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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (0815)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 99—we could call it the Gretzky meeting—of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 20, 2023, the committee is resuming its study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

I will take the time to share with you the measures to prevent audio feedback incidents, following the latest recommendations.

Before we begin, I'd like to remind all the MPs and other participants in the room of the following important preventative measures.

In order to prevent disruptive and potentially dangerous audio feedback incidents that could cause injury to interpreters, I would like to remind all participants to always keep their earpieces away from microphones.

As indicated in the communiqué sent by the Speaker to all MPs on Monday, April 29, 2024, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced with a model that significantly reduces the likelihood of an audio feedback incident. The new approved earpieces are black, while the old earpieces were grey. Please use only the black earpieces.

At the start of a meeting, all unused earpieces are unplugged. As you can see, the wire is not plugged into the microphone in front of you. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down in the middle of the sticker affixed to the table, as shown in the image on the table.

Please also refer to the card on the table for guidelines on preventing audio feedback incidents.

Finally, the room layout has been modified, as you can see, to increase the distance between microphones and reduce the risk of feedback caused by a nearby earpiece.

These measures are in place so that we can carry out our activities without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including interpreters.

I thank you all for your co-operation.

With that, I'd now like to welcome the Honourable Randy Boissonnault, Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre and Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages.

I would also like to welcome the accompanying team from the Department of Canadian Heritage: Ms. Isabelle Mondou, deputy minister; Ms. Julie Boyer, assistant deputy minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions; and Mr. Timothée Labelle, director, Intergovernmental Policy and Programs. While Ms. Mondou and Ms. Boyer are committee regulars, this is Mr. Labelle's first appearance at our committee.

Witnesses have five minutes to make their opening remarks. Then we'll move on to the question and answer period.

Before we begin, I believe Mr. Drouin would like to speak.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair. At the last meeting, I withdrew my words, but I would like to—

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): That is not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I would like to—

Mr. Joël Godin: No, that's not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Wait a moment, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin: May I finish my point of order, Mr. Chair? Afterwards, we can listen to what others have to say.

The Chair: Yes. You have the floor, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I just want to apologize to Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Bourdon—

Mr. Joël Godin: This is not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): He can submit it when it's his turn to speak.

The Chair: Wait a moment, gentlemen. Only one person at a time should be speaking. At the moment, there are three open microphones. If you count mine, that makes four.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Chair, you recognized Mr. Drouin first.

The Chair: Yes. I'll let Mr. Drouin finish his thought, and I'll decide afterwards.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: No. Mr. Chair, I apologize, but—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I just want to present my—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, please turn off your microphone.

We will listen to the end of Mr. Drouin's point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: No, he already made it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I didn't hear the end of his point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: He was in the process of apologizing, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please turn off your microphones.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm not the one turning it on, Mr. Chair; I'm not touching it.

The Chair: I would ask that the microphones of those who do not have the floor be turned off.

Everyone will have the floor in turn. I have carefully taken down the names of those who wish to speak.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Any witness who comes before this committee should feel free to have a conversation in a respectful environment. What I did on Monday was not conducive to that. That's why I apologize once again to Mr. Bourdon and Mr. Lacroix.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I yield the floor to Mr. Godin, then it will be Mr. Beaulieu's turn.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we have to put the situation back in the context of what happened on Monday.

On Monday, I raised a point of order to ask Mr. Drouin to apologize. You then mentioned to me, Mr. Chair, that Mr. Drouin had apologized, but that was untrue. I have a great deal of respect for you, Mr. Chair, but I must say that you misled me.

As we prepare to listen to the minister, this is not the time for Mr. Drouin to speak. It's not even a point of order. When Mr. Drouin gets his turn to speak, he can convey all the messages he wants to. We must respect procedure, Mr. Chair. As I said, in my opinion, there was no point of order. I don't think his comments should be entered into the record of proceedings.

• (0820)

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I completely agree with that. It's not a point of order. All the member has to do is wait his turn to say what he wants to say.

The Chair: First of all, Mr. Drouin's intervention is not a point of order, insofar as the Standing Orders have not been cited. I see his intervention as a continuation of what happened on Monday. It could have been considered a point of order last Monday, since it would have followed on from what Mr. Drouin had said to the witnesses. I should have intervened at that point to ask Mr. Drouin to apologize.

I haven't listened to the recording again, Mr. Godin, but it's possible that I said that Mr. Drouin had apologized. What I remember is that before he finished his sentence, before I intervened by banging my mallet, he had already withdrawn his remarks. In the heat of the moment, that's what I remember happening. When you asked for Mr. Drouin to apologize, I may have said that he had, but I was thinking more of the fact that he had withdrawn his remarks. If that's what happened, obviously he hadn't apologized.

That said, I consider the comment Mr. Drouin just made to be a continuation of the point of order that could have been made at the time. Obviously, no standing order was cited, but it's a continuation of what happened at Monday's meeting. That's how I see it.

So, when you say it's not a point of order, I don't disagree with you, because the meeting's just starting, but I see it as a continuation of what happened on Monday, since it happened before we started today's testimony.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I can confirm that just before you said that, I too had made a point of order. You said that he had withdrawn his remarks, that he had apologized, or something like that. It was confusing, because Mr. Drouin had said: "... excuse me, but I think you're full of ...", after which he withdrew his remarks. It was a bit easy.

I don't consider that a point of order. He should wait for his turn to speak. We'll get to it when it's time.

The Chair: That's fine, I'll make a note of it.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is important to move quickly to questions for the minister, as he has to leave at 9:15.

On the other hand, sometimes the chair of a committee or the Speaker of the House will give the floor to a member to allow him or her to apologize. There are precedents for this in all committees. So I don't know why the opposition members, in this case, are refusing to allow Mr. Drouin to apologize. He made it clear this morning, and it's done.

So, let's move on to the next stage with the minister who in front of us, please.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: In fact, Mr. Chair, I think my colleague Mr. Serré is trivializing Monday's situation.

In your defence, you raised the fact that this was a continuation of the point of order that had been made on Monday. I don't have the same interpretation as you. If the intention is to continue the debate from one meeting to the next on a point of order, we should be informed before the start of a new meeting.

I remind you that the comment Mr. Drouin just made is not a point of order. We knew very well what strategy he was going to employ this morning. Now, it's important to respect procedure. So, Mr. Drouin's comments should not be considered by the committee at this time. We'll come back to it later, rest assured, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Perfect.

With that said, we'll continue with the meeting.

Mr. Minister, welcome back.

I'm very strict about speaking time. You'll have five minutes to make your statement, and then we'll move on to questions.

You have the floor.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, committee members.

I'd like to begin by noting that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. I am accompanied by colleagues from the department: Timothée Labelle, Julie Boyer and Isabelle Mondou. They are regulars on the committee.

Colleagues, it's a pleasure for me to be with you again to talk about federal funding for post-secondary institutions in official language minority communities. This is a crucial issue for our communities. Guaranteeing access to quality post-secondary education in the minority language is a major asset for developing communities, improving employment prospects and alleviating labour shortages in many fields.

Personally, I've had the opportunity to enjoy a stimulating and comprehensive university environment in French in Alberta, in Edmonton, at Campus Saint-Jean, thanks to official bilingualism and our Canadian linguistic duality. I say it often, because I'm proud of it. When I was a student, I was elected to the campus student council, and three years later, to the presidency of the student association representing the entire campus, which numbered 25,000 students at the time.

In 2005, I was invited to teach and, as a lecturer, I taught an introductory politics course and an introductory government course.

Also, in 1997, I was part of the Chorale Saint-Jean as first tenor, and we'll be singing at Carnegie Hall, New York, on June 29.

This is the reach that our beautiful francophonie has across the country.

Our minority-language post-secondary institutions are essential to our country's success. I mentioned Campus Saint-Jean, which I know well, but it's not the only one. Collège Mathieu, Université de Moncton, Université de Saint-Boniface, Bishop's University, and I could go on. There's a whole network.

• (0825)

[English]

Many post-secondary institutions in Canada's minority communities are experiencing funding challenges because of their small size and unique challenges.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I don't hear the interpretation.

The Chair: We'll pause for a moment while we sort out the situation.

I'm told that everything's working fine now, so we'll continue.

We're listening, Minister.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: The study your committee is undertaking will certainly shed even more light on the situation.

[English]

As the Government of Canada, one of the best tools we have at our disposal to strengthen minority institutions is the action plan for official languages.

[Translation]

This new plan sets a record for investment in official languages. Totalling \$4.1 billion, it enables us to support communities through more than 30 initiatives.

This plan provides up to \$128 million over four years, starting this year, to support post-secondary education in the minority language.

[English]

This is in addition to \$121 million announced in budget 2021, specifically designed for post-secondary institutions.

[Translation]

To address a predominantly English-speaking academic environment, we have committed \$8.5 million over five years in budget 2024 to support the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge in French across the country.

We continue to roll out the action plan measures, and implementation is progressing as planned.

Financial investments are powerful levers to support establishments in this commitment. However, it takes more than that. All partners must be mobilized. Provincial and territorial governments are major players in education, and that's why federal funding is provided in collaboration with the provinces and territories.

We continue to strengthen our relationships with the provinces and territories, notably through bilateral agreements in minority-language education and second-language instruction. Negotiations for the current year's agreements continue, and there is talk of funding for post-secondary institutions. I look forward to announcing these new agreements in the coming months.

Partnerships in employment, education and all other areas are needed to benefit linguistic minority Canadians from coast to coast.

Strengthening minority-language institutions is at the heart of the action plan and my mandate. I'm here to deliver results.

Thank you for conducting this study. I look forward to seeing your recommendations.

Thank you very much for your time this morning. I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

We will begin the first round of questions; each political party will have six minutes to ask questions and hear the answers.

We begin with the committee's first vice-chair.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the minister and his team of officials for being with us. It's always a pleasure to meet them here at the committee.

Minister, first of all, I'd like to hear your comments about what's been happening recently.

Last Monday, while our committee was conducting its study on the funding of post-secondary educational institutions, one of your government colleagues addressed disrespectful words to witnesses. It took him four days to start apologizing. Do you find that acceptable?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I heard Mr. Francis Drouin's apology today. Personally, I've attended committee meetings before where the discussions were lively. In my opinion, when a member apologizes, we should accept it as such.

My task here is to inform you that our government, through the Official Languages Action Plan, is the first federal government to indicate that French is in decline—

• (0830)

Mr. Joël Godin: Minister, I apologize for interrupting you, but you know from experience that our speaking time is limited. I simply wanted to ask you this question with regard to your colleague's comments. So you're saying you're comfortable with all this, is that correct?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I answered the question.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay.

Mr. Chair, would you stop the timer, please?

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, did you see that my colleague raised his hand to speak?

The Chair: Are you raising a point of order, Mr. Généreux?

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): No, it's about an amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

Now I see three hands up.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I have the floor—

The Chair: You start.

Mr. Joël Godin: Wait, Mr. Chair. I have the floor, and I asked you to stop the timer because I want to move a motion.

The Chair: I did.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay.

Mr. Généreux raised his hand. He probably wants to speak.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I raised my hand at the same time.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Beaulieu wants to speak too. It's up to you to decide who goes first, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Marc Serré: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Wait a moment, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Généreux raised his hand first.

Do you have a point of order, Mr. Généreux?

Mr. Joël Godin: No, I had—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, we were advised of your motion, so I expected you to move it and I stopped the timer. Then you pointed out that Mr. Généreux had raised his hand, and I thought it was to do with your motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, it's about my motion.

The Chair: I have Mr. Généreux, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Serré on the list of speakers.

Mr. Godin, you had the floor, and you asked me to stop the timer because you had something to say, so please go ahead and say it. When you're done, I'll give the floor to Mr. Généreux, then Mr. Beaulieu, then Mr. Serré.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Following the committee meeting last Monday, we tabled a motion according to the rules and within the prescribed time frame. The clerk received the motion and forwarded it to you. I would like to move that motion today, and I would like us to make a decision about it. I'll read it:

That given the unacceptable remarks made by the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell towards witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon during the meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages on May 6, 2024, and that the Member has withdrawn his remarks but has not apologized. It is resolved that the committee requests the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to apologize to witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon as well as to the members of the committee.

As a committee, we must respect the witnesses, and the member's remarks were unacceptable. That's why I tabled the motion.

The Chair: Before we move on, I'll give the floor to the other people on my list who wish to comment on the motion that was just moved.

Mr. Généreux, you raised your hand. Did you want to comment on the motion?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to move an amendment to my colleague's motion. The wording will be sent to you shortly. The amended motion would read as follows:

It is resolved that the committee:

- (a) requests the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to apologize to witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon as well as to the members of the Committee;
- (b) demand the immediate removal of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell from the committee;
- (c) requests the immediate resignation of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell as Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie;
- (d) requests the immediate resignation of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell as international Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie;
- (e) reports to the House on this intolerable situation.

Mr. Drouin's remarks on Monday were not only unacceptable, but also harmful, to an extent. In life, we can disagree with statistics, statisticians, professors, researchers and other witnesses invited here at the parties' request. We can all disagree on certain things, but that's no reason to treat witnesses the way our colleague did on Monday.

It tarnished the reputation of the committee and of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, because Mr. Drouin is the chair of the Canadian Branch of the APF and international chair of the organization.

His remarks were deeply disrespectful. I think such behaviour is unacceptable. That's why we're asking that he resign from the positions he occupies, as stated in my amendment.

● (0835)

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I'll give you the floor, but keep your remarks to Mr. Généreux's amendment only.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd actually like to move a subamendment.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd like to add the following after point (a) of Mr. Généreux's amendment:

- (b) acknowledges that the data presented by the witnesses in support of their testimony is based on science;
- (c) recognizes that such behaviour is not worthy of the role of parliamentarian or president of a parliamentary association;
- (d) demands that Francis Drouin issue a written apology to the witnesses.

I feel it's easy to apologize as the member did, three or four days later. He should apologize in writing.

His behaviour was obviously not worthy of the chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. The witnesses were completely calm and reasonable. Their testimony was based on sta-

tistical data. What happened was absolutely unacceptable. That kind of response is tantamount to bullying.

Simply put, my subamendment is to insert these three points into Mr. Généreux's amendment. The rest of his amendment would stand.

The Chair: Have you provided this in writing? The amendments are starting to pile up.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I can send it to you. What I just proposed corresponds to points (b), (c) and (d) of the proposed amendment we sent initially. The other points of that amendment have already been proposed by Mr. Généreux.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, according to my information, your subamendment affects not only points (b), (c) and (d), but also point (a).

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Point (a) is already in Mr. Généreux's proposed amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Serré and Ms. Ashton want to intervene, but just to make sure everything is clear, I'll summarize the situation. I'll start by reading Mr. Godin's amendment, then I'll insert Mr. Beaulieu's proposed amendments so we can all see what's what.

Mr. Godin's amendment reads as follows:

It is resolved that the committee:

- (a) requests the Member—

Mr. Joël Godin: That's not my amendment. That's Mr. Généreux's amendment.

The Chair: Sorry, that's Mr. Généreux's amendment to Mr. Godin's motion.

I'll start over:

It is resolved that the committee:

- (a) requests the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to apologize to witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon as well as to the members of the Committee;
- (b) demand the immediate removal of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell from the committee;
- (c) requests the immediate resignation of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell as Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie;
- (d) requests the immediate resignation of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell as international Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie;
- (e) reports to the House on this intolerable situation.

I'm getting to your subamendment, Mr. Beaulieu. You're proposing to leave point (a) as is, but, before continuing to the point (b) I just read, we'd insert "recognizes that such behaviour is not worthy of the position of parliamentarian or president of a parliamentary association". That would become point (b).

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Actually, point (b) of my subamendment would be "acknowledges that the data presented by the witnesses in support of their testimony is based on science".

The Chair: That's what I was saying earlier. That's point (a).

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay, that's fine.

The Chair: So, your point (b) would become—

Mr. Joël Godin: Your point (a) would become point (b).

The Chair: Right, that's what I was saying earlier.

So, we would move points (b), (c), (d) and (e), which I just read from Mr. Généreux's amendment, down.

Point (b) would now read “acknowledges that the data presented by the witnesses in support of their testimony is based on science”.

Point (c) would be “recognizes that such behaviour is not worthy of the position of parliamentarian or president of a parliamentary association”.

Point (d) would be “demands that Francis Drouin issue a written apology to the witnesses”. If you ask me, that's part of the amendment already, but so be it.

Lastly, point (e) would demand the immediate resignation of the member from his position as chair of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. That's already part of the amendment.

● (0840)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We could actually put the new points (a), (b) and (c)—

The Chair: Point (b), too.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Because I don't think Mr. Généreux's amendment included a demand for a written apology.

The Chair: No, there was nothing about a written apology.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The text would go on from there.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We usually start by dealing with the subamendment.

The Chair: So this discussion is about points (a), (b) and (c) of the subamendment.

Mr. Serré, did I see you raise your hand?

If not, I know Ms. Ashton raised hers.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I raised my hand, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's right. I wrote Mr. Serré's name, but I remember it was actually Mr. Samson who raised his hand. Then we'll go to Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I believe these motions are inadmissible, so I request a vote.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Why would they be inadmissible?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Because our committee doesn't have the power or authority to demand that a member apologize.

Mr. Joël Godin: We can still ask for it. It's not about what we have the right—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We can ask, but—

The Chair: Wait a moment. As long as people have their hands raised to speak to this, we won't be voting. That said, before it comes to that, I'll rule on the motion. I would ask for your co-operation.

Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Ms. Ashton, you're next. Then we'll go to Mr. Serré, followed by Mr. Godin.

Just a reminder, we're talking about Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment.

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

First of all, I'd like to say that I look forward to seeing the final wording. I hope it will be sent soon, so we can see it in detail.

I also want to say that it's sad it has come to this. I'm sure we've all witnessed heated or explosive committee meetings before. However, in my 16 years here as a member of Parliament, I've rarely seen an explosion directed at witnesses. As parliamentarians, we must be prepared to hear points of view with which we do not agree. Indeed, that's the essence of our work. It's perfectly okay to express disagreement. I myself often do so in my committees. However, what we saw on Monday was insulting. It was incredibly disrespectful.

I also think it has damaged our committee's reputation. It sent a message that witnesses cannot feel safe and free to express their views as they wish.

The incident is all the more troubling knowing that the member in question, in addition to being a permanent member of the committee, is the chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, of which I am also a member. In that capacity, he represents Canada on the international stage. Word of this incident will reach our fellow international APF members, if it hasn't already. It's absolutely unacceptable for a representative of the Canadian francophonie to behave like this.

In closing, I'll add that I'm troubled by the fact that it took four days for the member in question to deliver an apology to the witnesses. As I said, it's unfortunate that things have come to this point, but I don't think we can downplay what happened on Monday. It sent the wrong message not only to the witnesses who were here on Monday, but also to witnesses we'll want to hear from in future. It damaged the committee's reputation and that of the Canadian francophonie on the international stage.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

● (0845)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The first thing I want to say is that—

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Serré. I think Mr. Beaulieu wants to say something.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes, I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I haven't moved my subamendment. Generally speaking, I should be able to present my subamendment before we move on to debate.

The Chair: It's done. Ms. Ashton asked that your subamendment be circulated. The clerk is—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My point is that I would then like to be able to explain it. You didn't give me a chance to explain it.

The Chair: Right, okay.

I would remind the committee that the discussion at this time must be limited to Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment and the changes he's making to Mr. Généreux's amendment, which the latter wishes to make to Mr. Godin's motion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I asked to speak, but I didn't even have a chance to explain it.

The Chair: Do you want to speak to your subamendment now, or do you want to wait until it's been circulated?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd like to be able to explain it. Then people can respond to it.

The Chair: You're right.

Pardon me, Mr. Serré, but I'm going to give the floor back to Mr. Beaulieu, while the clerk rewrites the motion to insert the elements proposed by Mr. Beaulieu into Mr. Généreux's amendment.

You have the floor, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

I think the subamendment is important for a number of reasons.

On the one hand, it must be acknowledged that the witnesses relied on science. In fact, they referred to a Statistics Canada study that shows that the fact that people attend university in one language encourages them to function in that language. Several studies have previously been done on the subject. This is by no means a new fact.

Over the past two or three days, after this insult, Mr. Drouin has added to it by saying that the witness's comments were simplistic and that it amounted to taking him for a fool. According to the polls, 58% of Quebecers are in favour of applying Bill 101 to CEGEPs, and I don't think these people are fools. In his view, defending this idea was extremist; in his view, it was simplistic. Be that as it may, it's based on scientific data. Criticize all you want, but there's no denying it. It's not simplistic.

On the other hand, it's unbecoming behaviour for a parliamentarian or chair of a parliamentary association, let alone the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, to scorn and try to intimidate witnesses who come to testify calmly. Mr. Drouin even twisted their words. The witnesses did say that it was one of the factors of anglicization, but it wasn't the only one. Mr. Lacroix made that clarification. Mr. Drouin said that, in their opinion, overfunding English-language universities in Quebec would cause the anglicization of Quebec. That's one of the factors.

Then Liberal ministers, including Mr. Boissonnault, followed up with personal anecdotes. However, the data put forward by the witnesses was based on science. You can't rely on personal anecdotes.

I wonder how Mr. Drouin can continue to act as chair of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie when he has denigrated the majority of francophones in

Canada, which is in Quebec. There will be a conference of the francophonie in Montreal this summer. How will Quebecers feel in this context? I think it's unacceptable.

By definition, we're here to receive witnesses. There have been times when I've had witnesses in front of me with whom I really disagreed. I even found their comments insulting, but I've never attacked them in that way, nor have I ever disrespected them. That's the bottom line. We're supposed to accept the diversity of opinions from witnesses.

I think it's really unacceptable—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Beaulieu. Give me a few seconds.

While Mr. Beaulieu is presenting his arguments, we're circulating the documents containing his subamendment. It will help us follow the discussion. The elements referred to in Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment appear in blue. Below it are the elements previously proposed by Mr. Généreux in his amendment, which would now be shifted down.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

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

We had originally planned to hear from the minister. Unfortunately, the circumstances brought about by the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell have put us in this situation.

I would like to ask the minister if he could extend his appearance at our meeting as Minister of Official Languages, since this concerns him, and it is in the interest of official languages. So can he extend his presence at our meeting?

• (0850)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Hold on one second. I—

Mr. Marc Serré: That wasn't a point of order.

The Chair: I don't know whether this is a point of order or not, but, in practice, we do need to know whether the witness we had planned to hear from in the first hour of our meeting can give us more time. He certainly has a very busy schedule. So let's get rid of that line of questioning.

Mr. Minister, is that possible for you? The floor is yours.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Unfortunately, colleagues, I have to leave at 9:15 because I have other commitments this morning. I'm sorry.

The Chair: That's perfect. We understand. We had an hour on our agenda.

Mr. Beaulieu, I apologize for interrupting you, but I think everyone will be able to follow your arguments more easily by having the subamendment that has just been circulated in front of them.

Please continue.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I raised a point of order.

The Chair: Did you have a point of order?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes.

The Chair: Which one?

Mr. Darrell Samson: When I had the floor, I said that the motions were not in order. You have to rule on this matter, and we have to vote on it. You have no choice, as I understand the procedure.

The Chair: I could have ruled on Mr. Godin's motion from the outset. However, an amendment and a subamendment have been proposed that could have had the effect of transforming the original motion somewhat, so to speak. One thing is certain, though: As things stand, after this amendment and subamendment have been proposed, I can inform the committee right away that the motion is not in order. However, I didn't want to intervene until we had finished proposing amendments and subamendments, because they could have given the motion a form that would have made it admissible, hypothetically. All in all, if this can guide the committee, I can say that the motion, with or without an amendment or subamendment, is not in order.

The reason is easy to understand: Even if the committee votes unanimously to that effect, the chair doesn't have the power to censure or sanction any member of the committee. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the House of Commons. According to procedure, at best, the committee can report to the House of Commons, and the House will be able to decide, make corrections, impose sanctions or censure what was said. I don't know what the power of the Speaker of the House of Commons will be. What I do know is that the chair of the committee or the committee itself cannot sanction one of its members for their behaviour or censure their words.

Let's go back to what happened on Monday. Those who were here saw that I was about to bang the gavel on the table and ask our colleague Mr. Drouin to withdraw his remarks, but he did so before I could even ask him.

This morning, the member apologized before the minister's five-minute speech officially began. As chair, I can't help but acknowledge that there was an apology. In any case, we all heard his apology in the media, even if it wasn't in the context of the committee.

As for the motion, given the way it would be amended by the amendment or subamendment, it is not in order.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I call the vote.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I asked you for the floor.

The Chair: Having said that—

Mr. Darrell Samson: No, no one can have the floor right now, because I have a point of order.

The Chair: We'll deal with the point of order.

I just ruled on the motion. Mr. Samson is right, and he asked for a vote. We will now vote on the chair's ruling.

Mr. Joël Godin: No, no. I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Hold on, there—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you—

Mr. Marc Serré: No, no, no—

Mr. Joël Godin: —mentioned that Mr. Drouin had apologized today. I think—

The Chair: No, I didn't—

Mr. Joël Godin: Let me finish, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I didn't say that Mr. Drouin had tabled his apology.

Mr. Joël Godin: You said he had apologized.

The Chair: I will repeat exactly what I said: I have no choice but to acknowledge, as chair of the committee—and the committee will acknowledge this too—that Mr. Drouin apologized here, in this committee.

Mr. Joël Godin: In terms of procedure, Mr. Chair, I rose in the House of Commons to speak to this yesterday afternoon, but the Speaker of the House of Commons, who is a member of the government party, told me that I had to make my remarks in committee. So that's what I'm doing this morning.

So, from a procedural standpoint, tell me what makes my motion out of order.

What I want to tell you, Mr. Chair, is that requests—

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin. I'll take one question at a time.

Mr. Joël Godin: I could have asked you several.

The Chair: You're asking me why the motion isn't in order, but I just explained it. We can't go to the Speaker of the House of Commons on that. As he told you yesterday, it must be up to the committee. However, as I just said, the only thing the committee or the chair of the committee can do is submit a report to the House. Once the committee has sent a report to the House, at that point, the Speaker of the House can decide.

● (0855)

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: A point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, allow me to add to the information you've just given us. If the committee decided to ask—we have the right to ask for this—for Mr. Drouin to resign from this or that position, we would then present a report to the Speaker, and the Speaker would make a decision.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, this is a madhouse.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Joël Godin: All I want to know is how it works.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I raised a point of order before you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: No, I'm still waiting for a vote on the decision of the chair. If my colleague wants to challenge the chair on the admissibility of the motion, he need only do so and there will be a vote. It's not complicated.

The Chair: That's—

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay, then.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I raised a point of order to—

The Chair: Hold on, everybody. Out of respect for the interpreters, I ask that you speak one person at a time.

I repeat what I said earlier: Given the way it would be amended by the amendment and subamendment that have been proposed, the motion is not in order, and I've explained to you why. The only procedure possible—and this is consistent with what Mr. Godin heard yesterday in the House of Commons—is to report to the Speaker of the House. The committee has to send a report to the House; that's all it can do.

Mr. Samson is right. He asked for a ruling on it, and I just ruled on it. Now, the committee can accept or not accept the ruling.

If it's accepted and then there's a resolution to ask that it be reported to the House—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Wait, Mr. Beaulieu, I'm going to finish what I'm saying.

First of all, the committee can decide to accept or reject the chair's decision. In the first instance, the committee can accept it and ask to report back to the House. That's one solution. In the second instance, the committee can reject the chair's ruling on the amendment, the subamendment and Mr. Godin's motion, and it will go back to the House in that case as well. We have to choose one or the other.

Since a vote has been called, I have no choice but to proceed with it.

Mr. Beaulieu, if your point of order concerns this procedure, I will give you the floor. If not, we'll go to a vote.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Absolutely.

I see that as a no-brainer. We don't have the power to remove the member from his position as a parliamentarian, but we do have the right to call for it. As a committee, we have the right to have opinions and make requests. We don't have the right to expel him, that's for sure. We don't do that. We ask that he apologize, we give our opinion, and we recognize that he isn't worthy of being a parliamentarian. So I think that—

The Chair: I understand all that, Mr. Beaulieu, but I don't want us to fall into—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I therefore challenge your decision, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Darrell Samson: There you have it, Mr. Chair: We are calling for a vote.

The Chair: We are asking for a vote, but just before that, I will refer to page 1058 of our green bible, our rule book that contains House of Commons jurisprudence. I'm going to read to you verbatim an excerpt that applies to the current context. It's under the heading “Disorder and Misconduct”, in the section dealing with committees and questions of privilege.

However, neither committees nor their Chairs have the authority to censure an act of disorder or misconduct. If a committee desires that specific sanctions be taken against those disrupting the proceedings, it must report the situation to the House.

That's what I am explaining to you.

Having said that, the vote has been called, and we will go to a vote.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, I—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: There has to be a report.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, Mr. Généreux's amendment asks that the committee report this incident to the House.

The Chair: That's what I've been explaining to you for a while now. Read all the proposed amendments and subamendments in their entirety. In this form, it isn't admissible.

The vote has been called, and it's too late. We'll go to the vote.

That said, there are other things we can do.

Mr. Joël Godin: What are we voting on, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We are voting on my decision that Mr. Godin's motion, given the way it would have been amended by the amendment and subamendment, is not in order, for the reasons I have explained to you.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 4)

● (0900)

The Chair: According to procedure, given the result of the committee's vote, the motion becomes in order. We will continue the debate at the stage we were at. Mr. Beaulieu had the floor. The subamendment has been circulated.

Were you finished your remarks, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: No.

As for the second point, I consider that the behaviour at issue is obviously not worthy of the role of chair of a parliamentary association, all the more so since the member refused to apologize for four days. He made it worse by saying that it was not only extremist, but simplistic as well and that it came down to taking him for a fool. I think the consequences are much more serious. It's become insulting to all those who defend French in Quebec and have the same opinions as these researchers.

It seems that by apologizing this way, somewhat hastily, the member is trying to sweep it under the rug.

Even the Prime Minister made it worse by saying that those who defend this point of view want to isolate Quebec, or even that we are against Franco-Ontarians. We are absolutely not against Franco-Ontarians or francophones outside Quebec. We've always supported them here, in the House.

A member: Oh, oh! (laughter)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You see, he is still defiant.

Constantly opposing francophones outside Quebec and francophones in Quebec is an endlessly reused old strategy.

I think we defend French everywhere. If underfunding francophone universities is unacceptable outside Quebec, it is even more so within Quebec. We can't keep having double standards.

In my view, I think Mr. Drouin can't just give verbal apology. He must also give an apology in writing.

The Chair: I noted earlier that Mr. Serré and then Mr. Godin raised their hands to talk about Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment.

You have the floor, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let's be clear, here. We have the minister before us. Members of the opposition are saying that post-secondary is an important subject. They could have moved the motion, the amendment and the subamendment in writing during the second hour, after the minister leaves.

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

Mr. Marc Serré: No, no, let me speak—

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

Mr. Marc Serré: No, you've already spoken enough, you. Let me speak—

The Chair: Wait just a moment, Mr. Serré—

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

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

Mr. Marc Serré: I'm not done. So—

The Chair: Wait just a moment, Mr. Serré—

Mr. Joël Godin: Who has the floor, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Wait just a moment, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'd like my colleague to withdraw his comments, because he is impugning our intentions. Right now, he is causing us to waste our time, too.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a—

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

You have the floor again, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you for setting the record straight, Mr. Chair. Mr. Drouin has apologized four times before this morning. Speaking to the media yesterday, he withdrew his comments, before the caucus meetings.

We are in the midst of an important study on post-secondary education and we have a minister with us. I would also like to remind the opposition that other witnesses also said they disagreed with the statistics that were put forward. I do think we should have a look at this. The minister is with us for another 10 minutes. The motion could have been presented earlier.

Let there be no mistake: Mr. Drouin is a defender of the francophonie the world over, everywhere in Canada and everywhere in Quebec. The political games the opposition is engaging in this morning are clearly irresponsible. Mr. Drouin apologized yesterday. That has been done. Why can we not continue our study? The other witnesses, including Ms. Boyer and Ms. Mondou, will still be with us for the second hour, so why wasn't the motion presented then? I don't understand why we are wasting time on this.

I have one last point. I have attended other parliamentary committees, such as the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, where Conservative MPs outright attacked and insulted witnesses without ever apologizing. So I think the opposition is coming on a bit strong given that the Conservatives constantly attack witnesses at other committees. There are various other examples, if Mr. Godin wishes to continue talking about this.

Right now, we have an important study to complete here. I don't understand why we cannot complete it. Moreover, today's meeting is the last one planned for our study on postsecondary education, which is such an important matter. So let's keep working.

People are proposing amendments and subamendments to motions now, but nothing is in writing. It's a waste of time.

• (0905)

The Chair: The subamendment was sent a few minutes ago.

Mr. Joël Godin: If it has not gone to Sudbury.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

The next person on the list who wanted to speak to the subamendment is Mr. Godin.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, in the interest of consistency, I would like to request a vote on the subamendment, and I will not engage in parliamentary obstruction as my colleague just did.

The Chair: A vote on the subamendment has been requested.

Has everyone received the document from our clerk? Did you receive the written versions of the subamendment and the amendment?

I understand you have. Perfect.

Do you have a question, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I simply want to clarify that we are voting on the elements in my subamendment.

The Chair: We are voting on the subamendment, which would add three new elements to the list. They would appear just before items b), c), d) and e), which were previously proposed in Mr. Généreux's motion and which would therefore be shifted to the bottom of the list.

Next we will have to vote on Mr. Généreux's amendment and then on the motion itself.

So we are voting on the subamendment. If memory serves me, the elements of Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment are written in blue in the document you have been sent.

Let us now vote.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4.)

The Chair: Do you have something to say, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to speak after the vote.

The Chair: We have just voted.

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to speak once the results of the vote have been announced.

The Chair: Yes, but the results have already been announced.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aurée Dallaire): He wishes to speak to the amendment.

The Chair: We have now come to Mr. Généreux's amendment.

Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment has just been agreed to.

Just a moment, Mr. Godin, I did see that your hand was raised.

Since Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment has just been agreed to, the elements he wanted to add are now inserted into Mr. Généreux's motion. It does not change the content of the paragraphs of Mr. Généreux's amendment. They have simply shifted to the bottom of the list and now appear after the elements of Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment which we have just agreed to.

So we are now considering Mr. Généreux's amendment as amended.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I would like to request a vote on—

The Chair: Just a moment. I have to listen to the point of order first.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Could we receive the full written version?

Does the version that was sent also include the elements of Mr. Généreux's amendment?

The Chair: Yes, that is what you received. That is what I was saying: The elements of the subamendment are written in blue, to distinguish them from the elements of the amendment. What is in blue is your subamendment, Mr. Beaulieu.

Getting back to Mr. Généreux's amendment now, that is, what he is proposing to amend in Mr. Godin's motion.

Mr. Godin, you are asking for a vote, is that right?

Mr. Joël Godin: That's right, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Let's vote then.

Mr. Marc Serré: No, I had raised my hand, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I had not noticed.

Mr. Joël Godin: No, he had not raised his hand.

Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, but—

• (0910)

Mr. Marc Serré: No, I have had my hand up for a long time.

Mr. Joël Godin: —Mr. Serré did not have his hand up.

Could you please check with our clerk?

Mr. Marc Serré: Yes, I have had my hand up for a long time.

Mr. Joël Godin: When I asked to speak, I was interrupted because Mr. Beaulieu raised a point of order. Mr. Serré's hand was not raised then.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We will proceed by order. Mr. Beaulieu raised a point of order so I interrupted Mr. Godin whose hand was raised. So we are back to Mr. Godin then.

If it is for a point of order, Mr. Serré, please go ahead.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to propose a subamendment. What is the process?

The Chair: That is not a point of order, Mr. Serré.

So we will move on—

Mr. Marc Serré: In that case, I raise my hand to propose a subamendment after the vote.

The Chair: That's fine, I understand.

Now we have to deal with Mr. Généreux's amendment.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

No, wait, I am not asking you; a vote has been requested on Mr. Généreux's amendment.

The Clerk: Actually, the debate is continuing because Mr. Serré wants to speak to the amendment. We cannot vote.

Mr. Godin had his turn, but Mr. Serré wishes to speak as well. He raised a point of order, but it should have been his turn after Mr. Godin to propose a subamendment.

The Chair: I'm sorry. The chair is mistaken this morning.

Mr. Godin, we cannot request a vote right away. Debate is still open for proposed amendments or subamendments.

We have voted on the subamendment. Let us now return to the amendment.

Mr. Serré, you have—

Mr. Joël Godin: [*Inaudible*]

The Chair: Now, Mr. Serré has—

Mr. Joël Godin: You just said that you had made a mistake, Mr. Chair, so I hope I can talk to you. I am asking you: When I can request a vote?

The Chair: A vote cannot be requested as long as there are still amendments or subamendments.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, if I request a vote, we should vote. Then we can move on to other subamendments.

The Chair: As long as people want to speak to the amendment, we have to listen to them. Now, it was Mr. Serré's turn.

I'm sorry, I have caused some confusion. I am entirely to blame.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: You apologized quickly, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to propose a subamendment. In addition, we will circulate the French version and the English version. The opposition does not do that, but we will. The subamendment is as follows:

i) And further, that the committee call on the Leader of the Opposition to apologize to the House for his use of unparliamentary language directed at other members and for his disrespect for the authority of the Speaker on April 30, 2024.

The Chair: Where would you like to insert this?

Mr. Marc Serré: We have Mr. Généreux's amendment, and then Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment. Mine could be between the two.

The Chair: It says "and further", so it could be at the end of all of that.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's right.

The Chair: Mr. Godin has the floor, followed by Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I think this subamendment is inadmissible. I would ask you to rule on it.

The Chair: Mr. Serré, I would say it is inadmissible because it is out of context of the events last Monday. That would really be stretching it. The chair finds this subamendment inadmissible in relation to this motion.

Do you have something to add, Mr. Serré?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, we asked an MP to apologize, so we are asking the Leader of the Opposition to apologize as well. If we can ask one of them, we can ask the other one. Moreover, the Liberal MP has already apologized four times.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré. I understand—

Mr. Marc Serré: The Leader of the Opposition did not even—

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you. I understand.

I will give Mr. Beaulieu the floor, but first let me say that the motion under consideration relates to something that happened here, at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Beaulieu, please go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I agree with you that it is inadmissible.

Moreover, the MP did not apologize four times. They were half-hearted apologies; he apologized and then insulted people.

Mr. Marc Serré: That's not true, Mr. Beaulieu.

The Chair: Be careful, please, for the sake of the interpreters. You received a notice two weeks ago about microphones being used at the same time. Auditory injuries are caused by the microphones used in committee and not the Zoom application. Only one microphone may be used at a time. You have to wait for me to give you the floor. I think everyone is used to that.

Mr. Godin, you may speak to the amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you have made your decision and ruled that Mr. Serré's subamendment is inadmissible.

So I would like to request a vote on Mr. Généreux's amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Serré's hand was raised.

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

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

Regarding the application of the Standing Orders, Standing Order 116 (1) states:

(1) In a standing, special or legislative committee, the Standing Orders shall apply so far as may be applicable, except the standing orders as to the election of a Speaker, seconding of motions, limiting the number of times of speaking and the length of speeches.

Regarding the end of debate, Standing Order 116(2)a) states:

Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House, the Chair of a standing, special or legislative committee may not bring a debate to an end while there are members present who still wish to participate. A decision of the Chair in this regard may not be subject to an appeal to the committee.

So I would ask you to consider those factors, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré. That is one of the first times someone has raised a point of order by quoting a specific standing order. The standing order states that debate may continue as long as there are amendments to a motion. That is the argument you were making, isn't it, Mr. Serré?

Mr. Marc Serré: Exactly.

The Chair: Okay.

I am ready to hear—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, you ruled that what Mr. Serré proposed was inadmissible. If he does not agree with your decision, let him request a vote to contest your decision.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, please let me finish what I am saying. You are the next person on the list to speak.

I have ruled on the matter, but I am not halting debate on amendments or subamendments. All MPs have the right to speak to propose them.

Yet the subamendment your proposed, Mr. Serré, is inadmissible because it is out of context of the motion proposed and the events that led to that motion being proposed.

That does not stop anyone from proposing other amendments or subamendments. The debate is still open and, for as long as MPs have something to say about it, it is my duty to listen to them.

Mr. Beaulieu, is that the argument you wanted to make?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Precisely.

The Chair: Fine, that's great.

Does anyone else wish to speak to Mr. Généreux's amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, I just want some clarification on the changes that we are about to make to the motion. Which amendment are we talking about? I proposed a subamendment, but we still have Mr. Généreux's amendment and Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment. I would like you to clarify how we will proceed.

As I said earlier, regarding the apologies made by MPs, what Mr. Beaulieu said is not true. Mr. Drouin spoke to the media yesterday and apologized several times. Moreover, Conservative MPs serving on other committees have outright insulted witnesses in the past and there were no consequences.

As to what is happening here at our committee, I have a lot of trouble with the way the opposition is attacking Mr. Drouin, who is in fact a proud francophone.

When there are facts, they have to be looked at closely. While it was initially inadmissible under parliamentary procedure, the motion calls for Mr. Drouin to apologize. Yet he did apologize to journalists. There are even some journalists present in the room who are aware of this. Mr. Beaulieu can go ask the journalists present himself. We have to look at the facts and focus on the facts. This debate is really politically motivated.

I will stop here, but I find what the opposition is doing very problematic.

We are talking about a person who spoke with passion at a committee meeting and said things that others have in fact also said. Other witnesses have indeed said similar things. I think we have to be careful. In my opinion, it is not true that Mr. Drouin is not a defender of the francophonie all over the world. It is not right to use this incident for political advantage. What the Prime Minister said is true. I completely agree with what Liberal ministers have said in recent days.

In my opinion, the other subamendment is inadmissible, but the committee challenged that decision. In any case, we have to continue to make sure that we look at the facts before we amend the motion.

• (0920)

The Chair: According to the order of speakers on my list, I will give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Drouin and then Mr. Samson. Before we continue this debate, however, I would like to provide some clarifications so the committee does not get off track.

Mr. Godin proposed a motion. Mr. Généreux proposed an amendment to Mr. Godin's motion. Mr. Généreux's amendment was amended by Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment.

Listen carefully to what I have to say about procedure.

I have made a decision as to the admissibility of the motion. To that end, I quoted the procedural rules of the House. The chair's decision was overturned and I have no problem with that. That will have to be reported to the House of Commons.

We voted on Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment. That is done and finished.

Mr. Beaulieu, do you have the documents now?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

The Chair: I will read the text of the motion as it stands right now, taking into account the amendments adopted.

Given the unacceptable remarks made by the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell towards witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon during the meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages on May 6, 2024, and that the Member has withdrawn his remarks but has not apologized. It is resolved that the committee:

- a) requests the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to apologize to witnesses Frédéric Lacroix and Nicolas Bourdon as well as to the members of the Committee;
- b) acknowledges that the data presented by witnesses in support of their testimony is based on science;
- c) recognizes that such behaviour is not worthy of the position of parliamentarian or president of a parliamentary association;
- d) demands that Francis Drouin issue a written apology to the witnesses;
- e) demand the immediate removal of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell from the committee;
- f) requests the immediate resignation of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell as Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie;
- g) requests the immediate resignation of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell as international Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie;
- h) reports to the House on this intolerable situation.

So far, we have adopted Mr. Beaulieu's subamendment, which corresponds to points b), c) and d). We now have to decide on Mr. Généreux's amendment as amended. Points b), c), d) and e) originally contained in the amendment now correspond to points e), f), g) and h).

Is everyone on the same page?

In my humble opinion, some elements are quite redundant, but that is the text we are discussing.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor to speak to Mr. Généreux's amendment.

Then it will be Mr. Drouin's turn, then Mr. Samson's. And Mr. Serré just added his name to the list.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think we could argue for a long time. Having said that, the points of view have been expressed, so I am asking for a vote.

The Chair: That's what I've been explaining for a while now. As long as there are people who want to discuss amendments or sub-amendments, we can't call a vote.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: No, but we can suggest it.

I would point out that Ms. Lambropoulos withdrew from the committee for much less than that. She just called into question the decline of French.

As for Mr. Serré, he has constantly been downplaying Mr. Drouin's comments.

I personally have never heard any other witness use the same expression to describe other witnesses.

I get the impression that the Liberals are going to filibuster to save time and avoid voting on the motion. I would encourage us to move to a vote.

● (0925)

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

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to inform the committee that, as I did earlier, I apologized four times yesterday. I would invite members of the committee to look at the transcript of events just before caucus.

With regard to the motion, I have a question for my colleagues Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Godin: Do they think the word “incompetent” is accepted in parliamentary language to refer to another parliamentarian?

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

Mr. Darrell Samson: Of course, I would have liked to hear what my colleagues had to say about this. It would have been interesting.

I am disappointed that this incident is being used for political purposes. I don't know how many times a person can apologize, but I know that this morning, at the beginning of the meeting, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell made a very official apology and that the members of the committee heard it. Then a motion was moved calling for the member to apologize, even though that had already been done. So we're playing political games here.

It's too bad, as the minister was here. Getting a minister to appear before the committee is not easy. He was here for an hour when we were finishing the study on funding for post-secondary institutions today, but we were not able to discuss that with him. What are we going to do? The minister will not be able to come before the committee in the next five weeks. So we won't be able to complete our study on post-secondary institutions, a topic suggested by Mr. Beaulieu.

This study is extremely important for the francophonie, for Quebecers and for francophones outside Quebec. It's part of the continuum. As you know, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was signed in 1982, established the right to education

in the minority language. Now, the government is being open and understands that, in principle, the right to education in French in Canada begins at birth and continues until the end of our days. Finally, we can take concrete action to make people understand, as I have already explained several times, that education is a key element for a society. We have a responsibility to ensure that those who have that right are able to exercise it.

It was Mr. Beaulieu who suggested this extremely important topic for us to study. We've heard from witnesses on this issue. A lot of worthwhile arguments have been made. I think the minister would have had the opportunity to comment on certain elements and probably could have guided us. For example, some of the witnesses we've heard from in this committee have asked to look at the possibility of creating a mechanism that would enable the federal government to provide funding directly—

The Chair: Mr. Samson, how is all this related to Mr. Généreux's amendment, particularly points e), f), g) and h), which call for the immediate removal of the committee member, his immediate resignation as chair of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, his immediate resignation—

● (0930)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I am in the process of explaining this point to you further. It's very clear.

As I explained, Mr. Drouin already apologized before the motion was even moved. So there was no reason to move this motion.

We're here to deal with the issue under consideration. Mr. Drouin's comments, for which he has already apologized, were related to this committee study.

So I'm trying to clearly explain to the people who are with us and to those who are listening to us the importance of the study. If we are unable to draw conclusions from this study, we will have wasted a year.

I would remind you that the minister was with us today precisely to answer questions that were raised by witnesses—either by the witnesses who were here on Monday or other witnesses who have appeared over the past three or four months. These people made suggestions that I found extremely worthwhile. One of those recommendations was to create a structure that would enable experts to find mechanisms through which the federal government could grant funding directly to universities.

I used to be the executive director of a school board, so I know what it's like to work with Canadian Heritage and the government to receive funding for certain purposes. If we don't have the funds to fulfill our commitments, we can't enforce the rights granted by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. At the end of the day, the responsibility of a school board administrator is to provide quality education, but without the funding to do so, they cannot fulfill the mandate they were given.

So I repeat that this study is important. When will we be able to continue it? I'm not sure right now. I am concerned about this decision to waste an hour with the minister, who could have given us more food for thought. It's even worse when you consider that the department's team is here today and could give us more food for thought. These people played an extremely important role during the study of Bill C-13. The beauty of modernizing the Official Languages Act is really that, now that we've established new rules of the game to better fulfill our responsibilities to the communities, topics will rise to the surface. One of those topics is the lack of funding for francophone universities in Canada. Once again, I want to congratulate Mr. Beaulieu for having the wisdom to bring this topic of discussion to the committee.

● (0935)

Why have these universities been relying on international students? It's to fill in the holes in their funding. We recognize that not all provinces are as open to the idea of supporting and providing education in French, but I can talk about Nova Scotia. Still, in Nova Scotia, we had good relations.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, I know that I have been fairly permissive in terms of the content of the debate, but I would ask you to come back to the subject at hand. Earlier, you made a connection with the apology from the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, then you came back to Bill C-13, and so on. I understand that. I know I'm permissive, and we've had this discussion at other times with other members, but my job right now is to make sure that the debate is relevant to the topic at hand.

I understand that, when you started talking, you made the connection with the apology that is being called for. I don't remember exactly what words you used, but you said that the member had already apologized four times. That said, the debate is currently on Mr. Généreux's amendment.

I would remind you of the content of this amendment. I invite you to refer to the documents, as it's easy to get lost in them. We are discussing points e), f), g) and h), which call for the member to be removed from this committee, his immediate resignation as chair of the Canadian branch of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* and his resignation as international chair of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie*, in addition to requesting that this incident be reported to the House of Commons.

I'm still listening to you, Mr. Samson, but your comments must be on that topic.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay, Mr. Chair.

I've been a member of Parliament for nine years. I was elected to represent my people. Like everyone around this table, I've sat on a number of committees, often two at a time. On these committees, my experiences have included, as my colleague just said, hearing emotional comments that sometimes fall short of expectations.

My parents always told me that, if I said the wrong thing, I should apologize. The first and most important step is to acknowledge that the choice of words may not have been correct or the most appropriate. These things happen, even to me. I'm sure that a number of people could say the same thing about me when I reflect on my conversations over the past nine years.

The example that comes to mind is a meeting where the committee heard from a Statistics Canada director. You were there, Mr. Chair, as were most of my colleagues. It was hot in the room. Even the journalists could certainly attest to that. I'm trying to remember what I said. At certain points during that meeting, I questioned the witness's honesty, analysis or interpretation. I remember it like it was yesterday. He said that a percentage obtained through a poll was more accurate than going door-to-door. We can certainly say that polls are significant. Nonetheless, whether you survey 100 people, 1,000 people, 10,000 people or 100,000 people, I think that a poll can never be more accurate or definitive than going door-to-door, individual by individual.

The person can say it. I'm right on the crux of the matter here. It's all about word choice. I remember it like it was yesterday. I challenged the witness, quite directly, as an Acadian can do. You know how it is, Mr. Chair. The Acadians came here to stay. As you well know, you have to stay up late and get up early...

Sorry, but that hurts me...

● (0940)

The Chair: I've been in a similar situation before, as chair. I think that my colleague, Mr. Beaulieu, will remember.

I'm quite permissive, and I prefer it that way, but—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I apologize—

The Chair: Mr. Samson, I'll let you have the floor for a few more moments. However, you need to get back to the point.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm getting there, Mr. Chair.

It took a while because I felt bad about making those comments. That said, I'm calming down and my voice is slowly coming back.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I, too, have been a member of this committee for a number of years. Fortunately, everyone here generally gets along well. Our committee admittedly isn't very partisan, and we enjoy working together. However, we're getting seriously carried away here. We're discussing some key amendments and subamendments. The situation that arose is no laughing matter. Far from it.

I seriously think that we should get down to business, to make sure that we finish everything for this amendment and motion. We can then move on to another appeal. Everyone here is saying that we're wasting time, especially time scheduled for the minister. However, other witnesses are still here. If we really believe that this study matters, we need to stop wasting time and get on with it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Samson, had you finished speaking about Mr. Généreux's amendment?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Absolutely not, Mr. Chair.

My colleague said that the committee wasn't partisan. However, this motion is exactly that.

I don't know what else we can expect. When you say something that perhaps falls short of expectations, you must apologize. That's exactly what Mr. Drouin did this morning. You gave him the floor at the start of the meeting, Mr. Chair, and he apologized.

The proposed motion asks Mr. Drouin to apologize. Should he go to mass and confess? He has officially apologized to the committee. Furthermore, he retracted his comments on the day of the incident.

Mr. Chair, you ruled the motion out of order.

I'll say it again. We may say things that fall short of expectations. If so, we must retract our comments. This was done here.

We're all emotional. I've been a member of Parliament for nine years. I've heard all kinds of comments and seen all kinds of gestures that people should have apologized for, but didn't.

Why move a motion asking a member to apologize when he has already done so?

Often people should apologize, but don't. Let me give you an example. Last week, when about 150 young people were in the House of Commons, the Leader of the Opposition made some unacceptable comments. I didn't say his comments were unacceptable. The Speaker of the House of Commons said so. The member in question didn't need to leave the House because of what he said, but—

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

Mr. Darrell Samson: —because he didn't accept responsibility for his comments.

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

The Chair: Hold on, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I think that my colleague is getting off topic. We see one thing in the House of Commons and another in a committee. I'd like my colleague to get back to the substance of the amendment.

● (0945)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I understand what you're saying. However, we've already been through this in another study.

Mr. Samson just referred to the apology already made. I'll let him continue. It's my duty to do so, as you know.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We're members of Parliament. We're elected to represent our constituents. Whether I'm sitting on a committee or in the House of Commons, for me, the responsibilities are the same. I play by the rules in both places.

People are saying that the Speaker of the House took away the right of the Leader of the Opposition to remain in the House. It wasn't because he used a certain word. That isn't why his right was taken away. His right was taken away because he refused to apologize to the Speaker. The same thing is happening here. However, in this case, Mr. Drouin was much wiser, so to speak. He took matters into his own hands and formally apologized. In the other case, the member of Parliament was expelled. Contrary to what people say, it wasn't because of the word "wacko". It wasn't because of that word. Canadians know that. This is serious.

As the Leader of the Opposition who aspires to become prime minister of Canada, he had to take responsibility when the Speaker of the House made it clear that his language wasn't acceptable in the House. The Speaker is the arbiter. That's democracy. We trust the Speaker of the House of Commons. We ask the Speaker to ensure that democracy is respected. We ask the Speaker to ensure that people follow the guidelines and procedures in the House of Commons.

I know that my mother and father wouldn't be happy with me if the arbiter responsible for ensuring democracy in the Canadian institution said that I used unacceptable language. We elected this arbiter democratically. All 338 members of Parliament voted or had the right to vote.

This person has responsibilities. The Speaker doesn't make a decision simply because he finds comments unacceptable and wants to make a decision. He must ensure that the rules of the game are followed. He asked the member for Carleton to apologize. Understandably, when someone reacts emotionally, they can make a mistake. I could make this type of mistake. The Leader of the Opposition may make a mistake. It's understandable. However, he must apologize. The arbiter of democracy simply made that request, nothing more complicated.

It pains me that the person who aspires to become prime minister refuses to apologize for making comments that the judge of democracy finds unacceptable. That alone is serious. It's hard to look at yourself in the mirror after having done this.

I know that most of us were in the House. I don't know whether you remember, Mr. Chair, but I believe that about 200 people were in the House.

• (0950)

That's one thing.

We also know that Canadians watch the House proceedings on television. My parents tuned in every day. They hoped to see me in the House, but I didn't make it there in time.

Let me get back to the number of people that I referred to earlier. The audience consisted of 150 to 200 young people between the ages of 15 and 25, all of whom witnessed the situation. What are they now saying about the elected officials?

I can imagine the discussion that these young people may have had with their parents at the dinner table, where education often begins. They undoubtedly told their parents how proud they were to have visited the Parliament of Canada, where they were told that laws are passed to ensure that Canada continues to prosper, for example. They then said that they heard a member of Parliament use unacceptable language to describe a person and that they found it surprising to hear this type of language used in such a place.

I can imagine the rest of their conversation at the table, with the parents then asking the young person if anyone had spoken up to say that this type of language was unacceptable. I can also imagine the young person then responding that the Speaker of the House of Commons said that the language was unacceptable and asked the person to apologize, which the person didn't do. Not only did the member of Parliament not apologize, but he continued to speak as the leader of the official opposition, the person who aspires to become prime minister.

I think that this situation is even more sensitive than the situation brought on by our colleague.

I tried to imagine the conversation between the parent and the young person after the young person explained that the language used wasn't—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: One moment, Ms. Kusie. I'll listen to you right after I pass on the clerk's instructions to the committee members.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: All right.

The Chair: She tells me the room is booked at 11 o'clock.

Would you be available to attend if we extended the meeting past 10:15?

If so, we would have to give instructions to the entire team assisting us, especially the technical team.

Are there any issues?

We need the committee's unanimous consent if we want to continue the meeting.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I can't stay past 10:15 because I have other obligations. I'm sorry. I'd really like to be able to do it. I'd even take the entire day if I could, but I can't.

The Chair: The discussion stops there in that case since people aren't available.

Go ahead, Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I really like Mr. Samson. We've had some really good times together, including eating scallops and spending time on a boat.

However, I have to tell him that it's important not to stray from the matter at hand. That's unfortunately what he did earlier when he diverted the discussion onto another topic.

Thank you very much.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kusie. I really appreciate what you're saying, but, to sum up the situation, in his last intervention, Mr. Samson drew a parallel between Mr. Drouin, who has apologized on his own, and another member of the House, who will remain unnamed, who apparently hasn't yet. I'm not quite sure but I can't say this isn't related to Mr. G n reux's amendment.

Mr. Beaulieu, you also had your hand raised for a point of order.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm opposed to extending the debate because what we have here is systematic obstruction, which shows that some members aren't being serious about Mr. Drouin's conduct and everything that followed it. Francophones outside Quebec are being used as an instrument to cause division, as is usually done in attempts to justify federal anglicization measures or to downplay the defence of French. I'm opposed to extending debate.

The Chair: We decided earlier that the meeting will not be extended beyond 10:15 p.m.

Do you have a point of order, Mr. Godin? Go ahead.

Mr. Jo l Godin: I'd like to go back to the same point that my colleague Ms. Kusie made and add to Mr. Beaulieu's remarks.

We're witnessing the trivialization of a very significant act committed here, and the situation is being ridiculed. We're doing what Mr. Serr  earlier asked us not to do. Can you see the Liberals' inconsistency? The Liberals are filibustering to prevent us from voting on my colleague's motion. It's permitted, but that doesn't make it morally right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: What you are ultimately telling us is that you aren't raising a point of order, is that correct? That's what I understand from what you're saying.

Mr. Samson, you may continue on Mr. G n reux's amendment, which concerns removal, resignation and a report to the House on last Monday's events.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague for getting me back on track. I tend to go off topic from time to time because I cite so many examples. Thank you very much.

Let's not forget why we're here. The example I cited to the chair was that the leader of the official opposition had refused to recognize the authority of the Speaker of the House. What concerns us here is entirely different. I fail to understand why we're discussing this motion. In my opinion, the motion is moot since Mr. Drouin has formally apologized.

Mr. Chair, could we hear the initial motion? I'd like to understand Mr. Godin's motion before it's altered by the amendment. Could the clerk give it to us? It's very important for our discussion.

The Chair: I can do that, Mr. Samson, but I remind you that the subamendment has already carried. That part is now set in stone.

In response to your request, I will read you the motion as it would be changed by the amended amendment: "Given the unacceptable remarks made by the Member—"

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

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I'm responding to this request.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you don't have to respond to that request because the focus of the debate is my colleague Mr. Généreux's amendment. If Mr. Samson hasn't done his homework and is asking you to read it a second or third time, that's his problem, not the committee's. If he doesn't know how to read, I can show him.

Mr. Chair, I withdraw my remarks. I have considerable respect for my colleague Mr. Samson and would not want to insult him.

• (1000)

Mr. Darrell Samson: There—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I apologize in advance, and that's intended for my colleague—

Mr. Darrell Samson: No, I appreciate, Mr.—

The Chair: Just a moment; unmute only one microphone at a time.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I believe I have the floor.

The Chair: The chair has the floor for the moment.

You have received the text of the motion, which includes the subamendment.

I agree with you, Mr. Godin; I won't read the motion a second time.

We now come back to Mr. Généreux's amendment. What is set in stone, and what you received from the clerk, is the passage beginning with the words "Given that" and as far as point d), which appears in blue letters. That has been adopted. What's left are points e) to h) inclusive. We have to debate them and hear all arguments for and against.

To summarize, the wording concerns the member's inadequate apology, the demand that he be removed from the committee, his resignation from certain committees and the report on the incident that should be made to the House.

Mr. Samson, I've been generous and have allowed you to speak, but you went off topic at times. You did return to it, but the next

time will be strike three, and I'll give the floor to Mr. Serré and Mr. Drouin in that order.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The context is still the wording regarding the apology that has not been given and the anticipated consequences for the member. Consequently, our arguments should concern points e) to h) inclusive.

The floor is yours once again, Mr. Samson. Let me know if you have finished.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'll be finished soon. I'm coming to the end of what I wanted to say.

I just wanted to respond to my colleague Mr. Godin by saying that my reading ability is very good and that I couldn't find my document but that I now have it.

The text states, "Given the unacceptable remarks made by the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell...". The member has apologized—

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

My colleague doesn't need to read what has already been accepted here in committee. Mr. Chair, you said that we would debate points e), f), g) and h). Consequently, it's the arguments for and against my colleague Mr. Généreux's amendment that should be raised.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you may not consider it necessary for us to read it, but Mr. Samson is speaking specifically to this motion. You think this reading is unnecessary, but it may be necessary for others. I can't decide that. All I can tell you is that, as chair, I have to hear all individuals who wish to speak to this motion if they are addressing the points we have discussed.

Having said that, Mr. Samson, I am listening.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank Mr. Godin, someone who definitely believes in democracy. He proved that a few moments ago, using words that may not have been up to scratch, but he quickly apologized. He withdrew his remarks, which is impressive. Actually, I shouldn't say that it's impressive, because I know him.

What's impressive is that my colleague apologized, formally and publicly, but in a manner deemed unacceptable.

That's what leaves me somewhat confused, I would say. The first idea in the motion was to request that the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell apologize.

I understand that the others are adding amendments. What the motion seeks has already been done. I see why Mr. Généreux and Mr. Beaulieu had their hands raised. You yourself asked if we were saying the same thing.

What happened is that he acknowledged that his motion was inadmissible. What was requested in the motion had already been done. He was looking for colleagues to improve it by proposing amendments.

I would like the members of the opposition to acknowledge my remarks today and to change their decision on how to proceed so that our committee can continue to be non-partisan. I would like—

• (1005)

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

The Chair: Mr. Samson, we have a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's false information. I had previously tabled a notice of motion requesting something more than an apology. We didn't want Mr. Drouin to get away with a mere perfunctory apology.

The Chair: Do you mean that you tabled it during this meeting?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I tabled the notice before our meeting.

The Chair: To avoid any confusion, I would point out that you didn't table it on time and that's why we didn't read it again.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's correct. It was included in Mr. Généreux's amendment and mine.

Given the seriousness of the situation, we are requesting a whole series of actions that go beyond a mere apology. I think this should have been done a long time ago since the consequences have been quite significant.

The situation should be handled in a more serious manner.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, I'm in no position to determine whether you or other committee members think it's that serious or not. All I can do is observe that people want to debate this motion, and we now have a proposed amendment to that motion.

We are all parliamentarians. We've seen this elsewhere, and we've seen it during other studies that we have conducted. As you will no doubt remember, Mr. Beaulieu, I have allowed you to speak to those matters. The only thing a chair can do is let people speak provided they stay within the framework of the discussion.

As I have previously told you in other circumstances, I am definitely more permissive than restrictive. When the chair is restrictive, the chair's decisions are always subject to appeal, which is why I am permissive. I request collegiality from the members. I think we've long had a very good committee. I ask members to respect each other and to abide by parliamentary rules as they stand. Canada is a democracy, and everything works well as long as those rules are followed. You may dislike or even be irritated by the way I chair or direct the committee, but I have to admit I'm inclined to hear what Mr. Samson has to tell us.

Mr. Samson, since you wanted to finish what you were saying, I'm going to let you do it.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I don't know why he's wasting time because I would have finished.

I won't take back that time. The only thing I want to say is that my colleague Mr. Beaulieu said something that made me think. He was talking about his notice of motion, and he said that Mr. Généreux and he had planned to table an amendment. This is where you see how the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives are engaging in partisanship. It's unacceptable.

Mr. Chair, thank you for the leeway you've allowed me. In closing, I hope the committee can learn a lesson from this situation on how to conduct its business more effectively in future.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

We have seven minutes left—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we're going to address this at the next meeting because we're dealing with filibustering by the—

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin. I have the floor.

As I've told you many times, the interpreters' injuries are caused by the committees' physical facilities. I ask you please not to un-mute your microphone while another one is being used. When we talk over each other... These injuries have been caused in committee rooms for some 20 years. It's documented. First we thought they were a result of the pandemic and the use of the Zoom and Teams applications, but the problem stems from the committees' physical facilities. So I ask you please to abide by the rules. Our role as MPs is to abide by the rules. We are fortunate to be able to do so within a beautiful democracy such as ours. So let's do it even if it's irritating at times. Let's speak one at a time.

Before I turn the floor over to Mr. Serré, and then Mr. Drouin, we have to reach a decision with the help of our clerk. Are we going to adjourn or suspend? I would remind you that, when we suspended a meeting, that had technical consequences that complicated matters. When a meeting is suspended, the notices of meeting, which are sent out to journalists and the public, can't be prepared and everything is pushed back.

There is a solution. We can adjourn the meeting. If you tell me that's what you want, I will do it. It would prevent technical problems. We could do it by ensuring, with the committee's unanimous consent, that we resume this debate at some future date. It could be at the next scheduled meeting or on another date. I would remind you that we plan to welcome the Commissioner of Official Languages on May 27.

If that's the unanimous wish of the committee, I can terminate the meeting and resume what we were doing at exactly the same point on a future date. It could be the next scheduled meeting or a date following the meeting with the Commissioner.

Otherwise, I will suspend the meeting, which will disrupt the entire schedule.

Correct me if you wish, Madam Clerk. I think the most practical solution would be to consent unanimously to adjourning the committee. I suggest that we resume this discussion, at this exact point, at the meeting following the meeting with the Commissioner of Official Languages. That decision would be untouchable because it would be unanimous.

If not, we will suspend the meeting. There will be no subsequent notice of meeting. It will be as though at the meeting hadn't stopped.

I'm requesting a little wisdom from the committee. I've told you the chair's preference, but that doesn't carry much weight. My preference is to adjourn the meeting with the unanimous consent of the committee. Then we can set a date on which to continue the debate. It would be as though we had suspended the meeting. That decision couldn't be undone without unanimous consent.

Are there any questions?

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

● (1010)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Are we voting on this? I'm in favour of adjourning the meeting.

The Chair: We can adjourn it. It's done.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think it requires—

The Chair: As I told you, if we adjourn the meeting, we disrupt the entire calendar.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: As I understand it, Mr. Chair, if we suspend the meeting, we will resume on the same subject at the next meeting. If we adjourn, we will receive the Commissioner at the next meeting and resume on the present topic later on.

The Chair: It can be done on whatever date we wish. We had planned to consider the report at the next meeting, on Thursday, May 23. The Commissioner will be coming the following Monday.

We may decide to resume on the present matter on Thursday, May 23, or on any other day.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we prefer the option of suspending the meeting. We have to bring this debate to a conclusion. We need to conclude on the matter so we can move on to something else. The Liberals want to drag this out. That's their choice. We could have resolved it immediately, but they preferred to stretch—

The Chair: I'm imposing nothing.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm giving you my opinion.

The Chair: I understand.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'd like us to suspend the meeting.

The Chair: You are entitled to request that.

I simply wanted to lay out the technical issues that suspension of the meeting might cause and the effect it could have on our agenda.

Witnesses, you are released.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The Commissioner of Official Languages is supposed to appear before the committee on May 27. The next meeting will normally be in camera.

I'm more in favour of suspending the meeting.

The Chair: From what I understand, committee members prefer that we suspend the meeting.

I therefore suspend this meeting. That means that the next meeting will have the same number as this one, Wayne Gretzky's number. It will be as if we hadn't concluded the meeting.

I hope that everyone has heard and understood that.

Mr. Marc Serré: I'm first on the speakers list, Mr. Chair.

● (1015)

The Chair: So far, I have Mr. Serré and Mr. Drouin on my list.

The clerk is also taking note of that.

Ms. Ashton, do you have something to add?

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'd like to be on the list.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'd also like to be added to the list.

The Chair: So I have, in order, Mr. Serré, Mr. Drouin, Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Ashton and Mr. Godin.

The clerk has taken note of all that.

That's great.

[The meeting was suspended at 10:14 a.m., Thursday, May 9.]

[The meeting resumed at 10 a.m., Wednesday, May 15.]

● (15400)

The Chair: Welcome to part 2 of meeting number 99 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Before we begin, I would like to remind all members and other in-person participants of the following important preventive measures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that could cause injuries to our interpreters, in particular, we remind all in-person participants to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times.

As indicated in the communiqué that the Speaker sent to all members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to assist in preventing audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced by black earpieces. These are the only earpieces that may be used. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of a meeting. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down, in the middle of the round sticker that you see in front of you on the table, where indicated. Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. The layout in the room, as you have noticed, has been adapted to keep the microphones further apart and reduce the risk of audio feedback.

These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

I want to thank all of you for your co-operation.

Just a reminder, I began the meeting by welcoming you to the second part of meeting number 99 because the meeting that we suspended last week will continue today. Our proceedings were suspended on Thursday, May 9 during debate on a motion. As you will remember, it was Mr. Godin's motion. Mr. Généreux moved an amendment, to which Mr. Beaulieu moved a subamendment. In short, that is what we are debating.

Furthermore, as you know, I requested that we resume this meeting outside the hours of Parliament, which isn't sitting this week, since five members of the committee, including members of the Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois, had requested that we invite the Minister of Official Languages to appear before the committee as part of our study on federal funding of minority-language post-secondary institutions to respond to the conduct of the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and for any other issue associated with his duties as Minister of Official Languages.

I am telling you all this because the committee may not consider two motions at the same time. We suspended the meeting and are now meeting pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) in order to table a motion.

Before giving Mr. Généreux the floor, I will complete my remarks by saying that our Standing Orders clearly prohibit us from doing both at the same time. It's one or the other.

With the committee's consent, we could adjourn debate on the motion that was interrupted on May 9 and discuss the issue raised pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). That was my introduction. I would ask you please to speak into the microphones one at a time. Let's avoid talking over each other.

Mr. Généreux, since you are first on the list, the floor is yours.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to introduce a dilatory motion: That the committee proceed to the discussion of the matter raised by the letter of Friday, May 10, 2024 sent pursuant to Standing Order 106(4).

As far as I know, when a dilatory motion is introduced, it must be voted on immediately.

The Chair: That's exactly what I was checking.

However, before doing anything, I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu, who wants to add something.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I would like some information. The meeting was suspended.

Would you please remind me which committee members had speaking rights at that time?

The Chair: They were, in order, Mr. Serré, Mr. Drouin, Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Ashton and Mr. Godin.

• (15405)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux has just tabled a motion. That cuts short what I was about to tell you.

Do we have the committee's consent to Mr. Généreux's motion that we immediately address the matter raised pursuant to Standing Order 106(4)? That would mean that we adjourn debate.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, we can't introduce a new motion.

The Chair: This is a dilatory motion.

Mr. Marc Serré: No.

The Chair: Yes, it is.

We immediately go to a vote in the case of a dilatory motion. The motion is that we adjourn debate and turn to the matter raised pursuant to Standing Order 106(4).

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, if my understanding is correct, we're going to adjourn debate.

The Chair: Yes.

Is that in fact what you're moving, Mr. Généreux?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We're going to consider the letter dated Friday, May 10, 2024 and the request made therein pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). In order to do that, we will adjourn debate.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If my understanding is correct, we're going to adjourn debate, address the request made pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) and then come back to what we were doing today. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes. If a member so requests, we can do it, until noon.

A vote has been requested, but I believe we have consent around the table. Perhaps I can expedite matters.

Is anyone opposed? I see that everyone agrees. Then we have decided unanimously to adjourn debate and to take up the request made pursuant to Standing Order 106(4).

Who has the floor?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, Mr. Godin wrote the letter concerning Standing Order 106(4). Is he here today?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: He'll be here in a few minutes. He's been delayed.

The Chair: Listen, everyone. I would prefer not to have to repeat this.

We are all adults. Three weeks ago, we received a communiqué concerning injuries that are caused during committee meetings by people speaking at the same time and more than one microphone being unmuted at a time. Please raise your hand. I see you on the screen. I also have the help of the clerk. I see what's going on around the table.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We think it's important to have Mr. Bois-sonnault appear once again since he couldn't testify on this matter at the last meeting. However, since he has been quite involved in the debate, it would be appropriate for us to be able to ask him questions about it.

For the moment, he has offered awkward comparisons based on anecdotes, not statistics. It's important that we be able to meet with him again and that he come and testify once again before the committee.

The Chair: The next speaker on my list is Ms. Lalonde, who will be followed by Ms. Goodridge.

Go ahead, Ms. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I'm trying to understand where we stand. Has a motion been introduced? I understand what Mr. Beaulieu said, but I don't know what we're talking about. I understand that we're meeting here and are considering a request made pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). Some members are attending the meeting in person and have made considerable efforts to get here on time. Others are attending virtually. My problem is that I've received nothing.

Mr. Beaulieu, do you have the written text of the motion indicating the subject we're going to discuss today?

The Chair: In response to your question, the chair has received absolutely nothing about this.

We will continue with Ms. Goodridge, who will be followed by Mr. Beaulieu.

Go ahead, Ms. Goodridge.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to say that I wasn't able to do the sound test before the meeting because I had some serious technical issues.

However, I hope everything's working well.

The Chair: That's good, Ms. Goodridge.

Was that the point of your intervention?

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Yes, I wanted to point out that I had some serious technical issues this morning.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Goodridge.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), we're asking that a meeting be convened to invite the Minister of Official Languages to appear before the committee as part of the study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions and to respond to the actions of the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and any other related issues.

In short, we want to invite the minister to appear before the committee once again without delay.

The Chair: All right, Mr. Beaulieu, but—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We have to introduce a new motion to do that.

The Chair: All right, Mr. Beaulieu. There is no motion at this point.

I give the floor to Mr. Drouin first. Then it will be Mr. Serré's turn.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I understand that a letter has been sent out inviting us to a meeting pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) and that you've convened that meeting.

We are here, but we haven't received a motion. Do you have the written text of the motion?

• (15410)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: All right.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, all we know is what's been said. We haven't received the written text of the motion. We would like to know what matter we're going to address today. A specific motion stating that has to be introduced.

I travelled from my riding Monday evening so I could get to the meeting here on time. I want to be sure that we'll be able to discuss a specific subject. We have a lot of work to do on the decline of French across Quebec and Canada. The committee has a lot of work to do to examine all the issues pertaining to French-language services.

Having said that, I hope we can have a constructive debate today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

We will continue with Mr. Généreux, who will be followed by Ms. Goodridge.

Go ahead, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I yield the floor to my colleague Mr. Godin, who has just arrived. He wants to table a notice of motion.

The Chair: First, we will give Ms. Goodridge the floor.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know that people have travelled to get here today. I tried to get to the airport yesterday, but I couldn't do it. As some of you may know, part of the community of Fort McMurray was evacuated yesterday, including a francophone school, École Boréale. There were some issues, so I was a bit muddled.

I believe my colleague Mr. Godin is now in the room to present the motion that we've tabled. I thank him for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Goodridge.

Mr. Godin was the next one on the list since he raised his hand.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We understand that the situation is exceptional and that everyone is busy.

I'd like to tell my colleague Mr. Serré that every effort was made to get here on time but that we unfortunately aren't immune from Air Canada's transportation issues.

Having said that, I'm here and very pleased to be because I think it's important for the Quebec and Canadian francophonie.

I would like to table a notice of motion, which I will send to Madam Clerk in both official languages. I am reading it to you on this Wednesday, May 15, 2024:

That the committee invite, as soon as possible, the Minister for Official Languages to appear for no less than two hours as part of the study on federal funding of minority-language post-secondary educational institutions and any other matter related to his duties as Minister of Official Languages; and that the appearance take place within two weeks of this motion being adopted.

Mr. Chair, I think it's important that the minister be present as we conclude our study on federal funding of post-secondary educational institutions. That was the last phase.

We unfortunately won't repeat the unacceptable words that were spoken in committee, and we won't discuss the procedure or slow pace of the process of apology and redemption of my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Mr. Marc Serré: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Joël Godin: I think it's important—

The Chair: I must interrupt you, Mr. Godin. There's a point of order.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We haven't received the motion in writing. Would it be possible to have it in English and French so we can study it?

May we suspend—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Just a moment; I have to interrupt everyone.

Mr. Godin, before you arrived, I said we needed to stop talking over one another. I would like this to be the last time I mention it to the committee. I've been saying it for more than three meetings. It injures our interpreters' hearing.

I can see all the raised hands around the table and all the people on the screen before me. The clerk is here to help me. Raise your hand, and I will give you the floor.

Mute your microphones when you aren't speaking. That applies to everyone.

Please continue, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: I think it would be appropriate to suspend the meeting so we can examine the motion.

The Chair: That's good. The motion is being circulated. So we will suspend for a brief moment to consider it.

• (15410) _____ (Pause) _____

• (15420)

The Chair: We will resume.

I apologize to Ms. Goodridge, Mr. Lehoux and Ms. Ashton, who are attending the meeting by video conference, because the screen switched off when I suspended the meeting, and I couldn't see you.

Everyone has read the motion.

Mr. Godin, go ahead since you had your hand raised.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned, I think it's important to re-invite the minister because some incidents that have occurred were exceptional, or rather particular; the word “exceptional” has a more positive connotation and “particular” a more negative one. We've lost an hour with the minister because the Liberal members were filibustering.

Then we invoked Standing Order 106(4), as a result of which we are here today.

The important thing is to get back to the main subject matter, which is our study on funding of post-secondary institutions. The minister's appearance was to round out the information-gathering component, enabling us to prepare a compelling and productive report. I think it's important that the minister come back to the committee so we can then draft the report.

We've chosen to use this process because the Liberals filibustered. Our meeting was suspended, but we had to continue it. We know perfectly well what the Liberals will be doing for who knows how long. I don't know why they pull out the heavy artillery to defend the indefensible. I personally think it's important—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, would you please ask my colleagues to be silent? As you mentioned earlier, when many people speak at the same time, that can cause injuries to the interpreters.

The Chair: I actually said that many microphones can't be unmuted at the same time.

Mr. Joël Godin: Does that mean we can speak if our microphones are muted?

The Chair: No, Mr. Godin.

What I said earlier I've said during the past three meetings: No more than one microphone can be unmuted at a time. When the chair gives someone the floor, that person then unmutes his or her microphone.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm going to go back over what you just said.

Do you tolerate someone making comments if that person's microphone is muted?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I've been sitting on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for nine years. It's true that someone on the other side made a comment, but it was said quietly and did not interrupt you.

You've been here a long time as well, and you know that loud comments have been made. In this instance, I think it's a minor problem. However, it's true that the ideal thing is that everyone listens when someone speaks.

Go ahead; continue.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I mentioned, I think it's important to hear from the minister. I won't waste any more time. I just want to work and attack the issues concerning the Quebec and Canadian francophonie.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Serré, the floor is yours, followed by Ms. Lalonde.

• (15425)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I would like to thank Mr. Godin for tabling this motion. We discussed this kind of motion on Monday, and we can debate it today.

However, I obviously don't share the opposition opinion on the exceptional circumstances mentioned in the letter of Friday, May 10. I think the motion is clear, even though I'll have an amendment to table.

However, since this is a matter of urgency and exceptional circumstances, I'd like to say, as Mr. Godin mentioned earlier, that we have reinforcements today because the Hon. Mona Fortier and Marie-France Lalonde, two major defenders of the Canadian francophonie, are here. We obviously have my colleagues Francis Drouin and Darrell Sampson here as well. They are passionate supporters of the French language, as I know are the opposition members who are here today.

I also know that it's important to continue monitoring the linguistic vitality of this country. I thought a motion would be tabled today to discuss the decline of French in Quebec and Canada or to continue our study on the underfunding of French-language post-secondary institutions, which are facing numerous challenges. I thought we might discuss francophone immigration and its importance for post-secondary institutions. I thought we would discuss the education continuum, particularly primary and secondary education. I thought we would talk about the Official Languages Act and the two regulations that will be coming into force. And I obviously thought we would also discuss CBC/Radio-Canada and how important Radio-Canada is for the official language minority communities. As for the CBC, the Conservatives want to cut off its funding—

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Godin, do you want to add something?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I think the debate should focus on the content of the letter regarding Standing Order 106(4). All comments should relate to that.

I would like Mr. Serré to withdraw his remarks and for his arguments to pertain to the content of the letter in question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Serré referred to the study on post-secondary funding and the possibility of examining the education continuum. He also mentioned the CBC and the well-known fact that the official opposition wants to shut it down. He was unable to complete his sentence, but that's what he was saying in the context of the study on post-secondary funding. I'm waiting to see whether we'll stray from the top-

ic in question. If I don't let Mr. Serré finish his sentence, I can't know.

Mr. Serré, the floor is yours again.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

These are obviously extremely important questions for organizations such as CBC/Radio-Canada and individual francophones across the country. This is a significant element of the motion.

I'm sitting temporarily on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, where we're examining Bill C-316, which concerns the court challenges program, a truly important program that the Conservatives oppose. They've previously abolished it twice.

I was thinking we would discuss those issues today, but, no, they've come back here with a motion.

I'm going to remind the committee of the meeting last Thursday. It was on May 9, at 8:15 a.m., which is a bit early, but we meet every Thursday morning at 8:15.

The notice of meeting stated that the purpose of the meeting was to study federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions. The Hon. Randy Boissonnault was here. He was in attendance at 8:15. He made a five-minute speech, as witnesses normally do. All that was directly related to the motion that Mr. Godin is tabling today. I'm going to try to use positive words and say that my interpretation of last Thursday's meeting is different from that of Mr. Godin.

I hope Canadians are watching us today. In our meetings, witnesses have five minutes to make a presentation, then the official opposition party asks its questions first. That's the way it always is in practice. The Conservatives go first and then it's the Liberals' turn.

The first speaker was Mr. Godin, and he spoke directly about Mr. Boissonnault's remarks. We had the study—

• (15430)

The Chair: Mr. Godin has a point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: My colleague is relating facts, but he has forgotten his colleague's apology that was made on—

The Chair: That's not a point of order, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'd like to go back to the motion—

The Chair: I ask you to mute your microphone, Mr. Godin. That's not a point of order; you know as well as I do. Thank you.

Mr. Serré, go ahead.

Mr. Marc Serré: It's very relevant, Mr. Chair, because when Mr. Godin, the first Conservative member to speak, asked the minister his first question, it wasn't even about the study we were conducting. We were talking about post-secondary institutions on Thursday. We had got to the last witness who had come to the committee to speak on this topic, and Mr. Godin didn't ask a single question about the subject under discussion. What I'm saying is relevant because the first thing Mr. Godin asked the minister about was his position on Mr. Drouin's comments.

The May 10 letter refers to exceptional circumstances and requests that the minister appear urgently. The committee members travelled from all over the country, at enormous cost, to attend a meeting requested pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). The letter refers to official languages and to Standing Order 106(4). I'm going to quote from it—

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Serré. Mr. Beaulieu has a point of order.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I don't understand the connection between Mr. Serré's comments and the motion.

Does he agree that the minister should be invited, or is he against it? That's the point of the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Serré is talking about the study and the motion pursuant to what was being requested in the May 10 letter. He's providing background.

I understand what you're saying, but he is keeping to the subject at hand. I can't prevent him from speaking. You know me and you know that I don't hesitate to call members back to order when they stray from the subject at hand. However, we are discussing post-secondary education, the motion, Minister Boissonnault and the context in which we are holding this meeting today. That's my understanding of it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The purpose of the motion is to invite Minister Boissonnault.

The Chair: Yes, precisely. To discuss post-secondary education.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I just want to know what the connection is. Is he for or against the motion?

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, do you have another point of order?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: No.

The Chair: Thank you.

Please continue, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your comment, Mr. Beaulieu, but the connection is obvious.

I'm going to read the letter that Ms. Kusie, Mr. Godin, Mr. Généreux, Mr. Dalton and Mr. Beaulieu signed on May 10. I won't read the whole thing, but will keep to the final section for the time being. Have a look at the final paragraph. I know that all the committee members received it.

It's clearly about Standing Order 106(4) and asking that the committee be convened pursuant to the study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions “to respond to the ac-

tions of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell”.

As I mentioned, it's the first question Mr. Godin asked the minister on Thursday, May 9, at 8 a.m. It was his very first question. Minister Boissonnault, a proud Franco-Albertan and a proud “franco-queer”, answered Mr. Godin clearly and explained his perception of the matter. We don't have access to the blues because the meeting was suspended. So we can't see the minister's comments, but he answered Mr. Godin's question fairly quickly.

After that, I expected Mr. Godin to discuss post-secondary education with the minister. Well, no, he instead immediately introduced a motion containing a single lengthy sentence about a proud Franco-Ontarian, Mr. Drouin. Its intent was clearly partisan.

I don't think this was solely tied to Mr. Godin's intentions. I think that the Conservative leader has a great deal of influence over his MPs, as does the leader of the Bloc Québécois. Both are highly partisan leaders and I think they had a strong influence over their members.

Instead of asking the minister specific questions when he was here at 8:15 a.m. last Thursday, only five days ago, they decided to introduce a motion demanding the removal of the Member of Parliament from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and his resignation from the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

I could reread the motion that was introduced, but what we're talking about today, is re-inviting the minister to the committee, even though he was just here. I find that a bit... I'll refrain from using certain words. I can't decide whether it's “arrogant” or “hypo-critical”, but I find it really hard to understand why we would come here from across Canada to study a motion to invite the minister when he was here last Thursday. The opposition members didn't ask him any questions at the time. Then they moved a motion whose purpose is to destroy the reputation of a proud Franco-Ontarian.

Speaking of proud Franco-Ontarians, I'm aware of the fact that this morning, we all received the letter from the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, telling us that we should move on to things that are important for the francophonie. The time has come. The linguistic insecurity problem is real. French is in decline in Quebec and across the country. And yet members of the opposition come here and launch a partisan attack on a Franco-Ontarian.

The minister already answered the question on Thursday. However, I heard some comments earlier and would like to respond to those. To begin with, we are not against the amendment. After that, with respect to Mr. Godin's motion, I would like to propose a minor addition. Lastly, in response to Mr. Beaulieu's question about whether the Liberals were in favour of the motion, I would say that we are not against having the minister come before the committee. Besides which, he was here last Thursday because we wanted him to appear.

We now need to take a co-operative approach and move on to what the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario asked us to do, which is to concentrate on issues important to francophones.

I am now proposing an amendment that I trust will be acceptable to all the committee members. The motion ends as follows: “and that the appearance take place within two weeks of this motion being adopted.”

• (15435)

Let's say that we were to adopt today's motion and request an appearance within the next two weeks. I think it's clear to those Canadians who listen to us and to the parliamentarians here today that the schedule in May and June is always a busy one. The busiest period for Parliament has always been the months of May and June. I suggest amending the motion to replace the two-week deadline with “by the end of business in June.”

I think this amendment might be acceptable to the opposition. I don't know whether all members would agree. We could make a minor change and replace the words “two weeks” with “by the end of June” or “before the end of business”. Business might end just before Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, a very important one for Franco-Ontarians. We don't want to be sitting in Parliament on that day. And, of course, it's important to the people of Quebec.

The minister's schedule is always tight, but then that's the case for all parliamentarians. It's a helpful amendment. I can see members of the coalition between the Bloc and the Conservatives are speaking to one another. I hope they'll find my proposal acceptable.

The Chair: So an amendment has been introduced.

Mr. Serré, could you send that in writing? Has it already been drafted?

Mr. Marc Serré: We can circulate it.

I am proposing two amendments. The first is to replace “within two weeks” with “by the end of business”. Ministers always come here for an hour, as was the case last Thursday. So rather than an invitation to appear for two hours, I suggest that it should be for an hour.

Then I propose changing “two hours” to “one hour” and replacing “within two weeks” with “before the end of business”. It's fairly straightforward.

• (15440)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

For those who are here virtually, I'm going to read the motion as it would be with the amendment. It's being circulated as I speak. Here it is:

That the committee invite, as soon as possible, the Minister for Official Languages to appear for one hour as part of the study on federal funding of minority-language post-secondary educational institutions and any other matter related to his duties as Minister of Official Languages; and that the appearance take place by the end of the current session in June.

Are there any questions about the amendment?

Mr. Beaulieu wanted to speak to the amendment, after which it will be Mr. Godin's turn. Is that correct?

Mr. Joël Godin: One moment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Wait, Mr. Chair. I want to say—

The Chair: Briefly, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I want to talk about the subamendment. I'd like to have it in writing. It's identical to what Mr. Serré asked for just now.

We were ready. We've sent it to the clerk.

Would it be possible to have it in writing?

The Chair: It is possible, which is what I was going to say.

We're going to wait until it has circulated.

We're not talking about a subamendment, but rather an amendment to your motion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Isn't it a subamendment from Mr. Serré?

The Chair: Wait a minute.

Before suspending the meeting to give everyone, including those who are here virtually, time to read the amendment, I'm going to summarize things. Mr. Godin moved a motion. What Mr. Serré is proposing is an amendment. We haven't yet got to a subamendment. We'll give everyone an opportunity to look it over. I have it in writing and the clerk is circulating it now. I think everyone has received it.

We will now suspend the meeting for a few moments.

• (15440)

(Pause)

• (15445)

The Chair: We're back.

Mr. Beaulieu wanted to comment on Mr. Serré's amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Basically, resorting to House of Commons Standing Order 106(4) was intended to prevent the Liberals from continuing their ongoing systematic obstruction, so that we could meet the minister and complete this study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

I would call what is happening parliamentary obstruction. Mr. Serré continues to defend Mr. Drouin, who in my view has taken a defiant stance. It's not a matter—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What I have to say is linked to the amendment. You're not even allowing me 30 seconds.

You gave him some time.

The Chair: I was going to ask you if it was connected to the amendment.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

The Chair: So it had to do with the one-hour meeting to be held before the end of the session.

Go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I find the Liberals' defence, to the effect that we are attacking Franco-Ontarians, unacceptable. They continually try to turn francophone minorities outside Quebec against the Quebec minority, which is also a minority within Canada. It represents 90% of francophones in Canada.

We have a right to defend French in Quebec. We thought things would change with the adoption of the official languages bill, but that's not what we're seeing. We'd like to put a stop to these efforts to deploy francophone and Acadian communities against Quebec. We want that to end. The member's comments were truly contemptible. I find them unacceptable and believe that he has discredited himself by making them.

Mr. Lacroix was appearing before the committee for the third time. What he presented was therefore nothing new. If the members had listened when people were talking about Quebec, they might not have reacted as they did, unless it had been deliberate.

I find that the entire defence follows the same pattern, which is to use bullying and to keep us from talking about the status of French in Quebec.

Ultimately, I agree with Mr. Serré's amendment, but only because I want to see an end to the systematic obstruction so that we can discuss the fundamental issue, which is the underfunding of post-secondary institutions, by which I mean colleges, CEGEPs and universities both outside Quebec and in Quebec.

• (15450)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Go ahead, Ms. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by simply apologizing to my colleague Mr. Godin, because during his address, I may have got a little overexcited, which is not something I usually do. I was just proud to see that we were considered leading lights in this area. It made me smile and I wanted to thank people.

I certainly don't consider myself to be anything of the sort, but rather just a proud Franco-Ontarian. I would in fact describe everyone in my caucus as VIPs, proud defenders of the French fact, francophiles, francophones, and for myself, Franco-Ontarian.

I take pride in the fact that my colleague Mr. Beaulieu appears to be receptive to the amendments to Mr. Godin's motion introduced by my colleague Mr. Serré. I did not attend the last committee meeting, and got wind of what had happened from Mr. Serré's explanations of what has brought us here, and why we are reviewing a motion.

When the minister appeared before the committee, there were efforts to score political points on a committee which I feel ought to be apolitical. We know that French is important but in decline, and I'm pleased to see that we are finally going to get back to—or at least try to get back to—the study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

I wanted to comment officially on my hobby horse, which is not really something I usually do. I would also like to confirm that not all the luminaries of the francophone world are here today. On my

side of the House, we are all leaders and proud francophones, francophiles or anglophones who defend the French fact in Canada and Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'd like to thank my colleague. It's always nice to see her express her enthusiasm.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to speak on behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada.

We are comfortable with the amendment proposed by my colleague, as well as with the motion. I think we could put the question now.

I'd like to approach the vote in a way that would speed the process up because I have another motion to introduce after we've voted on the amendment and the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is everyone okay with Mr. Serré's amendment? As I look at people around the table and on screen, there would appear to be unanimous consent.

Mr. Marc Serré: I'd like a recorded division, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

• (15455)

The Chair: We will now move on to the amended motion.

Are there any questions?

Ms. Lalonde, please go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I don't want to slow the process down, but there was some ambiguity surrounding the letter from the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario referred to by Mr. Serré. I know that you all feel it should be considered moved as drafted, but I was wondering if I could read the letter in question.

The Chair: The amendment to Mr. Godin's motion was agreed to, unanimously in fact, and so we have to vote on the amended motion first.

Are there any questions?

Mr. Lehoux, you both nodded and shook your head.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): I was answering your two questions at the same time.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: I'd like to clarify something with respect to the motion.

We are asking for the Minister of Official Languages to be urgently invited to give his opinion concerning the situation, but also for him to answer any other questions related to his duties. What is the opposition's intent? The minister is being asked to come here to speak about post-secondary education, on which we are in agreement, because he came here Thursday to do so; but then he's expected to answer any other questions pertaining to his duties. I'd like clarification on that.

The Chair: The motion was deemed admissible because it's linked to the letter we received. The passage you mentioned was part of it. It was in the final paragraph. You can propose an amendment, but we've already adopted an amendment and must now vote on the amended motion, if there are no further questions.

Go ahead now, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: When we are studying budgetary appropriations, we normally allow the opposition to ask any questions. However, here, it's strictly concerning our study on post-secondary education. I therefore expect questions to be about that. It would be interesting to hear what opposition members have to say, but our role now is to ensure that if the minister is invited to come and speak about our study on post-secondary education, we stick to that subject.

The Chair: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Drouin.

However, I repeat that the motion, as worded, is linked to the final paragraph in the letter.

Does Mr. Godin have any comments to add on that score?

Mr. Joël Godin: No.

The Chair: I believe some of you feel that the motion appears to go beyond the scope of the study on post-secondary education. Are we going to invite the minister to talk about post-secondary education, as we conclude our study on that, or are there also plans to ask broader questions? That is what Mr. Drouin is asking.

If there are no amendments, we'll vote on the motion, but you could still make comments. We are still debating it.

Mr. Godin, the ball is back in your court.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'll just say that I agree with your comments. The motion is indeed linked to the request for a meeting pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), and that is what our meeting today is about. So it is important.

My colleagues have already seen the motion and made an amendment, only to notice afterwards that there should perhaps be other amendments. Are they going to go over it line by line, word by word, and suggest other amendments? I don't know.

As for me, I've given my presentation.

The Chair: Motions are often to do just that, line by line, word by word.

Go ahead, Mr. G n reux.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: When ministers are invited to a committee, their role is to answer questions. We are here until the end of June and in the meantime all kinds of things may arise with respect to Canada's official languages. We may have to ask the minis-

ter questions about a situation that is not necessarily related to our current study. His role is to answer any questions pertaining to his work.

That's why I think this part of the motion is necessary.

• (15500)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. G n reux.

It's over to you now, Mr. Beaulieu. Go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I do believe that it's related to the post-secondary institutions study. We also want to hear further details about the arguments used by Mr. Boissonnault when he defended Mr. Drouin for not apologizing. Among other things, he said that Campus Saint-Jean had not led to Alberta's francization. We'd like to know what he's talking about. Are there statistics to back up this argument?

He even said that the anglophone universities in Quebec were not anglicizing the province and that there wasn't a problem. We'd like to know if there are numbers to back that up.

That's certainly related to the post-secondary education study.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: If Mr. Beaulieu is interested in this matter, he might like to invite his party leader to appear, since he too made comments about the Franco-Albertan community. He said that only French teachers could live in French in Alberta. He tried to backpedal on this for three or four days, even on Mothers' Day—

Mr. Jo l Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I would just like to know—

Mr. Jo l Godin: Right now, we are discussing the motion on the table—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have a nice sonorous voice—

Mr. Jo l Godin: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but you looked in my direction.

The Chair: You might make a fine tenor, but you and I both know that the studies have shown it's the sound in the committee rooms, and not the sound from the Zoom platform, that is harming the interpreters.

Please go ahead with your point of order, in your fine tenor voice, but you should know that I had spotted you already.

Mr. Jo l Godin: The light on my microphone was on, so whose fault was that? I certainly wouldn't want to blame the technicians; nothing of the sort. We couldn't manage without them.

Mr. Chair, I would just like us to get back to the main topic.

The Chair: Thank you, but that's what I was about to do.

Allow me to remind you that the amendment was unanimously carried and we have now got to the motion. If there's no debate, we'll move on to the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Jo l Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We'll get used to this.

Mr. Chair, I have a second motion, still in connection with Standing Order 106(4) and the letter duly sent by the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois.

The motion has already been sent to the clerk and it reads as follows:

That given the obscene and offensive comments made by the Liberal MP for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to a witness defending the cause of the French language in Quebec. Be it resolved that the committee report to the House:

- a) that the Chief Government Whip and member of the Liberal leadership team immediately remove MP Francis Drouin from the Standing Committee on Official Languages and;
- b) that MP Francis Drouin resign as the Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

Mr. Chair, I believe, despite of my feelings of friendship for my colleague, that he is at fault. The matter was spread out over four days in a process of redemption, as I was saying earlier, in which the MP took a variety of stances, such as not apologizing, apologizing in advance, apologizing conditionally and finally apologizing by availing himself of a procedural flaw.

These are not genuine apologies. We find it unacceptable for the Prime Minister, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Transport to have pulled out all the stops to defend their colleague.

In spite of my great respect for the member, we are in politics, and I don't think he still has the credibility required to be a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, or to be the president of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (15505)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to consult our clerk. I'll be back shortly.

● (15505)

(Pause)

● (15510)

The Chair: We are now resuming the meeting.

I would ask you all to listen carefully, because there are going to be many procedural details.

Mr. Godin, I am ruling your motion inadmissible for several reasons.

The first is that we just, through a motion, dealt with the matter on the agenda pertaining to the meeting requested pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). You referenced Standing Order 106(4). A motion had been moved and it has just been carried. So it's settled. We've finished with the meeting requested pursuant to Standing Order 106(4).

Secondly, I would remind you that meeting No. 99 is still suspended. A new motion cannot be introduced because such a motion requires prior notice of 48 hours. I trust that you are all still with me. Furthermore, the content of the motion you would like to move

is redundant, because it repeats the content of the motion we were debating last Thursday. The debate on this motion had been adjourned at Mr. Généreux's request. As the topic of today's meeting, requested pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), is closed, meeting number 99 is resuming without a witness. For a motion to be proposed, prior notice of 48 hours is required.

Thirdly, Mr. Godin, when you introduced your motion, you said that it was linked to Standing Order 106(4). I believe I heard you use those words. So your motion is not connected to the grounds stated in the final paragraph of the May 10 letter that invoked Standing Order 106(4), which means that it is inadmissible.

Your motion is inadmissible because it presents three procedural problems.

I'm all ears, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't agree with your procedural analysis.

To begin with, you're saying that the meeting requested pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) had been closed. How can you determine when it ended?

And where does it say that a motion cannot be introduced during a meeting requested pursuant to Standing Order 106(4)?

As for the 48 hours' notice, we are aware of the rules. You are absolutely right on that score, Mr. Chair.

On the other hand, I think that in the May 10 letter, there is a reference to the situation pertaining to the Liberal MP. As to redundancy, one might as well ask whether anyone is being more redundant than anyone else.

As parliamentarians, we have to use the tools and procedural rules available to us. However, if you read the letter carefully, I think you will see a link with the motion I would now like to move at this meeting, convened pursuant to Standing Order 106(4).

● (15515)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, your political party, and Mr. Beaulieu's party, invoked Standing Order 106(4). You introduced a motion to that effect. The motion was amended, and then carried unanimously.

The question with respect to Standing Order 106(4) has therefore now been settled, according to my interpretation of the procedure. I would also like to point out that if the matter had not been settled and the intent was to introduce a second motion pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), it should be reflected in the letter.

Mr. Godin, I am now going to read the letter that was signed by your colleagues and by Mr. Beaulieu:

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), we request that the committee be convened without delay to invite the Minister of Official Languages to appear before the committee as part of the study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions, to respond to the actions of the Member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and any other issues related to his duties as Minister of Official Languages.

The purpose of resorting to Standing Order 106(4) in this instance is to invite the Minister of Official Languages, Mr. Randy Boissonnault.

Even if I were to agree to the introduction of a second motion, it would be inadmissible because it doesn't meet the requirements of Standing Order 106(4), including the prior notice of 48 hours and the five-day deadline.

That's my explanation, but I understand why you might not agree with me.

As there are no further questions, the meeting is adjourned.

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