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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 40 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

As you will remember, we agreed to suspend the meeting for technical reasons. We are resuming exactly where we left off.

Ms. Ashton had the floor and was preparing to propose...

I will let you say it, Ms. Ashton. The floor is yours.

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

I'd like to know, and to be assured, that suspension criteria and obligations apply when you adjourn the meeting for a technical reason.

The Chair: No, they do not apply. I told you when we adjourned on Tuesday that I would follow on as though we had just suspended the meeting.

However, from what I understand of the Standing Orders, as committee chair, I don't have to do that; I could start over with the speakers list and pick up where we left off.

As Ms. Ashton had the floor, I will proceed as if we had suspended; that's what I told you when I adjourned Tuesday's meeting.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I trust you implicitly as committee chair. However, the rule must be clearly applied, and, as parliamentarians, we can't be harmed if we decide to adjourn rather than suspend a meeting.

What's the difference between suspension and adjournment? And how can we protect our rights as parliamentarians?

The Chair: I will begin and perhaps let the clerk provide additional information or correct me.

In the case of a suspension, we stop the clock, but the rules provide that time will resume at the start of the next meeting. Where were we on time? What was going on? Who had the floor? We still continue with the same meeting number. That's the difference between a suspension and an adjournment. When we adjourn the

meeting, the current meeting ends and we begin another one when we meet again.

However, technical reasons forced us to adjourn the meeting, not to suspend it. I believe we were on our sixth meeting. It was getting difficult to process the video as a result of all the meetings, which were still part of meeting number 38. There was also the hybrid format problem. I think that one of the main problems is that we change rooms, and, when that happens, the technical side, ParlVu and the rest, is more complicated.

This is normally meeting number 40 today. We are starting a new meeting.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): So the meeting was officially adjourned. We're starting a new meeting. We were on meeting number 38 for a long time, and that ultimately caused some technical issues, so we adjourned the meeting. Fifteen minutes later, we began a new meeting, but it was number 39. We adjourned once again and are now starting meeting number 40. Otherwise we would have had more technical problems.

The Chair: That's exactly it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right.

I have another question.

The Chair: Yes. It's Mr. Godin's turn, and then it's that of Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, what's important is that my rights as a parliamentarian be protected. I don't want technical issues to be used to undermine my rights.

• (1110)

The Chair: Yes, that's true for everyone.

Mr. Joël Godin: Perhaps we should give unanimous consent, at the end of today's meeting, to the idea of facilitating technical matters. I don't object to cooperating, but I'd like the meeting record to show that it was unanimously decided that we were going to adjourn the meeting, but that we will use suspension procedures at the next meeting.

As you can understand, I want to protect my rights.

The Chair: That applies to everyone. I think that's what we agreed to and no one objected when I adjourned the meeting on Tuesday.

What I'm saying is that no one objected when I proposed it.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Going back to the point of order that I raised at the last meeting, Mr. Godin cited the committee record from 2005, I believe, in which the clerk at the time said that we could not limit speaking time. A motion had been introduced to limit members' speaking time to five minutes during cause-by-cause consideration. The clerk said that members' speaking time couldn't be limited without the unanimous consent of the members.

Ultimately, we now find ourselves doing indirectly what we can't do directly—

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Chair—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If we set a deadline for clause-by-clause consideration, we limit members' speaking time. You answered that you had checked with senior authorities—

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Beaulieu.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm just saying that we're discussing the amendment. Mr. Beaulieu's point of order has nothing to do with the amendment.

The Chair: When I adjourned the meeting, we had agreed to continue the discussion today as though we were continuing the meeting. No one objected to that.

Ms. Ashton had the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I thought points of order took priority.

The Chair: What you are adding is further to Mr. Godin's request. He just told us we should ensure that our rights are upheld if we suspend or adjourn a meeting for technical reasons. That's what we had agreed, and it's not a problem.

You are changing the subject. I agree with Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I don't think so. Ultimately, if what the clerk said during that meeting is true, that means that any attempt to limit this debate reveals an intent to limit debate on clause-by-clause consideration and to set a deadline.

We're going to wind up limiting members' speaking times, and without unanimous consent.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, if worse comes to worst, may I ask you to advance that argument when we come to the specific paragraph of Mr. Godin's amendment concerning clause-by-clause consideration?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right. It will be long and it will render everything else null and void.

The Chair: Let's allow Ms. Ashton to introduce her sub-amendment because we all agree we're going to address one part at a time. The sub-amendment that Ms. Ashton is preparing to propose must address Mr. Godin's first amendment.

What you're discussing appears a little further on in the motion. Do you agree with me? I'm referring to what you're alleging.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I pointed it out to you. At the last meeting, we just said it had been checked by senior authorities and that it was in order. I would've liked you to give us the details on that.

The Chair: I will let the clerk tell you about that at the proper time. The office did the research, and it's entirely feasible.

We will continue the meeting.

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

Pardon me. I don't want to be a party pooper.

Can someone tell us where we stand? You're giving the floor to Ms. Ashton, who apparently intends to introduce a sub-amendment.

Where do we stand right now? There was Mr. Beaulieu's amendment, Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment, my four amendments and Mr. Serré's motion. Now Ms. Ashton wants to speak. I just want to know where I stand so we're all on the same page.

The Chair: We are considering your amendments, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Have we voted on my amendments, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, we haven't.

Mr. Joël Godin: All right, thank you.

The Chair: I give the floor to Ms. Ashton.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you.

I'm proposing something so we can move forward efficiently and be able to—

The Chair: Would you please turn up your volume a little? We are having trouble hearing in the room.

Is your headset selected, Ms. Ashton?

We seem to be hearing you more clearly. That seems perfect.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right, that's good.

In order to expedite our work by doing what has to be done to improve the bill before us and to ensure that we do so efficiently, I would like to propose a few amendments. I know they have to be introduced one by one.

My first amendment is as follows:

that the Minister of Official Languages, the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, as well as their department officials, be invited to appear for one hour, instead of two, per minister, in separate meetings, no later than Thursday, December 1, 2022.

I'd like to add that we would all like those persons to appear for two hours. However, I believe we must make an important compromise to ensure we move forward so we can improve the bill before us and provide tools to francophones across the country. We must move forward and do the work that has to be done.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Before giving you the floor, Mr. Beaulieu, I'd like to know if the sub-amendment to Mr. Godin's amendment and Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment are clear in everyone's mind. Yes?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Could we have copies of them?

The Chair: Instead of saying "for two hours per minister, in separate meetings, no later than Thursday, November 24, 2022", it would read, "for one hour per minister, in separate meetings, no later than Thursday, December 1, 2022".

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Did Ms. Ashton state December 1? Does she agree? Stating November 24 would be illogical, since that's today.

The Chair: That's correct. Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment would amend Mr. Godin's first amendment in two places to read "one hour per minister" instead of "two hours per minister" and "no later than December 1, 2022" instead of "no later than November 24, 2022".

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If it were December 1, there would be two meetings and one hour per minister. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That would work.

The Chair: We will proceed in orderly fashion.

Ms. Ashton, do you wish to add something?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes. I'd like to move sub-amendments to the second and fourth amendments to change the dates so we can work on a realistic timeline. Many meetings have already been wasted.

In accordance with the procedure, could I introduce those two sub-amendments so we can get a realistic idea of the timeline I'm proposing?

The Chair: Just a moment.

Yes, Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, with all due respect to my NDP colleague, Ms. Ashton, I would like to recall that, last week, she invited us to follow the procedures. However, it was decided that we would proceed point by point. It was the committee that decided that, not me. I therefore object to the idea of dealing with her amendments together, as is being proposed.

On many occasions, I have reached out to committee members who are members of the party in power, the Liberal Party. I have reached out and said I was prepared to withdraw my amendment if Mr. Serré would withdraw his entire motion and if we could restart the process.

Ms. Ashton was correct when she made her presentation just a moment ago. We aim for efficiency here. Do you know how many meetings have been wasted since the Liberal Party's motion was introduced? It's been six meetings, which I consider unacceptable. I reached out, I am reaching out again, and I'm receptive. I want to move matters forward and to defend the French language. Consequently, we must not be accused of being in bad faith. You know that, if anyone can be accused of that, it's the individuals with whom you have a certain relationship, a certain coalition.

Mr. Chair, I won't change my position on this.

The Chair: Are there any other questions?

Ms. Ashton, I'm going to answer the question that you put to the chair.

We will proceed as we did in Mr. Beaulieu's case. Once we have considered and voted to adopt that amendment, we will have to vote on the sub-amendment. If it amends the amendment, we will have to vote on the amended amendment. Then we'll come back to you first for the other amendments, since you say you want to group them together.

Does that suit you, Ms. Ashton?

• (1120)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, and I'd like to state that the purpose of the remaining proposals is to establish realistic dates for the work we have to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Are there any further questions concerning the sub-amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Gordon.

Mr. Joël Godin: I appreciate the effort my colleague is making to facilitate our work. However, I've introduced a notice of motion in accordance with procedure, and I've thanked the Bloc Québécois for being inspired by it so we can have clear tools and are unrestricted by calendar dates—

The Chair: Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Godin, but we're dealing with Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment right now.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, but we're talking about time, Mr. Chair.

You're talking about dates, and I'm talking about time.

There has to be an introduction at some point.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

You said at the first meeting that the chair is required to honour parliamentarians' right to speak as long as what they say is related to the issue at least in some minor way.

This amendment concerns the entire debate on language. It concerns the possibility of hearing the ministers, among other witnesses.

I think that what Mr. Godin said relates to that in more than a minor way.

The Chair: I really didn't understand it that way. I definitely didn't understand that the motion from Mr. Godin, who is in good faith, added elements to, or contradicted, the sub-amendment that Ms. Ashton is proposing.

If that's the case, Mr. Godin, I'll listen to you again.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, the connection is there in that Ms. Ashton refers to dates. You have to understand that I submitted an amendment to Mr. Serré's motion on November 1. That amendment referred to dates because I was relying on Mr. Serré's motion. He referred to dates, and I referred to dates. I withdrew the clause about our time being limited at the clause-by-clause consideration stage.

Now Ms. Ashton is showing that she's in good faith as well. She's also probably reaching out for the Liberal Party to withdraw its motion so we can move ahead with our work.

Actually, Ms. Ashton said on Tuesday that it was important to follow procedure. I absolutely agree with her because that's efficient and contributes to the proper operation of a committee.

Consequently, in my notice of motion of November 10, instead of referring to dates, which is what Ms. Ashton suggests in her point 1, I refer to meetings. I'm therefore asking whether you would be prepared to have us refer to meetings. When there's a date, we're forced to limit ourselves to that date.

Could any technical issues arise? We don't know. As you know, there have been technical issues during the last three meetings. That's no one's fault. It's not the fault of the NDP-Liberal coalition, or of the Bloc Québécois or the Conservative Party. It's not your fault either, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Godin.

You are continuing a discussion on something that might alter your own amendment. We are dealing with the sub-amendment that Ms. Ashton has proposed. That's what we are discussing.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: If you wish to withdraw your amendment, you may request unanimous consent to do so.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I will withdraw my amendment when my colleagues on the other side have committed to withdrawing their motion.

This makes no sense. It's 11:25 a.m. on November 24, and we're wasting time again, and once again, it's the French language that's paying the price.

That's the way it's been since the Liberals introduced their motion on November 1.

The Chair: Are there any further questions on Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment?

I will give the floor to Ms. Ashton and then Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I've actually wanted to introduce this sub-amendment for a while, and here we finally are.

The purpose of my amendment is to get the committee moving so we can improve this bill, as virtually all the witnesses asked us to do.

Could we please proceed with a vote on the sub-amendment that I've proposed?

• (1125)

The Chair: Yes, but before calling for a vote, I have to make sure everyone has had a chance to comment on the sub-amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think that cutting hearing time in half for the ministers is clearly unsatisfactory.

For example, the Minister of Official Languages has previously appeared before the committee on Bill C-13. We've also asked her questions in the House.

In the throne speech two years ago, the government admitted for the first time that the French language was declining. That means it has been denying that decline for 50 years.

There are eight million francophones, and the government has admitted that Quebec francophones are in the minority in Canada and North America. This is big news, but it was ultimately obvious. However, the government has admitted the obvious, which is good.

The government says it has a responsibility to assist the French language in Quebec, not just English in Quebec. When the minister appeared before the committee, we asked her what the government would do to help the French language, but we didn't get an answer. To tell the truth, the only answer was the part of the bill concerning federally regulated private businesses, which prevents the Quebec government from applying the Charter of the French language to federally regulated businesses that won't help the French language. You'd think people are trying to appeal to potential voters by leading them to believe they're going to support the French language. I see frowns on some faces here. French is declining in Ontario, and, according to researchers, the war is virtually lost. I think this is quite serious. Measures should be taken to actually address the decline of French. We've received no response to that.

I've often spoken about Quebec and official language support programs. I've often asked the minister and the House what will be done about that.

Right now, all the money goes exclusively to promoting English and developing the anglophone community in Quebec. We have nothing against anglophones, but they're in a dominant position and are part of the Canadian anglophone majority. The Canadian anglophone majority has said that, under the Official Languages Act of 1969, anglophones are considered a minority and we have to help reinforce that anglophone minority. However, it represents the majority.

As for actual measures, it will take time to really—

Some voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I would just like some order, please, because I can't really hear Mr. Beaulieu's remarks. It's important that we listen to everyone.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I know some of you don't want to hear us, but I think the idea behind this motion is precisely to avoid having to debate or listen to each other too much longer. However, for the future of French, we won't back down because it must not continue declining.

The Official Languages Act is the main obstacle in the fight against the decline of French in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, where I think it does an inadequate job of ensuring the survival of that language. Positive measures currently only serve to support English. Approximately \$1.55 billion was allocated from 1995 to 2022 under the development of official-language communities program, which is one of the official language support programs. According to earlier studies, \$1.1 billion was allocated to the English-language education system in Quebec, which was previously overdeveloped in the 1960s.

The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA, even conducted a study and released a report entitled *The Heirs of Lord Durham*, in which Quebec anglophones were compared to francophones outside Quebec, and there was a follow-up to that too. The authors found that Quebec anglophones were in a better position than Quebec francophones, based on a number of factors, such as schools, graduation rates and so on. However, what authorities have done is reinforce English-language institutions in the only francophone state in North America. We constantly put questions to the minister, but she doesn't answer.

Then there's the enhancement of official languages program. In the context of the B & B Commission, it was said that the purpose of the Official Languages Act wasn't to make everyone bilingual because, if everyone were bilingual, the minority language would definitely go out the window and become useless. Despite that fact, a significant amount of funding, more than \$15 million a year, is allocated to English-language instruction in French-language schools. That's virtually the only funding provided on the francophone side. To be completely honest, there are 4 million—

• (1130)

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: My colleague is raising some important points, but I wonder how they relate to my amendment. Since I've already said that I had other amendments to propose, we have to move forward one way or another. I understand my colleague's frustration, but I wonder how it relates to with my amendment.

The Chair: It's a tenuous connection, but Mr. Beaulieu nevertheless mentioned the time allotted for the appearance of the Minister of Official Languages. He said that one hour wouldn't be enough and that the minister wasn't meeting the Bloc Québécois' expectations or responding to its requests. I therefore find that there is a connection, albeit a tenuous one.

I will let Mr. Beaulieu continue.

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

The Chair: I'm listening, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: The other two parties are filibustering to prevent the minister from appearing. We're even prepared to hear from all four ministers. So it's time to move on to something else. We can vote.

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

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: With all due respect to my colleagues, we're taking time to discuss this now because we know we're going to be gagged soon. Consequently, since we won't be able to speak, we're using every means at our disposal to express ourselves as parliamentarians and opposition members. Here again, these are minority rights. We're often accused of failing to honour minority rights in Quebec, but we're the largest francophone minority in Canada—

The Chair: You're going off topic, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right.

Let's go back to the reasons why we should hear each minister for two hours.

I explained the case of the Minister of Official Languages by discussing the official languages development program and the access to justice in both official languages support fund. Sometimes we don't even have the right to justice in French in Quebec. We have to pay for translation. Some judgments are drafted in English only.

I remember one judgment that blocked Bill 104. I'll briefly explain that bill.

Until 2002, unsubsidized private English-language schools published advertising that encouraged parents to send their children to English-language schools for six months to a year so those children, as well as their brothers and sisters, could circumvent Bill 101 and attend public English-language schools. Bill 104 prevented that. In 2008, a judgment was rendered by a former lawyer from Alliance Québec, an organization that I think was established in 1982 and was subsidized by the federal government, which also appoints judges.

The judge in question rendered his decision in English only. Many people were up in arms about it. First of all, he ultimately annoyed people with his arrogance. However, we now have the access to justice in both official languages support fund, which provides approximately \$525,000 a year. The minister doesn't want to answer our questions on the subject. From what I can see, the federal government intends to continue this funding and to provide nothing for organizations struggling to defend the French language.

One witness appeared before the committee; I think he represented Droits collectifs Québec. That organization isn't funded by the federal government. It doesn't receive a penny, which just goes to show you there's a double standard. We aren't on equal terms. When you look at how the official language communities program has developed, you can see there are programs that fund each organization. At the time, that concerned Alliance Québec in particular. According to the documentation, the federal government claims that it worked with those people to establish a coalition.

When the federal government saw the Parti Québécois return to power in 1981, it passed the Constitution Act, 1982, which largely defeated Bill 101, which was based on different principles. However, the federal government funded those organizations, which were established to oppose French as a common language. Those organizations still try to ensure that all services from A to Z are in French, but they also say they agree with Bill 101, whereas that the objective of that act is to make French the common language.

A common language is usually the one that everyone knows and that makes it possible to include newcomers, but the result is the opposite. In an article this morning, Marco Micone personally accuses me, and other Quebec figures, of "linguistic racism". That's the argument that Alliance Québec and the federal government use. I think it's really hypocritical. The federal government funds these organizations to the tune of millions of dollars a year. I want to hear the minister explain that and tell us what she intends to do. Will she extend that funding?

There's no response from the government, despite the fact that we've asked the question many times. If the minister appears before us for only one hour, it'll be very easy for her to sidestep the question and avoid answering it.

The same is true of the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. We've also heard that the department denies or rejects the study permit applications of 80% of francophone African students. Sometimes it's impossible to proceed in French before the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, even in Quebec.

So all of this has to be clarified. The Minister of Immigration appeared before the committee and said he didn't know why that was the case. He tried to justify himself by saying that equal numbers of anglophones and francophones are denied in those African countries. What are we to conclude? Does this constitute discrimination against those countries? Study permit applications mainly come from those countries, which form the main francophone immigration pool. Why is there so little respect for French at IRCC, even in Quebec? It's quite incredible. And yet, we get no response despite our efforts.

• (1135)

We're discussing what's threatening French and linguistic diversity around the world. I think it's important to do so. We often hear that it's important to combat declining biological diversity, but global linguistic diversity is just as important.

Quebec is the only francophone majority state in North America. We have a right to invite the Minister of Immigration to appear and answer our questions. Personally, I don't think one hour is enough. That will influence the rest of the debate and clause-by-clause consideration. I think this is really essential.

The same is true of the Treasury Board. Can it give us information on all the funding amounts?

I don't know who's responsible for Public Accounts, but there are a lot of errors in the Public Accounts regarding the Official Languages Act. We thank certain officials, but the Department of Canadian Heritage hasn't responded, and others don't want to respond. We've received some responses, but it's been very long and diffi-

cult. The ministers must therefore appear before the committee and answer our questions. We need to press them to do so.

We've discussed the Department of Canadian Heritage, the department that distributes the grants. Is it normal for the Department of Canadian Heritage to fund organizations that interfere in elections and put pressure on the Quebec government with regard to an area of purportedly exclusive provincial government jurisdiction. It makes no sense.

It makes no sense to gag us during consideration of the bill or to limit debate and the number of witnesses. We're told that linguistic duality is a fundamental Canadian value, but we see the contrary in Parliament and in this bill. We're told we won't be entitled to debate or conduct clause-by-clause consideration or to invite witnesses to answer those questions. I personally think that makes no sense.

We want the Minister of Canadian Heritage to appear before the committee. I don't think Health Canada is on the witness list. However, those organizations boast that they've received money. Consider Health Canada's official languages health program, for example. The funding allocated to that program is used to elect people who'll exercise pressure to anglicize the health system and to enable them to be elected to the boards of local community service centres, or CLSCs, hospitals, youth centres and so on.

There was only one francophone university rehabilitation centre in Quebec, the Institut de réadaptation de Montréal, which merged with a small English-language centre, the Lindsay Rehabilitation Hospital. The board was obviously controlled by anglophone organizations, which wanted all profits from the merger to go to McGill University, even though the Institut was affiliated with the Université de Montréal.

Two employees, including a warehouse employee, opposed the move and met with ministers to tell them that it made no sense and that it was false to say they mainly served anglophones. Under article 29.1 of the Charter of the French language, English-language institutions in Quebec may operate in English, hire people who don't speak French and prepare medical reports in English if the writer so wishes.

Some people protested in front of the Institut de réadaptation and convinced the Office québécois de la langue française to conduct an investigation, and it found that more than 90% of the institution's clientele was francophone. However, the board nevertheless found a different way to anglicize the institution.

• (1140)

In Quebec, there's no counterweight to all the money spent to anglicize government institutions in Quebec, particularly municipal institutions. I was president of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste for a long time, and we didn't receive a penny from the government. However, money has been distributed since the time of the patriots. The federal government ensures that the struggle really isn't waged on an equal footing.

However, a mobilization may be under way. I think it's important that the debate take place, that we hear from the ministers and that we be able to question them. I don't think two hours is enough. We should be able to question them until they provide us with some answers. That would be ideal. However, we need at least two hours. If we only have one hour per minister, they'll just laugh in our face. It makes no sense.

The public isn't necessarily aware of certain facts. We could potentially conduct a survey and ask people if they know what percentages of grants made under the Official Languages Act go respectively to English and French. I'm sure very few of them know that virtually all grants go to English-language institutions. The only field where slightly more funding is granted to the French side is French-language instruction in English-language schools, but that remains a minor contribution. The rest of it goes for English courses at French-language schools.

However, we're aware of the current situation regarding the quality of French. The Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec has even taken a stand on the subject, requesting that French-language learning be enhanced. It wasn't to enhance English-language learning.

This essentially shows that these two hours are just a minimum. We mustn't allow ourselves to be gagged. I don't understand the NDP people. I've often had the sense that they support the future of French and understand that this is an injustice. Some people believe that we francophones think we're better than other people and that's why we're fighting, but that's not the case. We fight because this is a matter of collective social justice and the right of peoples to self-determination. In my view, Canada has been violating that right since the very start of colonization, and even since 1867. I won't dwell on the historical facts because you might stop me.

This situation must stop in 2022 and 2023. We can't continue declining. We must speak out, and people should sense that there really is a public debate and that parliamentarians are receptive and ready to discuss these issues. That would be a minimum level of democracy, even though, as we know, Quebec will always be in the minority in Canada. We will always come up against the anglophone majority. It will always undo our laws when it disagrees with us. In my opinion, if we can at least debate these issues without being silenced, that will be a step in the right direction.

We could question the ministers, and a minimum amount of time could be scheduled for them to answer our questions. I'm an "indépendantiste" because I don't think we can survive in Canada as francophones. The federalists could at least decide to let French survive in Canada, but that's not at all what we're seeing in Bill C-13.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I just want to ensure that everyone around the table is aware of the subject of the decision we're preparing to make. When we first sat as new members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we adopted rules determin-

ing the amount of time that would be allowed for opening remarks and the questioning of witnesses.

Witnesses have five minutes for their opening remarks. The time allotted for the first round of questions is 6 minutes for the Conservatives, 6 minutes for the Liberals, 6 minutes for the Bloc Québécois and 6 minutes for the NDP. That's 24 minutes. Adding the witnesses' 5 minutes, that comes to 29 minutes.

We now have before us a proposal under which four ministers would appear at two meetings, so one hour per minister for two meetings. Barring any changes, if there are no technical difficulties, votes or other setbacks, we would logically conclude on December 1.

I've submitted a notice of motion. On Tuesday, my colleague Mr. Drouin told me that notice was public because I had read it out loud. As regards Ms. Ashton's proposal, I understand that she's trying to undo something, and that's all to her credit.

Now, under my proposal, two hours would be allotted for each minister, including representatives. Unlike mine, Ms. Ashton's proposal wouldn't include representatives. Thus, if one hour is allotted for each minister over four hours, that means two hour meetings, consisting of one hour for each minister and his or her representatives.

My Bloc colleague is proposing a minimalist format that wouldn't allow us to ask in-depth questions. It means there would be four members of the Conservative Party of Canada...

• (1150)

The Chair: Ms. Ashton has a point of order.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I want to clarify a point. In my proposal, I referred to "representatives" as "officials". I want to make sure we're discussing my sub-amendment in full knowledge of the facts.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Ashton, you're absolutely right.

Mr. Godin, the only change to your first amendment is "one hour" instead of "two hours" and the date. The rest of the amendment remains as is. So that includes the representatives.

Mr. Joël Godin: I want to say that I'm talking about my notice of motion, which is still pending. It reads, "and their representatives".

Before we continue, Mr. Chair, could we have the wording of Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment? Did we receive it in our P9 accounts?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Michelle Legault): I sent them all together, but I can—

Mr. Joël Godin: You sent them all together? You understand that we're talking about representatives and dates.

The Chair: Just a minute. The clerk will take a breath and send Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment to our P9 accounts in a few moments. We are about to receive them.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm going to wait until I receive the document so I can discuss it.

The Chair: All right.

We will suspend for a few moments.

• (1150) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1155)

The Chair: We will resume.

I believe everyone has had a chance to read Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I've actually realized that the minister will be here for half an hour and we'll be able to ask the representatives questions for half an hour.

I think that's unfair and unacceptable. However, in a dramatic development, it's five minutes before noon on November 24, 2022, and I'm prepared to accept this proposal and to invite my Conservative Party colleagues to accept this sub-amendment, provided Ms. Ashton doesn't add an obligation to conduct clause-by-clause consideration with a time limit.

That's on the table, Mr. Chair. I'm ready. I want to move this forward, but I'll never yield on clause-by-clause consideration. I'm prepared to sacrifice my speaking time with the ministers and their representatives, but I won't sacrifice anything else. I'm going to lie down on the tracks and face the consequences. I'm going to do everything I can to defend the French language and ensure that our rights as parliamentarians aren't violated.

The Chair: Thank you for laying out your case, Mr. Godin, but, as you know, we have to vote on an amendment to your first amendment. You can do what you want when we come to your amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, I request unanimous consent for Ms. Ashton to be able to correct her sub-amendment, if she can agree to my intentions. Then we could move on to something else.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Godin, as I understand it, Ms. Ashton has proposed an amendment to your first amendment, and you are requesting unanimous consent to commit Ms. Ashton to later proposing changes to paragraphs that she hasn't yet submitted.

Mr. Joël Godin: No. The Conservative Party of Canada is prepared to accept her sub-amendment provided that she doesn't then propose a sub-amendment establishing a deadline for clause-by-clause consideration. We don't want the time allotted for clause-by-clause consideration to be limited. We therefore request unanimous consent that her sub-amendment be accepted, provided she makes that commitment.

The Chair: I have never seen a procedure in which someone was asked to make a commitment with regard to a paragraph that would be presented in fifth position, but, since you've requested it, I will see if we have unanimous consent.

Do we have unanimous consent?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): No.

The Chair: That's what I thought.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If Ms. Ashton had wanted to accept this request, she would have asked to speak, and she would have received the committee's consent, but as she is not requesting the floor, I imagine she's maintaining the gag—

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu—

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm coming back—

Mr. Marc Serré: No, he never comes back to it.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you may speak to Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, which we've all received in writing.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's great.

I wanted to discuss something important. Why should we meet with the minister responsible for the Treasury Board and ask her questions? Because she's the one concerned. When we heard from the CEO of Statistics Canada here, we wanted him to disclose the findings of his study on rights holders, something the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA, considered important. He responded that he couldn't do it and that he needed authorization from the minister—

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, are you referring to the Chief Statistician?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes, I'm referring to the evidence he gave during his appearance before the committee.

It surprised me because I thought Statistics Canada was relatively independent, given the important work it does to provide an objective picture of French in Canada and Quebec. However, he told us he needed the minister's authorization to publish anything.

Mr. Corbeil, a former Statistics Canada employee, was there for all the presentations. He still suggests that the mother tongue and language used in the home aren't important. He claims you have to look at a series of indicators. However, mother tongue, the language used in the home and the language of work are indicators that point in the same direction. They're all aspects of linguistic behaviour.

We're seeing what I would characterize as gross abuses. For example, we cited a statistic concerning mother tongue, and, according to this morning's article, that's called linguistic racism. Remember that number comes from Statistics Canada. The Constitution Act, 1982, is based on mother tongue. I think that's tantamount to accusing the whole spectrum of stakeholders, including Statistics Canada, of linguistic racism.

That kind of comment is frequently made by organizations funded under the Official Languages Act. They spend their time repeating that we're close-minded and don't honour the rights of minorities.

When Ms. Jennings appeared before the committee, she alluded to racism in the United States in saying that we didn't want to wind up at the back of the bus. That's frankly revolting for the people who our fighting.

Quebeckers are in the minority in Canada, and I hope everyone agrees on that. Our demographic weight is constantly declining. We're increasing immigration, but we're being prevented from francizing immigration. We don't want to admit as many people of French origin as possible. I've always made a point of emphasizing that. What we want is to include all citizens in Quebec society, including newcomers, but they have to understand French for that to happen. However, the departments are interfering with it.

The denial of the French language's decline that we've observed for 50 years has prevented measures from being taken to neutralize the measures that have anglicized Quebec. Statistics Canada, which is controlled by the minister, since everything that's done there has to be approved by her, reported that the number of francophones outside Quebec had increased. However, it also indicated that there had been a smaller decline in the percentage of francophones.

It has recently insisted that linguistic diversity is on the rise, that more and more people are bilingual and speak several languages in the home. That's the assimilation process at work. Francophones start by using English more frequently in the home. That's not linguistic diversity; it's linguistic assimilation. Statistics Canada has suggested that.

I think Statistics Canada should enjoy a certain amount of independence, and we'd like to question the minister on that subject.

● (1200)

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, Statistics Canada doesn't report to any minister named in the amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Committee members want to limit the time allowed for questioning the minister who has authority to control what Statistics Canada does or doesn't publish. That's more what I'm suggesting. If Statistics Canada were completely independent, I'd agree with you and wouldn't add this to the debate, but it isn't independent of the minister, and it requires her approval in order to publish data.

We would've liked to have the time to question the Minister of Canadian Heritage, whose department is responsible for distributing funding. We would've liked to know why the department allocates funding to organizations that divide francophones and attempt to anglicize newcomers to Quebec.

Another question that the Minister of Official Languages should absolutely answer concerns the use of the first official language spoken indicator, which incidentally is based on mother tongue and the language spoken in the home. If it's racist to use those indicators, then the entire federal government is indirectly racist. However that's not what I'm saying, but that's what this gentleman was ultimately suggesting.

I can understand why the federal government is comfortable funding organizations that spread these kinds of ideas that undermine the integration of immigrants which is so vital for Quebec. And then it feels free to characterize Quebeckers as racist. Our efforts to integrate newcomers are being undermined. We'd like to have time to ask the minister why the Official Languages Act is designed to integrate newcomers in Canada's majority anglophone society. Our right to self-determination is being violated, and that right carries with it a right to secession under international law. It's easy to prove.

I'd like to be able to question the minister about this, about whether she thinks that attempts to defend the French language and Quebec constitute racism. We want time to ask her that question. As my colleague said, we have only six minutes to ask questions over a one-hour timeslot. After that, time for asking questions declines for both the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, and we have no right to speak in the final round. We can ask the minister very few questions in the course of one hour. I think it's clearly inadequate.

For that reason, I invite all members to vote against this proposal. I'm reaching out to the NDP. The Liberal Party, which was in the minority, formed the majority when it joined forces with the NDP. Consequently, there's no other solution for us but to make every effort to have a debate now. I'm somewhat surprised because I thought the NDP wanted to defend social justice.

Thank you.

● (1205)

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you didn't speak to the sub-amendment.

Ms. Ashton, you are the next speaker. The floor is yours.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'm going to repeat that I proposed this amendment in order to mobilize the committee and advance its work so we could make improvements to the act. I've clearly said since May that this bill must be improved in accordance with the recommendations made by the witnesses who have appeared before the committee. That's why I proposed this amendment.

I would add that I'm sensitive to the suggestions made by my colleagues from the other parties. However, the wording developed in my amendment is clear, and I would like it to be respected in full. I've been a member of the House of Commons for 14 years. I introduce nothing unless I'm convinced that it's valid. I truly discourage my colleagues from trying to guess my intentions. My intentions are clear, laid out in black and white. I chose the words used in this amendment in order to move this bill forward so we can make a difference for communities across the country. They're clearly telling us they want a modernized act as soon as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I want to commend my colleague's effort. I hope she appreciates the offer I've made her, which also shows my intention to move our work forward. However, it has fallen on deaf ears.

Now I would like to ask a question, Mr. Chair. On June 13, we agreed that the committee would meet in camera after 20 sessions with witnesses to discuss future business regarding Bill C-13.

Have we held those 20 sessions?

The Chair: Technically speaking, we haven't held 20 sessions because we turned to consideration of Mr. Serré's motion and therefore stopped counting. Unless I'm wrong, I believe we've held 14, 15 or 16 sessions with witnesses.

• (1210)

Mr. Joël Godin: Then I would note that this motion is obstructing the committee's work.

I understand the arguments from all quarters, but I don't believe we've done everything in our power to address this matter properly. This is urgent. We know that francophone minorities across Canada, and anglophone minorities in Quebec, want us to move ahead.

I would also note that the Liberal government has been in power for seven years. So it has had ample time to act if it intended to do so. Suddenly, today, some sort of witch or fairy has decided that we have to step on the gas, that this matter is urgent and that it has to be resolved before the holidays. There's no consistency here. In my opinion, this government has no intention of protecting francophones. As a parliamentarian, I think it's important to point that out.

If that isn't the case, if the committees are useless—

The Chair: I will stop you there, Mr. Godin.

You must speak to the sub-amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I've made an offer, and I'm now prepared to offer my support, but you know what I'm going to do when Ms. Ashton goes back over other parts of her sub-amendment. I'm being transparent. I want our work to move forward.

Once again, before going any further, I'm reaching out to the party opposite. I request unanimous consent to withdraw all motions and amendments.

The Chair: That's been done, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: No, that's not true, Mr. Chair. I repeat: discussions took place from the moment we requested them until the moment we requested them again. I now request unanimous consent to withdraw, all together, Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, our amendments and Mr. Serré's motion. I never proposed that. We must set all of it aside and establish a new agenda.

As I have said many times in committee, I don't want to work on the basis of dates, but rather on the basis of a number of meetings, and I won't be bullied with regard to clause-by-clause consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I will not allow you to request unanimous consent for your suggestion. I'm told I can do that. You may

challenge my decision if you wish. We will proceed one step at a time, and we're currently discussing Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment.

If you wish to challenge my decision, I will give you the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, out of respect for the institution and the work you're doing, which is not easy, I will not challenge her decision.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Ms. Ashton has spoken, and I just wanted to respond on the subject of her amendment. I don't want to impugn her intentions, but actions usually betray intentions, and I personally can't see how reducing the time we have to question ministers will support the cause of French. She always reverts to the argument that various groups want an act at all costs and as soon as possible. What I'm saying is that, if the government wanted to help the French language and francophones outside Quebec, it could ultimately do so immediately, without the act being amended, by means of the funding it grants them or by appointing a governor general or a lieutenant-governor who knows French.

Everywhere we see that, despite the act, government officials aren't comfortable speaking French. We're entitled to get answers from ministers, but we don't have any. It's quite incredible. The government in power doesn't need an act in order to tell its Minister of Immigration and officials that, as of now, they must meet objectives and acquire the resources to do so regarding francophone immigration or other matters. We've seen it often: it's an empty gesture to welcome francophone immigrants who will then be anglicized.

Getting back to the matter before us, we want the minister to answer us. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA, represents people who struggle in much tougher conditions than in Quebec; they've experienced assimilation over the years. I commend their courage and determination to continue living in French as much as possible in the everyday adversity they encounter. I recall, very respectfully, that 90% of francophones in Canada live in Quebec. I want to emphasize that in response to my colleague.

There may be French language advocacy groups that I am unaware of, but none or virtually none of them agree at all about the Official Languages Act. They want major reform. Many have come and told us that here, and they increasingly say it in the media. If MPs are gagged, we will solve nothing. Parliament is supposed to be the preferred venue for democratic debate and presenting points of view. If that isn't done in Parliament, it's done in the media. Consequently, we need to ensure that people remain hopeful that we can change something by democratic means. Otherwise, the remaining means aren't any better. I'm in favour of non-violence and always will be. I think we have to give democracy a chance, and we won't do that by silencing people.

It isn't true that all francophones think this is a good act. Only a minority of francophones in Canada consider this a good act, and the more they get to know it, the more they'll understand that it's far from being an act that, despite what people tell us, promotes French, and that Bill C-13 will change nothing. We question ministers in order to determine what measures will defend French, and they respond by saying that they're the first ones to have admitted that it's in decline. We agree that this is a good thing. Apart from that, what will they do?

We need answers from the ministers, but we don't have any. I think we should have the time to question them.

● (1215)

The Chair: As I see there are no more speakers, we will go to the vote.

(Sub-amendment agreed to: yeas 10, nays 1)

● (1220)

The Chair: We'd normally have to vote on Mr. Godin's amended amendment, but, since we'll be discussing dates, I'll have to consult the clerk.

The situation is somewhat unusual. We'll be hearing several sub-amendments amending several amendments to the main motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: As the saying goes, it's hard to make heads or tails of it.

The Chair: Seriously, I think we'll have to do one thing at a time in order to get through this. We just adopted a sub-amendment and now have to vote on Mr. Godin's amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Rather than vote on all the sub-amendments of one member, we should deal with them one at a time. Once we voted on the first, you could decide to drop the others and go on to something else.

The Chair: Are you referring to Ms. Ashton's sub-amendments?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes. You said we would deal with the sub-amendments one at a time. So you can't say now that we're ultimately going to skip—

The Chair: I meant we would deal with them one at a time but that Ms. Ashton would come again with her sub-amendment. We're really in an unusual situation. There are several amendments and sub-amendments. If you think there's a consensus, we can deal with all the sub-amendments. Let's take two minutes to discuss it.

Here are our two options. First, we can deal with Mr. Godin's first amendment as amended by Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, an amendment that will be accepted or rejected, which will send us back to the main motion, in the same paragraph.

Second, we can hear all the sub-amendments proposed by Ms. Ashton, which would amend all of Mr. Godin's amendments, and then apply them one at a time to Mr. Serré's main motion. Those are the two paths we can take.

Let's take two minutes for everybody to come to an agreement. This is a procedural matter.

The floor is yours, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we have voted on Ms. Ashton's first sub-amendment, but you're suggesting that we go to my amendment as the first option. I'm telling you we can't go to Ms. Ashton's second sub-amendment because we have to dispose of the first point in the initial motion. We have to go all the way back.

That's what I've been trying to show from the start. This doesn't work. We're wasting our time talking about dates, and we're spinning our wheels. We're running like a hamster on a wheel, and it's endless.

The Chair: That's true, Mr. Godin, except that the content of the first paragraph of the motion stands. Everything turns on the first paragraph.

Your first amendment altered the first paragraph of the motion, and Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, which we just adopted, is consistent with that. So we're still in context. We can use the first or second option and deal with them all together. I think we can agree among ourselves, or else I'll make that decision. Personally, I would prefer that we agree.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we're changing the ground rules on the fly here.

The committee agreed to proceed point by point. As I remember it, we had unanimous consent on this. Mr. Beaulieu's proposal and Ms. Ashton's first proposal were withdrawn. We need to continue along the same lines.

Now I think we have to deal with Ms. Ashton's three, four or six other proposals. Then we'll move on to mine and those of Mr. Serré. That's what we've done since we started. Why would we change the ground rules?

The Chair: I don't necessarily want to change the ground rules, but I proposed this very openly.

Mr. Joël Godin: Those were the ground rules, Mr. Chair. Don't tell me they weren't the ground rules.

The Chair: Yes, but we had proposed to do them point by point.

You moved five amendments, Mr. Godin.

If we proceed point by point, we should normally vote on your first amendment, the purpose of which is to amend the first paragraph of the main motion. That's one piece. We can do it that way; that's the first option.

● (1225)

Mr. Joël Godin: According to the practice adopted at the start of the debate on the motion introduced by Mr. Serré, we started at the end, to use the expression of our extraordinary chair. We start at the end and then work our way up.

I don't necessarily agree with the other option. I don't want to change the ground rules.

The Chair: You prefer the second option. Is that it?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Does that suit everyone?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: When I introduced my amendments, you said we would deal with them one at a time, and we went right to the end. Otherwise, to be consistent, we will require—

The Chair: All right.

I suggested two minutes, and that's done. I agree on that.

Ms. Ashton, please introduce your sub-amendment.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, gladly.

The second—

Mr. Joël Godin: We can't hear her, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Your volume is really low, Ms. Ashton. You may be disconnected.

Ms. Niki Ashton: No, I'm not.

The second part of the motion reads as follows: "amendments to Bill C-13 be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 5:00 p.m. ET on Thursday, December 1, 2022 and distributed to the committee members in both official languages by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, December 2, 2022."

The Chair: Great.

The clerk has just sent it to your P9 accounts.

I believe everyone has now received Ms. Ashton's second sub-amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We have until December 1 to submit our amendments. As we've already said, this is a long and complex bill, probably the longest of the reforms of the Official Languages Act.

The bill is so complex that I've even requested the opinion of a lawyer. He examined the bill and found that it has several vulnerabilities if a gag order is imposed. He told me that a month or two ago. He anticipated the threat of a gag order.

Certain clauses in the bill would retroactively amend previous sections. We could adopt certain amendments concerning, for example, the new act respecting federally regulated private businesses. If we adopt certain amendments at the outset, we might wind up with a new bill that would retroactively amend previous amendments. It's very complicated.

The imposition of a gag order would leave us very vulnerable because we would have to work quickly. We would have very little opportunity to hear from the ministers in order to gather food for thought and propose amendments.

Imposing a gag order on clause-by-clause consideration would merely gain a little time for those not wanting to amend the act. If we don't have time to examine all the amendments properly and adopt certain amendments toward the end, we may well undo what was previously done. It would be very difficult to make the desired changes.

I think we have to take the time to present our amendments well so we can establish matches. That way, when we adopt an amendment, we can advise people that it will change amendment "X" a little further on. It's quite complex work.

It's really unfortunate that we're being rushed and that attempts are being made to limit the time allowed for something this important.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

As there are no more speakers on this subject, we will go to the vote.

(Sub-amendment agreed to: yeas 10, nays 1)

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'm very surprised to see we're moving ahead.

I want to thank my colleagues for adopting this sub-amendment.

I'm not proposing any amendment to the third paragraph.

In the fourth paragraph, I propose the following wording: "the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill no later than Tuesday, December 6, 2022 at 11:00 p.m. ET".

The Chair: So it's just the date of December 6 that changes. Is that correct?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, that's it, and I added the time, 11:00 p.m.

The Chair: The time was already in Mr. Godin's amendment.

Paragraph 3 of Mr. Godin's amendment remains intact.

The fourth paragraph of Mr. Godin's amendment would be amended.

Mr. Godin has the floor.

Mr. Marc Serré: I want to be sure that all committee members receive the sub-amendment in writing. Otherwise we'll have to start over.

The Chair: Like teachers, sometimes we even love the the most unruly students.

I take it for granted that everyone has received the sub-amendment in writing. I see heads nodding.

The third sub-amendment is in fact the proposed sub-amendment to Mr. Godin's fourth paragraph.

Mr. Godin, you wanted to speak. We are listening.

● (1235)

Mr. Joël Godin: I have nothing against anglophones, but I want to defend the French language.

"That the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill no later than Tuesday, December 6".

I want to be consistent. What will happen between December 1 and December 6? I would prefer that this provision be replaced by a meeting rather than a date, that is to say "the meeting following the final appearance of the ministers". We don't know if that will be on December 6. We will be coming back and wasting our time again.

Let's make our work easier. Ms. Ashton said she was surprised, but we have the same objective: to move the matter forward. She need not be surprised when the proposals are acceptable. We have to understand that, when we're in committee, we have to give and we also have to expect that the other parties will be receptive.

I'm uncomfortable with the idea of setting a specific date. I agree that, following the motion we just voted on, we should proceed to the meeting following the final appearance of the four ministers.

The Chair: Are there any more speakers?

Mr. Beaulieu has the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like a clarification.

As I understand it, this applies to paragraph 4.

The Chair: It's a sub-amendment to paragraph 4 of Mr. Godin's amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Would that mean that clause-by-clause consideration would begin on December 6 or conclude on December 6?

The Chair: Clause-by-clause consideration would begin no later than December 6.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I don't agree with that because we may not be able to hear from a minister if there's a vote or an emergency debate until midnight. That sort of thing often prevents committees from sitting the next day.

Furthermore, with the new motion that was adopted, we no longer need unanimous consent to extend debate; we only need the support of one party. So it's conveniently the Liberals who will control the timetable, together with the NDP. As that could well happen frequently between now and the end of the session, we might not be able to hold any meetings with the ministers. If that happens once, it will further limit the time allotted for the ministers to appear.

So if we want to have each minister for at least one hour, that will take two sessions. So we should say that clause-by-clause consideration will begin after two sessions with the ministers.

I don't know whether my colleague would agree to amend her sub-amendment to refer to meetings rather than dates. Otherwise we may not be able to hear from the ministers or to hear only a few. If we're lucky, we'll have one session out of two. In that case, certain ministers won't be heard. As I said earlier, it's very important that we speak to all the ministers.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I have to inform you that it is out of order for the person who has proposed an amendment to amend it on the fly.

• (1240)

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I think one point is missing from your response. It's possible if we have unanimous consent.

The Chair: I see that Ms. Ashton has raised her hand, Mr. Godin. So I will let Mr. Beaulieu finish, then give the floor to Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We could request unanimous consent if Ms. Ashton is in agreement.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Some good arguments have been advanced. Since my intention was obviously for us to hear from each minister for one hour, it's essential that we keep that. Considering what's happening, I acknowledge that could get complicated.

If we have unanimous consent, I suggest that we retain the spirit of that amendment but clarify it with the following wording: "the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration no later than the meeting following the two meetings with the ministers and their officials."

That way we would ensure that we have each minister for one hour, which would take up two meetings. Then we would move on to clause-by-clause consideration in the next meeting.

That's almost exactly what I had proposed, but it guarantees that we'll spend one hour with each of the four ministers and their officials.

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, while the clerk takes notes, would you please repeat what you are requesting be done by unanimous consent?

Ms. Niki Ashton: The idea is to replace point 4 with the following: "the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill no later than the meeting following the two meetings with the ministers and their officials."

We wanted consideration to be conducted no later than December 6, but we also want to ensure that we spend four full hours with the ministers.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

We will give the clerk time to finalize all that and to send the document to your P9 accounts.

Mr. Godin, do you have something important to say, or are you waiting to have the document in your hand?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, first of all, everything I say is important.

The Chair: Oh, oh! That's absolutely true.

I misspoke. I should have asked you if you want to speak to that or to something else.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, there's a connection, Mr. Chair.

I want to commend the openness that Ms. Ashton shows. I'd expect the same from the Liberal Party, but we'll see.

Ms. Ashton, I would like to say—

The Chair: Mr. Godin—

Mr. Joël Godin: This is along the same lines, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: You can always vote against my proposal. If we can't—

The Chair: That's because first we have to get unanimous consent for Ms. Ashton's proposal—

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, I understand, but this is along the same lines as what she's proposing.

The words "no later" aren't necessary. I would replace them with "begin", as in the following: "begin at the meeting following the two meetings with the ministers". However, these are just linguistic details.

Lastly, do you think what I had to say was important, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I will let Ms. Ashton tell us what she thinks since she's the one requesting unanimous consent.

Then we will go to the vote to determine whether we have unanimous consent.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I approve of that suggestion. I think we mean the same thing.

We will retain the December 6 date, but it must be noted that the four ministers must be able to be heard for one hour each. Then we can continue consideration of the bill.

Mr. Marc Serré: May I speak, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The representatives of the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives have clearly exhibited their intention to obstruct. That's why a date has to appear in the amendment. So we don't have unanimous consent.

They've clearly showed they wanted to obstruct, and that's what they've done over the past eight weeks.

The Chair: So the matter is resolved regarding the sub-amendment proposed by Ms. Ashton.

I see all the raised hands. Please wait a moment.

Since we don't have unanimous consent for Ms. Ashton to amend her own sub-amendment, we will go back to that amendment as it was sent by the clerk, that is to say the one stating the December 6 date. Debate is still open on this sub-amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

• (1245)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I think it's appalling that we're working this way.

I would stress that the Liberal Party of Canada has never approached the Bloc Québécois to look for solutions, and I don't think it has done so with the other opposition party either.

It should start by meeting with us if it wants a solution other than a gag order.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you said we didn't have unanimous consent for a proposal we haven't seen yet.

Can we get the wording of Ms. Ashton's proposal?

Then you can put the question to the committee. Then we'll know whether people are for or against it. What Ms. Ashton has presented isn't clear.

The Chair: Members of the committee must give unanimous consent when a person moving an amendment or a sub-amendment requests that it be amended when we are still at the debate stage. It's an unofficial procedure. I could normally deny it.

So we're going back to the date of December 6, 2022 proposed in Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, the purpose of which is to amend the fourth paragraph of Mr. Godin's amendment. Am I clear?

This is Ms. Ashton's third sub-amendment.

I will review the timeline for the public.

Ms. Ashton is proposing a third sub-amendment, the purpose of which is to amend the fourth paragraph of the amendment moved by Mr. Godin.

Are there any other speakers on the subject?

We are listening, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In the circumstances, I'm going to vote against the sub-amendment since we aren't even sure we'll have two meetings with the ministers. We want to hear the ministers' answers.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage was reported in an article as saying that more French could indeed be spoken at the inquiry into the government's use of the Emergencies Act. Journalists and the media also lamented the fact that francophone witnesses felt compelled to testify in English and that there was little room in the debate for French. The Minister of Canadian Heritage seems to agree because he says there should be more.

We want to know what parts of Bill C-13 would ensure that more French is used. We also want to ask the minister why...

On the one hand, this concerns all of government, but the ministers first of all. We know that Quebec's new act, Bill 96, has established December 1 as a deadline for businesses to register with the Office québécois de la langue française, the OQLF, and to comply with the Charter of the French language. Bill 96 has amended Bill 101 so that the Charter of the French language applies to federally regulated private businesses, and the deadline set is December 1.

As we all know, Air Canada, CN, VIA Rail Canada and others have said they don't want to register. However, they'll be contravening the act as of December 1. Then a gag order will be imposed on us to ensure the bill is passed before December 1.

I think we need to have the time to do things right because—

• (1250)

The Chair: Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Beaulieu, but I'm not sure I follow you.

Under Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment, clause-by-clause consideration would have to be done no later than December 6.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's correct.

Yes, we're talking about December 6, which is a little later than December 1.

The Chair: We are talking about the start of clause-by-clause consideration. We are far from—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My argument doesn't just concern the fact that we should have until December 6. It's more about the reason why we should have two complete meetings. Unanimous consent on the matter has just been denied on the ground that we're filibustering. Who's filibustering?

I think it's more serious to impose a gag order than to filibuster because it limits democratic debate. I also think it's essential that we be able to question the ministers. We said we'd allow two hours for each minister, and now we want to allow only one hour.

The Chair: I'm going to stop you, Mr. Beaulieu, because we've already discussed that. That was the first amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's right. We just gave—

The Chair: I want to remind you that we are discussing Ms. Ashton's third sub-amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's right, it states that clause-by-clause consideration—

Wait a minute, I'm just going to look at the document again.

The Chair: I'm going to state it for you as I understand it: the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill no later than Tuesday, December 6, 2022 at 11:00 a.m. ET.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, it's not "no later than". Ms. Ashton has suggested that the words "no later than" be deleted and replaced by the word "commence". That's what I understood.

The Chair: No, we didn't have unanimous consent. That was part—

Mr. Joël Godin: The unanimous consent concerned the meetings, not the substitution of "commence" for "no later than".

I'd ask you to check with Ms. Ashton.

The Chair: I'm going to check right away because you may be right, Mr. Gordon.

Mr. Gordon, I'm told that we did have unanimous consent on that point. However, we're honestly a hair's breadth away from saying the same thing.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu. Then it will be Mr. Dalton's turn.

Your name is on my list, Mr. Dalton. Don't worry, I haven't forgotten you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would first like to commend Ms. Ashton for agreeing to our holding two meetings to hear the ministers.

However, I want to point out that, if her objective was really to hold two meetings, perhaps it would have been better if she had voted against her sub-amendment. We'll see what happens.

Furthermore, if we agree on the date of December 6, the appearance of the ministers could well be compromised. Then we might have to proceed with clause-by-clause consideration without even being able to hear them.

As this is a public meeting, I want the people from Quebec to be able to see that an effort is really being made to muzzle us. I want them to be aware that Quebec is in the minority in Canada, that it isn't being given a chance to really express its point of view and that increasingly restrictive limits are about to be set.

I don't know why it's so important to limit debate if not to prevent people from becoming aware of what the Official Languages Act is. I'm asking Quebecers to monitor what happens in the media. The Official Languages Act is the main factor in the anglicization of Quebec. It gives free reign to the assimilation of francophones everywhere. There's a lack of political will to fight it. We can see it in the act and in what goes on every day.

I hope we can make sure we have more time. The more we advance, the less time we have to debate and express our views.

• (1255)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you.

I see it's nearly time to stop. So I'm going to yield the floor to my colleague Mr. Godin.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I wouldn't want to limit your speaking time, but before we go any further, I want to remind you, as we discussed at the start, that when we are forced to suspend a meeting for technical reasons, is that what you wanted to talk about?

Mr. Joël Godin: No, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to make a suggestion, and you may not have to explain yourself. We'll see.

The Chair: You have the floor and are still in the debate.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, the Liberals are showing us that they aren't in good faith.

The Chair: Can you speak to the sub-amendment?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, that's what I'm getting ready to do.

We are now at the point of deciding on the sub-amendment of Ms. Ashton, who has expressed her point of view and demonstrated her willingness to find a solution. As for the Liberals, they have unfortunately demonstrated that they weren't in good faith and didn't have the same objective as the other three parties by deciding not to give unanimous consent. I sensed that the NDP was moving closer to the position of the opposition parties, and I appreciate that.

I want to do this publicly: thank you, Ms. Ashton.

In a similar vein, I have a suggestion to make because, like all my colleagues, I want to resolve this issue. Since November 1, we've held and wasted six meetings debating Bill C-13. I therefore suggest that the next meeting be held by the subcommittee. The Liberals, the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives must try to find common ground and stop bogging down in procedural matters. That's my suggestion.

I would like you to check with the other members to see if they agree and, of course, to tell us whether you agree as well.

The Chair: I understand, Mr. Godin.

We can definitely do that as a subcommittee. For the moment, however, we have to deal with a sub-amendment.

You're asking us to gag—

Mr. Joël Godin: That's quite a slip of the tongue!

The Chair: I was saying that you wanted us to conclude our present proceeding regarding Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment. Is that correct?

Mr. Joël Godin: No, I was suggesting that we be able to dispose of Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment. Then I'll present my proposal.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

That being said, does any one else wish to speak to the sub-amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: What Mr. Godin just proposed is really unacceptable. It truly stretches credulity. We could conclude consideration of Bill C-13 now.

Amendments have been proposed. We have accepted Mr. Godin's amendments. I accepted them two weeks ago. What we're seeing now is total obstruction by the Bloc and the Conservatives.

May we please go to the vote? That way, we can move the matter forward as quickly as possible. Francophones across the country would be very grateful for that.

The Chair: Very well, Mr. Serré.

Does anyone else wish to speak to Ms. Ashton's sub-amendment?

I see on the screen that no one wishes to speak.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll take the floor since Mr. Serré has taken the liberty of speaking.

What I find unacceptable and what I often observe is—

The Chair: Allow me to interrupt you, Mr. Beaulieu. I'll come back to you later.

It is now 1:00 p.m., and I would like to know if we have unanimous consent among the committee for me, as chair, to adjourn the meeting as a result of the technical issues that I mentioned at the start of the meeting and that we resume our work, at a new meeting next Tuesday, exactly where we are now, as if we had just suspended the meeting.

I would first like to know if I have unanimous consent on that matter.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Will the meeting be adjourned now?

The Chair: No. I want to give you the floor since, from what the clerk tells me, we still have a few minutes left.

Before we discuss unanimous consent, I will give the floor to Mr. Drouin, who has something to add.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I just want to make sure I understand what we're doing. The meeting is being adjourned as a result of technical difficulties, yet it isn't, in theory. Everyone has to understand so we don't have to repeat ourselves.

Is that correct?

The Chair: Absolutely. It's difficult to continue the same meeting, our 40th in this instance, as a result of the room change.

Do I have everyone's consent?

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

• (1300)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'd like to add that a lack of understanding isn't the issue. We want instead to ensure that the rights of every parliamentarian are respected.

The Chair: I will explain once again to ensure everyone understands the situation.

We are adjourning the meeting now as a result of technical difficulties and will resume our proceedings at the next meeting as though we had suspended this one.

Do we have unanimous consent?

Some voices: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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