do it publicly? It will take at least 15 to 20 minutes. Are you leaving it to the chair's discretion? The first 15 or 20 minutes will deal with a report that the subcommittee is to submit to this committee. I am letting you know, and it will be up to you to decide. I suggest that we do it in camera.

It will be in camera, so wait until the next invitation. We are going to resume where we were this past Monday, with Mr. Drouin on the speaking list, which everyone knows. It will be noted.

Mr. Beaulieu, I am listening.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If we do it in camera, the report has to be submitted to the committee for it to be adopted.

The Chair: I suggest that the committee meet in camera to hear the recommendations of the subcommittee on the education continuum.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The committee would sit in camera.

The Chair: Yes, it would sit in camera for the first 15 or 20 minutes.

Is everyone happy with that? Yes? Fine.

With that, we will adjourn on the same terms as the adjournment last Monday.

I would like to thank the witnesses.

Have a good day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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