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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 118 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

In order to avoid acoustic incidents, I would like to remind participants who are here in person that they must wait for me to call on them before speaking and turning on their microphones. They should also keep their earpieces as far away from the microphone as possible.

I also ask them to read the small card in front of them on the table.

So we're picking up exactly where we left off in the debate on Mr. Iacono's motion.

When the last meeting was adjourned, the list was as follows: Mr. Iacono had the floor, followed by Mr. Godin and Ms. Gladu. That's the order of the speakers I have on the list for now. I see that Mr. Dalton has his hand raised, so I'll add him to the list too.

We'll start with Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to my colleagues this morning.

Mr. Chair, by way of context, I would like to remind you that last Thursday, October 24, Conservative MP Larry Brock criticized the fact that Minister Duclos provided an answer in French to a question put to him in English.

A series of incidents followed. Last Tuesday, at a meeting of this committee, I presented the following 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;

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

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

That the Committee recognize 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 the face of repeated anti-Francophone remarks by his MPs.

After spending an hour using delaying tactics to prevent a vote on this motion last Tuesday morning, MP Godin made the following remarks during debates in the House of Commons on Tuesday afternoon: "Canada is a bilingual country that uses French and English. Let us not forget that." He made a strong case for the French fact. I'll say it again: He made a strong case for the French fact. These are powerful words, and I continue: "We need to protect this bilingualism. It is a strength that attracts people who have the chance to be able to use both languages."

If the French fact is so important to him and his party, why did no one on the other side of the House object to the comments made by the member for Brantford—Brant last Thursday, when my colleagues and I witnessed the scene?

It's very interesting that there was no intervention other than to start shouting at us.

For the Canadians who are listening this morning, for Canada's francophones and for the 80% of the population, as Mr. Godin said last Tuesday afternoon in the House, who approve of bilingualism, will the opposition parties affirm the importance of French by demanding an apology in the House for the disrespect of the member for Brantford—Brant?

The Conservatives must stop saying one thing and its opposite and must shoulder the weight of their words. I repeat that, for the 80% of the population who support bilingualism and for francophones in Quebec and the rest of Canada, these are the words that Mr. Joël Godin was saying, shouting and inventing in the House of Commons.

Why does he refuse to allow his colleague to apologize in the House of Commons for his lack of respect for francophones and the French language?

Mr. Chair, the Conservatives' lack of respect for francophones is a recurring theme. Once again, in the face of such disrespect, I have never seen another Conservative MP stand up and challenge the actions and words of other MPs.

On October 24, MP Larry Brock objected to a response in French from Minister Duclos. On November 23, 2023, MP Rachael Thomas demanded answers in English from Ministre Pascale St-Onge to her questions at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. It was at a committee meeting.

Soon, when I answer or speak in English, my colleagues opposite will probably tell me I should speak in French.

To top it off, in 2019, a Conservative MP from Quebec, Mr. Luc Berthold, criticized Minister Diane Lebouthillier in the House of Commons for answering in French to questions asked in English.

Enough is enough.

Will my Conservative colleagues on this committee continue to bury their heads in the sand when their colleagues disrespect francophones, or will they call them to order and demand an apology in the right place?

I don't know if they're capable of doing that. They never have.

Member Larry Brock lied in the House and his colleagues are repeating and amplifying his lie. He did it on a point of order after question period. I was still sitting in my seat. My colleague Mr. Lightbound and I sit in front of him. We saw the whole thing. We saw the scene and the way the Conservatives acted in that situation and their lack of respect for the French language, for French-speaking MPs and for all French-speaking Canadians.

I'll quote what the MP said when he returned to the House:

• (1110)

[*English*]

“My volume was not working correctly on my headpiece. That is why I made the reference.”

[*Translation*]

This is nonsense.

Madam Clerk, just to clarify the importance of the motion we're talking about today in relation to the incidents—

The Chair: Mr. Samson, would you please mute your microphone?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I apologize. I had moved the video window on my screen.

The Chair: You may continue, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

So as not to lose the thread, I'll repeat.

Member of Parliament Larry Brock lied in the House of Commons. His colleagues repeated and amplified his lie. On a point of order, he said after oral question period:

[*English*]

“My volume was not working correctly on my headpiece. That is why I made the reference.”

[*Translation*]

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

The Chair: Please wait a moment, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Godin has a point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I wonder about the use of certain words.

Can MP Iacono say that some MPs lie?

Maybe I'd like to consult the clerk about that.

Does a member have the right to say that another member is lying, and must we accept this?

The Chair: From what I understand, he was in the middle of explaining what he was referring to and didn't get a chance to finish his sentence.

• (1115)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, as soon as he spoke, he said that the member was lying.

I could say you're a killer and then explain why. I don't have the right to say you're a killer. That would be decided later.

My question is quite simple: is using the word “lie” when referring to another MP allowed in parliamentary language?

The Chair: Indeed, Mr. Iacono, until proven otherwise, we could use more suitable parliamentary language.

I'm trying to find a synonym, but I'll leave you with this. I'll think about it, but go on with what you were going to say.

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

The Chair: Wait a moment, Mr. Godin.

Continue, but use different words. Perhaps you could say that the member's comments were not accurate.

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

Mr. Chair, you are not supposed to tell a member what words to use.

I'd like you to tell me if the use of the word “lie”, when one is talking about another MP, is allowed in parliamentary language?

The Chair: As I just explained to Mr. Iacono, this is not parliamentary language. There's nothing to prevent me, as chair, from suggesting synonyms to someone, for example, to say that comments weren't accurate or didn't reflect reality.

You could say that the member didn't tell the truth, which is even more direct. I allow myself the flexibility, as chair, to help a member of any political party.

Mr. Iacono, I'll let you get on with it.

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

I'm going to withdraw the word “lie” and replace it with “distort the facts”.

Madam Clerk, in order to clarify the importance of the motion we're talking about today, which relates to last Thursday's incidents in the House, can we view the segment from Oral Question Period on October 24, 2024, at 3:03 p.m. and 54 seconds?

The Chair: Wait a moment, Mr. Iacono.

I'm told there's no technical way to reproduce this segment, both for those in the room and those in virtual mode.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's unfortunate.

Canadians who watched the House debates last Thursday could see that Larry Brock was not wearing his earpiece. For those who would like to see the recording, it was at 3:03 p.m. and 54 seconds. He wasn't interested in the answer and, without any embarrassment, attributed his lack of respect for francophones to a fake equipment failure. That says it all. It's really disappointing to see such gestures, because it's simply a question of language. He doesn't respect francophones, since he has repeatedly decided not to wear his earpiece. I've witnessed it myself, because I sit opposite him in the House.

Moreover, on Tuesday, my esteemed colleagues on the other side shouted loudly that he had apologized in the House; when I made my speech and mentioned the equipment breakdown, they shouted that this was indeed the cause. Yet my colleague Mr. Godin was not in the House when the event occurred. However, my colleague Mr. G n reux was present. It's nothing personal, Mr. G n reux—

• (1120)

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

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

Mr. Jo l Godin: Mr. Chair, if we apply the same rules as in the House, we don't have the right to talk about the presence or absence of members in committee either. My colleague, who has been an MP since 2015, should know the rules. What's more, I think he's a lawyer. So I think he was already manipulating the rules in his daily life, before he was an MP.

I'd like you to rule on this, Mr. Chair. Does my colleague have the right to mention, in committee, my presence or absence from the House?

The Chair: That's an excellent theoretical question. Indeed, we all know that in the House of Commons, it's forbidden to mention someone's absence, although some members of certain political parties go out of their way to do so almost every day. They are called to order, but in the end, the damage is done.

However, here we are in committee and, honestly, I don't have the answer at my fingertips. I don't want to waste time talking about it. If you don't mind, I'd like to say that we should refrain from mentioning, in committee, the absence of people in the House of Commons, whatever the period in question. I would infer that to be the case. Committees are creations of Parliament, so I imagine that by association, this rule applies, but we can agree today that it's peculiar to mention this in committee.

So, Mr. Iacono, I propose that in committee, we apply the same rule that applies in the House of Commons, that is, we don't mention the absence or presence of people in the House of Commons.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Jo l Godin: In fact, Mr. Chair, what I'm asking you is to come back to the committee with a very clear decision. I understand that you don't have the information today, but I'm asking you to tell us, at a future meeting, whether we have the right to do this or not. You didn't say we're not allowed to do it, you just suggested to Mr. Iacono that he shouldn't do it. That's my understanding. If that's the case, I ask you to confirm it, and then we can move on.

The Chair: I've just read Standing Order 116, which sums up what I've just said even better than I can. Indeed, by inference, the rules of the House must be observed in committees, insofar as they apply, which is the case here.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I apologize and withdraw my comments.

I'd like to ask some questions of my colleagues opposite, who loudly proclaimed that Mr. Brock had apologized in the House last Thursday. How can they say that? Where did they learn or read that he had apologized? Last week, I referred to the texts published in the media, in which it was made very clear that Mr. Brock had only apologized in the media, on the platform X or on other social networks. He has never apologized to the minister or to the House of Commons.

Furthermore, I'd like to ask my colleagues opposite, those who were present and especially those who weren't—I'm referring to everyone—how they came to the conclusion that the MP in question had put on his earpiece. How did they know whether it was working or not? Why do they say that MP Brock got up in the House to tell the Speaker that there was a technical problem, something he never did? How did my colleagues opposite come to these conclusions after viewing the video of the House of Commons proceedings? They misrepresented the facts.

Mr. Chair, I ask that the committee proceed to a vote on the motion. I hope it will be adopted.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

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

I'd like to express my appreciation for my colleague Mr. Iacono's comments about my passion for defending official languages. He confirmed that I had the privilege, as a member of Parliament, to stand up in the House of Commons on Tuesday to demonstrate my full commitment.

I was pleased to propose a motion to conduct a study on the educational continuum for Quebec's English and French-speaking communities. Unfortunately, on Tuesday, my colleague tabled a motion that we believe is far-fetched. I'll explain why later, Mr. Chair.

I think all stakeholders in Canada's official language minority communities are being shortchanged by the Liberals, once again.

At the end of the last session, in May and June, there were seven meetings that we couldn't hold, because a member had told witnesses that they were full of something that starts with "s". I'll let you complete the sentence, Mr. Chair. We're not talking about "full of love". I won't go any further. The MP had treated these people disrespectfully. Some witnesses no longer wanted to appear before the committee, because they didn't accept being treated that way.

There's a journalist in the room. It's important to remember that, at the end of the meeting, the MP said he wouldn't apologize. When he left the caucus on Wednesday, he paid lip service to the fact that if he had hurt people's feelings, he was sorry. I can't believe it.

What's important is how long it took for this MP to apologize. He appeared before a committee to read a text without necessarily respecting procedures. His colleagues probably put pressure on him, and I thank his colleagues for making him see reason.

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

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

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask why we are talking about Mr. Drouin here. The motion is about how Mr. Brock was disrespectful to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Mr. Duclos. That's what the motion is about.

I would like to know what relevance Mr. Godin's comments have. The motion stems from the fact that Mr. Brock was really irresponsible and disrespectful to Mr. Duclos on the floor of the House of Commons.

The Chair: I'd like to say two things.

Thank you for your comments, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Godin, is what you're saying related to the motion?

I will tread carefully, because I was chairing the committee when the incident with Mr. Drouin occurred. I will let you continue, as long as your comments are relevant to the motion under consideration. I'm giving you a little leeway to see how you're going to tie it all together or bring it all back to the motion.

You have the floor again, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: My colleague's question is very relevant, and I will help him understand the connection between what I am saying and the current motion, which concerns apologies on the part of members for their behaviour in the performance of their duties.

In case my fellow member Mr. Serré cannot make the connection, I'm talking about apologies. The motion does say "apologize". I think it's an easy connection to make.

• (1130)

The Chair: First of all, a motion was proposed in Mr. Drouin's case. We debated it at length. It is over and done with. What does it have to do with this motion?

I remember that I even had to rule Mr. Godin's motion out of order, and the committee overturned the chair's decision, by a majority, I might add. What I mean is that the matter is settled—it's been decided and dealt with.

How does what you're saying relate to this motion?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we're talking about elected officials who did certain things in the performance of their duties, and we're asking for an apology. We spent seven meetings asking for an apology in Mr. Drouin's case. I refer to that because now the roles are reversed. In the spring, it was a Liberal member, and now this motion is aimed at two Conservative members.

Past testimony on this motion is about the actions of elected officials. I'm referring to Mr. Iacono, but I'll be referring to Mr. Lightbound later as well.

I think it's important to give us an opportunity to express our views on this, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: As long as you're debating the motion, I'll let you do so.

Mr. Joël Godin: In that case, I will continue.

I find it odd that the member needed four days to apologize—

The Chair: Are you talking about Mr. Brock?

Mr. Joël Godin: No, Mr. Brock did it very quickly. I'll come back to that later. I'm talking about Mr. Drouin.

The Chair: Okay.

I would ask that we pause for a moment, Mr. Godin.

As chair of the committee, I was there. Everyone was there, except for Marilyn Gladu, who was not yet with us at the time.

When Mr. Drouin made the comments you refer to, which are certainly not parliamentary or appropriate for witnesses, I raised my gavel to reprimand him. Immediately, in the heat of the moment, he apologized before I asked him to do so.

At the time, I did not gauge the extent of Mr. Drouin's remorse, nor could anyone here, by the way. That was not my role. However, even before I admonished him, in the heat of the moment, a few seconds after his inappropriate remarks, Mr. Drouin apologized. That's what happened at committee.

Then a motion was proposed. I don't remember whether it was by Mr. Beaulieu or by you, Mr. Godin, but it was proposed by the opposition. There were consequences of some kind. We discussed the motion and voted on it. We know the facts.

However, on the current motion, I'll let you speak—

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): No, but I remember Mr. Drouin saying, "I'm sorry, but I think you're full of hogwash." I guess it's an apology of sorts—

The Chair: In any case, I will go and see—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We have to see—

The Chair: However, I remember that, in the heat of the moment, Mr. Drouin apologized before I even reprimanded him because I was stunned, as were many people here.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor again, but go back to the current motion.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, from the outset, I simply want to tell you that I wasn't accusing you of not being impartial as chair. I was simply stating the facts, as my colleague Mr. Iacono earlier relayed facts that we feel are not true, let's just say.

Mr. Chair, we're talking about the lack of an apology in the House of Commons by the member concerned. We, the Conservatives, are being accused of not getting him to apologize quickly enough.

My colleague Mr. Lightbound, the member for Louis-Hébert, is accusing us, the francophone members of the Conservative Party, of not defending the French language. Where was he when his colleague made unacceptable comments to the witnesses, as has already been mentioned? It took five days for an apology to be offered.

Before he hurls insults at us for not moving quickly, I would like to remind my colleague from Louis-Hébert, Joël Lightbound, that we were never aware of any measures he took within his party to encourage his colleague to apologize.

Speaking of apologies, Mr. Chair, I have here the verbatim record of what happened in the House of Commons on October 24. I won't read it in its entirety, but if there are questions, you can interrupt me, Mr. Chair.

At 3:02 p.m., Larry Brock rose and asked a question, probably to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Mr. Duclos. Mr. Fergus turned the floor over to Minister Duclos, who said:

Mr. Speaker, you also could have said it in French, because I am going to say something in French that my colleague has already heard several times in English.

Mr. Duclos is asking Mr. Brock to speak in French. Mr. Brock has rights.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1135)

The Chair: Please continue, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm hearing reactions from the other side.

The Chair: Please continue, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: I will read Mr. Duclos's full answer. I didn't make it up. This is a House of Commons document:

Mr. Speaker, you also could have said it in French, because I am going to say something in French that my colleague has already heard several times in English.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: It is very clear that the member opposite is twisting the facts and interpreting things that are not real. I was there. The minister was asked a question. He answered that the answer had already been given several times in English and that he would answer in French. He never said a word about how the member should ask a question or speak in the House.

My colleague across the way is twisting the facts. If he wants to continue to read and twist the facts, I'm going to ask that we watch the video. It is becoming a matter of interpretation, and that's not fair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Indeed, I would remind you that everything members say here must accurately reflect what they know.

Mr. Godin was quoting, if I'm not mistaken, from the House of Commons Debates.

There is no problem as far as the quote is concerned. Perhaps Mr. Iacono was referring to the comments you were making at the same time as the interpretation.

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

If my colleague opposite is reading a copy of the House of Commons Debates, I would like to have the document in hand so that, while he is speaking, while he is explaining and interpreting the text, I can read it as well. Right now, it's hearsay.

The Chair: I'll ask all of you to pause for a second.

The records of the House of Commons are public. They are available online and anyone can read them.

Mr. Godin is quoting from a document he has in his hands. If he were misrepresenting those quotes publicly, there would certainly be questions or consequences.

Public records are accessible. I don't have them in front of me, but anyone can go and check them on their computer after the meeting.

I'm not saying that your comments about the context and its accuracy were wrong, but since these are quotes, I'll let Mr. Godin continue talking about them.

Mr. Godin, to help committee members who would like to go online, can you tell us your source?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, since my colleague is probably new here as a member of Parliament, I will help him.

On the House of Commons website, use the Publications Search tool. Here is the address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Publication-Search/en/?PubType=37>.

Should I continue or can he find it himself?

I don't have to provide that kind of information. I'm describing facts from an official document of the House of Commons.

• (1140)

The Chair: I wanted you to provide that information to the members of the public who are following our proceedings, in case they want to consult the documents.

Mr. Joël Godin: There are numbers, codes and symbols.

The Chair: Is it a House of Commons document?

Mr. Joël Godin: Absolutely.

The Chair: There you go. Carry on.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, rest assured that I would not come to the committee and perjure myself.

My integrity has just been called into question, and I would like an apology from Mr. Iacono.

The Chair: No, Mr. Godin. Mr. Iacono asked a question, and you addressed his concern.

You're quoting House of Commons documents, and everyone can hear you do so. You're reminding us for the third time that these documents come from reliable sources.

Mr. Joël Godin: If you recall Mr. Iacono's comments, he told me that I was distorting and interpreting the statements made. There's a margin. I'm reading a complete text.

The Chair: Please continue, Mr. Godin. I'm listening.

Mr. Joël Godin: People will judge for themselves.

I'll now quote the comments made by the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos on October 24, 2024, at 3:03 p.m., and published in Hansard on page 26912.

Perhaps this will help him even more in his search. We can see on the screen that he's quite busy on his computer.

Mr. Speaker, you also could have said it in French, because I am going to say something in French that my colleague has already heard several times in English.

He knows perfectly well that the Auditor General is independent, that the RCMP is also independent, that both of those organizations are doing their job, and that we will always be there to help them do it.

I have some keywords to help him with his search. These words are: "Canada Border Services Agency", "borders", "GC Strategies", "application software" and "government procurement".

Mr. Brock rose and said: "Mr. Speaker—"

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Godin.

Did you just read us a quote from Mr. Duclos?

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm reading you the full proceedings in the House of Commons.

Mr. Iacono asked to see the videos. Unfortunately, we don't have the technical capabilities for this. I simply want to help him understand the real situation.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, to help everyone understand and keep up with the discussion, you must tell us when you start reading a quote.

Before you quote a person's comments, you need to identify the person. For example, you can say "the Speaker states that", then specify when you finish the quote. You can then start again, specifying what a given minister or member of Parliament responded and saying that you're starting a new quote.

Mr. Joël Godin: You're right, Mr. Chair. I'll do so out of respect for the people listening to us. I should point out that the key words weren't part of Minister Duclos's response in the House of Commons.

Mr. Brock rose and said the following:

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

Liberal corruption is on rinse and repeat. The Auditor General is investigating \$100 million in contracts awarded to GC Strategies, a two-person IT company that did no IT work—

Then it's written:

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

I won't repeat the key words. Then, the Speaker, Greg Fergus, rose and said this:

Order.

It is a very important and basic fact here that questions can be asked in English or in French and that questions can be answered in English or in French.

I am going to ask the hon. member to start from the top.

Then Mr. Brock stood up. This is what he said:

Mr. Speaker, Liberal corruption is on rinse and repeat. The Auditor General is investigating \$100 million in contracts awarded to GC Strategies, a two-person IT company that did no IT work on the failed arrive scam app. The RCMP has already raided the home of GC Strategies founder Kristian Firth as part of an ongoing criminal investigation.

Will the Liberals cut the corruption and, again, get taxpayers their money back?

Mr. Duclos then rose and started speaking.

Mr. Speaker, what we just heard is an insult to all francophone members of the House, including the Conservative members opposite. If he wants to tell me that I do not have the right to answer a question in French in the House, he should rise and say it again.

Later, at 3:15 p.m., the Honourable Minister of Official Languages, Randy Boissonnault, said:

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is very important to note that we have seen a blatant lack of respect in the House for—

Then it's written:

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Then the Honourable Greg Fergus stepped in and said:

Order.

The Chair has already made a statement on this matter during question period.

Then Mr. Brock rose and said:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, in relation to the introduction of my second question, the question was originally in English. [That's what he said.] I was unable to hear the minister's response because of commotion in the House. [I notice that he didn't specify whether he was wearing his headset.] My volume was not working correctly on my earpiece. [That's probably why he wasn't wearing his headset.] That is why I made the reference.

He added this key point:

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

Mr. Fergus, the Speaker, then responded:

The hon. member for Brantford—Brant raises a very interesting point, which is that when people take the floor, referring to the conversation that is happening right now between the member for Pickering—Uxbridge and the member for Lakeland, we cannot hear what is going on if there is too much ambient noise caused by people speaking out of turn. This is a very important point.

Moments later, Mr. Lightbound chimed in and said:

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The member for Brantford—Brant is clearly trying to deny what he did, but everyone in the House knew what he was trying to do. He intimated that the member for Québec should not answer in French. He should apologize. That is the kind of condescension that—

• (1145)

The Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr. Fergus, then rose and said:

The Chair has heard enough on this matter.

I repeat, the Liberals are making francophones and the organizations that get up every morning to defend the French fact in Canada pay dearly. They want us to take the blame for this filibuster. We've come to expect this government to remain inconsistent when it comes to the French fact.

The Prime Minister set up a centre of expertise on francophone immigration, but we don't know what it does.

A podcast was translated in Paris using the French accent, not the Quebec or Canadian accent. We know what happened with bilingual RCMP positions filled by unilingual English speakers. We should also talk about the ArriveCAN application, which doesn't comply with the Official Languages Act. Mr. Brock also spoke about this in one of his questions.

This government appointed a Governor General who doesn't speak any French. Worse still, in New Brunswick, Canada's only officially bilingual province, this government appointed a unilingual English-speaking Lieutenant Governor. The member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Westmount, Ms. Gainey, and the member for Saint-Laurent, Ms. Lambropoulos, don't even acknowledge that French is in decline in Quebec. When Ms. Gainey was introduced in the House, the Prime Minister had difficulty speaking in French. We're talking about a member of Parliament from Quebec here.

An improvised francophone immigration policy gave way to a unilaterally applied cap on the number of foreign students. A complaint regarding this issue was submitted to the Commissioner of Official Languages.

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

You have the floor, Mr. Iacono.

• (1150)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, remember that a motion has been moved and that we're debating this motion. I would like the debate on this topic wrapped up so that we can finally proceed to the vote.

As my colleague across the way says, we don't want to waste the time of Canadians who get up early in the morning. I'm one of the people who want to get back to the topic at hand and stick to it. We want to avoid a whole slew of irrelevant considerations.

In short, if possible, I would like us to get back to today's topic and then move on to the next steps.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

The motion talks about an apology in the House of Commons. Mr. Godin reminded us of the apology requested from Mr. Brock, compared to others. That's my interpretation. As you know, for debates on motions, we traditionally want to remain as permissive as possible. I acknowledge that the argument presented ties in with the motion up for debate. However, I think that we're getting a bit off topic.

The connection between the motion and the arguments will soon begin to weaken, but I'll let you continue.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue to list the measures taken by the current Liberal government—which has been in power for nine years—that show its

inconsistency, lack of interest and lack of will with regard to official languages.

First, remember that the Rouleau commission and the Hogue commission, which report administratively to the Privy Council Office, violated the Official Languages Act.

We talked about the Franco-Ontarian member of Parliament earlier.

We're still waiting for the orders in council needed to implement the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act. This bill was passed in June 2023. It will be November 2024 tomorrow, and the orders in council haven't even been tabled yet.

Regarding the action plan for official languages 2023-28, which lacks transparency and inflates the public service, organizations on the ground aren't seeing the results.

Today, we Conservatives are accused of lacking sensitivity. Our colleague is being asked to apologize, which he did on the X platform. As far as I know, Minister Duclos accepted his apology. Don't say that X fails to provide a good picture. Even the member of Parliament for Louis-Hébert, 15 minutes after leaving the House, posted a tweet. It's funny. Our member of Parliament apologized in both official languages, and it took an hour and 40 minutes at most. By the way, if the Liberals need a reminder, the official languages are English and French.

We're accused of lacking sensitivity to the French fact. I would like to list a few even more compelling facts to show that what's being said isn't necessarily true.

Let's talk about our leader's sensitivity to the French fact. He was adopted by Fransaskois parents. When he was young, they used to tell him that, if he wanted more presents, he had to send his wish list to Santa in French. He grew up in Calgary, where he unfortunately lost his French. As the saying goes, when you're in a relationship, it helps to learn a second language. When he met his wife, a Montrealer with an immigrant background, he fell back in love with the French language. His children are being raised in French. It's their first language spoken at home.

Moreover, our leader speaks fluent French in all his remarks in the House of Commons and in interviews. This factor helped me rally behind him. He's an inspiring leader. Remember that a leadership race was held. I'm now proud to work with him. He has fully entrusted me to advocate for both official languages. I want to thank him for that. Obviously, French is the most fragile language and it's in decline. Our leader also regularly takes part in festivities for Quebec's national holiday, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day; Acadia's national holiday; and so on. He's very sensitive to issues affecting Canada's francophonie.

Canada's Conservatives have been clear. We'll take concrete action to stop the decline of French in Canada. A future Conservative government will make the necessary investments to support the vitality of Canada's francophone communities. Every dollar will be spent on concrete action, not on more bureaucracy in Ottawa and across Canada.

My colleague, Mr. Iacono, reached out to me so that we could do our job. On Tuesday, he decided to table this motion, which cost us this meeting. On Wednesday, you decided, Mr. Chair, to cancel the visit of the witnesses from British Columbia who were scheduled to speak today. I think that you made the right decision.

It's now time to stop. I'm reaching out to Mr. Iacono and all the committee members. I'm reaching out with both hands, because there are two options.

• (1155)

The first option is that he simply withdraws his motion, we move on to committee business and we deal with the education continuum study. The second option is that I move an amendment to the motion. To this end, I would like the meeting suspended.

The Chair: What are you proposing?

Mr. Joël Godin: I propose that the meeting be suspended. I can read the amendment while my employee sends the text to the clerk so that it can be passed on to the committee members.

The Chair: Please pass around the text of the amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'll read it in the meantime.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's what I wanted to say, Mr. Chair. You beat me to it.

I propose to eliminate the first paragraph and keep the second paragraph in its entirety. The third paragraph would be amended.

I'll read the amended paragraph: "That the Committee accept the MP for Brantford—Brant's apologies 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".

There's another paragraph: "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". Lastly, I propose to withdraw the last paragraph of Mr. Iacono's motion.

There you go, Mr. Chair. I think that you already received it.

The Chair: Yes, I have it. Our clerk is extremely efficient.

Before I suspend the meeting temporarily, I would like to remind you of the order of speakers: Ms. Gladu, Mr. Dalton, Mr. Lightbound, Mr. Iacono and Ms. Ashton. In the event of a debate on Mr. Godin's amendment, we'll follow the procedure.

I'll suspend the meeting.

• (1155)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: At Mr. Beaulieu's request, we'll suspend the meeting again.

• (1210)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order. However, before continuing, I'd like to clarify a few things.

As I mentioned earlier, I don't know whether or not someone will propose a motion after Mr. Godin speaks.

Those who raised their hands and whose names I have taken down will have the floor as we continue the debate. That has nothing to do with a possible amendment to the motion.

The next speakers will therefore be Ms. Gladu, Mr. Dalton, Mr. Lightbound, Mr. Iacono and Ms. Ashton. Their comments pertain to the debate on Mr. Iacono's motion as currently drafted. If we start debating an amendment and you raise your hand, it will be for something else.

I don't know yet whether an amendment will be moved.

I yield the floor to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think you've all received the text of my proposed amendment.

Before going any further, I will say that we are wasting time and that official language minority community organizations are yet again paying the price.

At MP Angelo Iacono's initiative, a motion was moved on Tuesday while Statistics Canada witnesses were present.

I'm reaching out with both hands, as I did mention previously.

First of all, I invite Mr. Iacono to withdraw his motion, or to accept the amendment I am now proposing.

The amendment reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by deleting the first paragraph, by replacing the words "request that the MP for Brantford—Brant apologises in the House" with the words "accept the MP for Brantford—Brant's apologies", and by deleting the last paragraph.

The motion goes on to say:

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 is our proposed amendment, Mr. Chair.

I could draw out the debate and repeat what has already been said. I could add further arguments, but in order to be consistent and act in the interest of the official language communities that wish to participate in the study on the minority-language education continuum, I will now stop speaking.

The Chair: Are you proposing an amendment to Mr. Iacono's motion? What exactly are you proposing? You said two things.

Please enlighten the committee on your amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Very well, Mr. Chair.

Actually, I thought I was clear. However, thank you for allowing me to set the record straight and flesh out my comments so everyone can better understand them.

I am proposing two options to committee members.

The first option—

• (1215)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, we all understood that. You said you had two options, but which one do you want us to look at?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I am proposing two options.

I move that the committee withdraw Mr. Iacono's motion. Otherwise, I am proposing an amendment to his motion, which I read to you.

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

I am new to the Standing Committee on Official Languages, but I find it somewhat astounding that, after all these years, there is such a profound lack of understanding of procedure.

Mr. Godin, there is a motion on the table, and it has not been withdrawn. You cannot offer options to the committee. You only have one option: either you move an amendment, or you stop talking and someone else will debate the motion. It's quite simple.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, is that a point of order?

The Chair: It's a point of order. That's why I was trying to guide you by telling you to move your amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

I now remind committee members to be reasonable.

I am officially moving the amendment that I read.

Would you like me to read the text of the amendment again, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, you've already read it and shared it.

Mr. Joël Godin: To be consistent, we must not waste time.

The Chair: You even shared your proposal with the committee. So you're moving your amendment to the motion.

Is that correct?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, and I won't make any speeches in the interest of consistency.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Perfect.

Are there any questions or comments on Mr. Godin's amendment to Mr. Iacono's motion? If not, we'll go to a vote.

I see no questions. We will now vote on Mr. Godin's amendment.

(Amendment negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We are back to the list of speakers who wish to debate Mr. Iacono's motion.

We've reached Ms. Gladu. Then it will be Mr. Dalton's turn.

Ms. Gladu, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'm very disappointed that the amendment didn't pass, because it addressed the concerns that I have with the motion.

I don't like this motion. I don't like the way it was presented. I think we're above this at this committee. We're trying to promote the French language, and I think it is very vindictive and petty to be pointing out people's behaviour.

It's clear that all parliamentarians have made a mistake at one time or another. We know that Mr. Fraser, when he was the minister, was criticized for publishing memos only in English. Mr. Brock, from Brantford—Brant, realized that he had made a mistake, and he apologized, and Minister Duclos accepted the apology.

I think this committee has wasted over three hours talking about this. Clearly it is our job, as committee members, to remind the House of Commons that everyone can speak in either official language, but the way that this is phrased at the beginning, that there is "disappointment at the behaviour of Conservative MPs", it's as though they're lumping everybody together all into one.

I don't appreciate that, because I think I've been very clear that I'm super-supportive of French and English across the country. I've demonstrated that continually at this committee and in the House. You heard Mr. Dalton talk at great length and passionately about his appreciation of the French language, so I don't like lumping them all together.

I also don't like that there's an assumption at the end of it that denounces "the inaction of the Conservative leader in the face of repeated anti-francophone remarks". People have no idea what the leader did or did not do here, so to assume that he didn't take any action is unfair and, frankly, not true.

I don't like this motion, so I would like to move an amendment that would delete, in the first paragraph, "Conservative MPs". Then in the third paragraph, it would say, "That the committee accepts that the MP for Brantford—Brant apologized in the House". Then we keep the next paragraph, but strike the last paragraph.

That's what I think we should do so that we can get back to the good work of the committee.

We have done a lot of good reports here. I think the point that the Liberals wanted to make has been made ad nauseam for three hours, so let's move this amendment and see if we can vote on it and move on.

• (1220)

The Chair: Madam Gladu, I completely understood your proposed modification for the first sentence of the first paragraph.

About the third paragraph, can you repeat it? I just want to make sure it's not the same thing that we just dealt with.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: It is, “That the committee accepts that the MP for Brantford—Brant apologized in the House”, and then strike the last one. It's similar, but not exactly the same.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: People have raised their hands to speak to the proposed amendment.

Mr. Lightbound, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Has Ms. Gladu finished speaking?

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you done, Ms. Gladu, with your amendment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: We are debating the amendment proposed by Ms. Gladu.

Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: We're therefore debating it as long as it's in order. It is quite similar to the one the committee just put to a vote, after all.

I'd like to say a few words about what the member just said. I have enormous respect for her, and I think she is one of the voices of reason in the House and certainly at this committee.

She said it was vindictive and small-minded, but I'd like to remind her of something. Even though she and I were not on the committee, in the case of Mr. Drouin—about whom Mr. Godin spoke to us at length—after he apologized repeatedly, the Conservatives practically wanted him tarred and feathered. That's barely an exaggeration.

A voice: Barely.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: In my opinion, in this case, it could be said that there's a double standard.

Ms. Gladu also mentioned that she didn't like us to paint all Conservative members with the same brush. To that, I would respond with a proverb, “Silence implies consent.” What we witnessed last Thursday with Mr. Brock's behaviour was silence from the members from Quebec. They were somewhat embarrassed and sat back. They said nothing. Even today, before the committee, they are unable to acknowledge that there was reason to apologize and that this behaviour should be condemned. I'm talking about asking another member to speak in a language other than their mother tongue, that is, in this case, French.

Those are essentially the points I wanted to raise.

I would encourage members to vote against Ms. Gladu's amendment.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: We're debating—

The Chair: We're debating Ms. Gladu's amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: All right.

An hon. member: Have we received it?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you may continue. I will rule after your remarks.

Mr. Joël Godin: Have we received it?

The Chair: No, we have not.

Mr. Joël Godin: We should wait until we receive it before commenting.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Chair, I forgot to mention at the end of my remarks that the amendment is out of order because the committee has already ruled on essentially the same thing.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, had you recognized Mr. Lightbound?

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Godin. I believe Mr. Lightbound has a point of order.

Mr. Godin, are you asking that the meeting be suspended?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, I am, because we can't work until we have the document in front of us.

A voice: It's the same thing.

The Chair: It's not exactly the same. We will suspend while the clerk sends us the text of Ms. Gladu's proposed amendment.

• (1220)

(Pause)

• (1230)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I'm ready to rule, but before I do, I'm going to accept a final comment on Ms. Gladu's amendment.

You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before we go any further, I think we need to clarify things. We recognize that the member should not have made that kind of statement, which sowed doubt.

The Chair: All right, but what about the amendment?

Mr. Joël Godin: That is therefore unacceptable.

The Chair: I understand.

Mr. Joël Godin: He apologized and—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I am currently receiving comments on Ms. Gladu's amendment. I'm prepared to rule on that.

Mr. Joël Godin: Very well, Mr. Chair. I'll continue on that subject.

I think my colleague's amendment is reasonable. We are trying to find common ground to provide our colleague with an honourable way out of this impasse.

As my colleague Mr. Lightbound mentioned, “Silence implies consent.” We experienced that last spring. That is why I began my remarks by acknowledging the facts and reiterating that the member apologized on social media—and less explicitly, in the House of Commons. To me, that is equally significant.

It's time to move on, accept my colleague's amendment and return to the study on the minority-language education continuum.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I currently have both amendments before me—that is to say Mr. Godin's, which the committee rejected, and Ms. Gladu's.

The only difference between the two amendments is that, instead of completely deleting the first paragraph, Ms. Gladu is proposing to simply remove the reference to the Conservatives in the plural. It's as if Mr. Iacono's initial motion should pertain only to the persons named, not all Conservatives. The other proposed amendments share precisely the same goal, though they are worded differently.

That's why I think this is essentially the same amendment as the one proposed and rejected by the committee.

Mr. Joël Godin: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Before giving you the floor, Mr. Godin, I'm going to finish my *obiter dictum*.

I reject Ms. Gladu's amendment, although I understand that the first paragraph is worded differently. I think it's perfectly legitimate. However, in my opinion, it is out of order, given that, in the other two paragraphs, exactly the same thing is being requested as what was proposed in the amendment that was defeated.

That said, the rules give the chair a great deal of latitude in making decisions. For the reasons I mentioned, however, I find the amendment out of order. Two out of three paragraphs are similar, which has influenced my reasoning.

Therefore, I rule the amendment out of order.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I would like to interpret your ruling. It's important to understand that the nuance is—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I'm not sure you can interpret my ruling.

Mr. Joël Godin: In that case, Mr. Chair, I will—

The Chair: You can challenge it.

Mr. Joël Godin: I do challenge your ruling, Mr. Chair, and call for a vote.

The Chair: Very well.

I'm sorry to interrupt.

• (1235)

Mr. Joël Godin: That's all right, it's a procedural matter.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, please call the vote.

The vote will be on whether the ruling of the chair shall be sustained.

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

The Chair: We're back to debating the main motion, the only one that still stands. It is now Mr. Dalton's turn. He will be followed by Mr. Lightbound.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Good afternoon.

It's unfortunate that we didn't go with Ms. Gladu's amendment. It was quite reasonable, and this is unacceptable for Ms. Gladu. We are therefore obliged to continue speaking to the motion.

I'm going to speak to the part of the motion with which I agree. If that part had been the entire motion, I think it would have been unanimous.

The passage in question reads as follows:

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

I completely agree with that proposal.

During the break, we talked about Lucky Luke and the Daltons. I read that comic strip as a child. I also used it in my classes, because students liked it. The Daltons mean a lot to me. I identified the most with Joe, because he's the smallest. The Daltons were villains, though.

Canada's identity is important. We see it across Canada and around the world—

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, I would like to speak.

How are these remarks relevant to the motion? We're talking about Mr. Brock.

The Chair: He's telling us. He began his sentence with “Canada's identity”.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, this is part of who we are as Canadians.

When I was young, I spoke more English, but I made the effort to read those cartoons, including *Astérix*, in French. They interested me a great deal.

During the break, I did a bit of research. The Lucky Luke cartoon was created in 1946 by a Belgian author, Mr. Morris. It's a western comic strip that was originally designed in French but is now available in 30 languages. There are 82 volumes of Lucky Luke. Movies were also made featuring this character. So this is something that will—

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, I have to inform you that we're straying from the motion.

Mr. Marc Dalton: All right.

Now I'm going to talk about education.

When I was a teacher, I would organize exchange trips for my French immersion students. We went to Quebec City and Rivière-du-Loup. They were really impressed to see just how much the French fact was a part of Canadian identity. The students stayed with francophone families so they could be immersed in francophone culture. They were eating poutine before you could find it everywhere like you do now. Those trips were a good thing, because the students were there, in a francophone community, realizing what it meant to be Canadian.

Not only did English-speaking students go to Quebec City, but Quebec students also came to British Columbia. It was the first time most of them had ever seen British Columbia's famous mountains. They went to Whistler. They took the ferry to Victoria. They got to see how beautiful that part of the country is and experience an anglophone environment.

What struck me was that it helped the students better understand what it means to be Canadian, thanks to the people they met on those exchange trips. That's as true for the anglophone students who stayed in francophone communities in Quebec as it is for the francophone students who stayed in anglophone communities. As Canadians, we should be proud of our linguistic duality. Canada welcomes immigrants from many different cultures, but our linguistic duality always remains.

Canada is known as one of the world's most open countries when it comes to immigration. That has long been the case, and I think it even goes back to the time of our founding. From the earliest settlements, the francophone and anglophone cultures have existed side by side, as have indigenous cultures. Openness is in our DNA. When the Liberals accuse us, the Conservatives, of being against French, it's like saying we're against our Canadian identity. It's very important to make that clear.

Now I want to tell you about my family. I have three children. The youngest went to a French immersion school. French immersion schools are very popular in Canada. Some 500,000 people in British Columbia have attended French immersion schools. That shows there is an appetite for French. It also has to do with the fact that Canada is officially a bilingual country, and being bilingual means more job opportunities. Another reason is that learning other languages is important. The French fact is very important in Canada, and that's evident across the country.

● (1240)

Still today, parents looking to put their kindergarten-aged children in French immersion programs sometimes have to wait for spaces to open up. That was a problem for me. My daughter Simone was number 42 on the list for a school that had 40 spots. She wasn't able to start French immersion then. We had the right to send our kids to a school within the school board, but, in our case, the school was an hour away by bus, so it wasn't really an option for us.

It's important to understand that there are many francophones in minority communities who have the right to send their children to school within their regional school board, but it's not always a practical or easy thing to do. That is why it's important to have enough schools. It's always a challenge.

Basically, my daughter Simone wasn't able to get into an immersion program, but my youngest daughter was able to go to French immersion school. Even better, she went on to register for the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles program at Simon Fraser University. She did her entire bachelor's program in French, and it worked out well for her. She really learned French. She also took classes at Université de Montréal for six months.

The appetite for francophone culture and French learning is even greater in minority communities. The challenge before this committee and the government is to find ways of supporting the vitality and growth of Canada's francophone community. That is very important.

My youngest daughter went to French immersion school, and it worked out well. My oldest son is 38, and he's a lawyer in Edmonton. He was part of a non-denominational Christian group for six months, and he studied with Youth With a Mission, in Montreal and in Dunham. He also worked in France. He was able to learn some French. My mother encouraged me to speak French, and I did the same with my children. That's what we want.

I want to turn to another subject. As an MP, one of the things I like most about being here, in Ottawa, is how many opportunities I have to speak French, whether it's with the parliamentary security officers, the leaders or staff members. I'm often free to speak French, and that's very encouraging. I like that. Even here, in this committee, I'm glad to be able to speak French right now. I know I need to work on my French, and that's what I'm doing. Thank you for being patient with me, by the way.

I do want to say something about Ottawa. It's a place that illustrates the heart of Canada. It underscores the importance of our linguistic duality. Look at where we are. All we have to do is step outside to see Quebec across the river. Queen Victoria's decision to choose Ottawa as the capital is one of the most important decisions ever made since our country's creation. It is the link between Lower Canada and Upper Canada.

● (1245)

It's crucial to see that relationship between the two. Quebec is mostly francophone. The capital, where we are now, is right on the border of the two provinces. In addition, many members, such as my colleagues, Mr. Généreux and Mr. Godin, live on the other side of the river, in Gatineau. Many other members live not far from here. That's why I think Ottawa is such a good example. I know that French is frequently used in government by parliamentarians, but it is also spoken by a large number of people. There is the University of Ottawa, which I believe has about 20,000 francophone or francophile students.

The city of Ottawa plays a really important role in the francophonie, and I'm happy about that, because we have the opportunity to practice speaking French here. It showcases our country's bilingualism and the importance of French, which are essential elements of Canadian identity. It's the political capital. Culturally, we have the Canadian Museum of History, located across the river in Gatineau, just two minutes away. It is a museum in Quebec that tells the story of Canada.

Canada does not exist without French or without Quebec. It's part of who we are. I remember, back when I was a student and when I was teaching Canadian history, talking about some of the people who really stood out in Canadian history. The first one that comes to mind is Jacques Cartier. He stood out, not because he discovered an unknown land, since Canada was already inhabited by indigenous peoples, but because he introduced the Europeans who came here in 1534 to the land. Jacques Cartier was also a cartographer. He sailed up the St. Lawrence River and made his way to Stadacona, which is now Quebec City, and then to Hochelaga, which is now Montreal. I believe there were about 3,000 indigenous people in Stadacona.

• (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, do you think that the subject of this motion was of any concern to those people?

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, Mr. Chair. If this is not essential to the Canadian identity, then what are we doing here? It's important; it's what Canada is built on. When we talk Canada's foundation, we're talking about our roots. Mr. Chair, I'm not talking about my own roots now, but maybe I'll talk more about that later. I'm talking about Canada's roots.

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

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

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

We have five minutes left in the meeting. I'm concerned that we're straying from the motion. I don't think anyone is saying that Mr. Dalton doesn't believe in the importance of French. Based on his remarks, it's clear that he does.

However, we're debating a very important motion about a Conservative member who hasn't apologized for showing a flagrant lack of respect for the French language and the francophonie. I would like us to get back—

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: I would like us to get back to the motion and vote on it. Then we'll be able to get back to our study on the continuum of education in French, which Mr. Dalton and others are very interested in.

Let's be honest about what's going on here. This is a filibuster, and people are protecting a Conservative member who has shown a flagrant lack of respect for the French language, francophones and the francophonie.

• (1255)

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: I hope we can vote as soon as—

The Chair: Just a moment, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Godin, when someone raises a point of order, we have to listen to it. This is now the second or third time you've said you have a point of order, and I've heard you. I even signalled to you. We have to hear from Ms. Ashton first. Once she finishes her point of order, I will rule, and then we'll listen to you.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: As I said, I hope we can vote on the original motion. People have repeatedly said that the Conservative member in question, Mr. Brock, didn't really apologize in the House. An apology on Twitter is not an apology in the House.

I think we all have a responsibility to show that the committee will not tolerate a flagrant lack of respect for a francophone, for the French language and for the francophonie. We need to show that by voting in favour of the motion.

NDP members are in favour of the motion. We believe that Mr. Brock needs to apologize. I think it's time to do better. Really—

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: We've already wasted enough time.

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: We're not questioning Mr. Dalton's belief in the importance of French, but that's not what the motion is about.

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

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, I understand what you're telling me about the relevance or lack thereof of Mr. Dalton's comments to the motion before us. It's true that the argument you used to explain your point of order about Mr. Brock's lack of apology in the House of Commons is part of the motion.

The latter part of the motion includes wording about the Canadian identity, Canada's bilingual status and the importance of that status. Even though the connection is tenuous, Mr. Dalton has been referring to that in his arguments. When he was talking about Jacques Cartier or Champlain or whoever, I asked him if this subject was of concern to people back then. I think Mr. Dalton got the message, and I'll let him continue.

Mr. Dalton, this is strike two. If there's a third strike, I'm going to move on to the next speaker. I'm letting you continue because you mentioned Canada's identity and bilingual status a few times.

That said, before I give you the floor, I would like to give the floor to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for your point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, as I understand it, a point of order is not an opportunity to debate or summarize everything that has been said.

I think that, as chair, you have an obligation to stop the debate when someone raises a point of order.

The Chair: You're right, but, in Ms. Ashton's case, she provided some context that enabled me to give an even better answer. She referred to the beginning of the motion, which Mr. Dalton didn't talk about in his remarks at all. As Ms. Ashton said, the crux of the motion is the fact that a member cavalierly remarked that a minister had responded to him in English. That's my own polite way of summing it up.

The motion calls on the member to apologize in the House of Commons. I listened to Ms. Ashton's arguments, and I think it's true that Mr. Dalton's remarks had nothing to do with that. However, as I said, the motion contains other elements and other paragraphs, including the one I referred to.

Mr. Dalton can talk about whatever he wants, but it has to be related to the motion. Before he was interrupted, he was talking about Canadian identity. Nevertheless, he went off on a bit of a tangent.

That's strike two. If there's a third strike, I'm going to move on, as I did with another colleague.

Mr. Dalton, please stick to the motion. If you go off on another tangent, I'm going to move on to the next speaker.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Chair, the motion is not just an attack on a member of Parliament. The member obviously made a mistake,

and he immediately apologized for his comments. I believe it was Jesus who said, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. We're all casting stones.

We find that the motion casts stones not only at MP Brock, but also at the Conservatives. That is the subtext to the attitude of certain members and the comments I've heard.

The motion isn't just about MP Brock. It's about all Conservatives. That's their position. They're trying to hide what they truly feel. That feeling came out and affected everyone. I am totally against—

• (1300)

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, I have to interrupt you.

I'm doing the same thing I did last Tuesday. I'm not suspending the meeting; I'm adjourning it.

The notice of meeting will be similar. I will not call the witnesses who were scheduled for next Tuesday's meeting.

Here's the speaking order for when we resume debate next Tuesday. Mr. Dalton will continue his remarks. I would remind him that he's at strike two. Then it will be Mr. Lightbound, Mr. Iacono, Ms. Ashton, Mr. Godin and Mr. Serré.

The meeting is adjourned.

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