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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





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• (1200)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 39 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Since we are starting to get used to it, I don't need to remind you how it works.

Today we are resuming debate on Mr. Serré's motion. At our last meeting, Mr. Beaulieu was telling us about the sub-amendment.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we're resuming the meeting now, I conclude we're no longer in camera.

**The Chair:** We are no longer in camera.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** As I said earlier, François Larocque, Mark Power and Darius Bossé, three law clerks specializing in language, published an open letter this morning. They were also supposed to testify here, which is one of the reasons why we didn't want to shorten debate and why we reacted to the motion that was introduced to limit clause-by-clause consideration and to shorten the meetings devoted to the appearance of witnesses.

In their letter to the editor, the three men state that Bill C-13 "is one of the 10 longest government bills ever drafted". The last revision of the Official Languages Act was conducted in 1988 and was based on the same fundamental principle, a continuing search for symmetry between anglophones in Quebec and the francophone and Acadian communities. However, that principle is now in question, and that's a far more important change.

They also contend that there's a consensus on the need to "break with a stultifying status quo that threatens the survival of French and undermines respect for the rights and reasonable expectations of francophone communities" outside Quebec, and I would add those of the Quebec people as well.

They also note that we should watch out for the bogeymen raised by the defenders of the status quo. For example, one of the main demands of francophones outside Quebec is that the implementa-

tion of the act should be coordinated by a single agency, the Treasury Board. However, the argument that the Treasury Board can't coordinate application of the Official Languages Act because it can't ensure that programs will be delivered is one of the bogeymen raised in that regard. However, it has never been suggested that the Treasury Board should be called upon to deliver programs.

We also support the request that francophones outside Quebec have made, that the Treasury Board coordinate and oversee the administration of the act because it controls the purse strings, which would make it possible to avoid what we've had over the past 50 years, which is an ineffective act that doesn't really guarantee the provision of French-language services outside Quebec. I would add that this also contributes to the anglicization of Quebec.

The second bogeyman is the idea that Bill C-13 should be passed "without delay". The authors of the open letter note: "A little objectivity and realism are called for. Some historical context as well." We aren't opposed to historical context. "The reform in the 1980s," they write, "ran to 45 pages and 111 clauses," and "Bill C-13 was of similar length, 64 pages and 113 clauses." They add that the 1980s reform required the House of Commons to hold 17 meetings with witnesses for a total of 34 hours and that clause-by-clause consideration took up 8 meetings.

That's in striking contrast with what's happening today. Since June, Bill C-13 has been the subject of 10 meetings with witnesses, for a total of 18 hours, whereas five more meetings have been used to debate government motions to limit testimony and the duration of clause-by-clause consideration. Despite the imposing size and complexity of Bill C-13, the government has attempted to limit its study since the Standing Committee on Official Languages first met and did so again on November 1 by proposing that clause-by-clause consideration be limited to a maximum of 7 hours and that it conclude on December 1.

This is why we're opposed to this motion. It's not that we don't think it's important to defend the French language, on the contrary. We think we need to take the time to do things right.

The Government of Quebec has presented some 30 amendment requests, and the Commissioner of Official Languages has drawn up nearly 40. We need to take the time to consider them properly.

Lastly, the three law clerks conclude that Bill C-13 must be amended in order for it to achieve its objectives, even if that it a little time. What's worth doing at all is worth doing well.

My sub-amendment is proposed with this in mind. Since the dates suggested in Mr. Serré's motion are no longer valid and my colleague Mr. Godin's proposed amendment is no longer up to date, and since we're in the midst of our fifth meeting on this subject, I propose that, instead of setting dates, we hold four meetings so we can hear from the Minister of Official Languages, the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Unless I'm mistaken, I believe that the predecessors of those ministers testified during the last amendment, in 1988.

It's therefore important that we hold a two-hour meeting with each of those ministers and plan four additional meetings to hear from the final witnesses, including the three individuals who wrote this open letter, Mr. Bossé, Mr. Power and Mr. Larocque.

I think that's very important.

There is nothing unreasonable or unusual in what we're requesting. It's entirely consistent with normal procedure. We are simply asking that we accept the fact that this is a major amendment and that it's important. Consequently, we must have the time to do the work effectively.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Godin, you are the next speaker on the list.

It was actually the turn of Mr. Samson, who was here last week, but it's your turn now.

The floor is yours.

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** I'm happy to replace him since we get along well, despite the fact he's a member of the Liberal Party. He's an Acadian who's very sensitive to the French language. So it's an honour for me to speak in my colleague Mr. Samson's stead.

First of all, Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the Bloc Québécois for drawing inspiration from my notice of motion that was distributed on November 1.

Before going any further, I'd like to request unanimous consent for that notice of motion to be made public.

**The Chair:** Are you referring to your notice of motion?

I think it already is.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm referring to my notice of motion of November 1.

Pardon me, but it was November 10.

**The Chair:** Yes, it's the one from November 10.

We will suspend for a moment.

We will now resume with the notice of motion of November 10.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, to ensure that we're all on the same wavelength, allow me to read it out loud since this is the first time we've discussed it publicly.

Notice of motion, Joël Godin, Member of Parliament, Thursday, November 10, 2022:

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

a. The committee conclude its hearings of evidence after six two hour meetings, with four meetings devoted to the appearance of the ministers concerned and their representatives for two hours at a time, namely (i) the Minister for Official Languages, (ii) the President of the Treasury Board, (iii) the Minister of Canadian Heritage—

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** One moment please, Mr. Godin.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** With all due respect, I'd like to make sure I understand where we stand now since I wasn't here last week.

What sub-amendment are we debating?

We're debating a sub-amendment, but my colleague's reading a notice of motion. I don't see the connection between the two.

I just want to ensure everyone's following the process.

**The Chair:** We are debating the first sub-amendment moved by Mr. Beaulieu to Mr. Godin's amendment.

Mr. Drouin, I thought you were going to discuss the amendments you want to withdraw, but you're discussing another motion.

The floor is yours, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I actually requested unanimous consent when I had the floor and was discussing my colleague Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment.

I want to thank the Bloc Québécois for being inspired by my notice of motion of November 10. I requested unanimous consent because the notice wasn't public. We have to be well informed for everyone to be on the same page.

I read it to provide everyone with clear and accurate information on my notice of motion, which is now public.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Is that related in any way to the debate on Mr. Beaulieu's first sub-amendment?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** I'll let you continue. Go ahead.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, the problem is that I don't know where I was.

**The Chair:** Reread the paragraph.

**Mr. Joël Godin:**

(ii) the President of the Treasury Board, (iii) the Minister of Canadian Heritage, (iv) the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; and two meetings devoted to the appearance of other witnesses, including lawyers from Power Law for two hours, as well as the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario and other witnesses suggested by the committee members...

The words "Power Law" in the French version of the motion should be replaced by "Juristes Power". That was an error on my part.

I'll continue reading.

- b. The committee proceed to clause-by-clause consideration of the bill at the next meeting; and,
- c. Amendments to Bill C-13 be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 5:00 p.m. ET on the day of the last appearance of witnesses and distributed to the committee members in both official languages at least 4 hours prior to the first meeting devoted to the clause by clause consideration.

Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, I can't make heads or tails of this. I don't know what you meant to suggest, but I thought what you wanted to present to us was somehow related to Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** It is.

**The Chair:** We aren't talking about the same things now. It's as though you wanted to propose a sub-amendment to the sub-amendment.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** That's not the case.

Mr. Chair, I asked—

**The Chair:** I understand what you asked, but—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Now I am asking the committee to take a position. I'm requesting unanimous consent for this notice to be public.

Do I have the committee's unanimous consent?

**The Chair:** That's not a problem. You may go ahead.

I thought you wanted to make a connection with Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Yes, there is a connection.

**The Chair:** What is it?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Before making the connection, I ask that the committee decide whether this notice of motion can be made public.

**The Chair:** Did you just read it?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Is there another paragraph or two?

Go ahead.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I've finished.

**The Chair:** All right.

What did you want to do?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I want to know if the committee can make it public. The people who are watching now heard it, but the people who will be doing searches on the website tomorrow have to have access to it. Do I have unanimous consent?

**The Chair:** We've said yes. That's already done.

**An hon. member:** We haven't given our consent.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** All right.

**The Chair:** Haven't we given unanimous consent?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I'm belabouring the point here because I sense some resistance on the part of the members on the other side of the table.

Now, is it—

**The Chair:** Just a moment, Mr. Godin.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I can't give my consent because I wasn't here last week.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You can still give your consent all the same.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I can't consent to something I haven't seen.

It's public now because you read it. Now it will be on the record. I'm sure Joe Citizen is smart enough to understand that the spirit of what you just said is now in the committee record. It will also be available on the parliamentary website because you just read it in public.

**The Chair:** We can't go back. What's done is done.

What I want to know is what's the connection.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I want to thank the Bloc Québécois, which has introduced a sub-amendment that refers to meetings rather than dates, whereas the motion of my colleague Mr. Serré concerns dates. I'm particularly uncomfortable discussing a motion that refers to November 17. Since today is November 22, his motion is no longer valid.

**The Chair:** Exactly.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I did this last week, but I'd like to invite my colleague once again to withdraw his motion so we can resume debate and thus move forward on this matter and defend French in Canada.

**The Chair:** I understand.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm asking my colleague whether he wants to withdraw his main motion. That way, my amendment and that of Mr. Beaulieu would also be withdrawn. We'll have to do our work over again based on the meetings, not dates.

Do you see the connection, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** As I said, just so we don't lose our way, we're going to follow the procedure as it was explained. We now have before us Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment, on which we are going to vote. Debate will thus resume on Mr. Beaulieu's amendment to your amendment. We will move on to the next step once we've resolved this.

• (1215)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair. I believe that, as a parliamentarian, I have the privilege of being able to reach out to the party opposite to see whether it agrees to withdraw its motions so we can start over and move this matter forward. I'm offering my cooperation. I don't know what the Bloc Québécois or the NDP think of that, but we of the Conservative Party want to advance this matter and cooperate with the other parties; so I am reaching out to my colleagues.

Can you put the question to my colleague and the other members?

**The Chair:** This is a good sign, and I understand you loud and clear, but to do that, we always have to start with the last motion introduced. So we have to consider the sub-amendment before addressing the amendment.

Mr. Beaulieu, since we're talking about you, what do you have to say?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'd like to clarify one point. Some people are accusing us of engaging in obstruction and delaying the committee's work, but, if no motion had been introduced to limit debate at the clause-by-clause consideration stage and virtually to conclude hearings of witnesses, we wouldn't have wasted all this time. That's not our objective. Once again, I'm reaching out to the government and to the NDP and asking them to vote for my sub-amendment. Then we will have made another step toward solving the problem.

I'd like to suggest that everyone attend the next meeting in person because we have to resolve this situation and it would be easier to do it that way because we'd be able to speak to each other directly. I'll have a chance to introduce a motion on the subject later on. At any event, I encourage people to vote for this sub-amendment. It would be a first step toward resolving the situation.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Ms. Ashton actually requested the floor before I did.

**The Chair:** Pardon me, Ms. Ashton; go ahead.

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

I'm trying to follow the committee's process as we prepare to vote on Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment. I intend to propose changes to Mr. Godin's amendments to reflect the fact that, as a result of systematic obstruction, the dates aren't enough. However, we have to deal with Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment first before I can move that amendment. So I'm eager to continue the process that we have to follow.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ashton. You're absolutely right.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, as I mentioned earlier, it's important to work on the basis of a number of meetings. The sub-amendment that the Bloc Québécois has introduced, which is inspired by the motion that I made on November 10, is commendable. I'd be prepared to vote for that sub-amendment if Mr. Beaulieu reduced the number of meetings from eight to six to make it consistent with my notice of motion.

This demonstrates the willingness of the Conservative Party of Canada to move matters forward without engaging in obstruction and to cooperate with all members of the committee so we can deal with this matter as soon as possible.

I say "as soon as possible", but I should also say that whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well, to quote the three authors of the letter published in *Le Devoir* this morning.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Go ahead, Mr. Serré.

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

The Senate has already done a study and submitted a report. We've wasted five meetings. Mr. Chair, follow the process regarding amendments.

The Conservative-Bloc coalition has merely submitted amendment after amendment.

Follow the process, and we will vote. We're flexible; we proved that two weeks ago. We were ready to accept the dates that Mr. Godin proposed, and then we continued with another meeting. We've heard from 6,000 stakeholders on the action plan and they told us we should pass the bill as soon as possible. The Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA, and the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, the AFO, told us we should proceed with clause-by-clause consideration. Since 2019, we've proposed the white paper, Bill C-32 and Bill C-13. Stakeholders want us to proceed with clause-by-clause consideration.

I really don't understand what's going on. I'm being told to withdraw my motion without the other sub-amendments being voted upon. We have to follow the process. We're prepared to vote on an amendment. I encourage the members here today to vote for the sub-amendments. That way, we'll be following the process and can then move on to my motion. We're flexible on dates, as we've previously said.

We can't get there because there's been systematic obstruction over the past five meetings. Don't tell me we're wasting meetings. We've already wasted five. That's enough.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Very well. If I understand what's being said around the table, Mr. Beaulieu has a sub-amendment, Mr. Gordon has an amendment to your motion, Mr. Serré, and they're telling us they're ready to be more efficient and move matters along if they have some flexibility. Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Gordon. That's also your position, Mr. Serré, as I see it.

As I understand it, you're telling us you're prepared to amend the first paragraph of your motion to change the dates.

I don't know if we want to discuss that first, but let's consider the matter paragraph by paragraph starting with the main motion, that is to say Mr. Serré's motion.

If we focus on the first paragraph and agree on the dates, can we amend it by unanimous consent? Absolutely. Otherwise, we'll proceed by sub-amendments, amendments and votes. Time is passing; it's 12:25 p.m.

With your permission, I now give the floor to Mr. Serré regarding the first paragraph. On what date would everyone agree?

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Mr. Chair, before selecting dates, let's put the sub-amendments on the table. If we resolve the sub-amendments, then we can discuss my motion. We still have some amendments and numerous sub-amendments.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. I meant that if we had unanimous consent on a specific date, we could do that and it would go very quickly. However, if we don't have unanimous consent, we'll proceed one sub-amendment at a time.

All right. Let's go back to the sub-amendments. I don't think there's unanimous consent there. Let's consider the sub-amendments one at a time.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I requested the floor, but I yielded to my friend Mr. Serré.

**The Chair:** Yes, but I think Mr. Beaulieu was just before you. I think I saw—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I did it long before him; I yielded the floor to Mr. Serré. I don't want to violate my colleague's right to speak. We haven't formed a coalition. I do want to allow requests for the floor.

**The Chair:** I thought I saw Mr. Beaulieu first, but I'll give you the floor since he's in agreement.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Actually, Mr. Chair, to show our goodwill, I just reached out to the party opposite so we can understand all this and start over. That's what I wanted to do. Now I believe the Liberal Party doesn't want that. It wants to waste our time. In addition, the five meetings that Mr. Serré accuses us of wasting followed the introduction of his motion.

Look at where everything that's going on started. I won't take the blame for that, and I'd like people not to accuse us of engaging in systematic obstruction. I'd like the people opposite not to use the term "systematic obstruction" because that's not what we're doing. What we want to do is work for the French language and defend bilingualism in Canada. Bilingualism is English and French.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair. The exact term is "filibustering".

**The Chair:** Yes, that's what is called in the regulations.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'd like to say two things.

First, the compromise that Mr. Serré has proposed misses the whole point. Our main reason for opposing it in this way is, to repeat what Mr. Godin said, that the Liberal-New Democrat coalition, which goes far beyond the scope of this committee, has limited clause-by-clause consideration. We can agree with the Conservatives on certain matters, but on an ad hoc basis. If Mr. Serré had proposed amending that part of the motion, the entire situation would have been quite different.

Second, Mr. Serré said that organizations such as the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA, wanted an expedited debate on Bill C-13, but that's not the case in Quebec because the Official Languages Act merely anglicizes Quebec. That absolutely has to change.

In response to what Mr. Serré said earlier, I would add that, in another open letter, the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, which is the oldest—

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, we have all agreed to address your sub-amendment. So let's discuss it and follow the process.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** All right.

To conclude briefly, virtually all the groups that defend the French language in Quebec agree that Bill C-13 makes no sense and that we can't keep allowing the federal government to continue

anglicizing Quebec. This has become a matter of survival for the French language, and it concerns all of Canada. If we continue weakening French in Quebec, that will have an impact on Canada as a whole.

Yes, we are inspired by Mr. Godin's notice of motion, and that's why I'm keeping an open mind. Make a good faith gesture and vote for the sub-amendment. That will help move things along.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I would like to thank my colleague Mr. Beaulieu of the Bloc Québécois for saying they've been inspired by my motion.

Now, talking about good faith, we are reaching out to the Liberal Party. I'm reaching out to my Bloc Québécois colleague in an attempt to find some common ground between six and eight meetings. If that's not possible, just to show the Liberal Party that I want to move matters forward, I would be prepared to sacrifice two meetings by lowering the number to six, including four in which we would hear from the ministers.

I will respect by the decision of my colleague, whom I appreciate and who works hard to defend the French language in Quebec. I am working relentlessly to defend the French language and Quebec, but elsewhere in Canada as well.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** We agree on that.

Mr. Chair, I have a procedural question. May I amend my sub-amendment and go back to six meetings instead of eight?

**The Chair:** You may amend your own amendments if we have unanimous consent.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In that case, if we have unanimous consent, I would agree to go back to four meetings in order to hear the ministers and two additional meetings to hear the final witnesses. Time is indeed passing, and we're prepared to compromise.

**The Chair:** All right.

Once again, we're discussing Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment, which would be amended to read as follows: "in separate meetings, for four meetings, and that the Committee plan for two additional meetings to hear from the final witnesses."

So the four meetings devoted to the ministers would remain as is and we would go from four additional meetings to two to hear the final witnesses.

Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

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

Could we indicate who the final witnesses would be so that everyone knows, instead of leaving that unclear.

I'd like to have that clarified since Mr. Beaulieu didn't do it.

**The Chair:** No one has clarified how many that would be yet, but I believe we have unanimous consent to call for—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I think that was clarified in Mr. Godin's amendment.

**The Chair:** I think the Power Law lawyers were mentioned.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Here's what I actually said in my notice of motion of November 10: "and two meetings devoted to the appearance of other witnesses, including lawyers from Power Law for two hours, as well as the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario and other witnesses suggested by the committee members".

Consequently, for the moment, we can't firmly establish the list of witnesses we'll hear from during those two meetings, Ms. Lantanzio. What I just read to you comes from my notice of motion, not Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Yes. Now we need to consider Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment, which doesn't state who the witnesses are. Mr. Beaulieu proposes to amend his own sub-amendment so that, following the four meetings with the ministers, there will be only two meetings for additional witnesses, whom we will have to select here in this committee. He may do so provided there is unanimous consent around the table.

Do we have unanimous consent to amend Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I'm going to give my consent to my colleague's proposal.

**The Chair:** I requested it.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** That's why I gave it.

**The Chair:** All right.

Do you agree, Mr. Serré?

**Mr. Marc Serré:** No.

**The Chair:** All right. So we don't have unanimous consent.

Now we are discussing Mr. Beaulieu's unamended sub-amendment.

Are there any further questions on the amendment of the sub-amendment?

We'll go to a recorded vote.

(Motion negated: nays 6, yeas 5)

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, we agreed that we would continue one sub-amendment at a time.

Now we'll go to your second sub-amendment.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** The text reads as follows: "Amendments to Bill C-13 be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than..."

The second amendment would amend Mr. Godin's amendment. Mr. Serré's motion refers to Thursday, November 7, and that of Mr. Godin Thursday, November 24. In my sub-amendment, I would strike out the passage starting with the words "no later than

5:00 p.m." I would also add the words "the day following the final witnesses."

It would be hard to oppose that. That means that the amendments to Bill C-13, those of the Liberals, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Conservatives, would be submitted on the day following the final witnesses. I think that this is simply consistent with the first part of the sub-amendment, and that it's very logical.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Honestly, Mr. Chair, I'm thinking of the people who are watching us at home. We're working on a sub-amendment to change the date from November 17 to November 24 and to add a series of meetings that will conclude the period of testimony. However, the first paragraph hasn't been adopted and we're hearing about the day following the final witnesses, but the main motion contains a date.

I proposed another date in order to push back the process of submitting amendments. The Bloc Québécois proposes a sub-amendment designed to rely more on meetings than on dates. I think that's very smart. Now we're being told that if we act on the basis of meetings, we'll be able to submit our amendments after the final meeting.

Nothing makes any sense in all that. We can't see our way through all of this. So I am reaching out to my colleague the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, who heads up the team opposite and who has introduced this motion to restart the process. Let's erase it all and start over. We've held five meetings, and there are 23 minutes left in this one, after which we're going to realize that we've wasted another one.

It's true that we've had technical difficulties this week and that we had even worse ones last week. So it's not always the fault of the members of the committee. However, if we want to further the cause of the Acadians, Franco-Ontarians and all francophones in Canada, we have to make decisions. Let's settle our disagreements and start over.

That's my comment on the second amendment to Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment, which would apply to my amendment and to Mr. Serré's motion. That sums it up. Do we know where we stand now?

• (1235)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

I also think it's important to clarify that we may oppose the amendments being proposed. It seems quite clear to me that we're wasting time discussing amendments rather than putting them to a vote.

As I said about 15 minutes ago, I have a proposal to make to alter the dates so we can have a realistic agenda, one that suits our calendar. Certain members of the committee clearly don't want to move on to that stage. I'm opposed to the amendment moved on that subject. I'd like to go to a vote so we can resolve this major situation or dilemma and move our study of Bill C-13 forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Yes, we need to proceed one step at a time. That's how we'll be able to keep track.

I'll give the floor to Mr. Godin first, and then it will be Mr. Beaulieu's turn.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I agree with the comment made by my colleague Ms. Ashton, who is participating virtually in this meeting.

She said that some members aren't cooperating in moving this matter forward. I won't accept any blame for that because, once again...

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, I—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** ...if we erase our differences and start over, we'll be able to do so on a more productive basis. What stands to gain from that? The French language.

I know that Canada has two official languages, English and French, but French is the more vulnerable of the two.

**The Chair:** That's great, but—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So that's my focus.

**The Chair:** I will ask all the members to focus on Mr. Beaulieu's second sub-amendment.

Do you wish to add anything to that, Mr. Beaulieu?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I just want to say that, if we had preserved the initial understanding among the opposition parties, we wouldn't have had all these problems since—

**The Chair:** I'll stop you there, Mr. Beaulieu.

I'm going to start being more strict—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** So I'm going—

**The Chair:** We are focusing on your own sub-amendment.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Then let's vote.

You can't tell me I don't compromise.

**The Chair:** Good.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I would just like to take you back to June 13 of this year. A motion had been adopted, point e. of which read as follows. I'll read it out loud so I'm not accused of being in bad faith.

e. the committee meet in camera after 20 sessions with witnesses to discuss...

We were talking about dates at the time—

**The Chair:** I'll stop you there, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Why?

**The Chair:** We are on the second sub-amendment. Do you have an argument you want to advance regarding the sub-amendment proposed by Mr. Beaulieu?

I just want to prevent you from—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair I will yield to your authority as chair and wait for another opportunity to repeat what I just said. Thank you.

**The Chair:** That's good.

Are there any further comments on Mr. Beaulieu's second sub-amendment?

(Sub-amendment negated: nays 10, yeas 1)

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, you still have the floor to discuss your third sub-amendment?

• (1240)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** The third sub-amendment concerns point 4 of Mr. Godin's amendment. I move that the words "no later than Tuesday, November 29" be replaced by "the meeting following the final witnesses." The result would read as follows:

4. the committee proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill the meeting following the final witnesses.

That's essentially my last sub-amendment.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, my colleague Mario Beaulieu's sub-amendment is relevant. It's consistent with what we proposed in the notice of motion, which has now been made public. I think it's entirely logical to act in that manner. We can't submit amendments until the witnesses have completed their testimony. If we want to proceed to clause-by-clause consideration, we'll have to wait until the testimony phase is complete. Then we can begin clause-by-clause consideration.

Since I don't know whether it's time to do that, you'll be able to remind me if I exceed my speaking time. I'd like to discuss the clause-by-clause consideration. May I do so?

**The Chair:** You may since that's part of this sub-amendment.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair. With your permission, I'm going to consult the notes that my outstanding team have prepared for me.

I want to provide some historical context.

In 2005, the Standing Committee on Official Languages was chaired by none other than the present Minister of Canadian Heritage, Pablo Rodriguez. At the time, the committee was discussing the parliamentary right of committee members to discuss and attempt to improve a bill. On Thursday, October 20, 2005, the committee conducted the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

I'd like to read certain passages from the record of that committee. I won't read all five pages because that would be too long.

Maurice Vellacott said:

Let's ask the clerk this question, then. Can we not set limits in terms of speaking times for individuals? We're trying to expedite the bill here.

A little further on, the clerk at the time, Susan Baldwin, responded as follows:

If the committee wished to do that, they could do that, but I don't think you could limit the number of rounds that person has. The only way you can impose a time limit on consideration of a bill in committee is with a time allocation motion from the House.

If that's what they want, they need only go to the House of Commons, but they'll have to bear the blame for silencing members of Parliament. I'll continue reading:

The whole point of the committee system—and this is largely to the advantage of the opposition parties—is that they have time to completely, thoroughly, and in detail, discuss all that they wish on the line-by-line, clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. In fact, this is the only time the House has that possibility. It's very carefully not circumscribed, so that the members will have as much time as they need.

A little further on, Ms. Baldwin said:

If the entire committee agrees, perhaps, but you're not supposed to have time limits.

I think that, if we surveyed the members, we'd see that not all members want time limits.

Further on, Mr. Vellacott added:

So the part of the motion in respect to having hereafter five minutes total per member on an amendment or a subamendment, I believe...even so, the other clerks would find that this is in order. It's just that the committee, being the master of its own destiny, can do that.

And Ms. Baldwin responded as follows:

The advice I would give to the chair on that matter is that this, in effect, is not in order.

I would recall that it was Pablo Rodriguez who chaired the meeting. Today he is the Minister of Canadian Heritage. A little earlier, the Liberals voted in favour of a motion for the minister to testify before the committee.

Mr. Vellacott responded as follows:

Well, if you consulted with your other clerks, you would find the—

Then the clerk said:

We have discussed this.

Further on, she came back with the following:

Committees are not allowed to impose closure on a bill. They can't put a deadline on it. What they can do is do schedules, and there's a nice fine line between those two things.

My feeling is that if you limit each member to five minutes and one round on a clause, all you have to do is do your number of members, each with five minutes, and multiply by the number of clauses, and you have, in effect, imposed a hard and fast deadline on the committee that cuts off debate, and the entire point of having a bill in committee is to allow everybody to have their say.

To which Mr. Vellacott replied:

There's no reference to it, and we have in committees in the past. The committee, being master of its own destiny, can impose totality time limits per clause and per amendment.

To which, the clerk responded:

I'm sure there were times when committees have done that. I'm not sure necessarily that it was a proper precedent.

● (1245)

So, Mr. Chair, I wanted to bring this to your attention because it's important. As a parliamentarian, I feel pressed because a very restrictive timetable is being imposed on us, particularly since Mr. Serré's motion contains dates that have already passed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** According to what my colleague Mr. Godin just said, a clerk previously claimed that the committee didn't have the authority to limit debate on clause-by-clause consideration and that that could only be done by means of a time allocation

motion in the House of Commons. Is my understanding correct?

**The Chair:** At the risk of being corrected by the clerk, the committees are free to act as they wish and to introduce the motions they wish to introduce. They must then debate and adopt them. The committee is therefore master of its own destiny, as it were.

We have motions on the table: the main motion, an amendment and sub-amendments. We're working on them, and the committee will decide the fate of Mr. Serré's motion democratically and in accordance with parliamentary rules.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I wanted to introduce a motion that established an order of priority among the amendments. I wanted us to give priority to those from Quebec, and I was told that we had no right to do so, that it wasn't in order.

Is it in order for a committee to want to limit debate on clause-by-clause consideration, as Mr. Serré's motion proposes?

● (1250)

**The Chair:** Two points require clarification here, since the public is watching us.

First, regarding the amendment you wanted to introduce, I recall very clearly that part of that amendment was admissible because it concerned the main motion or Mr. Godin's amendment but that the other part was unrelated.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That's the reason I was given.

The intent of my motion at the time was to give priority in clause-by-clause consideration to the amendments requested by the Government of Quebec and by the francophone and Acadian communities. I was told that the committee wasn't entitled to alter the order in which the clauses were considered and that we would have to follow the order in which they were presented in the bill under consideration, Bill C-13, in this instance.

**The Chair:** Yes, that was one of the reasons, but it was also because the change you wanted to make was unrelated to any amendment. None of the changes proposed in Mr. Godin's amendment and no aspect of the main motion addressed that. Consequently, it was inadmissible from the get-go because there was no connection.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I don't think that's the answer that was given. There's a connection because Mr. Serré's motion would limit clause-by-clause consideration as of a certain date, and my amendment would have given priority to the Quebec government's amendments because they hadn't been discussed and weren't included in Bill C-13.

**The Chair:** I will check that and get back to you.

As for your second question, Mr. Serré's motion is a motion. It wasn't the committee that decided.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** What I understood from what Mr. Godin read is that the clerk at the time said that clause-by-clause consideration couldn't be limited by a mere committee motion. That could only be done by means of a time attribution motion in the House of Commons. Please tell me if I misunderstood.

**The Chair:** I'll repeat what I understand as best I can. The committee is free to make whatever motions it wishes. We debate them in committee. The clerk tells me that Mr. Serré's motion was verified by the highest authorities. Nothing in that motion is prohibited by our rules of procedure, quite the contrary.

Consequently, all that remains for us is to debate your sub-amendments. We have to do that, and we must proceed in reverse order. First, there was Mr. Serré's motion, then there was Mr. Godin's amendment to that motion and, lastly, there are your sub-amendments, and that's where we stand, since we're starting with the sub-amendments. Once we've disposed of your sub-amendments, we'll move on to Mr. Godin's amendment and then to the main motion, which may be debated and agreed to, negated or amended. The committee is free to do that, in accordance with our parliamentary rules. That's democracy.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** If I correctly understand what you're saying, clause-by-clause consideration may be limited by a committee motion, as Mr. Serré's motion stated.

**The Chair:** That's correct, if the members of the committee have indicated their agreement by vote.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** We could therefore alter the order of the clauses addressed in clause-by-clause consideration.

**The Chair:** No.

Thank you for reminding me, Madam Clerk.

We've discussed that. Standing Order 75.1 prohibits it from being done that way.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** However, the Standing Orders nevertheless impose limits on what the committee can do.

**The Chair:** That's correct with respect to clause-by-clause consideration.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** However, the committee may decide to limit clause-by-clause consideration.

**The Chair:** Are you referring to time?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That's correct in this case; we're talking about a time limit.

**The Chair:** Yes, indeed.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, in view of what I read from the 2005 committee meeting, is the committee's unanimous consent required in order to gag us, that is to say to limit time for clause-by-clause consideration?

**The Chair:** Mr. Serré's motion is admissible.

To answer your question, all the clauses in Mr. Serré's motion are admissible. They may be obsolete today as they pertain to dates, but it is the committee that decides that.

It's like in Parliament, where we don't always agree on bills. We vote, and the majority carries the matter.

In short, this motion is admissible point by point, and we will have to vote on every one of its points.

• (1255)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I have two points I want to raise. First, must the committee decide unanimously to limit debate on clause-by-clause consideration?

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Second, I would like to inform the committee and to officially announce to it that today, November 22, the entire process, that is to say the five points in Mr. Serré's motion, the four points in my amendment and Mr. Beaulieu's final point, will be negated as a whole.

We will begin another debate after examining all aspects of the matter. We are wasting our time. That's all I wanted to say, and I've been saying it from the start. I hope we have finally understood. However, if I haven't been well understood, I'll shorten that sentence to this: we're wasting our time and the French language is paying the price.

I have no objection to our voting on Mr. Beaulieu's amendment. Then there'll be a domino effect and we'll be wasting our time.

We've wasted six meetings. I'm not talking about dates because the number of meetings is more important to me than dates. We will have wasted six meetings. In the meantime, we've made no progress.

That was triggered by Mr. Serré's motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Any further comments?

Barring any additional comments, we will put the third sub-amendment to a vote.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Clerk, to be consistent, I'll vote "yes" to support the sub-amendment of my colleague Mr. Beaulieu.

**The Chair:** (Amendment negated)

**The Chair:** Now we come back to Mr. Godin's amendments.

As we did for Mr. Beaulieu's sub-amendment, we will proceed point by point so we don't get lost.

Mr. Godin, you were reading the first paragraph:

[That] the Minister of Official Languages, the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, as well as their department officials, be invited to appear for two hours per minister, in separate meetings, no later than Thursday, November 24, 2022.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I would like to take another step back. I'm clearly opposed to an unrealistic amendment. However, since we seem to want to dwell on procedure rather than strive for unanimous consent in order to expedite the process, which is unfortunate, I want to go back to the first point of my amendment, which concerns four ministers.

We're begging for two hours of testimony per minister. I would just like to remind you that, for Bill C-72, the ministers came and testified during the testimony phase and during clause-by-clause consideration. Their testimony totalled 11 hours. However, we're now begging for 4 ministers to come and testify for 8 hours.

I would simply like to remind you that, according to the article by François Larocque, Mark Power and Darius Bossé, Bill C-13 is one of the 10 longest Canadian government bills in history.

Can we show some seriousness in our efforts?

Can we quickly hear testimony from those ministers so we can give Bill C-13 even more teeth?

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Good afternoon. I'd like to propose a sub-amendment to Mr. Godin's amendment. Before doing so, however, I want to know if we'll be sitting later. I may have missed part of the discussion on the subject.

**The Chair:** I just realized that it's 1:01 p.m. I personally have another 15 minutes at most. We have to have unanimous consent if we want to continue. We can do it. Do we want to continue until 1:15 p.m.?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, given the lack of openness that I sense on the part of my colleagues opposite, my answer is unfortunately no.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, I didn't give you the floor.

Ms. Ashton, keep your sub-amendment in mind. We will have to adjourn because we can't continue.

I therefore bring this meeting to a close, but we will resume exactly where we left off. Agreed?

The meeting is adjourned.

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