



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 030

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

Chair: Yvan Baker



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

• (1715)

[Translation]

The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Colleagues, welcome. The meeting is now public.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Godin.

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

As you know, a few weeks ago, my Liberal colleague moved a motion to invite the president and chief executive officer of Air Canada following his—I will let you fill in the blank—disregard of the French fact and the family of Mr. Forest, the francophone pilot who lost his life, because he did not extend his condolences in the pilot's language. Mr. Rousseau wanted to convey his condolences to the family, but unfortunately, he addressed them in English.

Following that incident and the motion moved by my colleague, the committee unanimously agreed to invite Mr. Rousseau, but he has since announced his retirement. Given that Mr. Rousseau has previously appeared before this committee, I would like to read out the motion I've had on notice since April 14 so that we can take a position on this in committee. I will read the motion in French. Understandably, I couldn't table it earlier because we were in camera for report writing work. However, we're quite familiar with this matter, and all of us here have been following the news. The matter was a bigger issue on April 14 than it is today, but it is still relevant.

That, whereas the President and Chief Executive Officer of Air Canada, Michael Rousseau, has appeared on several occasions before the Standing Committee on Official Languages without demonstrating significant progress in fulfilling his commitments to improve his ability to communicate in French; and,

Whereas he has recently announced his upcoming retirement, rendering any future appearance of limited value to the committee's work;

That the committee:

1. Cancel its invitation to the current President and Chief Executive Officer of Air Canada;
2. Invite the next President and Chief Executive Officer of Air Canada to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f); and,
3. Request that this appearance take place no later than two (2) months following their appointment, in order to allow the committee to assess the new leadership's commitments regarding compliance with official languages obligations.

We cannot change the past. However, the purpose of this motion is to change the future. We want to work with the incoming leadership. We hope the board of directors will make the right decisions

and appoint the right person, and that that person will respect Canada's two official languages to help us enhance the relationship between Air Canada's CEO and the various people who use the airline, which is subject to the Official Languages Act.

The Chair: Okay. The motion has been moved.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Villeneuve.

Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have listened to my colleague's arguments keenly. They make sense. However, I would like to propose an amendment to Mr. Godin's motion, to read as follows:

2. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the Chair of the Board of Directors of Air Canada to appear before the committee for a period of one hour to explain the organization's priorities with respect to both official languages in the recruitment of the future President and Chief Executive Officer, as well as in the organization's broader priorities, no later than May 29, 2026.

Mr. Godin, is that okay with you?

• (1720)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, do you want the floor?

Joël Godin: Actually, Mr. Chair, I think the idea is even more compelling. We're stronger when we work as a team, and I think we need to stress that.

Now, there is a matter of procedure. Point 2 of my motion starts with "Invite the next President and Chief Executive Officer of Air Canada to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, pursuant to Standing Order...". I suggest my colleague edit his amendment to insert point 2, that the current point 2 becomes point 3, and point 3 becomes point 4. I don't know if you get how it builds up.

Louis Villeneuve: Mr. Chair, it's very clear for me, and it's fine for us. There's no problem.

Thank you, Mr. Godin.

The Chair: It's not very clear for me.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Joël Godin: Let me explain, Mr. Chair.

My colleague has proposed an amendment to my motion. First, we all agree on point 1 of my motion. Second, point 2 will be replaced with my colleague's proposal. He can read it once more. It's about inserting the point he's going to read out into my motion. That way, we'll retain the text of my current point 2, but it will have a different number and will now be point 3.

Louis Villeneuve: Mr. Chair, that's what I wanted to say earlier, but I didn't express myself clearly and I apologize for that. Perhaps that's why you couldn't understand. I wasn't quite clear or clear enough to ensure you could understand.

The Chair: Apparently, you were not clear either, Mr. Villeneuve.

You have the floor.

Louis Villeneuve: Mr. Chair, I'm now going to read out what will become point 2:

That the committee:

...

2. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the Chair of the Board of Directors of Air Canada to appear before the committee for a period of one hour to explain the organization's priorities with respect to both official languages in the recruitment of the future President and Chief Executive Officer, as well as in the organization's broader priorities, no later than May 29, 2026;

The Chair: Okay.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Joël Godin: For clarity, Mr. Chair, I would add that we'll proceed with my colleague's amendment and the new point 2. My point 2 will become point 3 of the motion, and my point 3 will become point 4. I will read it out:

...

3. Invite the next President and Chief Executive Officer of Air Canada to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f); and

4. Request that this appearance take place no later than two (2) months following their appointment, in order to allow the committee to assess the new leadership's commitments regarding compliance with official languages obligations.

The Chair: Okay. I will now consult with the procedural clerk.

My understanding is that Mr. den Ouden, who is our clerk today, has distributed a motion and I think it reflects what Mr. Villeneuve and Mr. Godin have just told me. I would therefore request committee members to check their emails to see if the version is accurate.

I see all of you are nodding. That's great.

I've consulted with the clerk, and I'll summarize where things stand.

First, Mr. Godin moved a motion. Then Mr. Villeneuve moved an amendment, which is now point 2 of the amended motion. Right now, we're working on the amendment. If we adopt the amendment, we can move to the full motion as amended.

Are there any comments on the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

• (1725)

The Chair: We'll now move to the motion as amended. Are there any comments?

You have the floor, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, the Bloc Québécois will definitely support this motion.

However, I would like to point out the following: Members of the federal, federalist and national parties get all worked up whenever there is a scandal like the one pertaining to Mr. Rousseau. They find it appalling and say that it should not happen again, but this has been happening again and again for the past 50 years due to the system in place. Meanwhile, they support full institutional bilingualism in Quebec and funding for anglophone lobby groups that constantly want more services in English, everywhere and for everyone.

Basically, they want people to live fully in English without ever speaking French, as Mr. Rousseau bragged. He said he had lived in Montreal for 14 years without speaking French. In his opinion, that reflects well on Montreal.

I believe that unless the system changes, there will be other Michael Rousseaus just about anywhere in Quebec. I believe Quebec needs to be independent to ensure the future of French. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

You have the floor, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

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

First, I'd like to say that as stated when the motion was initially moved, it would have been a good idea to invite CEO Rousseau before the committee. It's a matter of accountability. He was the CEO, the chief executive of Air Canada when the incidents occurred, and that reflected a pattern. It was not the first incident within the past five years.

It would have been worthwhile to have Mr. Rousseau appear before the committee to have a better understanding of the internal systems, or rather, the lack of certain procedures that may result in non-compliance of one of our official languages, and to ask him questions about some of the decisions that have been taken during his tenure. The goal is not to focus our remarks on the past, but to gain a better understanding of the systems or issues that make these things happen and to plan for the future.

I'm also thinking about decisions that have been rescinded or abandoned, particularly with regard to services for Acadian communities in northern New Brunswick. I didn't get a satisfactory answer from Air Canada employees when they appeared before the committee, and I would have liked to put these questions directly to the CEO who was in charge at the time.

That said, I think the amendment moved by my colleague Louis Villeneuve is a valuable contribution. This matter allows us to focus on the future, and as such, I will support the motion, in spite of the aspects I have just mentioned.

I think we're being proactive, particularly with respect to the invitation to the chair of the board of directors. We will ask them questions at the front end. We can ask them what they think the language requirements should be, whether the next CEO should be proficient in French and whether this will be one of the hiring criteria. We're taking a proactive approach. We'll ask the board of directors' representative these questions directly. We're also turning to the future to understand future priorities.

I will therefore support the amendment proposed by my colleague Mr. Villeneuve to the motion moved by Mr. Godin, but I still wanted to say that I would have liked to have the current CEO appear before the committee.

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

You have the floor, Ms. Chenette.

Madeleine Chenette (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to emphasize that, collectively, around this table, what we really want is for our corporations, such as Air Canada, to be fully committed to providing all their services in both official languages.

We cannot change the past, but we can learn from past mistakes. That is why I fully support this motion.

First, we want to hear from the chair of the board of directors. We're referring to the chair of the board, but since an annual general meeting is coming up, it could be either a male or female chair. We'll leave it to let the general meeting to choose its chair.

Second, it's important to secure a clear commitment from the chair of the board of directors in May regarding how crucial bilingualism is as a key factor in the recruitment of the CEO and in the organization's strategic direction. This is an expectation the board has of the CEO. Thus, when the new CEO comes to testify before the committee upon taking office next fall, they will be able to explain to us in concrete terms how they will fulfill these commitments and express this in both languages, English and French.

Those are our expectations. That is why it's important that we work together to ensure a better future at Air Canada for our fellow Canadian citizens.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chenette.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Joël Godin: Thank you Mr. Chair.

I think we're all on the same page about the future.

We have a lot to gain on all sides. However, my only concern is about the current CEO. I hope that our position here on the Standing Committee on Official Languages will put the necessary pressure on the board of directors. We don't have any guarantee that the current president and chief executive officer will step down in September. The exact date of his departure has not been announced. He has publicly announced that it will be in September. I hope they will not pull a fast one on us by extending his term and keeping the current president at the helm of the corporation due to a lack of candidates or procedural issues. We'll have to revisit this issue if that were to happen.

Furthermore, this does not rule out the possibility that if this president is still at the helm of Air Canada in October, we will have to reconsider our approach to apply pressure to ensure Air Canada complies with both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

You have the floor, Mr. Bélanger.

Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC): I have some questions about our mandate—specifically, whether we're overstepping it. I'm not sure it's up to us to decide who Air Canada hires. I think we're well positioned to require the company to provide services in both official languages, but I don't think we're in a position to tell an organization what it must do.

I'm just curious, and I'd like to hear your comments.

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

Mario Beaulieu: I believe the time we had set aside for the debate has run out and that we're going over the time allotted for the meeting.

Essentially, Air Canada has benefited from subsidies for a long time. It used to be a public institution, but it was privatized. It's still subject to the Official Languages Act and is required to provide services in English and French. Personally, I think we're fully within our rights to apply pressure. During the clause-by-clause study of Bill C-13, we submitted a proposal to compel institutions to meet their obligations, but unfortunately, it was rejected. However, I believe we can still do so under the current act. In fact, even the Commissioner of Official Languages supported this approach.

In short, there is no law that requires it, but it would be a good thing if there were one.

The Chair: Ms. Chenette, you have the floor.

Madeleine Chenette: To answer Mr. Bélanger's question, we're not telling Air Canada whom it should hire. We want to have a conversation with the chair of the board of directors to find out about the criteria for hiring the next president and chief executive officer, whether male or female. According to Air Canada's mandate, services must be provided in both official languages, and we want the president and chief executive officer to affirm that this is important to them. That is the difference. We're not here to make decisions on behalf of the chair of the board of directors or the board itself, but we want them to tell us about Air Canada's direction. I think it's fair for the committee to ask this kind of question.

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

Jim Bélanger: Actually, at his level, I don't know if being bilingual is that important. I don't know if he needs to be bilingual to do his job. After all, he's not out in the field, and he doesn't talk to many people.

That's all I wanted to say.

Mario Beaulieu: He issued a statement after the plane crash, while he was Air Canada's spokesperson, and it was delivered in English only, despite everything that has happened in the past.

Personally, I think that's part of his role as Air Canada's spokesperson, unless he hires another spokesperson.

The Chair: Does anyone else have anything to add?

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): I just want to say that the president had several years to learn a few words to communicate or to read in French. He was familiar with the laws and the importance of having a good command of the French language. He knew all that. I think that's an important point, but I also understand what my colleague is saying.

• (1735)

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak?

Since it appears no one seems to wish to speak, we'll proceed to a vote on the motion.

Does the committee wish to adopt the motion unanimously or proceed to a vote?

Joël Godin: I suggest that the motion be adopted unanimously, but I'm not sure if my colleagues agree with that.

The Chair: Does everyone agree to adopt the motion unanimously?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: I know we've gone over the time allotted for the meeting, but would anyone like to have the floor?

Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, if my colleagues agree to extend the meeting, on a much more positive note, I would like to table another motion.

We had the good fortune to hear an astronaut speak French on the moon. Speaking both official languages is a source of Canadian

pride. I think this is worth mentioning, since it's the first time the French language has been spoken so far out in space.

I would therefore like to call on the committee to draft a letter of congratulations to astronaut Jeremy Hansen. I propose:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages send a letter of congratulations to Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen in recognition of his historic participation in the Artemis II mission, including his use of the French language aboard the mission, the furthest French has ever been spoken from planet Earth, and that the committee recognize this outstanding achievement and its significance for the promotion of the French language, one of the two official languages of our country, Canada.

I think Air Canada's president and chief executive officer should take a cue from this passionate Canadian astronaut.

It would have been more appropriate to bring this up earlier, but since the last few meetings were in camera, I'm tabling the motion today.

The Chair: Does anyone wish to speak on this motion?

Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor.

Jim Bélanger: Just a quick note: I think this is also the first time the English language has been spoken so far. There are two official languages.

The Chair: Since there are no further comments on Mr. Godin's motion, is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>