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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 15 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 23, 2025, we are meeting today to continue our study on the use of French in government communications.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses we will hear from during the first hour of the meeting.

We first welcome the Honourable Shafqat Ali, President of the Treasury Board. He is accompanied by Bill Matthews, secretary of the Treasury Board, Carstee Quell, executive director of the official languages centre of excellence at the office of the chief human resources officer, and Francis Trudel, associate chief human resources officer.

We also welcome three representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage: Isabelle Mondou, deputy minister, Julie Boyer, assistant deputy minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, and Sarah Boily, director general, Official Languages.

I will give the floor first to Minister Ali.

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

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

Joël Godin: In fact, I would like to understand one thing.

On October 23, our committee adopted a motion concerning the percentage of French usage by the Prime Minister in his activities and all the repercussions on the various government agencies. The first point of the motion stated this:

That...a. The committee invite the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Official Languages to appear for no less than two hours each, separately and at two distinct committee meetings, within 21 days, to discuss the state of official bilingualism in Canada and the government's plan to uphold the equal status of French and English in federal communications; particularly the use of French in federal institutions in Quebec, given that the Charter of the French Language stipulates that French is the only official and common language;

In the notice of the meeting today, which we received very late this morning, I see that the President of the Treasury Board is listed among the witnesses. I am very happy that he is with us this morning. That said, I don't see the name of the Minister of Official Lan-

guages, although I see that representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage are with us for the first hour of the meeting.

My question is simple: why are the representatives from Canadian Heritage here? It's not that I don't like them. It's because the waters are being muddied.

So, I ask you the question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The clerk and I are doing our best. The clerk worked very hard, at the committee's request, to organize today's meeting on the subject being studied.

Committee members can take advantage of the presence of representatives from Canadian Heritage to ask them questions, but it's not mandatory. The only presentation we will hear will be from Minister Ali, after which the members will be able to ask their questions. It's really for that.

• (1105)

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, their evidence is scheduled for the second hour of the meeting. In fact, according to the wording of the notice of meeting, the representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage are with us from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

It's important to understand that, under the Official Languages Act, the Treasury Board Secretariat has certain responsibilities, while another responsibility is shared between it and Canadian Heritage. I don't understand why Treasury Board needs representatives from Canadian Heritage to support it. It was not the will expressed in the motion we had adopted. So, I'm wondering about that.

The Chair: All the members can decide whether they want to ask them questions. For my part, my goal was to organize a meeting that would allow the committee to study the topic it wanted to study. You have the choice to ask them questions or not, but there will be no time allocated for officials from that department to make a presentation.

Joël Godin: Can I assume that the Liberals will ask questions to the representatives of Canadian Heritage?

The Chair: I have no idea, Mr. Godin.

Joël Godin: All right, you can't assume that.

You say that the representatives from Canadian Heritage are here, so the members will be able to put questions to both groups, if I can call them that. This means that, if there were a third group, we could ask questions to them without the subject of our questions specifically concerning Treasury Board. Is this what I should understand?

The Chair: We are trying to organize a meeting that is as productive as possible to allow you to get answers to the questions you want to ask. That's what I'm trying to do. If the members of the committee do not want certain people to be present, it is up to them to decide whether they want them to leave.

Joël Godin: In fact, I am requesting that the representatives from Canadian Heritage be there for the second hour of the meeting, but that during the first hour, we focus on Treasury Board. That's what I'm asking for, as a member of Parliament. So, I'll open the debate, if you don't mind, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: What is the will of the committee members?

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I would like to know one thing. Will the Minister of Official Languages still appear a little later? By doing it this way, we're not exempting him from participating in the study, are we?

The Chair: The motion that the committee adopted remains in effect. I know that a new minister has just been appointed to this position, namely Minister Miller. The clerk confirms to me that he was invited, but he declined the invitation for today. I think, however, that he expressed the desire to appear later.

Does that answer your question, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mario Beaulieu: Yes, but I assume that, when he appears, the minister will be accompanied by representatives from Canadian Heritage. We will thus see them twice.

The Chair: It is up to the committee members to decide. I work at the behest of the committee members. It's not up to me to decide.

Ms. Chenette, you have the floor.

Madeleine Chenette (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Allow me to be a little surprised by the discomfort. Ultimately, it's clear that the first part of the meeting is dedicated to Treasury Board. In doing so, we will be pleased, just like you, to ask questions of the President of the Treasury Board and his team concerning the aspect of Treasury Board that concerns us.

As for the second part, it's perfectly normal that Minister Miller, who has just taken on that role, may not be as available to answer all questions today. However, given that our two official languages, including French, are so important in our lives, as we have discussed several times in the committee, we have a great opportunity. Indeed, we can maximize the presence of members of the Canadian Heritage team by first asking them questions about what is important.

What I understand is that Minister Miller will be pleased to come see us at a later meeting. Of course, when the minister appears, he comes with members of his team. We can, however, maximize their presence today. For my part, I'm delighted that we can take advantage of this opportunity, instead of wasting an hour saying that the committee has no other guests this morning.

So, for our part, what was proposed by the clerk and the chair is perfectly fine with us.

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

Joël Godin: In fact, Mr. Chair, what I understand from my Liberal colleague's remarks is that the Liberals will put their questions directly to the representatives of Treasury Board during the first hour.

So, what is the need to have people from Canadian Heritage in the room? Is it to prepare for the second hour?

I ask you the question.

The Chair: Ms. Chenette, you have the floor. I will then answer Mr. Godin's question.

• (1110)

Madeleine Chenette: In my opinion, the benefit of having representatives from Canadian Heritage at the table right now is that, if for any reason a synergy and more specific answers are needed, we can then obtain information from them. However, the questions will first be directed to the representatives of Treasury Board. If relevant, we can obtain more precise information from the representatives of Canadian Heritage. That's where their presence at the table is an asset. Otherwise, they can just listen to the discussion on television. However, they're here, so we're best to take the opportunity to ask them the right questions if needed.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I won't make it a fight, but I find it quite peculiar that a second team of officials is coming to support Treasury Board's team. My perception is that Treasury Board does not necessarily have a good understanding of the content of the Official Languages Act and protects itself by asking to have the team of officials from Canadian Heritage on site. There you go, it's been said. I will, however, listen to you, Mr. Chair. For my part, I'm ready to continue, but I find it very unfortunate.

The Chair: Since we have the minister with us until noon, we will make the most of the time we have left in his company.

Minister, you have the floor for five minutes. We will then move on to the questions from the members.

The Hon. Shafqat Ali (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.

As the President of the Treasury Board, I'm committed to protecting and promoting both official languages. My mandate and priorities related to official languages in the public service....

I'd like to inform you that I'm accompanied by Bill Matthews, secretary of the Treasury Board, and Carsten Quell, executive director of the official languages centre of excellence.

As the President of the Treasury Board, I'm proud to be responsible for the effective implementation and governance of the Official Languages Act across federal institutions. The Treasury Board is responsible for developing and coordinating policies and programs in federal institutions that relate to part IV of the act, which covers services from federal institutions received by the public; part V, which relates to the language of work in federal institutions; part VI, which commits the government to ensuring that English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians have equal opportunities to work in the federal public service; and part VII, which seeks to advance the equality of status and use of English and French.

The TBS plays a key role in guiding federal institutions to make these visions a reality. My department supports federal institutions in achieving the objectives of these parts of the act and monitors their compliance.

Mr. Chair, allow me to dive a bit deeper into part VII of the act, which I know is of importance to the members. On this, the Government of Canada has made commitments such as “enhancing the vitality” of official-language minority communities. This includes supporting community organizations that provide on-the-ground support in areas such as culture, health, immigration and youth.

Part VII includes promoting the recognition and use of both official languages in Canadian society. A practical example is supporting organizations such as Canadian Parents for French and French for the Future.

Finally, part VII includes a commitment to strengthen opportunities for English speakers and French speakers in minority communities to learn in their own language. This takes place from early childhood development to post-secondary learning.

The Treasury Board is responsible for some aspects of part VII, following the modernization of the act in 2023. One key example is making new regulations under part VII. These regulations outline how federal organizations must implement the government's commitments, which I just mentioned, and I look forward to tabling draft regulations for part VII of the act soon. Work to develop them has involved significant engagement, and we have looked forward to receiving additional input from parliamentarians, stakeholders and members of the public.

There are initiatives under way to further support official languages. For example, nearly 180 federal institutions are updating the linguistic designation of some 10,000 federal offices across Canada. This will result in 733 newly designated bilingual offices across the country and more Canadians being able to receive services in their preferred official language. We have also raised the requirements for second language proficiency for supervisors in the public service to ensure that all employees in bilingual regions are supervised in the official language of their choice.

Mr. Chair, the modernized act has strengthened and expanded the official language responsibilities of the Treasury Board. It is our role to ensure accountability and monitor federal institutions' compliance with their official language obligations so that Canadians are served by their government in their preferred official language.

In closing, I want to reaffirm my commitment to the act and my department's role in strengthening its implementation across the government.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now move on to questions from the members.

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

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here this morning, Mr. President of the Treasury Board. I apologize in advance if I ever address you as minister, but it must be said that you have a special title compared to the other members of the cabinet.

First of all, I would like to know if you acknowledge the decline of French in Canada.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair.

I was looking at the statistics from the census in 2021, and I see that, as the member says, there is a decline in French being spoken.

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin: To the President of the Treasury Board, with all due respect, I don't want you to use my words, but I want to know if you, as President of the Treasury Board, acknowledge the decline of French in Canada. If so, what do you think is the extent of that decline?

I would like short answers because I only have six minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Mr. Chair, as President of the Treasury Board, my responsibility includes implementation of the Official Languages Act across the public service in all federal departments—

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin: I apologize, Mr. President, but I would like you to answer me with a yes or no, to start.

Do you acknowledge the decline of French, yes or no? The question is simple. I would like a short response, please, out of respect for our work.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

I'm here to talk about my mandate as the President of the Treasury Board, which—

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin: No, no.

I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

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

Joël Godin: We must remind the President of the Treasury Board that he is not here to talk about his mandate. He is here pursuant to a motion adopted on October 23 following the infamous article from CBC/Radio-Canada stating that the Prime Minister used French 17% of the time.

You have been misinformed if you think you're here this morning to talk to us about your mandate letter. You're here to talk to us about this specific situation. Is that clear for you?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: If I can refer to the Official Languages Act, I can quote what it says my responsibility is as President of the Treasury Board. In subsection 2.1(1), it states:

The President of the Treasury Board is responsible for exercising leadership within the Government of Canada in relation to the implementation of this Act.

It further says:

The President of the Treasury Board shall, in consultation—

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin: Mr. President of the Treasury Board, I must interrupt you once again.

Mr. Chair, may I interrupt the President of the Treasury Board?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Give me the opportunity to respond to the question. If my colleague does not want to hear the response to the question, I don't think it would be fair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Before we continue, Mr. Godin, I would like to point out two things.

First, I was advised that we should avoid having two people speaking at the same time. It's so the interpreters can do their job, but also to protect their health. That's the first thing to consider. I therefore ask all members to be aware of this aspect.

Secondly, Minister, I would ask you to finish your response. I know that Mr. Godin has other questions, so we need to be aware of that.

• (1120)

Joël Godin: In fact, Mr. Chair, I will withdraw my question.

The Chair: All right, that's your right.

Joël Godin: Can you tell me how much speaking time I have left? With all that, we're wasting time.

The Chair: You have three minutes left.

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

To the President of the Treasury Board: Do you find it normal that the Prime Minister of Canada, a country with English and French as two official languages, only uses French 17% of the time? Moreover, as has been said here at the committee, when he chooses to speak French, it is to discuss topics that I would describe as trivial.

Do you agree on that?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Mr. Chair, before I respond to that specific question, I'd just like to remind the member what the act says my responsibility as President of the Treasury Board is. It says:

The President of the Treasury Board shall, in consultation with—

[*Translation*]

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

The Chair: I apologize, Minister.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I don't understand why the President of the Treasury Board does not want to answer my question. I find that unacceptable.

Yet, my question is simple, but I will repeat it for you. I don't know if it's because French is a problem for you, as it is for many others in your party. I don't know.

An October 9 CBC/Radio-Canada report provoked this motion to find out what you, on the government side, will do to improve the use of French both by the Prime Minister and within your institutions.

Do you agree that the Prime Minister only uses French 17% of the time, and that when he does, he chooses to discuss less important topics, in my opinion? The question is simple.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, I respectfully ask my colleague not to play politics with the Official Languages Act. As the President of the Treasury Board, my responsibility is to ensure that the Official Languages Act is implemented across the federal public service institutions.

He should allow me.... Yes, I can't speak French. I'm learning; I'm taking lessons. This is my sixth language. I am learning, so you don't question my ability to learn French. I am learning and I don't want to take that personally, but the act provides the charter right to every Canadian to receive any communication or services in the language of their choice. Any person, any Canadian, has a similar right and can choose to communicate in either French or English because of equal rights in the act.

If you want to get technical, I can ask my secretary, Bill Matthews, to give you more information, but you don't question my learning of French. I am committed to bilingualism, because that remains the core of our Canadian identity.

Now I can pass this on to my secretary to respond to that specific question.

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I am grateful to Mr. Matthews for being available.

That said, I will take back what I said, because I did not mean to make it a personal attack. I am in exactly the same situation as you. I take English classes every week. It's not easy to learn a second language. I completely agree with you.

However, the purpose of my question was to know if you recognize the situation and if you have taken concrete actions since the release of that CBC/Radio-Canada report.

I thank the President of the Treasury Board.

The Chair: Minister, Mr. Godin's speaking time is up. I must therefore move on to the next person.

I now give the floor to Ms. Chenette for six minutes.

Madeleine Chenette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the President of the Treasury Board for being with us.

You just indicated that learning French is one of your priorities to set an example in your department. Can you tell us what you do, besides occasionally speaking with me in French to learn a few words, to master this beautiful language?

• (1125)

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you very much, my friend.

[English]

We come across this many times, and every time I ask you about a word, how we say it in English. Yes, in this age, I'm learning French. Sometimes pronunciation could be challenging, but that is not a challenge that cannot be overcome. I'm learning from my colleagues, and I'm learning from my staff. I'm taking lessons every week.

Colleague, the question about my understanding of French was, I think, offensive, because we do have our interpreters who translate, and that is a service we have. As the President of the Treasury Board, it's my commitment and it's my responsibility to make sure that across the federal departments and institutions the services are provided in both official languages. However, as the president, I don't have any tools, nor does the act allow me, to impose.... Yes, I can guide. We can set the rules and policy, and that's what we're doing. Yes, I'm focusing and committed to improving my French, and yes, bilingualism remains the core and the heart of our Canadian identity.

[Translation]

Madeleine Chenette: Thank you for your commitment.

I just read an article in La Presse this morning that reported that 60.4% of people speak French at home, at least, in the beautiful Montréal region. You are a great example of multilingualism. That is an important reality that is on the rise.

As part of your mandate at Treasury Board, you must ensure that employees who provide services to citizens can adequately respond to their requests in the official language of their choice, either in English or in French, and this applies across Canada. On the other hand, you need to work to ensure that staff learn both languages well.

Can you help us understand the role that Treasury Board plays in providing this learning capacity across government?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you very much.

[English]

We're improving access to federal services in both official languages across Canada by adding over 700 bilingual offices by 2027. This will raise the percentage of bilingual federal services offices from 34% to over 40%. That is a commitment we have. We are working to improve. There's always room for improvement.

Census 2021 said that English and French remained by far the most commonly spoken languages in Canada. More than nine out of 10 Canadians spoke one of the two official languages at home, at least on a regular basis. The proportion of Canadians who spoke predominantly French at home decreased in all of the provinces and territories except the Yukon. In Quebec, the proportion of the population who speak predominantly French at home has been decreasing since 2001. In Quebec, the number of French speakers is increasing, but their proportion of the population is decreasing. This is not me; this is census 2021.

Then, across official federal departments, we are increasing the capacity of the delivery of services across the country with more than 700 bilingual offices by 2027.

[Translation]

Madeleine Chenette: More specifically, what kind of development program is offered by the government to help civil servants master both languages well? What are the criteria, in terms of the two official languages, for advancing in a leadership role?

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I think I'll ask my deputy, Secretary Bill Matthews, to respond to those technical questions.

• (1130)

[Translation]

The Chair: You have about 35 seconds left to answer the question.

Bill Matthews (Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you.

Very briefly, I would say that it starts with the requirements for people who manage employees. We recently strengthened these requirements in June 2024.

The Treasury Board Secretariat has also published a new guide for employees to establish a framework for second-language learning.

I imagine the 35 seconds are already up.

The Chair: Yes.

Thank you very much, Ms. Chenette.

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Minister.

First, I'd like to know if you think it's important for the Prime Minister and the ministers to speak French.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: In my opinion, everyone should be able to speak in both official languages, but the act and the Charter of Rights give everyone the right to choose to communicate in the language of their choice.

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu: Isn't it even more important for the Prime Minister and the ministers, who are at the top of the hierarchy, since it sets the tone for the entire public service? If we want to be able to manage employees using their language, we need to know French.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, like my colleague knows well, if you speak either French or English, there's translation. It's translated to the second official language. I think it's what the act says or what the Charter of Rights says: that Canadians have a choice to communicate in either French or English, the choice of their...

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu: In your opinion, French could simply be the language of translation and that would be acceptable.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I'm sorry. Can you repeat the question?

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu: You mentioned translation.

On that subject, Mr. Gilles Duceppe, a former leader of the Bloc Québécois, said that there were two official languages at the federal level: English, and the translation of English into French. Do you agree with that philosophy?

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, I'm here at this committee on my mandate as the President of the Treasury Board. I'm responsible for the coordination and good governance of the act. My department sets policies and monitors compliance, ensuring institutions meet obligations—

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu: I understand your mandate, but that wasn't the purpose of my question. I will rephrase it to make it clearer.

A major issue we see in the federal public service is that the language requirements for different positions are often not met. For example, when a position requires knowledge of French, it's accepted that a person who does not know French can be hired, provided that they learn French. However, we see that it's very difficult. Often, the person is unable to learn it. We saw that in the case of the Governor General. We also saw it in the case of Michael Rousseau, the President and CEO of Air Canada. Clearly, he's struggling to learn French.

Would you agree that, when hiring someone on the condition that they take French courses, when knowledge of French is a requirement for the position, we should check their skills after a certain

period to ensure they have actually acquired a good knowledge of French?

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: We're committed to a bilingual workforce and, since June 2025, in bilingual regions, new supervisors must have advanced proficiency in their second official language, and employees have the right to be supervised in the official language of their choice, and 92% in public service.... We have a bilingual workforce.

I just want to ask my secretary if it's the right information.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Bill Matthews: In the case of public servants who hold a position that requires the ability to speak in both official languages, over 90% meet the standards. I think it's 95%, more precisely. Furthermore, according to the latest survey conducted among public servants, over 90% are comfortable speaking with their supervisor in their official language.

Mario Beaulieu: I don't want to spend too much time on this, but I want to remind you that that is a self-assessment. Our committee has already conducted a study on this, and we have a lot of questions about that data, at least I do. These are self-assessments, not actual indicators.

I return to the decline of French.

So French is on the decline, Minister, you agree with that. Moreover, French is in decline according to all linguistic indicators, whether the language used at home, the mother tongue, the language of work or the first official language spoken.

Do you agree that French is in decline and that there is an urgent need to act to counter this decline?

The Chair: Minister, you have only 15 seconds left to formulate your response.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, I'd just like to correct that information. It's 96% of public servants who meet their language requirement; I said 92%. We're committed to actively offering services in both official languages with equal quality and simultaneous delivery across all communications channels.

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu: With all due respect, you are not answering the questions. You're sidestepping.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Beaulieu, but your time is up. I have already given you a little more time.

Mario Beaulieu: That's good, thank you.

The Chair: We will now move on to the second round of questions. There are about 22 and a half minutes left in the first part of our meeting, and the second round of questions should last exactly 22 and a half minutes. I will therefore be stricter about respecting speaking times, to allow us to finish the question round without having to shorten speaking times. I ask for your help with that.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for five minutes.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Good morning, Minister.

You are the President of the Treasury Board, as you know, and you oversee expenditures before funds are released.

What is the approximate annual budget of the Office of the Prime Minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, thank you for the question.

I'm here at the committee on official languages—

[*Translation*]

Marc Dalton: Thank you. I will tell you—

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: —to talk about my mandate as President of the Treasury Board on the Official Languages Act—

[*Translation*]

Marc Dalton: Indeed, he is not answering the questions.

The Chair: Wait a moment, Mr. Dalton. So, I'm going to stop the clock.

I ask all members to try not to speak at the same time as someone else. I know it requires respect, but I ask for your help and co-operation in this regard, out of consideration for the interpreters.

Mr. Dalton, the floor is yours.

Marc Dalton: Thank you.

The answer to my question is \$11.4 million.

According to CBC/Radio-Canada, the Prime Minister only speaks French 17% of the time during public activities. We all agreed, within this committee, that this was unacceptable, given the bilingualism required for many positions. I doubt that the Prime Minister writes his speeches himself. It's probably his staff who handle that.

Given the budget of \$11.4 million for his political staff, does his refusal to speak French during public appearances reflect his own wishes or those of the people around him?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, I reject that misleading question from my colleague. Conservatives try to mislead Canadians. The Prime Minister does speak French. Characterizing him as not speaking French is false and misleading, and I reject that. The Prime Minister does speak French.

[*Translation*]

Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, he is not answering the questions.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: You know, if you have any questions, I'm here as the President of the Treasury Board to talk about Official Languages Act implementation for the federal government and the department. If you have a question, yes, you're welcome to ask the Prime Minister, but seeing as the Prime Minister does not refuse to answer a question in French, saying that he does not speak French is totally false, misleading and disinformation.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Marc Dalton: He takes a lot longer to respond than I take to ask the question.

The Prime Minister took two French courses in July and one in August. In September, it seems that he lost his French teacher.

I wonder if it's due to a lack of money. I'm not going to ask you the question directly, since you won't answer it. I'll tell you the answer: No, it is not because of a lack of money that he was unable to hire another French teacher.

We have \$15 billion for Stellantis so it can open factories in the United States, but not here. It was just announced with President Trump. That was wasted.

Algoma was given \$400 million a few months ago, although people knew that it was in trouble. Then, 1,000 employees received a layoff notice before Christmas.

I'm talking about money because you are the ones responsible for it.

The government gave \$500 million to the European Space Agency. However, half of the contract is tied to Brookfield, Mark Carney's company.

It's not due to a lack of money in his budget that the Prime Minister does not take French lessons and only delivers 17% of his speeches in French.

It's a rhetorical question, but I think you can understand that, for many people, including we Conservatives as the official opposition, it shows a lack of appreciation for the francophonie and the French language.

We have also heard the comments from Marc Miller, who's tired of the discussion about the decline of French.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Marc Dalton: All right, Mr. Chair.

Can you understand that francophones and Conservatives are worried?

The Chair: Please give a very brief response, as Mr. Dalton's time is up.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, that's the problem with the Conservatives. I'm here at committee with officials to talk about the Official Languages Act in the public service. My Conservative colleague is playing politics.

If you have a question around accounts, come to the public accounts committee or the government operations committee. This is the committee for the Official Languages Act. You have to ask questions on that. You're focusing on your clips rather than focusing on your work.

As parliamentarians, we're here to work hard to deliver for Canadians, to build Canada strong and to deal with issues that face affordability and other issues, not just clips—

[Translation]

Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. In a previous round, you gave the President of the Treasury Board an additional 15 seconds to respond. In this case, it's been more than 15 seconds. At some point, discipline is needed. I would invite you to conclude this intervention.

The Chair: Minister, Mr. Dalton's time is indeed up, so I must interrupt you here.

That said, I think you already know this, but I want to remind you that, as chair, I always try to give flexibility to the witnesses, no matter who they are. If a question is asked in the last seconds of a member's speaking time, I allow the relevant witness to provide an answer. Often, it means that I give a little more time for that intervention. That's why I allowed the minister to respond. I do it not only for the minister, but for everyone. That's always my approach.

I now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault for five minutes.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

The President of the Treasury Board is responsible for playing a leading role within the federal government in the implementation of the Official Languages Act. This includes part VII of the act, which states that "the Government of Canada is committed to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development". As part of that commitment, "Every federal institution has the duty to ensure that the commitments under [part VII] are implemented by the taking of positive measures."

All departments are therefore involved, not just one. Treasury Board has a leadership role to play in ensuring the implementation of part VII of the act across the entire government machinery.

Minister, I would like to hear you explain how you see the leadership role of Treasury Board in the implementation of the Official Languages Act.

• (1145)

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you very much.

[English]

This is an important question.

As President of the Treasury Board, I'm responsible for the coordination and good governance of the act. My department sets policies and monitors compliance, ensuring institutions meet obligations in serving the public service. Bilingualism in the serving of the public is a core of the mandate, and supporting the minority communities is also a part of it. Notably, I'm responsible for part IV and part V. You talked about part VII, the participation of English- and French-speaking Canadians and promoting equal opportunities for employment and advancement for both official languages communities within the public service.

I am, as President of the Treasury Board, committed to ensuring that the Official Languages Act is implemented fully across the public service. That is my goal. As we said, in the public service, 96% of employees are bilingual. To further respond to your technicality, I'm going to ask Bill Matthews, secretary, to highlight a bit more to fill you in on our leadership and implementation of the policy.

[Translation]

Bill Matthews: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to add two small items.

With respect to part VII, initially, after the regulations have been established, the Treasury Board Secretariat will assist the committee and other stakeholders in reviewing them.

Secondly, after the regulations have been adopted, the Treasury Board Secretariat will need to provide departments with guidelines to assist them in implementing the new regulations with respect to positive measures.

I imagine that the time I have to respond is up.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I have a little time left, but I would like to take advantage of the minute and a half I have to ask a second question.

At Treasury Board, you're currently conducting a comprehensive review of expenditures to enhance the efficiency of our public service. Several efforts have been made in this respect in recent months.

I would like you to explain to us the efforts that are being made in this exercise to protect bilingualism within the public service and to ensure full compliance with our obligations under the Official Languages Act.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Again, that's a very important question. As I said, bilingualism remains a priority for the Government of Canada. All departments must continue to meet their obligations under the Official Languages Act. The CER would not have any impact on delivery of services in both official languages across federal government institutions.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for two and a half minutes.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a very important question for Quebec. In the new version of the Official Languages Act, several provisions state that the federal government must also protect French in Quebec. It should therefore take new measures to protect French in Quebec. Do you agree with that?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I can talk about the act. The Official Languages Act protects both minorities—

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: However, you are not able to—

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: —English and French, equally.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: So you're not aware that the Official Languages Act contains new measures. Yet, you're responsible for its implementation.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I think I would like to correct my colleague that I'm responsible for implementation across the public service, federal public service employees across the government, but this question, I think, goes to Heritage. We have a team from Heritage. If my colleague wants to know, I can ask the deputy minister—

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: Treasury Board has no role to play in the implementation of part VII. Is that what you're saying?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: That was not my colleague's question. It was a broader question. As Treasury Board president, I'm just saying it again and again to understand my colleague's—

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: My speaking time is really very limited.

Clearly, you do not fully understand the new version of the act and you are not ready to implement it.

The federal government is currently breaking its own law. There are new provisions. The Liberal ministers have spent their time assuring us that they would protect French, but that's false. In section VII, all the positive measures seek to strengthen English in Quebec. Except in minor cases, they aim to develop English-speaking communities.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mario Beaulieu: In Quebec, federal institutions are where French is spoken the least, according to Quebec's Commissaire à la langue française. Do you agree with that statement?

The Chair: Please provide a response in less than 10 seconds.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I understand that my colleague wants to play politics here. This is an act. It stays with me, and I read it and understand it. It talks about public service. Your question was more towards Heritage, and you don't want to get answers; you want to get clips, and that is your choice.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Minister, Mr. Beaulieu's time is up.

I now give the floor to Mr. Godin for five minutes.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To the President of the Treasury Board: Earlier in your testimony, you stated that the new act did not provide you with the tools to impose it on institutions. I'm using your words; I'm not putting words in your mouth.

To the President of the Treasury Board: I simply want to tell you what paragraph 41(10.4) of the act says:

(10.4) The Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Treasury Board made after consultation with the Minister of Canadian Heritage, make regulations in respect of the duties of federal institutions—other than...

I will spare you the exceptions and continue my reading a little further:

...under paragraph (7)(a.1) and subsection (10.1), including regulations:

(a) prescribing the manner in which those duties are to be carried out and reported on...

What did you do when you found out that the Prime Minister was not using French in a respectful manner? What actions did you take?

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair, for the question.

My colleagues still like to play politics. You're wasting everyone's time here—

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin: No, I'm talking about a section of the act.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: You're not focusing on the issue that Canadians sent us here—

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin: I apologize, Mr. Chair, but I would ask the President of the Treasury Board to stop there with respect to this question, since he does not want to answer it. I will instead move on to another question.

The Chair: Okay, that's your right.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To the President of the Treasury Board: Why were you not the one who introduced the regulation on the new power granted to the Commissioner of Official Languages allowing him to impose monetary penalties? It was tabled by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, or more precisely, the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture the day before his resignation from cabinet. Why did you not table it? It is, after all, you who are responsible for the regulations.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, do I have time to respond to questions? I see my colleagues ask questions, but they don't want to hear the responses.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have the floor to respond to the question, Minister.

I would also ask all members to allow the minister to answer their questions.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: This is a technical question. I'm going to pass it to my secretary to respond, please.

[Translation]

Bill Matthews: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Treasury Board Secretariat is certainly responsible for developing the regulations in relation to part VII. As the President of the Treasury Board has already stated, we have responsibilities related to other parts as well, including parts IV and V. It is therefore the responsibility of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

• (1155)

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

You have other regulations to table. We are waiting for those regulations. This is what is delaying the implementation of the new version of the Official Languages Act. If it's that important, I remind you that the Bill to implement those new legislative provisions received royal assent in June 2023.

Can you tell us the dates when the upcoming regulations will be tabled and who will be tabling them? My question is simple, Mr. President of the Treasury Board.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, is that a question to me or my deputy?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, is the question addressed to the minister?

Joël Godin: It is addressed to the President of the Treasury Board; that's what I just said when I asked my question.

The Chair: The floor is yours, Minister.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I'm going to ask my deputy to respond to this question, please.

[Translation]

Bill Matthews: The act is in effect, so everyone must respect it.

The government will establish the regulations as soon as possible. It will be done in the future, and we will discuss the regulations at the appropriate time.

Joël Godin: My question was more detailed. Will it be tabled by the President of the Treasury Board, who is responsible for it, in my opinion? Why was he not the one to table the regulations on the new power granted to the Commissioner of Official Languages to impose monetary penalties?

The Chair: You have 55 seconds left, Mr. Godin.

Bill Matthews: For the regulations related to part VII, the President of the Treasury Board will be doing it. It will be done soon.

Joël Godin: Why were the regulations regarding the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages tabled by the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture? Was it because the President of the Treasury Board was unavailable, or not interested?

Bill Matthews: I don't know, but I can provide a written response to the committee.

Joël Godin: Yes, that's what I would like you to do, please. Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Godin.

Joël Godin: Yes, thank you.

To the President of the Treasury Board: You stated that you enforce the act. What have you implemented since the publication of the CBC/Radio-Canada report on the use of French by the Prime Minister and in government institutions? You have been in your position for almost eight months.

The Chair: I ask you to give a very quick answer, as there are only 15 seconds left.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I expect all departments across the government to continue to meet their obligations under the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mingarelli for five minutes.

Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the President of the Treasury Board for being here today.

[English]

I would like to begin by making a comment, as this is the official languages committee.

It is the expectation that all of us speak in both official languages. I grew up in a riding, a community, that's Franco-Ontarian. It's 60% francophone and 40% anglophone. My father was francophone and my mother was anglophone. Both were from Montreal. That environment is the environment that exists around this table at this committee, and I think it's important that we celebrate all of the efforts of all of our colleagues who speak both languages, regardless of their level of fluency.

[Translation]

I think it's very important to note that.

I will now ask my questions.

There remains some confusion about the distribution of roles and responsibilities between the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board Secretariat under the modernized Official Languages Act. Could the President of the Treasury Board please clarify this point?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you very much for the question.

[English]

Thank you for the comment that we should celebrate.

I'd like to talk a little bit about myself, because my Conservative colleague was questioning my ability to understand French. This is my sixth language. I have three kids. They're learning French. Even my wife and I try to speak French words.

We should celebrate. This is great news. Across the public service, 96% of our workforce is bilingual. I think we need to celebrate.

Yes, we have a lot more work to do. That's what this committee is for. This committee is to focus on the work that matters to Canadians, not to play politics. Canadians sent us to focus on service delivery to them.

As President of the Treasury Board, my roles and responsibilities include the implementation of the Official Languages Act across government institutions and to make sure services are provided to Canadians in the language of their choice. That is my responsibility. We're committed to making sure that those policies and guidelines are provided across government departments and that the Official Languages Act is fully implemented. As someone who is not francophone and a non-anglo, I am committed to making sure the Official Languages Act is fully implemented.

Thank you.

● (1200)

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

To that point, congratulations for speaking six languages. I think that's amazing.

I actually tried to bring up, once before, at this committee the use of indigenous languages in Canada. Unfortunately, it's beyond the scope of this committee.

Nonetheless, further to your point, I think that multilingualism in Canada is to be celebrated.

Thank you.

[Translation]

I will ask a second question.

The Chair: You have 25 seconds left.

Giovanna Mingarelli: What is the Treasury Board Secretariat doing in response to the 2024-25 annual report from the Commissioner of Official Languages?

The Chair: Please provide a very quick response, as there are 15 seconds left.

[English]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I had a meeting with the Commissioner of Official Languages. We are trying to take all of the feedback from stakeholders, from organizations, and put it into efforts to improve the implementation of the Official Languages Act. We're taking that very seriously and are making sure that we follow the act.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mingarelli.

Minister, on behalf of the committee, I thank you for being with us today.

The minister must leave now, but we will continue our meeting right after the break.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Chair: We will resume meeting number 15 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We are continuing our study of the use of French in government communications.

We will go straight to the question round.

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

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

Joël Godin: In fact, I would like to propose a motion related to the study we are currently conducting. I could send it to you. It states: "That, in relation to the ongoing study on the use—"

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you do not have the right to use a point of order to propose a motion. You must have the right to speak to propose a motion.

Normally, it's you who corrects me on procedure, but not this time.

Joël Godin: Okay. In that case, I would like to speak, Mr. Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We will begin the round of questions. Anyway, you are first on the list, Mr. Godin. I will therefore give you the floor, and it will be up to you to decide how you want to use your speaking time.

Joël Godin: If I propose my motion, will it be included in the time that I am allotted for asking questions?

The Chair: The clerk confirms to me that, if a member proposes a motion, I must stop the clock while they present it to us.

Now that the minister has left the meeting, we will move directly to the question rounds. Mr. Godin, you are first on the list. You have six minutes. If you decide to propose a motion during your speaking time, I will stop the clock.

Joël Godin: Perfect.

Mr. Chair, I would like to propose a motion. Since it is related to the study we are currently conducting, I do not need a 48-hour notice, to my knowledge. Correct me if I'm wrong.

The motion is as follows:

That, in relation to the ongoing study of the use of French in government communications and federal institutions the committee report to the House that it condemns the recent comments made by the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Official Languages, in which he expressed that he was "fed up" with the public debate concerning the decline of the French language;

That the committee reaffirm its view, based on evidence presented across multiple studies and testimonies at this committee, that French is in decline in Canada, particularly in Quebec and in francophone minority communities and that this situation constitutes a linguistic and cultural crisis requiring urgent federal action;

That the committee express its disapproval that the Minister responsible for protecting and promoting French would dismiss or minimize legitimate concerns about its vulnerability; and,

That the committee call on the government to take immediate measures to reverse the decline of French, including strengthening federal enforcement mechanisms, enhancing support for francophone institutions, and ensuring that official languages obligations are upheld across all departments and agencies.

I believe my adviser has submitted this motion to the clerk. I would like, if possible, for the committee to discuss this motion.

• (1210)

The Chair: The clerk is currently distributing your motion, Mr. Godin.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so the committee members can review the motion.

• (1210)

(Pause)

• (1245)

The Chair: We are ready to continue.

Before the suspension of the meeting, you had the floor, Mr. Godin, and you proposed a motion. Do you want to add anything on this subject?

Joël Godin: Yes, I would like to add two things.

First, I think we could allow the witnesses to leave, since there are 10 minutes left before the scheduled end of the meeting.

Second, we had discussions with members from the various parties about my motion. I think amendments will be proposed in the hope of finding common ground. We must remember that we were expecting to receive the Minister responsible for Official Languages, Mr. Miller today. Unfortunately, he is not here. That's why we are intervening. We want him to commit to coming to testify here, before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. In doing so, he would show respect for the Standing Committee on Offi-

cial Languages, as we are entitled to expect from the Minister responsible for Official Languages.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

The clerk will help me keep track of the list of people who wish to speak. For now, there is Ms. Chenette, Mr. Beaulieu, and Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

With respect to Minister Miller, I want to make it clear that his team stated he was not available today, but he would be happy to appear at a later meeting. I want to make sure that you have the same information as I do.

Ms. Chenette, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but can we allow the witnesses to leave?

The Chair: Yes, if everyone agrees, that's what we will do.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the witnesses for their participation today as well as for their work as public servants.

Ms. Chenette, you have the floor.

Madeleine Chenette: I move that we postpone the debate on the motion.

The Chair: This is a dilatory motion, so we must proceed immediately to a vote.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

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

Mario Beaulieu: I would like to propose an amendment to the motion. It is being sent to you right now. In the fourth paragraph, after the word "including", I would add "by applying the new asymmetrical approach of the Official Languages Act in favour of French in Quebec".

I think it's important, even if Mr. Miller downplayed the issue by saying he was tired of this debate, that it was an identity question and that, in his opinion, discussing the decline of French amounted to politicizing the debate. He backtracked by stating that he loved French and that he would defend it until the end of his days. The fact remains that his own department works only for English in Quebec. If we love French, we should defend it.

That's why I propose an amendment to add these words to the fourth paragraph. This is actually a wording that has already been adopted in the context of another motion.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu has just proposed an amendment.

Does that work for everyone? Do you need to see the wording?

Madeleine Chenette: Yes, please.

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to distribute it.

Mario Beaulieu: We have already sent it to her.

The Chair: Okay.

I will suspend the meeting to give the clerk time to distribute the amendment.

• (1250) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1255)

The Chair: We are resuming the meeting.

Mr. Beaulieu has proposed an amendment.

Did you finish what you wanted to say about your amendment, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak on the amendment proposed by Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I would like to propose a subamendment to reword the fourth paragraph. After “That the committee call on the government to take immediate measures to reverse the decline of French”, I would add “in Canada”; then we would keep the comma and the word “including”, followed by the addition proposed by Mr. Beaulieu, and the rest of the paragraph would remain unchanged.

Madeleine Chenette: That is what you are proposing for that paragraph specifically.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Indeed, this subamendment only targets that paragraph. Now that Mr. Beaulieu has proposed his amendment, I would like to propose adding the words “in Canada”.

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to read the wording as it would be amended by Mr. Beaulieu’s amendment and by Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s subamendment.

The Clerk of the Committee (Madeleine Martin): The fourth paragraph would therefore be as follows:

That the committee call on the government to take immediate measures to reverse the decline of French in Canada, including by applying the new asymmetrical approach of the Official Languages Act in favour of French in Quebec, strengthening federal enforcement mechanisms, enhancing support for franco-phone institutions, and ensuring that official languages obligations are upheld across all departments and agencies.

The Chair: Are there any comments on Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s subamendment?

If there aren’t any, I will ask the clerk to proceed with a recorded vote.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you could simply proceed to a vote by asking if the committee agrees.

(Subamendment agreed to)

The Chair: We therefore return to Mr. Beaulieu’s amendment as amended by the subamendment.

Are there any comments on the amended amendment?

• (1300)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I would like to speak, but it’s not about Mr. Beaulieu’s amendment.

The Chair: For now, we are discussing Mr. Beaulieu’s amendment as it has been amended.

Mario Beaulieu: Did we not just adopt it?

The Chair: No, it’s the subamendment that has just been adopted, Mr. Beaulieu. Now, your amendment includes Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s subamendment.

Mario Beaulieu: Ah, okay. So the clerk read the subamendment as it would be incorporated into my amendment.

The Chair: That’s correct.

The debate now focuses on Mr. Beaulieu’s amendment as amended by Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s subamendment.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I ask you to check whether the committee wishes to adopt this amendment.

The Chair: Does the committee wish to adopt Mr. Beaulieu’s amendment as amended?

(Amendment as amended agreed to)

The Chair: We therefore return to the motion as amended.

Are there any comments on the amended motion?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Yes. I raised my hand earlier to speak. I don’t know whose turn it is.

The Chair: It’s your turn, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault. Your name was already on the list.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Perfect.

Given that it is 1:00 p.m. and I don’t believe we’ll reach a consensus today, I move to adjourn the debate.

The Chair: This is a dilatory motion, so we must proceed immediately to a recorded vote.

(Motion negated: yeas 4; nays 5)

The Chair: According to my list, it’s Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s turn. Next, it will be your turn, Mr. Beaulieu.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to propose an amendment to my colleague Mr. Godin’s motion.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, does he have the right to propose an amendment when he has already proposed a subamendment to the same motion?

The Chair: Are you raising a point of order in this respect?

Joël Godin: Yes.

The Chair: Wait, I will check with the clerk.

Joël Godin: Actually, no, I apologize. It’s true, I’m the one who cannot propose an amendment to my motion.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: So, may I speak again?

The Chair: Yes, you have the floor.

Mario Beaulieu: However, I am next on the list, as I raised my hand earlier.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: So, my amendment seeks first to replace the first paragraph with the following:

That, in relation to the ongoing study on the use of French in Government Communications and Federal Institutions, the committee urges the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Official Languages, to testify regarding his position on the decline of French in Canada no later than February 12, 2026;

The second paragraph would be kept exactly as it is.

We would then remove the third paragraph.

The fourth paragraph would also be kept as is.

I have sent the text of the proposed amendment to the clerk.

Mario Beaulieu: I would have preferred the wording to say, “in Canada and Quebec”.

The Chair: We are therefore seized with another amendment, which has just been moved by Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

Do the committee members need a written version of the amendment distributed to them before debating it?

Joël Godin: No, we will see it in the final version.

The Chair: Okay.

The debate is therefore about the amendment.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I thank all the members around the table for their openness but, to my understanding, we had agreed to add wording requesting that the committee report to the House if the minister does not appear before February 12, 2026, or something along those lines. However, I didn’t hear that in Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s amendment.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: If you have a subamendment to suggest, Mr. Godin, it could be welcome.

Joël Godin: I will therefore make it a subamendment. Allow me a few seconds to write my wording.

In fact, at this point, could the clerk send us the wording of my colleague’s amendment? Otherwise, we need to edit the text.

• (1305)

Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, for my part, I would like the text to say, “in Canada and in Quebec”.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: If the wording said “in Canada, including Quebec, by February 12 at the latest”, would that work for you, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mario Beaulieu: I would like it to be “in Canada and Quebec”.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: You don’t want it to say, “including Quebec”? Because it includes Quebec.

Mario Beaulieu: It’s the same, but I prefer the wording with the word “and”.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: For our part, we have a slight preference for the word “including”.

Joël Godin: Can I share with you what I would like to add?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: We can discuss it while the meeting is suspended.

• (1305)

(Pause)

• (1310)

The Chair: We are resuming the meeting.

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault proposed an amendment, and that is the current topic of the debate.

Ms. Chenette, the floor is yours.

Madeleine Chenette: I’d like to move a subamendment.

Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. That’s not quite accurate, so I would like to set the record straight.

We had reached the point of considering my subamendment, for which I had to draft the wording. We had discussions—

Madeleine Chenette: You’re going to withdraw it, right?

Joël Godin: That is true. I wish to withdraw my subamendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Godin is therefore withdrawing his subamendment.

In fact, colleagues, the clerk needs to clarify a few things, so I will give her the floor.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Godin, I did not receive your subamendment. Since your subamendment was not taken into account, the committee was still discussing Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s amendment, which had been distributed and sought to amend the text as follows: “That, in relation to the ongoing study on the use of French in government communications and federal institutions, the committee—

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: In fact, Ms. Chenette will propose a complete rewording through a subamendment. We reached an agreement during the break.

The Clerk: So, if it’s a rewording, are you withdrawing your amendment?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: No. Ms. Chenette is going to propose a subamendment.

Madeleine Chenette: The option she’s proposing is that you withdraw your amendment first.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Ah yes, okay. I’ll withdraw it.

The Clerk: The unanimous consent of the committee is therefore needed to allow you to withdraw it.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent for the withdrawal of Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Chair: Ms. Chenette now has the floor.

Madeleine Chenette: I therefore move an amendment to the original motion. The motion would then state the following in the first paragraph:

That, in relation to the ongoing study on the use of French in government communications and in federal institutions the committee urges the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Official Languages, to testify for a period of two hours regarding his position on the decline of French in Canada, including in Quebec, no later than February 12, 2026. In the event of failure to meet this deadline, the committee will report to the House on the minister’s failure to testify on this matter;

We would keep the text of the following paragraph.

The previous amendment proposed to remove the third paragraph. I think it is important that this amendment also proposes to remove it.

As for the fourth paragraph, it would incorporate the amendments that have already been adopted.

• (1315)

The Chair: Colleagues, do you need the clerk to distribute the wording or can we continue?

Joël Godin: I reserve the right to revisit the motion if the wording does not match what was said, but since the session is recorded, I have no problem with that.

The Chair: The clerk tells me that—

Mario Beaulieu: Could we simply reread the first paragraph as it would be amended?

The Chair: Wait a moment, Mr. Beaulieu.

The clerk tells me that it would not be possible to revisit your decision.

I will therefore ask the clerk to reread the motion as it would be amended by the amendment, to make it clear. It's up to you to decide if you want us to distribute the wording, but the decision must be made right away.

Madam Clerk, can you read the motion?

The Clerk: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The first paragraph would start with “That in relation to the ongoing study on the use of French in government communications and in federal institutions the committee”. Then, we would remove “report to the House that it condemns the recent comments made by the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister responsible for Official Languages, in which he stated he was ‘fed up’ of the public debate regarding the decline of French”. This passage would be replaced by “urges the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Official Languages, to testify for a period of two hours regarding his position on the decline of French in Canada, including in Quebec, no later than February 12, 2026. In the event of failure to meet this deadline, the committee will report to the House on the minister’s failure to testify on this matter”.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mario Beaulieu: What the clerk read is the first paragraph as it would be amended by Ms. Chenette’s amendment. The second paragraph of the original motion would be kept as is. Then, the third paragraph would be removed. Finally, there would be the fourth paragraph as it has already been amended.

I want to specify that, so it’s clear.

The Chair: As far as I understand, and the clerk can intervene if I’m wrong, she did not read the entire motion. She only read the first paragraph as it would be amended.

Do you need her to read the entire motion?

Mario Beaulieu: No. I just wanted to confirm that the second paragraph would remain as is, that the third paragraph would be removed and that the fourth paragraph would be adopted as it has already been amended.

The Chair: That is correct.

Does anyone wish to speak on the amendment proposed by Ms. Chenette?

It seems not, so we will proceed to the vote.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: We therefore return to the motion as amended.

Does anyone wish to speak on this matter?

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Joël Godin: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but I thought that Ms. Chenette’s amendment combined the four paragraphs and that it was that text that we were adopting.

Mario Beaulieu: The amendment amended the first paragraph, then the—

Joël Godin: So, because the amendment has been adopted, the amendment will become the motion. Is that correct?

Mario Beaulieu: No. Ms. Chenette’s amendment replaced the first paragraph, the second paragraph is kept as is, the third paragraph has been removed and the last paragraph is kept.

Now, we are adopting the entire motion.

The Chair: Colleagues, I will ask the clerk to clarify all of this, because I want to make sure that everyone understands what’s happening.

The Clerk: When the committee began to debate the motion, the last paragraph was amended first. The proposed amendments to that paragraph were submitted for a vote and adopted.

This paragraph begins with “That the committee call on the government to take immediate measures to reverse the decline of French”. Mr. Deschênes-Thériault’s subamendment added the words “in Canada” here. Then, after the word “including”, Mr. Beaulieu’s amendment added ‘by applying the new asymmetrical approach of the Official Languages Act in favour of French in Quebec’. The rest of the paragraph remains as is, namely “strengthening federal enforcement mechanisms, enhancing support for francophone institutions, and ensuring that official languages obligations are upheld across all departments and agencies.”

Those are the amendments to the fourth paragraph that have been adopted.

The third paragraph has been removed.

The second paragraph remains unchanged.

The first paragraph incorporates the amendment from Ms. Chenette that has just been adopted. I will reread that paragraph, just to make sure everything is clear:

That, in relation to the ongoing study on the use of French in government communications and in federal institutions the committee urges the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Official Languages, to testify for a period of two hours regarding his position on the decline of French in Canada, including in Quebec, no later than February 12, 2026. In the event of failure to meet this deadline, the committee will report to the House on the minister’s failure to testify on this matter;

• (1320)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: That is the motion before us.

If no one else wishes to speak, we will proceed to the vote.

The Chair: Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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