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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 117 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Ladies and gentlemen, before we begin, I ask that you read the guidelines that are written on the small cards on the table to prevent feedback incidents.

I would like to remind participants to wait until I recognize them by name before speaking. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will do our best to respect the order in which people have raised their hand. Comments should always be addressed through the chair of the committee.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on April 29, 2024, we are continuing our study on the minority-language education continuum.

I would like to welcome the witnesses who are joining us for the first hour of the meeting. We have two Statistics Canada representatives: Éric Caron-Malenfant, assistant director, Centre for Demography, and Josée Bégin, assistant chief statistician, Social, Health and Labour Statistics Field.

Welcome, Mr. Caron-Malenfant and Ms. Bégin. I believe this is your first appearance before this committee.

Ms. Josée Bégin (Assistant Chief Statistician, Social, Health and Labour Statistics Field, Statistics Canada): Yes, this is my first time before this committee.

The Chair: The Standing Committee on Official Languages is a very good committee. We have a great team and amazing members.

Do you want to comment, Mr. Beaulieu?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'll have a motion to move while the meeting is in public. Would there be a way to extend the public portion of the meeting a bit, so that the moving of my motion wouldn't take away from the time allocated to the witnesses? It won't take long. It may take five minutes.

The Chair: Okay, that's perfect. I'll keep it in mind, but feel free to remind me if necessary.

Do you want to add anything, Mr. Iacono?

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): I will also have a motion to put forward, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, this is how we'll proceed. After the first hour, we'll stay in public. For the benefit of those watching us live or on the Internet, the notice of meeting states that we have one hour with the witnesses and then one hour in camera.

Are there any other questions on that?

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Actually, Mr. Chair, the notice of meeting we received clearly states that, from 11 a.m. to noon, we will hear from witnesses from Statistics Canada and that, from noon to 1 p.m., we will continue our work in camera. How can this notice of meeting be changed without unanimous consent?

We have witnesses before us, and I think it's important to hear their testimony. If the parties want to use their speaking time to move motions, it's up to them, but they must use the time based on the agenda we have received.

The Chair: Yes, the first hour is set aside for Statistics Canada, and then we will continue in camera. However, the committee is free to do what it wants, informally. If we want to stay in public to move motions, that's a choice the committee can make.

Mr. Joël Godin: In that case, I have a question for you, Mr. Chair. Do we need unanimous consent from the committee to go in camera or stay in public?

• (1105)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You could ask for it quickly, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sorry, my mistake, it's the other way around: It's when we want to go in camera that we need unanimous consent.

Mr. Joël Godin: Here is my question: Is the unanimous consent of the committee needed to change the agenda?

The Chair: No. As I understand it, the answer is no.

Mr. Joël Godin: Can you check that with the clerk?

The Chair: If we have the committee's consent to continue, we can do it.

Mr. Joël Godin: How is that consent expressed, Mr. Chair, according to parliamentary rules?

The Chair: It can be expressed by a majority vote.

Do you want us to hear from the Statistics Canada witnesses right away and wait until the last minute to deal with the motions?

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, do you want to speak to this?

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Yes. I just wanted to say that I would like to be able to listen to the presentations and ask the witnesses questions. At the end of the first hour, we can take a few minutes to discuss Mr. Beaulieu's motion. That would be my suggestion.

The Chair: Before suspending the meeting to go in camera, we will deal with the motions of Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Iacono.

Are you okay with that?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The only issue is that we don't know if the public portion of the meeting will be extended or not. I would have liked to have that clarified. Take the time to check that, perhaps later, Mr. Chair. Then you can advise us accordingly. Right now, we're eating up time.

The Chair: That's usually how it works: Someone can move a motion when they have the floor before the meeting is adjourned.

I see that we have two microphones on right now.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I would remind you of what we, on our side, have done in the past. To comply with procedure, we used our time during the questioning of witnesses to move motions. As I understand it, in this case, we're trying to avoid reducing the time planned for witnesses, which is very legitimate, and we're adapting the rules according to the requests made.

I feel that my rights as a parliamentarian are being violated because, in the past, I had to use my speaking time during the question and answer period to move a motion when the Minister of Official Languages came to testify before the committee. The opposing party criticized me for that.

Mr. Chair, I just want to make sure that the rules are strictly followed. I will stand in your way if my rights are ever violated.

The Chair: We started the meeting with Statistics Canada representatives. Mr. Beaulieu then mentioned that he would have a motion to move. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, everyone is free to use their speaking time as they see fit. I can't stop that.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay.

The Chair: As much as I didn't like it as chair, I would have to live with the rules as they are. At the last minute in a public meeting, if any of the members who have the floor decide to move a motion or speak to it, I can't interrupt them. I have to do my job as chair to the best of my ability.

Right now, we're wasting valuable time. I know everyone has good questions. Hold on, maybe I misspoke. Let's say instead that we're wasting valuable time with the esteemed witnesses from Statistics Canada. I would like us to hear from them, if possible.

Is it the will of the committee to let them begin their testimony?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I'll extend the first part of the meeting a bit so that we have more or less an hour with the witnesses.

Ms. Bégin, you have a firm five minutes for your presentation. I'm very strict with everyone's speaking time so that committee members can ask as many questions as possible.

You can begin.

Ms. Josée Bégin: Thank you.

Committee members and Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your work on the minority official language education continuum.

As the national statistical agency, Statistics Canada collects and disseminates statistical information to support the evidence-based planning and implementation of minority official language education programs across the country. The information can come from the census of population, administrative sources or surveys.

In 2021, questions on instruction in English in Quebec and French in Canada outside Quebec at the primary and secondary levels were added to the census to complement the existing questions on education and on different language characteristics of the population. These new questions helped determine that close to 900,000 children are eligible for instruction in the minority official language based on the criteria set out in section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The data helped to produce a detailed geographical distribution of these children and to determine the proportion of children who have already attended a minority language school.

According to 2021 census data, roughly 300,000 eligible children were living in Quebec and 350,000 in Ontario. However, New Brunswick had the highest proportion of eligible children, at 36%. The results also revealed that, in Quebec, about three-quarters of eligible school-aged children were attending or had attended a minority language school in Canada. This compares with just under two-thirds in Canada outside Quebec.

The census is a cornerstone of the data ecosystem that Statistics Canada is currently developing on children eligible for instruction in the minority official language. Given that the census paints a portrait of members of the same household on census day, Statistics Canada conducted an additional study. This study showed that another estimated 90,000 children are eligible on account of family members who live in other households, such as children in shared custody.

• (1110)

[English]

The data ecosystem also includes administrative data sources that shed more light on this population. For example, the elementary and secondary education survey is used to track the number of annual enrolments in minority-language programs in Canada. One finding from this survey is that 260,000 children and teenagers were in a minority-language education program in Canada during the 2022-23 school year.

Meanwhile, the open database of educational facilities includes information on the schools that offer minority-language programs. Combining this database with census data revealed that 87% of eligible children in Canada live less than 10 kilometres from a minority school. The proximity of minority schools, along with the language spoken at home by parents, is one of the factors associated with instruction of eligible children in the minority official language.

The first results from the survey on the official-language minority population, which was conducted in 2022, will soon be added to the data ecosystem on children eligible for instruction in the minority official language. The data from the survey will cast light on parents' education intentions for their eligible children and the reasons for their choice of language of instruction.

The survey also included many questions that will provide information on the entire school path from day care to post-secondary, and on various other aspects of the situation of official-language minorities.

[Translation]

The range of Statistics Canada data that we feel would benefit your work also includes the Canadian survey on the provision of child care services, which has a question on the language of the services offered; the postsecondary student information system, which can be combined with census data to determine the language of graduates; and the national graduates survey. Lastly, please note that, under the new action plan for official languages, we're working on assessing the feasibility of producing projections of the population of children eligible for instruction in the minority official language.

The information that Statistics Canada produces is available in different formats, such as analyses, tables, maps and other visual tools. Statistics Canada's recent analyses on this topic examined the characteristics of children eligible for instruction in the minority official language; the connection among language of instruction, bilingualism and the languages used at work; and enrolment in immersion programs in Canada outside Quebec.

In short, Statistics Canada already has a number of sources of information and analyses on the different levels of minority language education. It's actively working on adding to the data ecosystem to provide decision-makers and stakeholders with evidence-based data.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bégin.

We're starting the first round of questions and answers. Each political group will have six minutes. We'll start with the Conservative Party, represented by the committee's first vice-chair.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here this morning, Ms. Bégin and Mr. Caron-Malenfant. Your participation matters. You play a major role in counting the number of rights holder students.

From 1982 to 2021, the census significantly underestimated the number of children eligible for French-language schools outside Quebec and failed to count any children eligible for English-language schools in Quebec. In Ontario, 41% of children of rights holders didn't have access to French-language schools.

Do you think that these under-estimates have had a negative impact on francophone minority communities in Canada?

• (1115)

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant (Assistant Director, Centre for Demography, Statistics Canada): Good question.

Before the 2021 census, we asked the entire population a question on mother tongue, which is one of the criteria set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, we didn't have any information on the other criteria. Since 2021, we've been asking new questions on language of instruction. These questions help to provide a full and detailed picture of the population of children eligible for instruction in the minority official language.

We also have other sources of enrolment data, for example. For some time now, we've been collecting data each year on enrolment in minority-language programs in Canada outside Quebec. We had already noted the trends along these lines in the past. However, since the 2021 census, we've been collecting information in much greater detail.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Caron-Malenfant.

You're telling me that, since the 2021 census, you've had a much more representative picture of reality. I want to acknowledge the work done by the Standing Committee on Official Languages in 2019-20. It worked hard to convince Statistics Canada to include this question in the census.

You must know that a bill amending the Official Languages Act was passed in June 2023. Unfortunately, Canadian Heritage officials, with the complicity of the government, made sure that Statistics Canada's obligation to conduct a count wasn't clearly written into the bill. Yet you showed the value of this count in the 2021 census, because it provided a far more representative picture of reality.

How do you explain Canadian Heritage's position that the next census in 2031 should provide estimates rather than a count?

Ms. Josée Bégin: In accordance with Statistics Canada's position, we can't comment on the intentions of our colleagues in other departments.

However, I can tell you that each census is followed by a period of consultations on the content and questions asked. These consultations are conducted both with census data users and with policy-makers, including our colleagues in the federal and provincial governments. Tests are then carried out to try out new content or make changes to census content.

Statistics Canada has been doing this for the past two years. We conducted two census tests, one in May and one that just ended in September. These tests will lead to analyses to help us determine the content of the next census.

Mr. Joël Godin: You're telling me that the count may be part of the next census, but it isn't certain yet. Some uncertainty remains. Is that right?

Ms. Josée Bégin: I said that census tests were carried out. The content of these tests is available on the Statistics Canada website. For the tests, we did add questions about children eligible for minority-language instruction. These questions were tested.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Bégin.

In your remarks, you talked about studies that you carried out and that you combined with the census. This further established the true picture of the situation of official language minority communities in Canada. That's my understanding. Is that right?

Ms. Josée Bégin: As with any analysis, combining information with the census is a—

Mr. Joël Godin: Can you give me a yes or no answer?

Ms. Josée Bégin: Yes. It's a rich source of information.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Bégin. You can understand that my time is limited.

How much does it cost to add a question to the census?

I'll give you the answer. It's \$7 million. Statistics Canada has already answered my question.

Is it worth the \$7 million to add this question to the census to determine the situation of rights holders? Don't francophones and anglophones in minority communities deserve this in order to maintain a bilingual country?

Are all the stakeholders who benefit from the results paying \$7 million to include these questions in the census?

• (1120)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left for an answer.

Ms. Josée Bégin: As I explained, our approach is to determine content according to a frame of reference based on the needs of Canadians and policy-makers. It isn't necessarily related to the cost of a specific question.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bégin.

Thank you, Mr. Godin.

I'll now give the floor for six minutes to Mr. Samson from the Liberal Party.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I'll ask a few quick questions.

What's the difference between the 2021 census and previous censuses in terms of results? What have these questions really given to the people?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: The new questions concerned the language of instruction—

Mr. Darrell Samson: I know that, but what were the results? Sorry to interrupt, but I'm interested only in the results.

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: We could obtain, through the census, information on the population eligible under the three criteria set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This includes language of instruction.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, okay, but what's the difference? Sorry, but I don't have much time. What differences have these questions revealed? What makes our current data so rich?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: We can give planners, such as municipalities, detailed information.

Mr. Darrell Samson: What type of information? What came out?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: We can determine the number of eligible children per community, for example.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Is it a much higher number of children?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: The estimated number of eligible children is 900,000. This includes 600,000 in Canada outside Quebec and around 300,000 in Quebec.

Mr. Darrell Samson: What were the previous figures?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: We didn't used to have information on the three criteria set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So the number is high.

How many more students does this potentially amount to?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: Good question.

We already had information on attendance, but—

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would like to bring up another issue. Sorry to interrupt, but I don't have much time. Nevertheless, I would like to thank you for your answers.

I want to know what you mean by a data ecosystem. Could you explain this to me, please? I know that you find this quite important.

Ms. Josée Bégin: When we talk about a data ecosystem, we mean a set of data. We can obtain additional information from other sources to perhaps better understand the environment.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you. Good answer.

What type of analysis could you provide using this data ecosystem?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: For example, we've already been able to publish analyses of the distance between the homes of eligible children and the nearest French-language schools.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Good.

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: The upcoming new survey will also give us information on parents' intentions, meaning whether and why they plan to enrol their children in a minority language school. If parents enrolled their children in a majority language school, we can also find out why. This type of analysis can also be carried out.

We're also assessing the feasibility of producing projections to get an idea of how many children will be eligible in the future. This also falls within the scope of analyses or analytical products that could be developed regarding eligible children.

Mr. Darrell Samson: These are many new aspects.

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Good.

I'll now move on to my next question.

Does the data on the children of rights holders meet the criteria established in case law for assessing both current and potential demand?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: Good question.

The information available in the data ecosystem is multi-faceted. First, it tells us the number of eligible children, meaning the children entitled to attend a minority language school under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The available information also tells us how many eligible children are actually enrolled in the programs. It's a smaller number, of course. Somewhere in between, the new survey will tell us how many parents of rights holders plan to enrol their children in a minority language school. Since some parents may not plan to do so, this figure could fall somewhere in between the total number of eligible children and the number of actual enrolments. The data ecosystem helps us to quantify these three scenarios.

• (1125)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

Are you referring to a survey conducted by you or a survey commissioned by Canadian Heritage?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: It's the survey on the official language minority population. It concerns francophones outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Who commissioned the survey?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Will it be published shortly?

Mr. Éric Caron-Malenfant: In December.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Good. This survey will provide exceptional data.

Mr. Chair, I'll give the rest of my time to my colleague, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Chair, I would like to move my motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: It's his time—

Mr. Joël Godin: No, Mr. Chair. I'm just raising my hand to let you know that I plan to ask to speak immediately after the introduction of the motion. I want everyone to know that I asked to speak.

The Chair: Okay.

You have the floor, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I don't know how much time I have left, Mr. Chair. I hope that you stopped the timer.

The Chair: I stopped it, but I'm starting it up again.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My motion reads as follows:

That the Committee expresses its disappointment at the behaviour of Conservative MPs, notably the MP for Lethbridge and the MP for Brantford—Brant, toward Francophone ministers and toward the entirety of the Canadian population that speaks French, an official language of Canada;

That the Committee remind all MPs of their right to speak in whichever of the two official languages at all times in Parliament;

That the Committee request that the MP for Brantford—Brant apologise in the House to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement of Canada, to the 4,000 Franco-Ontarians in his riding, and to all Francophone MPs and all the Francophones in Canada;

That the Committee recognises that French is just as important to Canada's bilingual status as English, and that French is indispensable to the Canadian identity;

That the Committee denounce the inaction of the Conservative leader in face of repeated anti-Francophone remarks by his MPs.

I would first like to remind my colleagues, in particular the members of the Official Opposition, of subsection 16(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which states:

16(1) English and French are the official languages of Canada and have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and government of Canada.

I see that my colleague opposite is wondering why I am reading that. He may have forgotten, so I will remind him that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms exists today and contains that section, which refers to the official languages of Canada. I also want to point out that the peoples of the two founding nations of Canada, anglophones and francophones, came together under the umbrella of our Confederation, and that respect for francophones is in no way optional.

On October 24, after the member for Brantford—Brant asked the Minister of Public Services and Procurement his question and the minister answered in French, the member for Brantford—Brant said to the minister:

[*English*]

...my question is in English, but I digress.

[*Translation*]

It is the duty of every parliamentarian to uphold our Constitution.

Furthermore, it is shameful for a Canadian elected member to rise in the House of Commons to criticize a minister for answering him in French.

I find it hard to understand the inertia on the part of opposition members, whether from the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party or the NDP, and particularly on the part of members from Quebec and of Franco-Ontarians and Acadians, in the face of this crude insult from the official opposition. I hope that instead of protecting their Conservative friends who have been so disrespectful of francophones, they will denounce this insult and call for the member for Brantford—Brant to apologize.

It is time to show your true colours and demand unconditional respect for French in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

This is the list of members who wish to speak, so far, in this order: Mr. Godin, Mr. Samson, Mr. Lightbound and Mr. Serré.

If you want to add your name to the list, make sure I see you raise your hand.

The floor is yours, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: In fact, Mr. Chair, I don't want to give up my speaking time, but I have a point of order.

Is this motion in order? I would like us to think about that. By allowing this motion, we give the committee the power to dictate the conduct of a member in the House of Commons.

So before going any further, Mr. Chair, I might like to ask that you consult the clerk on this point, or, if you already have the answer, you tell us what it is. I will then resume my speaking time.

The Chair: That is an excellent question, Mr. Godin.

I actually did think for a minute when I read the motion. I was reminded of the motion that Mr. Beaulieu made, as we will recall, following on the episode of the member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, in which consequences were called for. Do you remember that? The issue was consequences, which might even be called sanctions. However, imposing sanctions on someone is completely outside committees' terms of reference. That is really the objective of this motion. I ruled it out of order, but despite that, the committee overruled the chair's decision.

I am now explaining where my analysis is coming from. I based my decision on something that was clear, in my opinion. Of course,

I am talking about that other motion, the one that Mr. Beaulieu made earlier. I thought it was completely out of order because our rules clearly state that no sanction may be taken against anyone.

In this case, I find the motion to be in order, and this is why. It is not a motion for a report to be made to the House of Commons. It is not a motion calling for sanctions. It is not a motion asking that someone be ejected from somewhere. It does not contain sanctions as the motion I alluded to did.

This motion asks someone to apologize, without calling for him to be removed from somewhere or calling for sanctions against him. The motion asks the committee to express its disappointment at the events it refers to, to recognize that French is just as important as English, and to denounce the inaction of a leader, and stops there. As you know, since I have often said it in the past, I always prefer to interpret the rules permissively, rather than the opposite. I therefore find this motion to be in order.

Mr. Joël Godin: In fact, I—

The Chair: Have I answered your question?

Mr. Joël Godin: No. You have partially answered it.

The Chair: Let's say it is not the answer you wanted to hear.

Mr. Joël Godin: No; that's right. You have read my reaction correctly. My non-verbal language speaks volumes.

At this point, Mr. Chair, I take your comment and your position on board. You began by alluding to the motion regarding the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. In that case, you had decided it was not in order, and it was the committee that decided.

The Chair: No. It was clear on its face that under the Standing Orders it was not in order. A committee may not sanction someone; that is clear. Nonetheless, the committee overruled the chair's decision. In a case like that, the Standing Orders provide that the House must deal with the question. There were lengthy discussions after that.

Mr. Joël Godin: By your argument, Mr. Chair, in order to take a position on the motion that my colleague has now moved, you based your decision on the motion you initially alluded to. You....

I see that you want to add something, Mr. Chair, so I will let you speak.

The Chair: I am not Lord Denning. That name may not mean anything to you, but the lawyers here know who I am talking about.

Mr. Joël Godin: That is my understanding, yes.

The Chair: I have to base my decisions on the committee's previous decisions. To be as objective as possible, I have to compare the two situations.

If, after reading the motion, you still think it is asking the committee to impose a sanction on one of our colleagues, I am prepared to hear you. However, if—

Mr. Joël Godin: I think—

The Chair: That is what I am trying to explain. That is the difference between the two motions.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, Mr. Chair. However, requiring a parliamentarian to apologize in the House of Commons is a sanction, in my opinion. I believe the motion is out of order, since it calls for there to be a consequence for a parliamentarian. Personally, I believe this amounts to imposing a sanction.

• (1135)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The floor is yours, Mr. Lightbound.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: In theory, a decision of the chair, like the one you have just made, may not be debated. There is a mechanism for challenging a decision of the chair, and Mr. Godin is familiar with it because he has used it in the past. This kind of arguing is not the procedure to be followed, as I understand it.

As well, the motion is not binding, in my view.

The Chair: You are entirely correct, Mr. Lightbound, and thank you for reminding me.

I have made my decision, Mr. Godin, but I do thank you for your comments. They were on point.

Mr. Joël Godin: However, I have not finished addressing this. I would like to resume my speaking time so that—

The Chair: Fine, but I have made my decision: the motion is in order.

Mr. Joël Godin: In that case, I challenge your decision, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Fine, we will move to a vote.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you said you wanted to continue speaking after the challenge to the chair's decision.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes. I will still be speaking about procedure, Mr. Chair.

What I tried to do was to close the debate on the motion, given that we have witnesses present for our study of the minority-language education continuum. This is a very important study. It was the Conservative Party that moved that the committee do this study, and our other colleagues around the table were receptive to it. I think it is important.

Mr. Chair, we had a chance to spend time together at the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones convention held last week in Prince Edward Island. I think this is very important.

I therefore ask that debate on the motion be adjourned.

The Chair: I am therefore going to ask the clerk to proceed to the vote on adjourning debate on the motion.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I don't understand what is happening. I know there is a vote, but why is there one?

The Chair: Mr. Godin has asked that debate on the motion be adjourned, so that is what the vote is on.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: If I recall correctly, since I—

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

The Chair: Wait, Mr. Godin. Mr. Iacono is addressing the chair, so I am going to listen to him.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, but the procedure is that we have to proceed to the vote right away, with no more comments.

The Chair: Yes, but it—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I said I don't understand why we have to proceed to a vote.

The Chair: I explained—

Mr. Joël Godin: Are you going to—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, are you going to let me finish?

Mr. Joël Godin: Are you going to educate all the members of the—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I have not given you the floor.

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours since you had a point of order.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Regarding education, I have learned a lot of things at this committee from looking at how my colleagues in the Conservative Party play with procedure. That is what I did today in moving my motion, as they have done repeatedly, and yet we have never done what they are doing: close the debate in order to—

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

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, are you going to let me finish?

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): This is a debate.

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

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I am hearing echos. It's rude.

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

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I don't understand why we are voting—

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Godin.

• (1140)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I am entitled to ask you the question. You know it was me who moved the motion. You are telling me, indirectly, that debate on my motion is going to be stopped. That is not fair.

The Chair: I understand what you are saying, Mr. Iacono, but Mr. Godin is asking that we follow the rules of procedure. We now have to proceed to the vote to find out whether we have to adjourn debate on your motion. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes.

The Chair: Good.

If the purpose of the vote is clear to everyone, I am going to ask the clerk to call the vote.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Madeleine Martin): The vote is on adjourning debate on the motion.

(Motion negated: yeas 7; nays 4.)

The Chair: I will now give Mr. Samson the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I raised three points of order, but I had also asked to speak.

The Chair: I thought you had finished. I'm listening.

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to move an amendment to my colleague's motion. I would like to add the following:

That the committee expresses its disappointment with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's appointment of a Governor General who does not speak French.

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

We are debating my colleague's motion, but my opposition colleague is moving another motion. It is not an amendment. This is an important difference. It is therefore not in order.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, please explain how your amendment amends Mr. Iacono's motion. As Mr. Samson has said, we might say that your amendment replaces his entire motion. Is that your intention?

Mr. Joël Godin: Not at all. It is an amendment that is added to the original motion.

The Chair: So please explain how it is added to it.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay. The motion, as amended by the amendment I am proposing, would say the following:

That the Committee expresses its disappointment at the behaviour of Conservative MPs, notably the MP for Lethbridge and the MP for Brantford—Brant, toward Francophone ministers and toward the entirety of the Canadian population that speaks French, an official language of Canada;

That the committee expresses its disappointment with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's appointment of a Governor General who does not speak French.

...

It is an insertion after the first paragraph of the motion, which would continue after that.

The Chair: It is very clearly an insertion.

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours on this amendment.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I am very pleased that my Conservative colleagues have educated me so well on procedure. If an amendment is proposed to a motion, the amendment must have a connection with the motion. I see no connection between my motion and the amendment that my Conservative colleague has moved. I believe this motion should be rejected.

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

Mr. Joël Lightbound: I essentially agree with the amendment proposed, because I have little sympathy for the appointment of a governor general who does not speak French. However, I agree with Mr. Iacono: the proposed amendment has no connection with the motion before us.

That said, I was very glad that Mr. Godin read the following passage from the motion:

That the Committee expresses its disappointment at the behaviour of Conservative MPs, notably the MP for Lethbridge and the MP for Brantford—Brant, toward Francophone ministers and toward the entirety of the Canadian population that speaks French, an official language of Canada;

I thank him for reading that passage. It was good to hear. Last Thursday, in the House, we did not see the Conservative members from Quebec and the francophone Conservative members rising to say it made no sense to question that a minister, my colleague, the member from Quebec, answered in French, his language. I was outraged. I am pleasantly surprised to hear Mr. Godin read the motion. I invite him to read it again, as often as he likes, and to read the rest of the motion as well.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

We are still on the amendment, and Mr. Généreux has the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is important to remember the facts. Our colleague, the member for Brantford—Brant, asked a question. The answer given by the Minister, Minister Duclos, was in French. My colleague wanted to hear the answer, but he was not wearing his earpiece. He was therefore not able to hear the answer properly. That is what happened. His intention was absolutely not to correct the Minister or tell him he had not answered in English, but he moved on to something else.

In fact, Mr. Iacono said as much in reminding us of the facts. That said, the member for Brantford—Brant apologized after question period—

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but we are talking about the amendment.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'm getting there.

The member apologized and Mr. Duclos accepted his apology. The member's intention was not to say he didn't want the Minister to answer in French. There is no connection.

Mr. Iacono's motion asks members to apologize to the House. What Mr. Godin is moving as an amendment is to add that Prime Minister apologize for appointing a governor general who does not speak French.

Mr. Iacono referred earlier to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is a bilingual country, but the Prime Minister appointed someone, a person for whom I do have great respect, who does not speak a word of French.

Sincerely, between you and me—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Wait a minute, please, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I understand very clearly what my colleague opposite is saying. I am not saying that what he says is false, but the motion relates to an event that took place in the House of Commons. It does not relate to the appointment of the Governor General.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair: what is Mr. Iacono's point of order?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you know how this works. If you want to speak, you raise your hand. That is what we always do.

I am allowing people to finish what they are saying. I am much more permissive than strict, as you know. If I have to call a colleague to order, I will do it, but I want to hear Mr. Iacono complete this thoughts.

The floor is yours, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I would first like to apologize to the witnesses who are here today, whose time is being wasted.

At the beginning of every meeting, you give instructions about how members are to speak so as not to make life difficult for the interpreters. When a member speaks at the same time as another member, what do you think happens? Can you advise Mr. Godin, once and for all, to let members speak? He will have a chance to speak afterward. If I did that while he was speaking, I don't think he would be happy. If there is to be no respect for members—because there really isn't any—I would ask for a bit of respect for the interpreters.

The Chair: Thank you for reminding him. We had a good discussion about that.

I am speaking to all members. Contrary to what we always thought during COVID-19, the acoustic incidents are not down to Zoom or the people attending virtually; rather, they are down to the people who are around the table in person. That is where the acoustic incidents happen. That is why I ask you to wait for me to give you the floor before speaking. Raise your hand, wave it around if you think I haven't seen you or the clerk hasn't seen you. Please do as I ask.

Mr. Iacono, I am going to let you finish your point of order.

• (1150)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, my motion relates to an event that took place in the House of Commons, not to appointments of governors general, judges or anyone else. It relates to something that was done and words that were spoken on October 24, 2024. When I referred to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it was about what took place in the House of Commons, not what took place elsewhere.

Every member has the right to speak in the language of their choice. We have two official languages in Canada, and on October 24, 2024, a member of the official opposition party failed to show respect not only to his colleagues in all parties, but to all Canadians.

I am a proud Quebecker; I was born in Quebec to Italian parents, and I learned French. I studied law in French after attending McGill University in English. My son also speaks French; he attends a bilingual francophone school.

If we may not move this motion at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, where should we do it? We are here to defend the rights of francophones. My colleagues opposite bring forward motions at every Tuesday and Thursday meeting to advance the rights of francophones. If we cannot move this motion at this committee, why would it be different now?

If the members of the Conservative Party block this motion, they will be blocking access to French in the Parliament of Canada, and that makes me ashamed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Some of you have spoken, and I will go around the table up to Ms. Gladu before deciding whether Mr. Godin's amendment is in order. I would like to hear everyone speak to this subject and I will rule after that.

Mr. Godin, do you have a question? I would like to let Mr. Généreux finish his comments, unless you have a point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you said you would go around the table up to Ms. Gladu. Will I also have the opportunity to speak?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you spoke first, and Mr. Iacono and Mr. Lightbound have also spoken.

Do you want to speak again? Did you raise your hand?

Mr. Joël Godin: While Mr. Iacono was talking, I signaled with my hand and you agreed with your eyes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, this is the list I have in front of me. Because Mr. Généreux had not finished speaking, I am going to start over with him. After him, it will be Ms. Gladu's, Mr. Samson's and Mr. Lightbound's turns, then you, and last Mr. Dalton.

Let's listen to what Mr. Généreux has to say about the amendment you have moved to Mr. Iacono's motion.

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

Out of respect for the interpreters, I have very patiently waited my turn. I now have the floor and I would like to invite my colleagues to dial it back a bit.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Généreux.

[*English*]

Do you have a point of order?

Mr. Richard Cannings: I'm wondering if we could let the witnesses go. The Conservatives seem to be wanting to drag this out completely, and I don't want to keep them here unnecessarily. I find this unacceptable.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Since there seems to be a consensus around the table, Ms. Bégin and Mr. Caron-Malenfant, we thank you for being here. You are free to leave.

• (1155)

Mr. Joël Godin: The reality is that this is a motion by the Liberal Party—

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, you had the floor.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I think the comments my colleague opposite just made are unnecessary. He says that it's the reality, yes, but I too could comment on the actions of Conservative members in the House of Commons. I'm not telling the witnesses that before they leave, though, and I think he's being a little disrespectful to the witnesses.

Could you call the member opposite to order, please?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Listen, this is the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I'm going to have to be tougher now. I'm sorry for everybody, but maybe what's happening is that I'm being too permissive.

We are now discussing Mr. Godin's amendment, which, I would remind members, would insert after the first paragraph of Mr. Iacono's motion the following paragraph:

That the committee expresses its disappointment with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's appointment of a Governor General who does not speak French.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor and I'm listening to you on the amendment.

Those who are next on the list will speak to the amendment. I would ask everyone to listen to Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: To my knowledge, in Canada, there is only one Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and there is only one Parliament, that of Ottawa. It's the home of all Canadians. The decisions made inside that chamber are as valid for appointments as they are for the free choice of the official language of members who speak in the House of Commons.

Consequently, I fully agree with the addition of Mr. Godin's sub-amendment denouncing the Prime Minister's appointment of someone who doesn't speak French. It's equally harmful to all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Ms. Gladu, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to speak.

While I think it's awful that they put in place a Governor General who doesn't speak French, it doesn't add to the context we have. Everyone knows you can speak English or French in the House. When French questions are directed at me, I try to reply in French, unless I run out of vocabulary, in which case I switch over.

I also want to say that Mr. Brock knows this, because he apologized that day to Mr. Duclos. He went on Twitter and social media and apologized as well, which affects all of what has been put before us.

I want to read it into the record: "I want to apologize to Minister Duclos and all my colleagues for my comments in Question Period today. Every Member of Parliament has the right to speak in the official language of their choice, my comment was inappropriate and I am sorry." Also, to make it better, he did it in French.

In light of the fact that we've all made errors.... We've seen, in the past, Sean Fraser putting ministerial things out unilingually. He apologized, and he's done much better to learn French and move along.

In the spirit of working better as a committee, I think we should skip the amendment and the motion.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Darrell Samson: I just want to say that the proposed amendment is out of order because it completely changes the main motion. The motion and the amendment are totally different. Amendments like this could be added indefinitely, but this amendment has nothing to do with what happened in the House. So I would ask you to vote against this amendment.

The Chair: I'm prepared to rule on this, but there may still be people who would like to speak to the relevance of the amendment. If there are other things I haven't heard, I'm prepared to listen to other people.

Mr. Lightbound, you were next on the list.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: I would prefer to speak to the motion. I agree that the amendment is in order.

• (1200)

The Chair: Are you saying "in order" or "out of order"?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: I'm sorry. I mean "out of order", because it has nothing to do with the substance of the motion that's being put forward. In fact, there is another motion on the subject that Mr. Godin is trying to raise, which I also find out of order. Otherwise, we could add amendments such as "heaven is red and hell is blue". It has nothing to do with the motion.

The Chair: I can recognize other members, but I'm prepared to make my ruling, unless someone thinks they can change my mind.

According to my list, the next speaker is Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's important to set the record straight. My colleague, who is the sponsor of the motion that I amended—

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

I'd like to remind you that you were asked to make a decision. If you find that we're debating an amendment that's out of order, we have to go back to the motion. For the moment, I get the impression that Mr. Godin wants to speak to the motion. I would have liked to speak to it as well, but I decided not to, because the debate is on an amendment that I believe is out of order.

The Chair: Yes, I have to make a decision.

I asked three times if anyone thought they could change my mind.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I'm of the opinion that the amendment to the motion is out of order, for the reasons you have heard. I'll give you the floor: Do you have an argument that might change my mind?

You yourself tabled a notice of motion, which is consistent with your amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: That doesn't discredit an amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Iacono's motion takes us into a specific day, into an event that happened in the House of Commons—

Mr. Joël Godin: That's not true, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You think that's not true, but that's what I'm reading in the motion. The motion calls on the committee to express its dis-appointment with the behaviour toward francophone ministers. We know what the event is. Ms. Gladu took the time to read the member's apology. It happened in the heat of the moment in the House of Commons.

I'm going to deal with the amendment right now, because I want to move on. I declare it—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, before ruling whether it's in order, I would like to share with you a very important point, which will probably convince you to change your mind. You talked about actions taken in the House of Commons. Where did the member for Lethbridge make the remarks for which she apologized? Was it in the House of Commons?

The Chair: I could let the mover speak to that.

However, my ruling remains the same: The amendment is out of order in the context of the motion.

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

Mr. Joël Lightbound: No, Mr. Chair.

The amendment is out of order, so we'll go back to the motion. I had given my name because I wanted to speak to the motion. I decided not to speak to it because we were discussing the amendment. Before making a new list....

The Chair: I have two lists, one of which dealt with the amendment. I ruled the amendment out of order. Is that clear to everyone?

Can we go back to the motion, or do you want to—

Mr. Joël Godin: No, Mr. Chair. I would like to propose another amendment.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Chair, Mr. Godin doesn't have the floor.

The Chair: He does not have the floor right now.

Mr. Joël Godin: In that case, I raise my hand.

The Chair: That's fine.

The list of those who want to speak to the motion is as follows: Mr. Samson, Mr. Lightbound, Mr. Serré, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Godin and Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, do you have my name? I had my hand up before. So I have to be at the top of the list, not at the end.

The Chair: I'll add that, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Dalton, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Marc Dalton: No, Mr. Chair.

My name should be on both lists, on the motion and on the amendment. However, you ruled that the amendment was out of order. On the list of the motion, I think my name should be fifth, but I don't know why it doesn't appear.

The Chair: You're right. I will combine my list with that of the clerk.

Here is the new list: Mr. Samson, Mr. Lightbound, Mr. Serré, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Dalton, Mr. Iacono, Mr. Godin and Ms. Gladu.

• (1205)

Mr. Marc Dalton: That's better.

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

Mr. Darrell Samson: I don't want to speak for long, because I think we should proceed with the vote rather than argue, to be honest.

I must tell you that I was astounded to hear the member's comments. It's mainly because this is the second time that the same party, a party supposedly willing to protect both official languages, has made such a statement. I was really very disappointed. It was an attack on my identity of choice. That's rare, because I'm so proud of bilingualism in Ottawa. However, when I hear things like that, it hurts me as much as it hurt Mr. Duclos.

I would ask that we vote as soon as possible so that we can continue our work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Lightbound, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the motion before us, I can clearly see the discomfort and embarrassment of the Conservatives, who want to do everything except talk about what happened in the House last Thursday.

I understand their discomfort, because what we observed last Thursday echoes years of condescension and contempt from that party toward parliamentarians who speak French. Other colleagues have experienced it. I experienced it when I was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and I answered in French, because, as we know, French is my mother tongue and I have the right to speak French in the House. I saw it in their eyes, I heard it in their sighs, and we hear it, year after year, in their comments like the one the member for Brantford—Brant made to remind the minister that his question was in English. Even though Mr. Généreux would have us believe otherwise, we all know very well what he was trying to do. He was trying to insinuate that Mr. Duclos, who is a francophone, should have answered him in English, because the question was put to him in English. It's embarrassing and it's shameful.

The member has tried to pay lip service to this by offering an apology in the House, which wasn't really an apology. He then repeated the message on the X platform and Mr. Duclos accepted his apology. This testifies to Mr. Duclos's great class, and I agree with him. I also appreciate what Ms. Gladu said. She's right that mistakes are human.

However, that doesn't prevent this committee from speaking out about what happened and condemning this type of behaviour, which, as I recall, didn't happen through the workings of the Holy Spirit. We have seen this kind of behaviour from the Conservative Party for years. What amazes me is that my Quebec colleagues, francophone and francophile, on the other side of the House are also unable, once in a while, when the mistake is on their side, to step up and say that it makes no sense. That isn't how francophone parliamentarians should be treated. That isn't how we should respect francophone Canadians.

I think the motion is very relevant. It's not binding, but I think it clearly expresses the committee's view of what happened on Thursday in the House. I hope that my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Official Languages, who, we assume, have official languages at heart, will rally around something that is ultimately not very controversial.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

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

I would like to add a few points to Mr. Lightbound's comments. First, since Mr. Brock's actions took place in the House, he should have apologized in the House. Clearly, an apology on the platform X is not an apology.

In a way, it's pure hypocrisy. When Mr. Drouin made a certain comment in this committee, he apologized at a meeting of the same committee. He did it in the media as well. He has apologized time and time again, but the Conservative motion has not been withdrawn. I find it very difficult to understand the total hypocrisy of the Conservatives here.

We must also remember the comments made to Ms. Lebouthillier by one of the Conservative members from Quebec, Mr. Berthold. He told her that she should speak English. We know Ms. Lebouthillier and how important her comments are. We are talking about a Quebecker who told a Quebecker to speak English. I think, as was mentioned earlier, there is a trend here. However, we can agree, accept the motion and continue our work on official languages.

Furthermore, I think that Mr. Généreux's comment earlier about the earpiece not working wasn't very convincing—and I'm being nice when I say that. In that case, it is possible to raise a point of order, which is often raised in the House, to indicate that the earpiece isn't working and that there is a problem with the interpretation. It's acceptable to ask for words to be repeated, and in the case of Mr. Duclos, those words would have been repeated in French.

I don't understand the argument that was made. So I'm just suggesting that we vote on the motion. These are really precedents that are included. The motion doesn't ask that we go back to the House,

unlike the motion the Conservatives moved in the case of Mr. Drouin. We were talking about sending this motion back to the House, which would have needlessly encroached on its time. In this case, we are simply telling Mr. Brock to apologize to Mr. Duclos in the House. It's really simple to do. Then we should move on.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What's unfortunate is that we've lost the time that was supposed to be devoted to the witnesses from Statistics Canada. Personally, I have two motions pending, but I had initially suggested to my Liberal colleagues that we allow our guests to testify before presenting our motions. That is not at all what happened, and we were not able to question them. I find that deplorable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I agree with Mr. Beaulieu that we didn't wait or take the time to have a discussion with our witnesses, which I think could have been very important.

However, coming back to the motion, the member in question clearly apologized in the House of Commons. Just as you have already dealt with the motion concerning Mr. Drouin, the committee doesn't have the power to compel a member to apologize to the House of Commons. So it's clear.

However, the motion reads as follows:

That the committee recognises that French is just as important to Canada's bilingual status as English, and that French is indispensable to the Canadian identity;

I totally agree. This is important. We're not talking about culture, but about the French language. It's really important for us as a country to determine who we are, and to me it's very personal. I make every effort in the House of Commons to answer, and even ask questions, in French. I encourage my colleagues to speak French, as well as those who are learning the language. I think that's crucial.

I can't say that I'm embarrassed, but it's a bit of an affront to hear that we, the Conservatives, are against the French language and that this is proof of that here, with this person who apologized. I really don't think that's the case. I know that my colleague and many members of Parliament, if not the majority, are learning French and making an effort. We think it's important to do that.

The passage I quoted refers to “essential to the Canadian identity”. That's true. Even the word “*canadien*” is French. So that's part of our identity. That's why I oppose the Bloc Québécois when it says “we are a nation”. Canada is a nation that includes Quebec and francophones.

I'll take my time to explain—

• (1215)

The Chair: Just one moment, please.

I will advise the committee that the House has been suspended, but there will be no vote. That was just to reassure you.

Mr. Joël Godin: For your information, can the committee continue to sit in this case?

The Chair: I'm going to enforce the rule that a meeting started before the bells ring can continue.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm not familiar with that rule.

The Chair: Unless the clerk contradicts me, we can continue.

Mr. Dalton, go ahead.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I'll take my time. In fact, I have to make more effort to speak French, but I like to take advantage of these opportunities.

We heard the story of Mr. Serré's family, which was interesting. We've heard Mr. Samson's story many times. We heard the story of the 1450 war, among other things. We stayed here, we didn't sleep too much, we tried to listen, and it was fascinating. So now it's our turn. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk a little about our personal stories and to explain how important French is for us who represent Canada and are members of the Conservative Party.

Do you agree? So I'm going to continue. Grab your cushions—

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, when you speak French, I could listen to you for a long time. I congratulate you, because you are doing a good job.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much.

There's always someone here who says it's not relevant to the motion. The motion talks about Canadian identity; those words are in the text. All of my remarks are about Canadian identity. I'd argue that. Mr. Beaulieu should appreciate what I'm saying, as should everyone here. I'll do my best.

Think about it, the *coureurs des bois* are francophones. They spoke French.

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

Mr. Marc Dalton: Oh no, not already! Listen—

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Chair, I really appreciate Mr. Dalton's comments. However, he shouldn't be making them here before the committee, but to his colleague from Brantford—Brant. He should focus on the motion before us, because we're talking about *coureurs des bois*, which is far from the subject.

The Chair: I was waiting to make the connection, but I hesitated. I was giving him another 10 seconds.

Mr. Dalton, there are people who want to speak, including your colleague.

Mr. Marc Dalton: It's clear that Mr. Lightbound wasn't here with us recently. He missed a lot of things from his colleagues. I'd ask him for a little patience, please.

The Chair: If I may, Mr. Dalton, I still, every time—

Mr. Marc Dalton: I haven't even started.

The Chair: We all remember the episode you are referring to. In that case, I always called the speaker to order to remind him of the subject of the motion. One word or another, once in a while, brought us back to the minimum.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Okay, I accept the minimum. I'll go back to the motion.

The motion is essential to Canadian identity. I'm talking about the paragraph in the motion that talks about that. This is really important.

Let's go back to the *coureurs des bois*. Yes, I know there were Scots, but francophones were the ones who went all over Ontario and Manitoba, to the Red River, where a colony was established. Do you know why that's important? The Red River was the birthplace of a new people.

Marc Serré, who were they? It's a matter of history. It's—

The Chair: The ball is in your court, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I'm talking about the Métis. There you go. So I'm going to talk about the Métis. Mr. Serré is proud, and I'm a proud Métis. Yes, I'm a Métis.

My roots go back to the Red River colony on my grandfather's side. They continued to explore and trade in beaver pelts. French *coureurs de bois* not only populated Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, but also went to British Columbia. Fort Langley was the first capital of British Columbia. French *coureurs de bois* were there. French Canadians were just across the river from where I live. From the outset, French Canadians were in the west and all the other provinces. That's part of our identity as a people. I agree with this point in the motion. I don't agree with everything in the motion, but I agree with that point. Let's also think about Louis Riel and the ties between Quebec and the people of the Red River.

It's important to point out that we fought for the right to speak French and to be educated in French. That's something we always do in committee. In this committee, all the political parties, the NDP, the Bloc, the Liberals and the Conservatives, we're all here in committee because we want to protect French and advance the rights of francophones and francophiles. We also want to see them develop and progress in French.

We had the opportunity to hold several meetings here in committee where we conducted studies on trade. We want to see people doing business in French. We want them to learn French in school. We really want to. This is important, because we all know that French is an island in an anglophone sea. It's really important to preserve the language. We don't want to lose that jewel. The French language and French culture are a real jewel. That's what really differentiates us from the United States. I think that Quebec is a jewel. It's important to recognize not only Quebec francophones, but francophones across Canada as well.

I talked about my personal story, I talked a little about my Métis side. My mother, who is now deceased, was a Beaudoin. Our lineage goes back to 1640, when the first Beaudoins arrived here. It was among the first families here, in the Quebec City region, on the other side. When I have more time, I'll do more genealogical research, because it's very interesting.

At the beginning of the last century, around 1910, like everyone else, the Beaudoins had very large families. But with most people working on the farm, land was starting to run out. Some people had to move elsewhere to make a living as farmers. So, a few members of my family moved near Amos and Val-d'Or. Families continued to grow. In fact, my grandmother, Alice Beaudoin, had 18 children. Eventually, her family decided to move near Kapuskasing.

• (1220)

Incidentally, I'm still discussing the Canadian identity as a Conservative and as someone for whom it's really important. I'm glad to see that in this motion.

So my grandmother and her family moved to the Kapuskasing area and stayed there for some time. My mother was born in Opasatika, although I'd point out that my grandmother's children weren't all born there. Then, around 1941, they decided to move with the entire family to the Rivière de la Paix region. I don't know if other committee members have had a chance to go there, but a lot of small communities were settled there during the 1930s and 1940s, villages like Falher, Girouville, Joussard and many more. There are villages like that in the region and many other regions as well. You also have Gravelbourg, in Saskatchewan, for example. Anyway, there are a lot of communities like that everywhere.

This is important because families were large at the time. As a result, there was a francophone society across the entire country, one in which people spoke French. What happened is that, with the inventions—right, Mr. Samson?—families got smaller and smaller.

• (1225)

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

We're digressing. I definitely think it's interesting to listen to my colleague Mr. Dalton. I even think I'm going to make a video and send it to his colleague Larry Brock so the latter can understand how important French is to Canada.

Mr. Joël Godin: On a point of order, this isn't a point of order.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: However, I find it hard to see the connection between Mr. Dalton's remarks and the motion before us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lightbound. I know I'm very permissive. Mr. Dalton wants to discuss the motion, which states among other things that French is just as important to Canada's bilingual status as English and that French is indispensable to the Canadian identity. So he has been talking about the Canadian identity for the past five minutes, but he will soon be circling back to the motion.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much for acknowledging that.

The Chair: I do so in a spirit of fairness because let's say this isn't our first discussion about motions.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, that's true. This is our opportunity.

The Chair: This is very educational, Mr. Dalton, and I admit that the *coureurs des bois* are an interesting topic. However—

Mr. Marc Dalton: It's also important for western Canada.

I'm talking about my mother's side of the family, the Beaudoins, because that's part of who I am and part of the history of French culture in Canada, and therefore part of my identity. That's one of the reasons why I'm proud to be here.

What has happened? Here we're studying and discussing the increasingly difficult situation of small francophone communities because we can see they're depopulating. More people are settling in major centres like Edmonton and Vancouver, and the challenge for us is to determine what we can do to improve the situation. That's our responsibility, and it's part of our vision. How can we promote this culture and afford the francophone community opportunities to speak French? That's the major challenge that immigration represents. We're talking about all that and about how important the French identity is to Canada.

My father, on the other hand, was a Dalton. The first Daltons lived in the Montreal region in 1760. Edouard Dalton was born there. It's interesting to note that he was born before the *Conquête*, in 1760. The English invaded Montreal in 1761. One wonders how that was possible. The Irish didn't really like the English at the time and were quite close to the French. There's even a Rue Dalton in Montreal, which the members from that city may previously have crossed. When you see it, think of my family, who lived there long ago.

I'm still thinking about the Canadian identity. It's really personal for me.

• (1230)

Mr. Marc Serré: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'd like to understand the connection between Mr. Dalton's remarks and Mr. Iacono's motion. If he wants to discuss the Canadian identity, he can discuss it directly with Mr. Brock, as Mr. Lightbound mentioned, because I think he needs to be educated.

What connection does Mr. Dalton's speech have with the motion?

The Chair: My understanding is that Mr. Dalton is saying that he agrees with Mr. Iacono's motion, particularly its second half. That's the connection, and he's telling us why he wants the committee to accept this motion.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I'm discussing the motion.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair, and I beg my colleagues' pardon.

Mr. Dalton, what you say is very interesting, but I'd like to get back to the second last paragraph and to stay on topic. You're discussing the Canadian identity, but the purpose of the matter before us isn't to define that identity. Instead it's to advance arguments concerning what happened in the House of Commons, by which I mean the disrespectful behaviour toward all parliamentarians and Canadians, especially old-stock francophones, when one member rose and told another that he wasn't satisfied with the answer he had received because it wasn't in English.

My motion doesn't address identity. I'm very sensitive to your remarks, but it's the actions taken and words spoken in the House of Commons that I consider relevant.

Mr. Chair, I know I'm the next speaker, and I will wait for you to give me the floor because I've listened to everything.

I just want to make a point. Many things are being said, but we're digressing from the facts and from what happened in the House. Canadians are watching us, and I believe they already know what the Canadian identity is. I think it's important to focus the debate back on what happened in the House and that we must discuss it. That's why I've introduced my motion.

The Chair: I understand, Mr. Iacono, but we are in the midst of a debate. Even though the connection between one speaker's remarks and the content of the motion before us is tenuous, it is traditional for us to allow him to continue. Since I've been chairing this committee, I've only once had to call a person to order and give the floor to the next speaker, and that was because the person had said the same thing three times when I had told him he had three strikes.

In this instance, Mr. Dalton is addressing a specific part of your motion. I'm listening to him, and he seems to be explaining why he supports the motion and how it all relates to the Canadian identity.

● (1235)

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I will therefore allow you to continue, Mr. Dalton, while reminding you that your colleagues Mr. Iacono, Mr. Godin and Ms. Gladu also wish to speak.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, I'm discussing part of the motion. There are other parts, and I'm going to discuss them too. Mr. Iacono will have his turn. I thank him for his patience.

On my father's side, the Dalton name comes from the Métis side of his family, who lived near Saint-Albert, a francophone region. However, his father was born in Villeneuve, which is why he was named Pierre-Arthur Villeneuve at birth. He has never discussed that name with me, but he comes from the former village of Villeneuve. He met my mother, who was a teacher, in Joussard, a small village near Slave Lake, and they married.

My father was in the Canadian Army for 36 years. He enlisted during the Korean War. Here I want to point out a significant connection with the national identity. He was stationed at Baden-Soellingen, a former Canadian Army base at the time, where there was a very strong Canadian military presence, and that's where I was born, in West Germany, during the Cold War.

The Chair: We're straying from the Canadian identity.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I'm talking about the Canadian Forces, about my history and my identity as a Canadian. Did you know that French is the first language I learned, Mr. Chair? I know that's not obvious now, but it's the language I spoke until I was three years old. I spoke neither German nor English.

I hope my colleagues are taking notes. I want to review the history of the Canadian Army, which isn't just English Canadian. It also includes French Canadians who were very brave. English and French Canadians fought in both world wars and died on the battlefields. A reminder that Remembrance Day is coming.

In short, I agree with Mr. Iacono's motion. The importance—

The Chair: Just a moment, please, Mr. Dalton. We have to do a sound test with Ms. Ashton.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Good afternoon. I can hear you. Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right. Pardon me, I was speaking in my capacity as the NDP's heritage critic in the House and am now back with the committee.

The Chair: We can hear you loud and clear.

I'm going to let Mr. Dalton continue his excellent speech on Mr. Iacono's motion.

Mr. Marc Dalton: So we're talking about battlefields where English Canadians, French Canadians, indigenous people and Métis—of which I am one, as I told you—gave their lives for this country. They fought and gave their lives for values, including our linguistic duality, the fact that our country is anglophone and francophone and that it possesses two official languages and two cultures.

In 1759, James Wolfe won the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, and New France thus became a British possession. Don't forget, however, that the American Revolution occurred a little to the south a few years later, in 1776. The Americans offered to join forces with the former New France, which at the time was part of the United Kingdom, to drive the English out of the country.

What happened then? The francophone and Catholic communities realized that their rights, language and religion were better protected under the English regime than under the Americans. Great Britain granted them considerable freedom at the time. They had an opportunity to join the United States but chose to fight against the Americans. You can see the sites where the battles took place in the areas surrounding Montreal and Quebec City, and at many other locations.

● (1240)

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, come to order, please.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, I'm talking about the Canadian identity, which is really—

The Chair: Help me understand.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, this has really been a fundamental part of our identity for hundreds of years. I'm trying to show that the Conservatives agree the French language is important. It's been said that we aren't in favour of the French language, but that's not true. It's as though they're saying we aren't Canadian. The French language is part of the Canadian identity, isn't it?

I was talking about Canadian military members, and we have regiments like the 22nd Regiment based in Quebec City.

My father was based in Quebec City and Chibougamau. When I was three years old, my family moved to the south, far from London, to Clinton to be more precise. My father began training at the radar stations. The children there spoke English and made fun of me because I couldn't understand them. I couldn't speak English. I remember my mother telling my father that they had to speak to me in English. My mother regretted her decision for many years because I lost my French, even though it's true that I now still speak a little.

So we went and lived on military bases in Alberta, north of Vancouver Island and in Chibougamau. We were living in Chibougamau when I was a teenager. My mother tried to force me to speak French, but I didn't want to do it. She sent me to live with relatives in Opasatika, not far from Kapuskasing. So I lived with members of my family who spoke only French. Personally, I still didn't want to speak French. I spoke to American tourists when I was at Opasatika Lake. My parents were angry with me because I didn't learn much French.

When I lived in Chibougamau, I attended an English Catholic school. My parents enrolled me in the French comprehensive school when it opened, but that only lasted a day or two. I wasn't happy and I went back to the anglophone school.

I was always very competitive at school. I always wanted to be the best in every subject. I competed with my sister Danielle, who's now a judge, but that's another story. I'll come back to it if I have time. It's unrelated to the motion for the moment. French was my worst subject; I even failed my French course. All the other kids in my class in Chibougamau spoke French, but I preferred to clown around.

Life went on: I earned my high school diploma and started travelling to Mexico, where I lived for a few months. So I had to speak Spanish. I started learning it, and that made me want to learn other languages. I thought it was really worthwhile to do it. So I decided to learn French and took correspondence courses. A few years later, I enrolled at Simon Fraser University and studied to become a teacher.

• (1245)

I became a history teacher, to the delight of my mother, a French second language teacher. Those poor kids! Anyway, I completed a master's degree and taught for many years, seven in primary school and another seven at the secondary level. I then became a provincial MLA, but wasn't re-elected, then went back to the high school where I had taught 16 years earlier. I taught French second language to grade 8, 9 and 10 students for six years.

The most important thing for me was for them to have a positive experience. They often forgot how to conjugate various verbs, but I wanted to give them an opportunity to communicate, to enjoy themselves and to want to speak French. That's what I wanted. What we want here, as individuals and as a committee, is to make Canadians want to promote French. We don't just want to maintain French in its present position; we also want it to flourish. French is very important for us.

As a teacher, I also observed that many students were enrolled in immersion programs. I'd like to discuss the importance of immer-

sion a little more in our current study because I think it's a missing piece of the puzzle. Much of the vitality of the francophone outside Quebec is found in the schools. In a way, they've replaced churches as language transmission centres. That's one of the reasons why we're conducting this study on education from early childhood to the post-secondary level. It's a very important study, but I think we should also focus on immersion programs or else conduct another study.

I'm still talking about the Canadian identity here. In the immersion programs, there are nearly half a million....

Mr. Chair, at this point, with your permission, I'd like to yield to my friend and colleague Ms. Gladu because I'd like a glass of water.

• (1250)

The Chair: If you've finished, others have requested the floor before Ms. Gladu. First, there's Mr. Iacono. Then it will be Mr. Godin's turn and, lastly, that of Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I can finish my story another day.

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Iacono, go ahead.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to clarify a few points because Canadians are watching us and some of them are no doubt trying to understand what's going on today.

I'm going to quote some of the comments that were made after the incident and that were reported on the CBC Lite website. They're unfortunately in English, but they'll nevertheless help clarify the exact words that my colleague used when he made his comments to the minister concerning the fact that the latter had answered him in French. They are as follows:

Actually, I'll start instead by citing the following remarks made by Mr. Duclos:

[*English*]

"What we just heard is an insult to all Francophone MPs in this House, including Conservative MPs," Duclos said in French. He later called on Brock to apologize.

Rising on a point of order after question period, Brock said he wasn't able to hear Duclos's response "because of commotion in the House."

"My volume wasn't working correctly on my headpiece. That's why I made the reference," Brock said.

"Clearly I recognize that every member in this House is entitled to respond and ask questions in both official languages."

Speaking to CBC News outside the House, Duclos said Brock's excuse was "very poor."

This is what led me to bring this motion forward. I feel, based on what I'm going to be saying after this, that everything concludes to the conclusion that the francophones are not respected by the allophones in the House of Commons, especially from the opposition party. We have colleagues from the opposition party who pronounce and confirm that they're defending the rights of the French Canadians, yet at that present moment in the House of Commons on October 24—I'm sure Canadians can go back and watch the video of that exact episode—when the comments were made and when the minister got up and responded to him, not a single soul of a Conservative MP got up or made a comment.

That also goes for other members of other parties. I know that some of my colleagues across were present, and I know who wasn't present. However, today we are hearing from the ones who weren't present conclusions that their colleague Mr. Brock excused himself.

I'd like to let Canadians know that Mr. Brock never excused himself correctly in the House of Commons. He made allusions to remarks of excusing himself.

If I read a little further down, Mr. Duclos says:

"I regret to say it's contempt for the fundamental choice that we have as MPs, including Francophone MPs, to express ourselves in the language of our choosing—

As you can see, Mr. Chair, I have a big connection to what the motion is all about, so I will continue:

...In my case, my choice is French. I don't always have the words that come to me easily in English," Duclos said.

"I think he should apologize. Maybe he said it without thinking. But it's up to him to say."

Going forward, the article continues:

Later, on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, Brock apologized in both languages.

"I want to apologize to Minister Duclos and all my colleagues for my comments in question period today," Brock posted.

"Every member of Parliament has the right to speak in the official language of their choice, my comment was inappropriate and I am sorry."

● (1255)

That's beautiful, but let it be known to Canadians and let it be known in this committee room that an apology in person has yet to be made.

Mr. Chair, I have to say that, amongst the members who are here, there are two of us who are privileged. Do you know why? It's because the two of us were sitting just behind Minister Duclos. Therefore, we can see and hear, without our earpieces, what he says and what he responds. We're also even more privileged to say, Mr. Chair, that MP Lightbound and I, who sit two seats apart, were facing our esteemed colleague of the Conservative Party when he answered his question and when he responded ungraciously to the minister with his comments.

We saw his actions of wrongdoing and, to the greatest surprise—you've heard me cite this here before—he stated, "My volume was not working correctly on my earpiece. That is why I made the reference." Wow. Do you want to know something, Mr. Chair? He wasn't wearing an earpiece when all this happened.

Every member in the House of Commons who has a problem with their earpiece, just like our colleague did before or like our other colleagues have done in the past, right away when they can't hear translation or they can't hear somebody speaking, makes a sign to the Speaker of the House. He wasn't wearing an earpiece, so how can he make such comments to the media? How can he get up in the House of Commons and conclude in front of Canadians that his earpiece was malfunctioning when he didn't have it to start with?

That's even more insulting to French-speaking people. Not only that, but somebody of his team came to get him and bring him into the lobby so he could come back calmly and make somewhat of an apology. There was no apology, Mr. Chair, because my esteemed colleague Joël and I were present in front of him. The apology was made in the air. It wasn't made to Mr. Duclos, and this is what the motion is talking about—that an apology should be made.

● (1300)

[Translation]

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

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I'm discussing the motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: When I raise a point of order, Mr. Chair, you have to stop everything and allow me to speak.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I would appreciate it if my colleague opposite would give me a chance to finish what I was saying.

The Chair: Wait a minute.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor; it's true. However, when a point of order is raised, I momentarily halt proceedings to listen to the member who raised it. I will come back to you later.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I've been a member of this committee since 2015, and my colleague has been here since 2015 too. He should understand the procedures, but that's another problem.

Mr. Chair, it's 1:00 p.m. I request that we suspend and resume debate at our next meeting. Unfortunately, I had an amendment to move, but I haven't had the time to do so. I move that we stop for today and postpone discussion to the next meeting.

The Chair: Allow me a few seconds.

I believe I have previously proceeded by unanimous consent. I have adjourned meetings for technical reasons so we could resume exactly where we had left off on the list. Does everyone consider that suitable?

Adjourning a sitting terminates the meeting, but we will nevertheless resume where we left off, as though we had merely suspended. We are proceeding in this manner for technical reasons. I want to confirm that this will be stated in the notice of the next meeting.

On the list, I have Mr. Iacono, who will complete his remarks, then Mr. Godin and Ms. Gladu. I see that everyone is in agreement.

Ms. Ashton, did you raise your hand? No? That's fine. We will therefore resume exactly where we left off. We are adjourned.

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