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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1200)

[Translation]

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

Welcome to meeting number 42 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We are resuming discussion on Mr. Serré's motion, Mr. Godin's amendments and Ms. Ashton's subamendments. I would remind you that the committee has to do this in reverse order: it must decide first on Ms. Ashton's subamendments, then on Mr. Godin's amendments, and last on Mr. Serré's main motion.

However, everyone around the table has done a good job and has unanimously agreed to abandon the subamendments, the amendments, and the main motion, and instead to adopt a motion along the following lines.

Six items are proposed in connection with the consideration of Bill C-13, an Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

First, it is moved that the Minister of Official Languages, the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and their officials be invited to appear over two meetings, for one hour per minister and department with their respective officials.

Second, it is moved that amendments to Bill C-13 be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11:00 a.m. Eastern Time on the business day following the last meeting with the ministers and officials.

Third, it is moved that the clerk of the committee write immediately to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee and any independent members to inform them of the consideration of the bill by the committee and to invite them to prepare and submit any proposed amendments to the bill which they would suggest that the committee consider during the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

Fourth, it is moved that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill for eight meetings, with the clause-by-clause consideration to start no less than 48 hours after the deadline for submitting amendments.

Fifth, it is moved that if the committee determines that there is a need to extend the clause-by-clause consideration, it may decide to extend the meetings, if need be.

Sixth, it is moved that if the committee decides that no additional meetings are necessary as provided in the foregoing fifth item, all other amendments submitted to the committee shall be deemed moved. It is also moved that the chair shall put the question, forthwith and successively, without further debate on all other clauses and amendments submitted to the committee, as well as each and every question necessary to dispose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, as well as all questions necessary to report the bill to the House. And it is moved that the chair be ordered to report the bill to the House as soon as possible.

Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Clause-by-clause consideration should be two meetings per week, but that is no longer in this motion. We could just add "with two meetings per week" to item four.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): That was part of the agreement.

The Chair: That's right, I didn't see those words when I read the proposed text of the motion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I had seen them in writing, but they have disappeared.

The Chair: Let's come back to item four that I just read. It would now propose that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill for eight meetings, with two meetings per week, clause-by-clause consideration to start no less than 48 hours after the deadline for submitting amendments.

Mr. Vis, I see you on the monitor, but Mr. Godin had already raised his hand.

Mr. Joël Godin: You can give Mr. Vis the floor.

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

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a point of clarification on point two of the motion. Generally speaking, in terms of practicality, just because it was hard to follow what was taking place... The submission of amendments will likely happen before the Christmas break. Is that correct?

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Vis. If the ministers are available next week, as we hope, it will happen before the Christmas break.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: The fourth item now proposes that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill for eight meetings, with two meetings per week, the clause-by-clause consideration to start no less than 48 hours after the deadline for submitting amendments

I want to be sure that we will start clause-by-clause consideration after hearing the four ministers. To my mind, what is important is not submitting amendments, but the four ministers' testimony. I don't know whether you understand the distinction.

● (1205)

The Chair: I understand the distinction, but in any case, because of the first two items in the motion, it can't proceed any other way. I would point out that the second item says "11:00 a.m. Eastern Time on the business day following the last meeting with the ministers and officials." It is therefore impossible to get around that and proceed with the clause-by-clause consideration for eight meetings before hearing the ministers.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I rely on your good faith, but I assure you that if it turns out that I was right to be concerned and that is not followed, I will raise a point of order.

The Chair: We are trying to pass a unanimous motion, so it would fail if...

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand. We have just received the motion and it's a question of interpretation. I don't want to hold the process up, but I reserve the right to raise this point if it is not followed.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is about the third item in the motion, which proposes that the clerk write immediately to the MPs who are not members of the committee to invite them to submit amendments. What would the deadline be, in the event that a minister did not appear? We don't know yet. If we write to the MPs, is there going to be a deadline? This is a point of clarification.

We, the members of the committee, will know the date, but if we ask the clerk to write immediately to the MPs who are not members of the committee to invite them to submit amendments, when will they have until, to do it?

The Chair: I'm going to let the clerk explain that for us.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Michelle Legault): We would follow the same rules as apply to committee members. At the end of the meeting at which the last minister scheduled appeared, I could have the text of the motion passed by the committee sent to the independent MPs and the others again to inform them that the ministers have been heard and that those MPs have until 11:00 a.m. on the next business day to submit their amendments.

The Chair: So it will be a two-step process. First, they would be immediately informed of the motion that has been passed, and, after hearing the last minister to appear, they would be send a reminder.

The Clerk: Yes, if the committee agrees.

The Chair: Yes, that's good.

Are there any other questions?

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Are we going to receive the new wording?

The Chair: Yes.

The Clerk: I am going to wait until everyone has read all of it, and then I will send the final version.

The Chair: That's good. The final version is coming.

Mr. Boulerice, welcome. I see you are being good.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): I am always good, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I don't doubt it.

Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would first like to see the new version.

The Chair: That's right. I'm sorry. The clerk is making the final changes to the motion. We will then circulate it and come back to it.

I am suspending the meeting briefly.

● (1205)

(Pause)

● (1220)

The Chair: Resuming the meeting.

Before circulating the additions that have been made, so the Chair can get everyone's blessing, Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I am going to come back to the third item, again. I want to clarify things for people who are not members of the committee so they know exactly what to expect.

I am therefore proposing to add the following words at the end of the existing text of the third item: "and that a copy of this motion also be distributed to them, and that once the deadline for submitting amendments has been set, they be sent the reminder of the deadline by the clerk."

● (1225)

The Chair: That will put in writing what we were just saying to the clerk. So there would be two notices. The first would be when the motion itself was sent. Then, after the last minister appears, a reminder would be sent to the independent MPs.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: The independent MPs don't necessarily follow our work and would not know about it, otherwise.

The Chair: Agreed.

Mr. Godin, do you want to speak?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I understand the meaning of what my colleague is saying.

I will now ask the clerk. Are we required to communicate that information at this point? The relevance is the text you are suggesting. It may not be necessary to communicate with the independent MPs now, unless procedure requires that we do it.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, what do you think?

The Clerk: It is not an obligation according to procedure if the date has not been set. However, out of courtesy, it would probably be better, because the committee has made a decision concerning the date, even if it is not a precise date.

Ultimately, it really is up to the committee to decide.

The Chair: The problem is that there is no precise date.

The Clerk: It's the meeting idea that is not usual here.

The Chair: The meeting idea is not usual, yes.

As the clerk says, since we don't have a precise date, we should send an initial notice of this motion, as a courtesy, to the independent members, who will know exactly what to expect. On the day of the last testimony by the last minister, those MPs will get a reminder.

That means that all our colleagues in Parliament will be able to propose amendments, even if they do not all follow the committee's work. I am thinking of the Green Party, for example. Those MPs have to have the same deadlines as us. That's how it has always been.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): I think questions about this were asked in the House the other day.

The Chair: Are we agreed on all that, friends?

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I understand my colleague's comment. We have to be transparent and work with all parliamentarians. I agree entirely with that.

Some MPs know today that they want to propose amendments. If they are sent the text of the motion today, they will know when to do it. It will be their responsibility. I would not go further than that and I do not think it is necessary to send them a reminder, which would amount to taking each parliamentarian by the hand and telling them not to forget. I don't want to fight about this, but I do wonder about it.

The Chair: I am only repeating what we told the clerk and I agree with her reasoning.

Ms. Lattanzio proposed that we put down on paper what the clerk told us earlier, before we suspended the meeting. Since we are not working with a precise date, and rather in terms of meetings, the situation is outside what is normal and is not following the usual procedure. Putting it down on paper is a more polite and respectful way of doing things, for our colleagues outside this committee, the other MPs in the House.

Nobody has a problem with that? Right. So I am asking for unanimous consent, as moved.

Mr. Samson, did you want to add something?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I ask for a recorded vote.

The Chair: Fair enough.

We will proceed with the recorded vote, Madam Clerk.

• (1230)

Mr. Joël Godin: We can't hold a recorded vote because we have not received the complete motion, which includes the addition that Ms. Lattanzio made.

The Clerk: Yes, I sent the text of the motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: Right. I apologize.

The Clerk: I added it to the third item in the motion. I didn't make a separate amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Right.

The Chair: Out of caution, I am just going to read the final text of the motion you have just received. Do you agree?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: We have taken a giant step today. Each member of the committee who had proposed subamendments, amendments and the main motion agreed to withdraw them. In return, we agreed on the following motion, which we are preparing to vote on.

The text of the motion is as follows:

That, in the context of the study of Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts:

1. the Minister of Official Languages, the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and their officials be invited to appear over two meetings, for one hour per minister and department with their respective officials;
2. amendments to Bill C-13 be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11:00 a.m. ET on the business day following the last meeting with the ministers and officials;
3. the clerk of the committee write immediately to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee and any independent members to inform them of the consideration of the bill by the committee and to invite them to prepare and submit any proposed amendments to the bill which they would suggest that the committee consider during the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, and that a copy of this motion also be distributed to them, and that once the deadline for submitting amendments has been set, they be sent the reminder of the deadline by the clerk;
4. that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill for eight meetings, with the clause-by-clause consideration to start no less than 48 hours after the deadline for submitting amendments;
5. that if the committee determines that there is a need to extend the clause-by-clause consideration, it may decide to extend the meetings, if need be;
6. that if the committee decides that no additional meetings are necessary as provided in paragraph 5, all other amendments submitted to the committee shall be deemed moved. It is also moved that the chair shall put the question, forthwith and successively, without further debate on all other clauses and amendments submitted to the committee, as well as each and every question necessary to dispose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, as well as all questions necessary to report the bill to the House and to order the chair to report the bill to the House as soon as possible.

Madam Clerk, we're ready to vote.

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

There is a typo in point 3. I will read it: "... to the bill which they would suggest that the committee consider during the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, and ..."

There are one two many "ands" and commas. They need to be removed.

Honestly, I can understand how an error might creep into the text, given the speed with which it was being written. I will also take the opportunity to congratulate the clerk and Ms. Lecomte, the committee's analyst, for their efficiency. Bravo and thank you to them.

The Chair: Our analyst and our clerk are in multi-tasking mode.

I imagine we all agree that this is a typo.

Please go ahead, Madam Clerk.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

● (1235)

The Chair: Bravo, team. Thank you, everyone, and the media following us, and thank you to our analyst and our clerk, who are amazing and adept at multi-tasking.

The committee now has to go in camera, to discuss its budget, among other things. The meeting is therefore suspended.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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