



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on International Trade

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 119

Monday, October 7, 2024

Chair: The Honourable Judy A. Sgro



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

This is meeting 119 of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Good Monday morning to everybody.

We will spend the first hour and a half with our witnesses today, and the last half-hour to consider Mr. Savard-Tremblay's motion from last week.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, September 16, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of Canadian women and international trade.

With us today, from the Réseau des femmes d'affaires du Québec, we have Ruth Vachon, chief executive officer, by video conference. From Samdesk Canada Inc., we have Ashlyn Bernier, chief operating officer. From Women in Governance, we have Caroline Codsí, founder and chief equity officer, by video conference.

Welcome to you all. Thank you for making the time to be with the committee today.

We will start with Ms. Vachon for an opening statement of up to five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Vachon (Chief Executive Officer, Réseau des femmes d'affaires du Québec): Thank you for having us this morning.

The Réseau des femmes d'affaires du Québec, or RFAQ, has been active for 42 years. It plays a key role in supporting women entrepreneurs on the ground so that they can expand their professional network. The RFAQ also helps them conquer local, national and international markets and win contracts in the public and private markets. RFAQ does this in various ways, whether by creating networking opportunities between women entrepreneurs and large businesses or by organizing events to give them visibility through structured networking.

The RFAQ's uniqueness stems from the fact that we have developed our own expertise in supplier diversification when it comes to promoting under-represented groups in entrepreneurship, including women, in medium and large business supply chains. For example, for the past 14 years, as part of supplier diversification, we have been accompanying and preparing women on trade missions, main-

ly to the United States and France, so that they can meet with the large companies that could award them contracts.

The women entrepreneurship strategy has helped the RFAQ in a number of ways. First, I want to highlight the importance of this strategy, because it has played a crucial role over the past five years for the entire women entrepreneurship ecosystem. We can talk about the extraordinary work that has been done as part of the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, or WEKH, and other initiatives that have enabled all women, including those from under-represented groups, to benefit from programs focused on their specific development.

Through this strategy, the RFAQ has established a pan-Canadian project with an exceptional vision for women entrepreneurs in all sectors, including manufacturing and services.

Our project connects Canadian women entrepreneurs with large businesses to increase business opportunities, including through a web platform that is unique in Canada, called Maïa. This platform has an algorithm that connects women entrepreneurs to potential partners, thereby maximizing their chances of successful collaboration.

The site operates in a number of ways. Large companies submit requests for proposals, or RFPs, through the platform, and then a robot extracts RFPs from government contracts that match the profiles of women entrepreneurs on Maïa. Women entrepreneurs are trained to respond to RFPs, just as large businesses are trained to better understand the benefits of supplier diversity. In addition, women entrepreneurs can also do business with each other.

It is important to build on that momentum. Over the past three years, we were able to build a solid foundation and demonstrate that the project meets specific needs, both for women entrepreneurs and for large businesses, which are constantly looking for under-represented suppliers in their supply chain.

We operate in a market where businesses are small. The majority of them have fewer than five employees. They need help on the ground selling the products and services they design and manufacture. The RFAQ is the ideal partner for them. It is a unique way for these women entrepreneurs to expand their markets, in which it is often difficult to break through.

The last three years have allowed us to set the stage, but three years is not a long time to implement a new, more inclusive business vision in Canada and the tools needed to make it happen. Canadian women need ongoing support on the ground. We believe it is crucial to continue our work, but financial support is still important for the RFAQ, as we cannot carry out a major societal project such as this on our own.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Ms. Bernier.

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier (Chief Operating Officer, Samdesk Canada Inc.): Good morning, honourable Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Ashlyn Bernier and I'm the chief operating officer at Samdesk, a technology company based in Edmonton providing real-time crisis alerts and monitoring powered by artificial intelligence. Our clients include NATO, the U.K. Ministry of Defence, the U.S. State Department and major global companies like Exxon Mobil, Ford, the UnitedHealth Group and Uber. Our technology helps organizations protect their people, assets, brands and public safety.

Today, I'm here representing Samdesk, but I'm also speaking as a member of the Council of Canadian Innovators. My goal is to share insights from our journey as a Canadian tech company expanding globally and from my experience as a female executive, as well as offer recommendations on how we can better support women entrepreneurs in international trade.

While I don't claim to be an expert on international trade policy, I do understand what it takes to build and scale a global business. That experience has helped me understand where government initiatives can play a crucial role and where they may fall short.

Bear with me, but I believe one critical area is actually domestic procurement. If we want more small businesses and start-ups to succeed internationally, they first need opportunities at home. When a government buys domestically, it provides vital early revenue and product validation, helping businesses like ours refine products, attract investment and build the confidence to scale internationally.

Unfortunately, many small businesses struggle to access these opportunities. While programs like innovative solutions Canada have good intentions, they haven't been effective for companies like ours. There's a need for programs that actively ensure Canadian SMEs are included in government procurement processes. Giving companies like ours a fair shot at selling to our own government not only helps us grow but also makes us more competitive on the international stage.

The second issue is the focus of government programs and grants. Too often, these initiatives underemphasize the true driver of growth: revenue. For Canadian companies to succeed, they need to discover if there is a large market for their products or services as quickly as possible, and if there isn't, to be encouraged to fail and move on to the next venture. This is especially important for pro-

grams that support women-owned technology businesses, where encouraging rapid validation and iteration is crucial. Companies should be encouraged to pivot or even fail quickly if their product doesn't meet market needs, and programs often inadvertently keep businesses operating when they should evolve.

A third challenge is access to capital. Many Canadian companies, especially women-led businesses, face significant barriers when raising the funds needed to scale and expand internationally. Samdesk will have to look outside of Canada in the future, as the domestic venture capital pool is too small to support the level of growth that many tech companies need. Seeking growth capital from international investors will make it difficult to maintain our Canadian-controlled private corporation, or CCPC, status, which complicates access to certain government programs. This can reduce our incentive to keep operations in Canada, as the pull from international investors and customers often leads businesses to consider moving south of the border.

Finally, I want to highlight the importance of Canada's trade commissioners. They are a valuable resource, but I believe they could be better equipped to support modern businesses, especially in tech. Enhancing the digital literacy of our trade commissioners and creating more opportunities for female entrepreneurs to network would better support Canadian businesses in global markets.

In conclusion, I would like to leave the committee with three recommendations.

First, leverage domestic procurement to provide early revenue and product validation for Canadian SMEs, ensuring they're better prepared to compete internationally.

Second, focus government programs on helping SMEs generate revenue and validate a sustainable growth model, which is critical to long-term success and reduces dependency on government programs and grants.

Lastly, upskill trade commissioners to better support businesses through e-commerce and digital channels and create more spaces for women entrepreneurs to network.

Female entrepreneurs are a tremendous yet underutilized force in Canada's economy. With the right support, these businesses can not only succeed at home but thrive on the global stage.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to discussing how we can better support women entrepreneurs in Canada's international trade ecosystem.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is Ms. Codsí for up to five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Codsí (Founder and Chief Equity Officer, Women in Governance): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning everyone.

[*English*]

I'm Caroline Codsí. I'm the founder and chief equity officer at Women in Governance. Our core is around supporting corporate Canada to close the gender gap in the workplace. Unlike RFAQ, we don't work directly with entrepreneurs. We work with large corporations that want to bring women to the top of the house.

We have more than a million people working for parity-certified organizations. All the largest banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, etc., in all the different industries, including a lot of government bodies as well, have been certified by our organization in both Canada and the U.S.

To dive into the focus of today's conversation, first of all, I'm truly honoured to be invited to testify here today. I will speak as a female entrepreneur myself. Women in Governance is going to be 15 years old in 2025. It's not quite as old as RFAQ, but we've been around and we've done a lot. We've also seen the negative impact in terms of achieving social equity when it comes to looking at how women are able to advance versus men.

Research from the BDC reveals that levelling the playing field for women entrepreneurs could inject an additional \$150 billion into the Canadian economy over the next decade.

Despite what we see in terms of talent and tenacity, women still own less than 16% of Canadian businesses. Even though we do a lot of work at Women in Governance to support women through governance training and mentoring, etc., I think it's a stark indication that there's still a lot of work that needs to be done.

It's not all on women's shoulders. There are structural barriers and funding disparities that have always existed and that we still see today. Women entrepreneurs, especially those who are in early-stage ventures, encounter deeply ingrained structural barriers. Funding is among the most significant hurdles that women face.

According to the Brookfield Institute, I believe, women entrepreneurs not only receive less venture capital than their male counterparts, but they also face a higher likelihood of being forced to rely on personal debt. That's a scenario that impedes scalable growth and sustainable success. This funding gap is even more pronounced in traditionally male-dominated sectors like technology and science, where gender bias often results in a lack of confidence in women entrepreneurs. These are sectors with immense potential for innovation and economic growth. Women remain drastically underfunded and undervalued. That obviously stifles their capacity to drive progress and to contribute to a diverse economy.

Government programs are crucial, obviously, but they are not sufficient to close these gaps. Although grants and resources have been made available, I'm not sure all women entrepreneurs even know where to turn. I can speak for myself. I find it very complicated to navigate the different government bodies to know where

exactly the pockets of money are and what is required. I think it would be helpful to make it easier to find. Some women are really good at working with organizations that specialize in helping them find the funding, but I think it needs to be more accessible. I think that women also need more training, better networking and more mentoring; this is critical to their success. A holistic approach is really important.

We need to address the unique challenges that women face. It's different from what men go through. The EDC, or Export Development Canada, reports that only 11% of Canadian exporters are women. That reveals the limited reach of existing initiatives. In 2024, it makes no sense to me.

Obviously, we have the invisible burden of caregiving. Quebec is a leading province in terms of offering affordable child care. It's fantastic that the federal government has followed up and it's now available across Canada, but I think this still largely falls on the women. McKinsey and Company has documented how this dual responsibility—the need to manage both your household duties and professional ambitions—disproportionately limits women's ability to scale their businesses, especially during critical growth periods when a lot of women are at that age when they still have young children at home. Without access to long-term and consistent support, women are often forced to make difficult choices between their personal lives and professional aspirations. It's a dilemma that not many men have to face, and that hampers economic advancement on a macro scale.

• (1115)

We need to strengthen the collaboration between the government and financial institutions and train the people who make the decisions on validating funding for women. They need to go through unconscious bias training to understand how to speak to women who are looking for financing. We need to raise awareness in these financial institutions, which play a critical role in either enabling or hindering entrepreneurial growth.

We need to support women in high-growth industries like technology, AI and renewable energy, where women remain vastly under-represented. Government-backed initiatives could target these sectors and provide these women with the resources and the confidence they need to enter, grow and lead within these fields—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Codsí. You'll have plenty of time—

Ms. Caroline Codsí: I could go on for the whole day, honestly, but—

The Chair: We can hear that. It was fascinating. Members will be anxious to ask you lots of questions.

We'll start with Mrs. Gray for six minutes, please.

• (1120)

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My questions are for Ashlyn Bernier. The Council of Canadian Innovators commissioned a survey of entrepreneurs in July, which showed that 90% of respondents believed the Liberals' capital gains tax hike would have a negative effect on the innovation economy.

Do you agree with the overwhelming results of that survey?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I do.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: In your opening address, you touched a bit on access to capital. I know for myself, as a former woman entrepreneur, when I was looking at this back in 2002, it was difficult, in particular because I was a woman. I actually recall a bank loan officer asking if my husband was coming to the meeting. I ended up getting a high-interest loan through the women's enterprise centre, which was funded through Western Economic Diversification. It was for women entrepreneurs, and I was very thankful for that. We became a business that was at the top of our field, and we won local and national business awards.

My question for you is about women tech entrepreneurs. Is one of their top challenges access to capital, and has it been more difficult because they're women?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I would agree that the major challenge for tech entrepreneurs is access to capital. In a sense, it should be. Venture capital is competitive, and you should be able to demonstrate that there is going to be a significant return rate on that investment to the venture capitalists you're asking for funding from.

I'm the chief operating officer of my company. I'm not the founder, but I've been there for seven years, which is the majority of the growth of the company, so I'm squarely a member of the leadership team. When we have raised venture capital, I've been at every meeting and in every conversation with my CEO, who is a male. It has been interesting to observe the dynamic and how he's treated sometimes versus how I'm treated in some of those conversations.

I can only really speak from my experience and reading between the lines a bit here. We've been very fortunate to have the chance to work with some venture capitalists who have been incredible. Actually, in our series A round of funding, which is a major milestone for a technology company, we raised series A in 2021 from McRock Capital, which is based in Toronto, and the partner we worked with there is a woman. It was a great experience for me to be able to work with her. Two of the partners there are female.

However, I would counter that with other experiences we've had with other institutions and venture capitalists—again, this is just my perspective—who have questioned my right to be in those conversations and in that room, as I wasn't the founder, even though based on my CEO's experience, I should be and need to be in those conversations in that room. I have definitely had to justify my participation in those discussions in the past.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you very much for sharing that.

You mentioned that you've gone through multiple fundraising rounds to raise money from investors, and that investors expect a return on their investment as they've invested under a certain pretext. However, the Liberal government has changed the goalposts, and investors will pay more taxes now.

Are you concerned that your investors will now likely have to pay more capital gains taxes and have less of a return on their investment?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Yes, that will absolutely impact us. It goes to my earlier point. We're going to have to broaden our horizons as we look for venture capital in the future and potentially look to the U.S., where there's just a different system. We may potentially lose our CCPC status, which would also prohibit us, in the future, from participating in the entrepreneurs' incentive program.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: It has been widely reported how Canada's GDP per capita has dropped over the last nine years compared to that of Canada's largest trading partner, the United States. It's making Canada one of the worst-performing advanced economies, which will continue for 40 years unless substantial changes are made to federal fiscal and economic policies.

Will Canada be less competitive for talent, investment or capital in the global market because of this capital gains tax hike?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I believe so, yes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: One of the things you talked about in your opening intervention had to do with domestic procurement. I want to ask you a little bit more about that.

Specifically, we know there was nearly \$2 billion spent in 2017-18 on IT contracts, which have gone to three firms, namely IBM, Bell Canada and Microsoft Canada. How does overreliance by the current government on these large tech firms harm small and medium-sized Canadian start-ups?

• (1125)

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: That's a great question. No one gets fired for selling to or buying from IBM. Taking a chance on a small company can be a risk, and I appreciate that.

We still want to compete. We're happy to compete, but we have to be part of the competition. That can be a challenge for us, because IBM has teams of people whose job it is to find these procurement opportunities. We're small and lean. We're just trying to find the time to make sure we find the right opportunity, when that window is open, so we can compete. It's massively challenging for us.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have Ms. Fortier, please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Vachon, Ms. Codsí, it is a pleasure to see you again. We have crossed paths a few times over the years.

Good morning Ms. Bernier. I am happy to meet you.

This study was truly necessary because we wanted to find ways to encourage women to take an active part in international trade. However, first we need to figure out which current initiatives work and which do not. Maybe we should also look at new measures to meet the needs of women entrepreneurs and women on the ground who want to do business internationally. That is one aspect that I, for one, would like to explore.

You have suggested certain initiatives and made recommendations, but I will go even further.

My first questions are for Ms. Vachon and Ms. Codsí. If we have some time left, I will also ask for Ms. Bernier's input.

Of the initiatives currently in place, which ones should we keep?

Should we introduce new measures? If so, which ones?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: I do not think that we need to reinvent initiatives. What has been introduced over the past five years has paid off with amazing results.

We often talk about funding, but I believe there is a discrepancy between investing in funding and investing in support for businesses. For instance, businesses are often a blind spot for the government. Large businesses get a lot of support, and maybe they need it, but let us not forget that today's small businesses are tomorrow's big corporations. Because they are small, their needs often go unnoticed. Calculations are based on dollars rather than numbers. I would like to tell the government to let us work based on numbers so that today's small businesses can grow into tomorrow's big corporations.

The last time I did the math, I believe that \$18 million was set aside for women entrepreneurs. We have to keep in mind that these women, often small business owners, are facing growth issues because they do not have the contracts. In those cases, it is obviously more difficult to fund a small business and meet its needs.

One of my recommendations would be the following.

If the government invested a bit more to help women access the market, they could then show up to the bank with a contract in hand. Their projects would therefore be more likely to benefit from bank advances, which is not the case at this time.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

Ms. Codsí, if you could please give a brief answer, it would allow Ms. Bernier to comment as well before my time is up.

Ms. Caroline Codsí: One aspect that was not really discussed and that I find extremely important is intersectionality. We are talking about women—all women. We all know the phrase, “show me the money.” Money is the sinews of war. To own and grow a busi-

ness, one needs money, but money lenders are still very often—too often—men. In the venture capital world, decisions are primarily made by men. The questions they ask women looking for a loan are always heavily focused on risk, while men looking for a loan are usually more geared toward potential and growth.

As far as argumentation skills go, women are already at a disadvantage, unfortunately. There could be training and supports offered in that regard as well so that women could learn to navigate through all of that. We should also take into account the fact that decisions are primarily made by white men who are more hesitant when they are addressing women, especially in traditionally male-dominated sectors, such as everything tech-related.

So there is this incorrect assumption that these investments are riskier. However, statistics show that women are just as, if not more, successful than men. It is only a matter of training women to improve their argumentation skills. The groups who make decisions regarding loans also need to be trained and diversified so that their decisions are not biased against women—think of a black woman in the AI sector, for instance.

It is crucial to start talking in more positive terms to encourage women to do this.

● (1130)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

Ms. Bernier, you have the floor for the remaining 30 seconds.

[*English*]

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Thank you.

The only thing I would add—and I completely agree with Ms. Codsí's statement there—is around that confidence she spoke of. We often get accused, when we're speaking with American customers or American funders, of being too Canadian, so you can imagine that Canadian women are even a step beyond that in being not confident or too humble. I think that confidence comes ultimately from customers. It doesn't come from grants. It doesn't come from programs. It doesn't come from a bank loan. It comes from customers. We have to think of the past so that we can help those companies and those entrepreneurs get to revenue generated from customers as quickly as possible, because I believe that's truly where that confidence comes from.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We will move on to Mr. Savard-Tremblay for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

I want to come back to international trade. The Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA, will soon be reviewed. Each country will have a position to defend. I would like to ask our witnesses if the agreement could be modified to place a greater emphasis on women entrepreneurs who are or would like to get into the export side of things. Is there anything that could be done in that regard?

What recommendations would you have for the representatives who will sit at the negotiating table?

Ms. Bernier, since you work in that sector, I imagine that you have some thoughts on that.

Our other two witnesses are welcome to chime in afterwards, of course.

[English]

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Not being that familiar with the intricacies of that agreement, I would say we actually haven't had too many challenges around selling into the U.S. I think what's interesting... I know I keep coming back to domestic procurement, but you may have noticed, when I listed our clients, that they include NATO, the U.K. Ministry of Defence and the U.S. Department of State. I did not list a Canadian government entity on that list, because we have not been able to do business. We struggle more to do business in Canada than to do business with customers in the U.S. and Mexico.

I would have to do more research to have more specific commentary on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Are there any issues with other countries? Do other jurisdictions have regulatory systems in place? Are there countries where things are generally more difficult?

You mentioned the situation in Canada and the U.S. Are there other situations elsewhere that this committee could look at?

[English]

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I think it hasn't been a struggle from a regulatory perspective. There should be more support for entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs specifically, in understanding how to do business in different countries, especially where you might not speak the language or be as familiar with the culture. In doing business with NATO and Brussels, we had a learning curve to figure out what is normal for them. We have a large customer in Brazil, so helping me, as I am having those conversations with their procurement team and reviewing contracts, know what's normal and how I need to address them or deal with certain challenges that I would deal with differently when it's a Canadian customer or a U.S. customer would be really helpful and would potentially be something that trade commissioners could help out with in the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Ms. Vachon, do you have anything to add?

• (1135)

Ms. Ruth Vachon: Most of the time, we are not exactly included in these agreements. We have to make sure that our interests are represented in the discussions. We advocate responsible procurement, which is an extremely worthwhile avenue to explore. What we find is that it usually benefits big companies. As someone mentioned earlier, women need to be informed. We have to make their paths easier and include them every step of the way.

The Réseau des Femmes d'affaires du Québec has a part to play, because making these inclusions a reality is up to us; it is our job to help women get ahead.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Does that mean that there should be more information meetings and training offered on emerging markets, business opportunities abroad or programs in place in other countries, for example?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: Yes, precisely.

That being said, their capacity needs to be taken into account. We are more often referred to level 1 and level 2 businesses than to direct suppliers. When we do get included, it is usually not for the big order, but for the ones that flow from it.

All those who work in the responsible procurement field have measures to adhere to. That is where women entrepreneurs and us are more easily taken into account.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: What should be improved in that regard?

You said that there should be more information meetings and training offered, but also that everyone's capacity has to be taken into account.

How can we improve the level of outreach?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: Let me give you an example. When we want to sell a good or service to BMW, instead of selling it to BMW, we organize missions to sell it to BMW suppliers. They can be in Mexico, the U.S. or any of the jurisdictions we cover. It is about making sure that there is a pathway for us to benefit from the evolution of these businesses.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Ms. Codsí, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Caroline Codsí: Not really, because my work is not directly related to exports. I do not want to waste the committee's time, and I think that the previous two speakers have answered the question brilliantly. I will leave it at that.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: The committee would not have wasted its time because I only had 30 seconds left.

I will have another turn in the next round of questions. We will resume the conversation then.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Cannings, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Thank you, all, for being here before us today.

I'm going to follow up on the questions Monsieur Savard-Tremblay asked with regard to international trade.

We have, over the last decade, signed numerous free trade agreements with other countries or groups of countries—the European Union, the Pacific partnership countries, the United States and Mexico, etc. These recent modern treaties, if you will, all seem to have some language.... Some of them have specific chapters supporting women in trade.

I'm getting the sense that the witnesses here today may not have a direct link to those issues, but could they comment on this? Perhaps I'll put it this way: If you were advising the government on what to put in a free trade agreement with a country or a group of countries—for instance, the new CUSMA—what should we put in there to support enterprises led by women?

I'll start with Ms. Codsí.

You were just finishing off there. I don't know if putting it that way gives you anything more to add.

Ms. Caroline Codsí: Well, yes. What I want to say is that, in any sort of agreement, I'm one who's always been in favour of legislation that actually helps women get to their goals, because if we look at, for instance, quotas of women on boards.... It has nothing to do with what we're talking about here, but there's a parallel. In France, they have the Copé-Zimmermann law, which requires boards to be 40% women; it worked. Here in Canada, we have half of that. When you legislate, you find the women; if you don't legislate, you find excuses.

With regard to anything that we are working on with another government about an agreement, if we say that we expect in that agreement that women will be given a certain portion, then I think that's going to happen because there will be efforts made on both sides of the border to make sure that the women are found, that the women are supported, that the women are propelled.

I think we have to take into account the fact that.... It's just like in politics. You know, everybody says that if you want a woman to run for politics, you have to ask her, on average, eight times before she actually does. Even for women entrepreneurs, it's the same thing. They'll go into entrepreneurship much later than men do. They'll miss out on a lot of grants that are supposedly for young entrepreneurs because they wait until their kids are older to start, etc.

I think there are ways to be very deliberate in terms of getting the women to decide that this is what they want to do and in terms of making sure that, whether it's a government, an organization or a company that wants these services, they're making sure that they're giving a fair chance, taking into account the fact that women are often not as good at pitching, not as good at networking, and less self-confident. They get less funding. Then, if you actually embed that in an agreement—call it quotas if you want—I think it's really worthwhile. Europe has shown us how it actually works.

I hope this helps.

• (1140)

Mr. Richard Cannings: That's very helpful. It actually just crystallized things in my mind. We have chapters on the environment and on labour, for instance, where we want to ensure that the countries we're trading with are on an equal footing with labour practices and with environmental regulations. The example you gave, I think, is a concrete example of where we could up the game here to make sure that we're on the same level with countries such as France. I mean, that was interesting.

I'm at a minute and a half, so I will turn to Ms. Bernier now and ask if she has anything to add. If not, I have another question.

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I think it's important to note that, as a private business, we can also explore different structures. For example, we have a U.S. subsidiary, as well as a European subsidiary, so those agreements have to take into account that we can—and I think should—be incentivized to keep business flowing through our Canadian entity and not be forced to run it through one of our subsidiaries.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Okay, but in terms of these chapters on gender rights and promoting equal opportunities, those chapters have not affected your business in any way, haven't helped...?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: No, or maybe they have and that's why they're not top of mind for me.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Okay.

I'll leave it there for now. I'll come back in the next round.

The Chair: Mr. Martel, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

Ms. Vachon, how do you view existing government and private initiatives to support women entrepreneurs?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: Frankly, I think a lot of people would like to go in the same direction or seize the issue.

The Government of Canada works a lot by sector. We know that 80% of women work in the service sector. Diversifying suppliers is a way of working with all women in all sectors, both services and manufacturing, which is not common.

Sometimes we tend to design initiatives that are so specific that, at the end of the day, they help very few women. Instead, we should focus on much broader initiatives to help as many women as possible. For example, a large sum, say \$500,000, will be invested in a business, when the same amount could have been used to help 500 organizations. I think the funds are not allocated properly. More work needs to be done on that.

Let us not forget that there are not a lot of women in the technology sector. The government should invest a lot of time in educational institutions to attract more women to the technology sector. We work mainly with women in the service sector. When they come to us, we do not have a lot of leeway in terms of the direction they have chosen. We need to respect their choices and help them evolve.

The important thing is to help as many women as possible. That is why sector-specific support is a major obstacle to women's growth.

• (1145)

Mr. Richard Martel: I often hear that women entrepreneurs, after getting funding to start their business, feel abandoned at the commercialization stage. It is as if there was no more assistance.

What do you think?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: There is a lot of money at the start of the business, but afterwards, we should help women develop somewhat because they hit a sort of low tide. Meanwhile, the doors are wide open for big corporations. It is important to support women at this stage, because they are inclined to delay the development of their business when they find themselves in this situation.

As Ms. Codsí said earlier, they are much less inclined to network. They work on their product and fall in love with it. They literally forget to go out and sell it. Our role is to bring them to markets so that they gain self-confidence. That is what Ms. Codsí was saying as well. Women lack self-confidence. We are here to try to fill this gap, which is somewhat generalized.

Mr. Richard Martel: Is the biggest challenge getting them to market?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Richard Martel: What are the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the regions compared to those in large cities?

Are there differences between the two situations? Is it more difficult in the regions?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: First, 80% of large businesses are in large urban centres. Of course, women tend to get closer to the major centres as part of their business activities. However, if they want to do something in a major city, they are often disadvantaged by the distance they have to travel on the road. Earlier, it was said that women are less likely to leave home when they have children. Distance is a barrier. We are trying to reduce its impact, but it is still a barrier.

Mr. Richard Martel: What role does the Réseau des femmes d'affaires du Québec play in supporting women entrepreneurs?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: We are right there on the ground. The RFAQ is the instrument of business development for women-owned businesses.

For example, we knock on the doors of large corporations and ask them how much they are willing to invest in women-owned businesses to buy their products and services during the year. We invite women to sit around the table, and we ask them what they need. We make sure that we invite the right people to make things happen.

During our last three-year mandate, we told the Government of Quebec that we were going to create economic benefits of about \$11 million. Our actual net economic benefits were \$80 million.

A woman entrepreneur with only three employees is not going to knock on Costco's door. These women need someone to represent them, someone who will be able to make things happen afterwards. We need to make sure that we are able to grow their business based on their capacity.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sorry. We're about 10 seconds over.

Mr. Miao, go ahead, please.

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

The government has created and funded several funding streams to help and support businesses, especially for women. When businesses are thriving, lives and the economy are generally better.

Ms. Codsí, in your opinion, which government program has benefited you or your members the most? Is it helping women-owned businesses access any international markets? Can you share any measurable outcomes or stories about that?

Ms. Caroline Codsí: Thank you for the question. I can't really answer it, because, as I mentioned at the start of my testimony, I have an organization that works with corporations to elevate women.

I can share my own experience as a woman entrepreneur. The difficulty I have is finding resources and understanding where there is government-led funding, support and mentoring. Ruth was mentioning how we can help women with their start-up phase, but then we drop them there. How do they scale up? How do they continue on? It's a massive waste of money if we put it into an entrepreneur who doesn't have the support to get to the next phase. It just dies there. What are we doing to ensure that there is support at every step of the way and that we take into account, holistically, the life of a female entrepreneur, whether it's her personal life or how we can mentor her?

I don't want to get back into all the details I shared earlier, but I can't tell you which programs are most beneficial. I think that's a question Ruth can answer better, or Ashlyn.

• (1150)

Mr. Wilson Miao: Ms. Bernier, would you like to add to that?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: We have taken advantage of any and every federal, provincial and local program along our journey. As we've grown and our needs have changed, some of them have become more important.

I would like to point out a few. SR and ED has been excellent for us. We are an R and D company, and that has helped us immensely to be able to continue innovating and developing new intellectual property. We have also taken advantage of the NRC IRAP. That has allowed us to focus on creating new jobs for new, highly qualified personnel and hire those folks into our company to do that R and D.

More recently, as we've been focused on scaling, we've taken advantage of the PrairiesCan program through Western Economic Diversification, whose zero-interest repayable loans have helped us incredibly with cash flow as we have focused our efforts away from R and D and more towards go-to-market and export. Those have helped us make some of those significant investments up front. This is a challenge that I think a lot of companies have as they're transitioning from research and development to commercialization; you have to spend a lot of money and you're not going to see the payoff for quarters or, potentially, years. Programs such as the PrairiesCan loan program have helped us immensely to be able to do that.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you for sharing that.

Do you believe the current financial initiatives are adequate to meet the needs of women-owned businesses? What kind of improvements would you recommend to the committee?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I think they're adequate, in that there is a big enough pot of money available. Potentially, there should be some reassessment and refocusing on how we specifically support women entrepreneurs. Again, to a point I've hopefully made several times here today, it has to focus on getting those organizations and companies to revenue as quickly as possible.

What we've seen—and I've seen it in our own ecosystem—is companies ending up reliant on government programs and grants and staying alive longer than they should, when the best thing for those companies, and ultimately for our economy, would be to wind down so those entrepreneurs could take those lessons learned and move on to the next thing as quickly as possible.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Do you agree that Canada is one of the leading countries in supporting women entrepreneurs?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I don't know if I have the information to say yes or no, unfortunately.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Does anyone else want to answer these questions?

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Vachon: I can answer that.

The women entrepreneurship strategy has been very promising over the past five years. It has allowed us to benefit from a knowledge portal that gives us access to an enormous number of studies. It helps us direct our actions.

For us, it was very important. This strategy has enabled us to create the Maïa platform, which helps women entrepreneurs connect with each other.

It is very difficult for women to win contracts. The platform's search engine finds calls for tenders in connection with the women's lines of business. That is an important aspect.

Another aspect that is underappreciated is the fact that women have relationships with each other. Through the platform, women can get to know other women entrepreneurs, and often they can give each other contracts. According to some studies, these contracts can ensure the survival of women entrepreneurs' businesses.

Growth requires support in any sphere of activity. This platform makes peer support possible and helps women ensure the profitability of their business. That is what large companies do.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Vachon, but maybe you can use those comments in response to another member's question. I don't want to take time away from the other members.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, please go ahead for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I am going to start with Ms. Vachon. I do not know if the other witnesses will have time to answer as well.

Ms. Vachon, given that you are the CEO of the Réseau des femmes d'affaires du Québec, do you see a difference in the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Quebec compared to the rest of Canada?

We know that the culture of government intervention is not necessarily the same in Quebec, where we have Investissement Québec, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec and other similar collective tools that form the model we have had since the 1960s.

Is there a difference between federal programs, Quebec programs and programs in other Canadian provinces?

How do all these realities differ from one another?

• (1155)

Ms. Ruth Vachon: The difference in Quebec is that we are on a bit of a blind spot, because Investissement Québec has relatively significant key performance indicators. So it is mainly about large companies. It is all about figures instead of numbers. There are things that could be improved in that regard.

Are our programs better? I do not want to brag, but the advantage we have in Quebec—

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: No need to be modest. I will certainly not complain about anyone boasting about Quebec.

Ms. Ruth Vachon: In Quebec, we have a unique expertise. That is why the Government of Canada asked us to share it everywhere. What we do generates benefits—millions of dollars going into the pockets of women that they would not otherwise get. That is why I think we do have an advantage.

That being said, are our women entrepreneurs facing greater challenges? I would say that we have come a long way in the last few years. We can say that we have very good women entrepreneurs in Quebec.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: In short, Quebec businesswomen are on a similar level as businesswomen in the rest of Canada, and Quebec's programs are so progressive that they inspire the rest of Canada.

Where do things stand in terms of implementing programs modelled on Quebec's in the rest of Canada?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: It's been almost three years since our initiative was launched. We have a solid foundation, and our Maïa platform is working very well. It provides training to large businesses and women entrepreneurs; just because you want to sell to Costco doesn't mean you're ready to do it tomorrow. We help women build their capacity.

Moreover, three years is a very short time in a life cycle, when you want to change a vision of society. After three years, the network wouldn't have the means to keep this initiative going without support.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have Mr. Cannings, for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

I'm going to turn back to Ms. Bernier.

You mentioned a couple of things. You mentioned how it would be very helpful to have more government procurement to help businesses. You mentioned the problem of confidence that you need from customers. It seems that procurement would not only bring the cash flow that you need to move from that research and development phase into full production, but it would also provide that confidence, because people could look at your track record with your government procurement contracts, and say, "This is a company that is doing well; it's doing what we want."

Could you elaborate on that? You mentioned you haven't had much, if any, government procurement from Canada. Can you try

to explain why that is, and where the problems are? If you can imagine a government program that would fix that, what would that look like?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: In the earlier days, when our technology was a little more experimental, we did attempt to participate in the build in Canada innovation program, which has since been rejigged into a program called innovative solutions Canada. I'm not familiar with the new program and how it might have changed, but our experience with the build in Canada innovation program, which was meant to be a way to facilitate early stage technology, technology that was ready to be used in government programs, was one of the worst experiences in my time building this company. It was slow and bureaucratic. We couldn't get straight answers from anyone on what steps were next, and eventually we just gave up. I would hope that the replacement for that program, innovative solutions Canada, is a lot more of a straightforward and smooth process.

I want to be really clear that we're not expecting our government to just give us business because we're Canadian companies. However, we need to be at the table to compete. In our case, we're competing with some massive, highly capitalized U.S.-based competitors that are winning contracts with the Canadian government. We can't even get in the room. We can't find our way in to have that conversation and show our product. It's really difficult to get in. We're just asking to be let in to show off that we could potentially solve this problem that U.S.-based competitors are currently solving right now.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry. The time is over, but I wanted to make sure Ms. Bernier had a chance to complete her sentence.

We'll go to Mr. Jeneroux for five minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's great to welcome a fellow Edmontonian to the committee. I think we should have a motion, Madam Chair, that we always have an Edmontonian at this committee. I think it would be great.

Thank you for your testimony here today.

I think you raised a lot of red flags, Ms. Bernier, about how you can do business with NATO, the U.K., the State Department, Uber and Brazil, as you mentioned, yet it's really challenging to do business here in Canada.

Some of my questions were scooped by Mr. Cannings, but could you elaborate on what that means not just for your company, but for other Canadian companies that are looking to do business with the Canadian government, provincial governments and municipal governments?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I'm probably hitting this point again and again, but it's because I think it is so crucial. If Canadian companies cannot find those initial opportunities at home, we are going to have such a hard time exporting, because we are then trying to do business internationally. We don't have the networks and we can't get the introductions, so we have to fight our way in. We've done that through a lot of hard work, grit and determination.

Looking back and thinking about.... For example, when we go to RFP to try to win these contracts with NATO or the U.K. Ministry of Defence, often one of the questions is, who are you already doing business with? What governments do you already have a contract with? They want to see those reference customers. They want to see that social proof, which counts for a lot in those RFPs. If we were able to first do business provincially or federally, that would just clear that path so much for us.

It's easy to say that in hindsight. Who knows? I think it's just something that this committee should consider. I know we're talking about export, but I believe that being able to export would be much easier when you already have some reference customers.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: You did reference three funding programs: SR and ED, NRC IRAP and PrairiesCan. None of those are, to my colleague's question, specific to women entrepreneurs. I just want to make sure that, through the analysts, we recognize that when asked what programs are working, those three were referenced, not the women entrepreneurship programs.

You also talked about looking to venture capital in the United States and what it means if you are getting venture capital there versus venture capital here. I get the impression that it's a negative, obviously, for nationalism, patriotism and whatnot. Is it a negative for you doing business here in Canada? Is that what you said in your testimony?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: It removes a lot of the incentives for us to maintain operations and continue hiring people in Canada. We would lose access to a lot of the programs that I mentioned. That is fair, if we make the choice to take investment from investors outside Canada and lose our CCPC status. That's a choice that we'll have to make, but it does significantly reduce the incentive for us to continue building our company here.

What really concerns me, and I think it should concern this committee, is this: If someday we have a liquidity event and we sell our company and everyone makes a little bit of money, where are they going to start their next businesses, knowing what they know and the experience that they would have gone through, especially if we lose our CCPC status?

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I think I have just over a minute left.

On the last point, you brought up the trade commissioners and what that means when you go abroad. I personally have never had any interaction with any trade commissioners. Could you elaborate on how that could be improved? How do you see it as perhaps not working right now?

• (1205)

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I don't have a ton of experience, and perhaps that's because some of the early experiences weren't particularly helpful. I did find that a lot of trade commissioners were just

pointing us in a lot of directions, telling us that we should do business with those people over there, but not making an introduction. Ultimately, when we're looking to do business abroad—and I recognize that this is a big ask—we need connections. We need introductions. Just saying that we should be doing business with Exxon Mobil.... Yes, I figured that, but can they get us an introduction?

That's where things could be really helpful, especially from trade commissioners, if possible.

The Chair: You have 14 seconds left. Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Sheehan for five minutes.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the presenters for their fantastic testimony.

Thank you to my friend here on the left for putting forward this very important study, one that's absolutely critical.

Chair, through you to our presenters, I'm going to ask Caroline a question.

I think you mentioned that only 11% of women are involved in trade-related businesses. It's disappointing, to say the least, when we hear it's 11%. First of all, I want to ask when that study was done. I have a couple of questions around that. We saw how \$10-a-day day care or reduced day care fees increased the participation rate of women in the workforce in Canada significantly. It's at record numbers now. It's the highest it's ever been. Are there any stats or numbers to indicate whether there's been any movement? It is a fairly recent announcement. Is it increasing the participation of women in entrepreneurship, in particular in trade?

Ms. Caroline Cods: I don't know when that study was, but I think it's quite recent.

These numbers are indeed alarming. If I look at a parallel in terms of what's happening in the corporate world.... Look at the FP500, the 500 largest companies in Canada. Female CEOs are about 6% or 7%. I don't think we measure the magnitude of the gender gap in Canada today. It's everywhere, in every sector—entrepreneurship, corporate Canada and big organizations. That is the reality we are facing. Whether they are in large corporations, or whether they are entrepreneurs, women are facing the same obstacles. It's always the same things. There are things that pertain to women. The work we do is to provide them with all the tools so they can up their game, come out of their comfort zone, overcome their fears, pitch, network and be out there.

We can look to the government. Earlier, I had a conversation with Ruth and one of the gentlemen about tooting the horn of Quebec. I think we are definitely a leading province in many things that are instrumental for gender equality. I talked about the importance of legislation. In France, the percentage of women on boards was allowed to go from 12% to 42%, because it was just not accepted by the government. There are sanctions. Board members can lose *les jetons de participation*. If a board doesn't comply, there are things that can be done. Quebec is the only province in Canada that has the Loi sur la gouvernance des sociétés d'État. Hydro-Québec, Société des alcools and all of our Crown corporations have parity. These boards are 51% women. There are definitely things being done in Quebec.

I think the government's responsibility is huge, because it works. Quebec did things 25 years before the federal government did. It adopted equal pay, with the Loi sur l'équité salariale. It took 25 years for the federal government to implement this, but we've had it in Quebec forever. We had \$5 day care. That was under Pauline Marois. Every government, whether Parti Québécois, CAQ or the Liberal Party, has implemented gender things that are very conducive to women's participation in the economy. It's not just about doing the equitable thing. It's because there is so much payback for the economy. When Chrystia Freeland did her budget, it was a feminist budget, because there has been ample demonstration that when we allow women to fully participate in the economy, it's beneficial to all of us, not just women. It's for our society as a whole.

I have one last thing, and we're the only province doing this: When women get married in Quebec, they keep their own last name, which is also a feminist approach you don't have anywhere else in the country. I mean, I'm from Lebanon. Living in Quebec is a dream for someone looking for equity.

There's a lot that can be done and should be done to further support female entrepreneurs.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Thank you.

My wife kept her name, too. She's a Bradford.

The Chair: Okay, it's going to be all "me too".

We have about 20 minutes left before we deal with the other business, so I'm going to suggest that we get partway through the third round. Everybody will get a few more minutes in this round.

We'll go to Mr. Williams for five minutes.

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to all the witnesses. This has been amazing testimony so far.

Ms. Bernier, you had some great recommendations at the start. You talked about capital programs for growth and revenue, which is fantastic. We need to be growing companies in Canada.

Something that we look at to free up access to capital and financial services is open banking. In Canada, we've been waiting six years, almost seven years, for open banking legislation. Do you be-

lieve that having this legislation enacted as soon as possible is beneficial to women entrepreneurs?

I'd also like you to comment on access to capital. VC funding in the U.S. is much greater than ours, and you're seeing the results of that. We only have \$6 billion a year in Canada. The U.S. has \$200 billion, so it's quite a stark contrast. That might be why you're seeing more interest.

What can we do? What recommendations can you make about open banking, should it be coming, financial access and then looking at VC as a whole?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Without getting into too much detail, we have experienced a lot of challenges with the banking options available to us in Canada. I find that there are better, more flexible, more transparent options available to me personally than there are for our corporate banking needs, and that has been a huge challenge for us.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that legislation, perhaps? I could try to comment specifically.

Mr. Ryan Williams: The Liberal government has promised to bring forth legislation on open banking. They keep promising, and we haven't seen it.

In terms of having that access to open banking, it allows more access from individuals and businesses to different financial services and banks as a whole. Do you see that as beneficial, not only to your business but to women entrepreneurs as a whole, to have more access to banks in general and financial services?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Without having read the legislation, based on what you're telling me, I would agree with that, yes.

Mr. Ryan Williams: For VC, of course, it's the same thing. Obviously, venture capital is different. It's a risk by individuals who put their own funds in, but it's a stark contrast. Are there any comments you have on venture capital?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Yes, and I guess one other comment I would make on banking is what we saw with Silicon Valley Bank a year or two ago. We want to avoid situations like that and keep that in mind with any legislation.

When we went through our series A round of funding, we talked to most major venture capital firms in Canada. Some were excited, wanted to participate and ultimately did, and some weren't. When we go to raise our next round of funding, we already have kind of covered that pool, and there just isn't a large enough pool of venture capital available for the kind of funding that companies like ours are after, companies that are interested in high growth and in getting to be massive, in getting to be one of 10, so that will be a challenge for us in the future.

Mr. Ryan Williams: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I'm going to give Mr. Baldinelli my last two minutes.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to follow up with Ms. Bernier.

The Council of Canadian Innovators recently had a “Prosperity for Every Generation” petition. That petition talked about how the government cannot tax its way to prosperity and how the Liberal government's federal budget will stifle innovation and growth. In terms of Samdesk, can you elaborate on which taxes are stifling growth potential?

• (1215)

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Potentially the changes to the capital gains taxes will.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Yes, considering that you don't have that in the United States, and that notion of venture capital.

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Yes. I know of businesses that have moved their operations to Austin, Texas, for example, for that reason, because of the more favourable taxes.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Wow.

I have one last question. You talked in your presentation earlier about how companies such as yours, Samdesk, struggle to do business with Canada and that there are more opportunities in the United States, the European Union or Mexico. You talked about NATO, for example. In one of your recommendations, you were talking about leveraging domestic procurement opportunities, and that also goes to your earlier point about scaling operations, if you can get access to those opportunities. What are those areas that we could assist in to open up those opportunities or to make you more aware of those opportunities?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: I think some of the systems are just antiquated in terms of how we can find out about these opportunities without having to check a website once a week. A lot of the other systems we experience have a bit more of an automated way to let you know about opportunities that might be of interest to you. It would be very helpful to look at something like that here.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is Madame Fortier, please.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Again, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here.

I think it's very important to see how we could do better. From what I understand, we're doing a lot already, but we could do more. Some of you mentioned that incentives might be necessary. If you haven't had a chance to name any, I'd appreciate it if you would do so now.

Are there any best practices or models elsewhere in the world that Canada should adopt?

Ms. Codsi, you talked about France's model, but are there others?

Ms. Bernier, you mentioned that the United States had set up incentives and support programs.

I'd like Ms. Vachon to answer my questions first. Ms. Codsi and Ms. Bernier can answer afterwards.

Ms. Ruth Vachon: Thank you for the question. It's almost my favourite question.

Our women entrepreneurs have a lot of trouble accessing government contracts, because the majority of them are small business owners.

The U.S. government offers tax incentives to private companies. For example, it asks them to buy 5% of goods and services from under-represented suppliers. If they don't reach that percentage, they aren't punished; rather, they're rewarded if they do, thanks to the tax measures in place.

In Canada, we've always shied away from the term “tax incentive”. I think that's a shame, because this practice would give women entrepreneurs much greater access to markets. Strategically, we're looking at U.S. companies, because we know they have quotas to meet.

Take Costco, for example. When Costco buys from us in Canada, I know very well that my dollar ultimately goes to them. Every time Costco does business with a Canadian company, that company is helping Costco reach the quotas set by the United States, which is very advantageous for Costco.

For our part, from a strategic standpoint, we focus on companies that have programs and on those for whom this has a decisive effect. The good thing is that our women entrepreneurs don't necessarily have to export their products now. They get an order in the U.S., then fulfill it in their Canadian subsidiary. It allows their business to grow without necessarily exporting. Sales increase. Later, these entrepreneurs can take an order directly from the U.S.

Personally, I think it's a great program. Canada is very close to being able to contribute directly to business development through a tax incentive. That would be a huge help to women entrepreneurs and large businesses.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Ms. Codsi, do you have any other suggestions on incentives?

Ms. Caroline Codsi: I'll be brief.

Canada is well known for its tax burden, which is very high compared to most other countries. Intuitively, we know that this will encumber or slow down innovative entrepreneurship, for example.

Ms. Vachon agreed with me that women entrepreneurs favour places where there's a quota. They say that women are needed to meet certain criteria, that these women exist and that we need to move forward. This reinforces the idea that a structure needs to be put in place.

I don't know what the federal government's requirements are for suppliers. Perhaps Ms. Vachon knows this better than I do. Does it ensure that some of its suppliers are women? I imagine so. Does it ensure that its suppliers are companies that have parity certification, for example?

In other words, is work being given—

• (1220)

Hon. Mona Fortier: So it's a matter of ensuring the best possible participation of women by proposing an incentive.

Ms. Caroline Codsì: I think the federal government needs to lead by example. It must be the first to say that it does business with women, in part. A quota could be reserved for women or businesses that have the parity certification, in other words, businesses that allow women to contribute at all levels of the organization.

I think this is the kind of incentive that leads to a societal shift. Businesses are saying that, if they want to do business with the government, they have to show their credentials, that more women are in positions at all levels. They may be women entrepreneurs, through the Réseau des femmes d'affaires du Québec, or large corporations or businesses that have thousands or tens of thousands of employees and parity certification. In addition, they must show that corporate initiatives, policies and culture are reviewed annually, and ensure that women and men have equal opportunities.

I see that Ms. Vachon wants to say something. I've said everything I wanted to say.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Unfortunately, I'm out of time, but if you have an example to share, Ms. Bernier, we would appreciate it.

[English]

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: Okay. I have just one quick point, and I think it is a really important one.

If we are going to explore introducing incentives and quotas, we have to consider our definition of a woman-owned business, because as a venture capital-based business, no one owns over 50% of our business. We have many shareholders. If that's going to be our definition, that's going to automatically preclude a lot of women-run businesses.

The Chair: That's great advice. Thank you.

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Ms. Vachon, we know that most export companies owned by women tend to be smaller than comparable companies owned by men. That alone raises questions.

In addition, women concentrate their activities in the service sector, including professional and technical services, as well as in retail.

How do you interpret that?

Ms. Ruth Vachon: It's a bit like the natural law that has governed this for years.

A link can be made with an earlier question. A small tax incentive could reverse the process. That would put it back in the hands

of the large companies, which would be looking for those companies to include them in their supply chain.

It's up to the government to get the system moving. I know it's difficult, but if there were a small incentive in place for large companies, they'd be the ones getting the system moving. The problem would disappear, and at the same time, it would make your job a lot easier.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Ms. Bernier, you work for a technology and artificial intelligence company. Is this a field where women particularly stand out?

How is the workforce distributed within the organization itself? Are women more involved in design, business relations or administration?

What is the ratio of men to women, and how is this reflected in the various areas of the organization?

[English]

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: We have women in technical roles in our company. Something we strive for when hiring for technical roles is bringing in as many female candidates as we can during the interview process. We still want to hire on merit, of course. What we're finding, because Edmonton, in particular, has an excellent university—we have the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute—is that a lot of women are coming up through that system and are able to join us in software development, machine learning and artificial intelligence roles. They tend to be early on in their career.

What I'm really excited for is this: In the future, are they going to be the next wave of entrepreneurs who will be starting their own technology-based businesses because of the training and experiences they had through working with a start-up like Samdesk?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cannings has two and a half minutes. He will be our last member for questioning.

• (1225)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

I'm going to continue with Ms. Bernier and follow up on my earlier questions about government procurement and that process.

You indicated that you were having trouble getting in the door for any government procurement in Canada, yet you've worked with NATO and big firms and agencies outside Canada. Does that not give the Government of Canada or other agencies here the confidence to employ you? It's the opposite of what we would normally think. This isn't an issue that specifically touches on international trade and women entrepreneurship, but it's just one more thing that women-run companies have to deal with.

Could you provide some background on your experiences and why you think the government is failing you here?

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: It's an interesting question. We have some ongoing conversations with Canadian government agencies about potentially using our product. We are generally selling into military and intelligence, so it just becomes a question of scale. NATO, the U.K. Ministry of Defence and the U.S. military are just on a bigger scale.

Conversations here tend to be slower, and they tend to be on a smaller scale. We're spending a lot of time waiting right now. Things just seem to be slow-moving here. What I'm hoping is that, as Canadian defence and military spending increases over the next 10 years, we might see more opportunities here.

The Chair: Mr. Cannings, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. Richard Cannings: I have one more follow-up question.

You seemed to indicate that the federal government was interested in talking to big companies from outside Canada and not to your company; to me, it's a bit of a conundrum.

Ms. Ashlyn Bernier: It's an awareness issue. We're less than a hundred people. Our competitors are a thousand. They have big budgets to spend on marketing. They have lobbyists. They're working with agencies. That's why we're asking for support and initiative from the government to help us get into those conversations. We don't necessarily have the means that our competitors do to force our way in.

Mr. Richard Cannings: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses. It's a very exciting study that we're doing, and your information this morning was invaluable. Thank you very much.

We will take a short break.

• (1225) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1225)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

First, I have to introduce in paper form, in English and in French, the motion submitted by Mr. Savard-Tremblay last week, so that we know exactly and clearly what we are currently dealing with.

Before we open that up for discussion, I need to read you the following procedural information to help the committee as we move forward.

Before moving to the consideration of the motion on the reception of documents from CBSA, I need to take a minute to go over what was already provided to date. As you will have seen, CBSA provided an additional update this morning on the documents—I assume everybody saw the letter from CBSA that came in this morning. Thus far they have provided the committee with five documents, made up of 16 appendices, totalling 290 pages. This does not include documents received on October 1 and October 7. As they noted in the updates, the remaining documents are not tied up with the department but with translation. In total, there are over 30,000 pages to be translated, which is a lot of work being undertaken by, apparently, a limited number of people.

I also suggested to the clerk, when he finds the opportunity, to invite the manager of the translation services to the committee. I think it would be helpful if the committee got a better handle on just how many people work in that department and so on, if that's okay with the committee. At a later date, we'll have the manager come in for a few minutes.

They also provided an update on when documents will be ready. Later today, if not already, CBSA will have provided the first package of documents responsive to part (a) of the committee's March 19 motion and all outstanding documents responsive to the committee's March 21 motion. You should have all received that already or will be receiving it today.

The next thing we would be looking for is a disclosure package responsive to one of the two remaining March 19 written undertakings in the next week; a series of disclosure packages, as translation is complete, responsive to part (a) of the committee's March 19 motion, to be provided as quickly as possible; second, disclosure packages responsive to parts (b) and (c) of the committee's March 19 motion, to be provided as quickly as possible; and a disclosure package responsive to the final outstanding March 19 written undertaking, again, to be provided as quickly as possible. CBSA also reiterated that they can prioritize any documents remaining that the committee would like them to.

At the end of last Wednesday's meeting, Mr. Savard-Tremblay presented a motion that, having now had a chance to look at it more closely, qualifies as a question of privilege. Namely, he's alleging that the committee's privileges were breached through CBSA's delay in providing the requested documents within the requested timelines. The power to send for papers and records is among the powers of House committees, so I agree that this relates to parliamentary privilege and that members are free to discuss that matter.

That said, I draw the members' attention to page 986 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, on the matter of refusals to comply with an order for papers and records, which states:

In cases where the author of or the authority responsible for a record refuses to comply with an order issued by a committee to produce documents, the committee essentially has three options. The first is to accept the reasons and conditions put forward to justify the refusal; the committee members then concede that they will not have access to the record or accept the record with passages deleted. The second is to seek an acceptable compromise with the author or the authority responsible for access to the record.... The third option is to reject the reasons given for denying access to the record and uphold the order to produce the entire record.

While this is not a one-on-one comparison, as CBSA is not refusing to produce the documents, I think it is relevant to the matter at hand. It is well within the committee's rights to report to the House if it decides that this is the best course of action in this instance. However, while the documents have yet to be produced, CBSA has been responsive when asked about them. Based on what we've heard, they have been working to co-operate with the committee's request, but translation is what's preventing them from providing the documents. As previously noted, there are over 30,000 pages currently being translated. They have also offered to prioritize the translation of specific documents at the committee's request, an offer that we as yet have not taken advantage of.

• (1230)

Therefore, I would seek the committee's direction on how you would like to proceed with this matter. I would like to think that we could find a compromise on this question, but I will leave it in the committee's hands.

Now, we'll move on to the motion from Monsieur Savard-Tremblay.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you.

As in any field, in politics, there are some pills that are bigger and harder to swallow.

I'm glad to know that most of the documents will be tabled, but my point remains the same. We got a verbal commitment here in March that all documents would be tabled. I must admit that I'm surprised that a government agency such as this doesn't already have a French version of these documents on hand.

We passed a motion, and we were clearly told that these documents would be delivered within two weeks. That's what they said, not me. I wouldn't have proposed something unrealistic. Agency officials told us that it was possible. Then, in April, if I'm not mistaken, a delay was announced, which will almost bring us to the imminent implementation of the new system. In your update, you said that we would receive the last two documents requested shortly, and we still haven't received them today.

There's a difference between saying that we may have miscalculated the time it was going to take and that two weeks may be a bit tight, and saying that it's already difficult to produce these documents in six months. I find it hard to believe that such an experienced agency would commit to this in front of everyone without having any idea how long it would take to produce such documents. In fact, this isn't the first time they've done this.

Although we'll continue to ask that all of this be given priority, I think we should still point out this complete failure and this erroneous commitment that was made to us, the members of the committee, so I'm going to keep my motion as is.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Mr. Sidhu, and then Mr. Cannings.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm not sure if all committee members got the printout of the amendment on their desks.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Grant McLaughlin): We don't have enough copies.

The Chair: They're running them off right now. They'll be here in a minute.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: I can speak to it in the meantime, but I did give you enough copies for everybody.

The Chair: Can we get what we have distributed? If necessary, we will wait a minute until the clerk gets the copies.

You can speak to it, Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: I think most of my colleagues have the document in front of them.

I hear where my colleague is coming from. I think it's important that we be respectful to both official languages. If we wanted it in one language, it could be ready, but I think it's important for our two official languages to make sure we have documents in both official languages.

As we've heard, there are over 30,000 pages. That would probably take someone close to 600 hours to review. If Mr. Savard-Tremblay wants to prioritize certain documents that he wants to look for, I think this amendment will help with that. It's about transparency, and I think the government wants to be very transparent in terms of what's presented.

As you can see in your original motion and in what the chair said, documents have been provided to us by CBSA, but this is not with CBSA. This is with the translation bureau, with the officials there, and they have to take their time to make sure the documents are translated properly.

I have a few amendments here. I'll read them into the record:

the CBSA continues to provide the committee with the requested documents as they are translated and has written to the committee on April 11, April 19, May 1, October 1 and October 7 requesting guidance from the committee; and

the CARM technical specifications alone exceed 30,000 pages, which need to be translated;

That the committee respond to the CBSA's request to indicate prioritization of the material to be translated and submitted to the committee.

We cross out the last section there: "as the committee has not received all the documents requested, the Committee report these matters to the House, so that the House may take the measures it deems appropriate with regard to parliamentary privilege."

I think this is an amendment to take Mr. Savard-Tremblay's considerations very seriously. I think that when we prioritize the documents Mr. Savard-Tremblay wants, he'll see that he can go through the documents as he wishes. Again, reviewing over 30,000 pages and getting them translated.... For someone reading at an average speed, it is going to take 600 hours to review 30,000 pages. I'm not sure what we're getting at here, but I think that, in the spirit of transparency, this is a good remedy for Mr. Savard-Tremblay's motion.

• (1240)

The Chair: I have Mr. Cannings and then Mr. Savard-Tremblay, Mr. Williams and Madame Fortier.

Go ahead, Mr. Cannings.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thanks.

I just wanted some clarification here. I'm not an expert—even after being here for nine years—on the definition of privilege and things like that. I would assume, as I think you were outlining at the start in your comments.... I think one of the main questions here is this: Do we think CBSA is delaying this on purpose, gumming up the works because it doesn't want to answer and because there are damning things that it's hiding? That's the spin that some around this table might want to put on this. Is it simply an issue of translation getting requests like this, not just from this committee but also from others perhaps, that is putting them behind schedule? Is CBSA doing this on purpose, or was it just wildly optimistic when it promised us documents in two weeks or a month or whatever it was?

There was an assumption, which I just heard from Mr. Savard-Tremblay, that this is a government agency, so perhaps you would think that translation wouldn't be needed and that it was already done. I'd like to find out if these contracts with Deloitte were only in English. What are we looking at here?

I just have one question on the motion. It says in the third paragraph, “adopted a unanimous motion indicating that the CBSA had not received the requested documents”. Is the CBSA waiting for something? Is it waiting for those documents from translation? What is it waiting for? Is it its problem, or is it somebody else's delay?

I have all of these questions before I can make up my mind whether this is a question of privilege and whether someone is actually thwarting our efforts to get at the answers, which I think are important. I would agree with Mr. Sidhu. I have one staff member here; we're not going to look at 30,000 pages of documents. I would be happy if other people around the table did, but that's their issue.

Again, to me, it's a question of whether we believe that someone is deliberately trying to hide something here. I haven't seen any evidence of that so far. There's a slow co-operation being shown here. You might want to read reluctance into that. I don't know. I'd be happy to prioritize things so that we could read these on a timely basis as they come in and could see what they say.

Those are my comments.

The Chair: Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Basically, I would like to raise three points.

Mr. Sidhu said that the problem was related to translation delays and that, if we wanted the documents in English only, we would have them. That's not true.

According to your update, documents are still pending. I'd like to remind you that we were supposed to receive the documents two weeks after the motions were put forward, in March and April. Some documents haven't been submitted yet, so it's not a matter of translation delays. Some documents haven't been sent for translation yet.

Again, there's a difference between saying that the documents will be sent maybe in two weeks—which was an ambitious time-

line—and saying that they will be sent in six months. I think the difference is quite significant.

That said, Mr. Cannings talked about the agency's intentions. I don't think we're here to assess the intentions of the agency. I, for one, am not attributing any harmful intent to anyone. We're here to evaluate the results. A commitment was made, but the commitment wasn't kept. More than six months later, as we speak, we still haven't received the documents requested. The assessment and revenue management system is going to be implemented, and we haven't been able to do our work on it yet.

I also agree with the idea of giving priority to certain documents, except that I think it's a completely different matter. That would have to be a separate motion.

The purpose of my motion is to find out whether the agency provided the documents we requested, in other words, whether it did what it committed to doing. That isn't what we're asking them to do now. It's something else.

I have no problem with providing a list of documents that we would like to prioritize. I agree with that. However, being told in committee that you're going to provide us with the documents in two weeks, when we haven't yet obtained them, is what's wrong.

Let's not confuse the issue. This motion isn't about the documents requested. It isn't a motion to request documents. The purpose of my motion is to come back to the issue of the documents that haven't been provided. I think this is a rather serious failing, and unfortunately, this isn't the agency's first misdeed.

● (1245)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

If we look at the correspondence we received from the department, CBSA provided the documents. They are still in translation, and the department is waiting for them to be returned.

Go ahead, Mr. Williams.

Mr. Ryan Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Obviously, I was not part of this committee in March, but I have looked at the facts. Thank you for presenting what you have. I have a major concern with the response that we're waiting from translation regarding the documents. The Official Languages Act states that all documents for any government organization need to be in both official languages.

Perhaps we can get a response from the government. If CBSA has documents, including CARM, that aren't in both official languages, why is that? We have borders and systems that are in Quebec and the rest of Canada. Why would we be waiting for translation? They should have been translated. That would be a bigger question of privilege to me. If we didn't have these documents already in both official languages from a government agency, I think there's a bigger issue here. There's some head-shaking, so maybe I'll get a response as to what the issue was.

Second, we've seen this multiple times. We're seeing it in different instances. If a committee asks for documents and it's been voted on, it is the privilege of the committee to get those in a timely matter. If the organization was here in March and said "a few weeks", it is the privilege of the committee to get those in a few weeks, or we should have had ample communication that said that we couldn't get them and we weren't going to get them. Two weeks is one thing. Having amendments on this maybe in two months would be a separate thing. Six months later is unbelievable.

Even if we don't have them, or if they're not there, I think it would be prudent for this committee to pass the original motion, at least to say to the House that this committee is serious about getting those documents.

I guess the procedural question, Madam Chair, would be this: If we pass the original motion without the amendment, and if CBSA did get the documents before it came to the House, would that mean that the motion would be deemed moot in the House? Otherwise, I don't see anything wrong with this committee pushing a little harder to say that this has been a breach of privilege and that we've had far too much time now. It would almost be that a limitation would be six months, no matter what the committee. Six months is way too long to wait for documentation that was asked for, because soon enough, we'll be in 2025, and that will be a year. That's much too long, but that's where we are.

Hopefully, I'll get some other answers, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I would just add that in the 25 years that I have been a member of Parliament, this is the first time there's ever been an issue at committee with not receiving documents as requested.

To go back to the issue, I think we need to invite the manager, or the head of translation, to come to committee—not to do a dressing down of translation, but to get a better understanding of what kind of workload they currently have. Is it very different than previously? For the future, we should know what's going on. If they are understaffed, they should make an attempt to get the staffing required. However, when the committee requests documentation, it needs to see it in order to be able to do the work that's necessary.

Next, I have Madame Fortier.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm a Franco-Ontarian and very proud of it. I worked extensively on the Official Languages Act. Unfortunately, as we know very well, only documents that are public in nature or that must be tabled in Parliament are subject to the requirements related to both

official languages. Internal contracts therefore don't have to be drafted in both official languages. It's in cases where, at a later date, a request is made to do so, as is currently the case for a number of the documents, that it actually has to be done.

Of course, we wouldn't have this problem if all documents within the government, whether public or related to the work of internal employees, were produced in both official languages. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

I'd like to reiterate the importance of inviting someone from the Translation Bureau, as well as a representative from the Canada Border Services Agency, to explain why we are where we are today. That might give us some direction.

I also support my colleague's amendment because it would make it possible to prioritize the documents and, as a result, know what we need to answer questions. I can tell you that it won't be my team members reading 37,000 pages either. Much like Mr. Cannings, we don't have that option.

It's nevertheless important, as a matter of principle, to give priority to certain documents that Mr. Savard-Tremblay referred to so that they can be translated.

I therefore support my colleague's amendment. I think that passing it will allow us to move forward.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before I go to Mr. Savard-Tremblay, I have a document. I'm not going to mention what's been completed but what is partially complete.

They were asked, on March 19, to produce both the external review results and the internal review results of CARM phase two. That was 300 pages. It is partially complete.

Another one was to submit documents—ITPRs—from Gartner and BDO on CARM readiness. That is 80 pages. It is partially complete. The independent third party review was sent on May 1.

Another one that's in progress is the 31,000 pages of material that has been collected in response. It is in translation and ongoing, and packages will be provided to the committee as they become available.

Another one is “the deliverable establishing the link between the detailed functional technical specifications of the system and the business needs”. It is in progress. It's 2,100 pages. It is in translation. The material will be provided as it's ongoing.

Another one is “all documents demonstrating which business needs from the Statement of Work the Agency considers to be met by the current solution”. That's in progress. It's approximately 200 pages. Again, it's in translation.

Those are the five relating to the March 19 request.

The March 21 request was “to produce, in both official languages, unredacted copies of the contingency and disaster recovery plans and the transition plan for importers who are not registered with CARM by May 13”. That is approximately 50 pages of material.

The June 2023 system outage contingency plan was provided to the committee on April 11. Some ongoing material to do with that request will be provided to the committee, and maybe that's one that's being provided today.

Out of those five that are partially complete, I'm told from CBSA documents this morning that two of them will be provided to the committee today, which would mean that there are three reports outstanding, one of them being the 30,000 pages referred to.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I want to emphasize again the issue of prioritization. Actually, that's a separate issue. If there were a motion on the table about that, I wouldn't have a problem with it. I don't think we're there yet. We're talking about a commitment that hasn't been kept. In your opening statement, Madam Chair, you yourself said that there was an apparent breach of parliamentary privilege.

I'd like to remind you that these aren't my requests for documents, but rather the committee's unanimous requests. I think that's a pretty important distinction.

That said, I move that we vote on the motion as soon as possible, if not immediately.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: With regard to Mr. Cannings' point in terms of getting some clarity from the translation bureau, it might be helpful for all of us here to hear from them.

I moved the amendment. Maybe we can vote on the amendment and then go to the main motion. I think that's how it works.

The Chair: You've moved the amendment. Yes, the amendment will get voted on first.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Let's vote on the amendment, then.

The Chair: However, Mr. Cannings indicated that he wants some additional information, which would come either from the translation bureau or from the CBSA. Does the committee want to try to get that additional information before going to a vote on this?

This is an important matter. If we ask the CBSA to come to our meeting on Wednesday and we ask the translation bureau to come on Monday, prior to having a vote, possibly we would get a fuller picture of just what the problem is and where we are going with that. I throw that out as a suggestion in trying to find a way to move this along.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: In fact, I'd like to say yes, but it will instead be no, because the debate on translation timelines is highly relevant. We need to have this debate. The situation raises questions that will be extremely important in the long term, not only for this committee, but for many others.

If we have to evaluate a new program that is about to come into effect and we have to wait that long, it's worth mentioning. We want to ask questions and delve into this issue.

In fact, the issue should be dealt with at a higher level than ours, not in every committee, because the situation could become generalized and problematic in many ways.

That being said, that's not what we're talking about. I think we're diluting the discussion by talking about translation issues, even though they deserve to be discussed. I see it as a separate issue altogether.

[English]

The Chair: I'm in the hands of the committee.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: If Mr. Savard-Tremblay is not amenable to that, maybe we should just go to a vote on the amendment I moved on the floor.

The Chair: All right.

Everyone knows the amendment that Mr. Sidhu has moved. We'll have a recorded vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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