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Chair: Mr. John Williamson



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

[Translation]

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 66th meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[English]

Before I go into committee business, there are a couple of things we're going to discuss today.

I might appear somewhat distracted today. If you have not heard, there is a forest fire in my riding. It's not far from Saint Andrews, the place government members know well, because you keep coming back. You are welcome there again. It's 15 kilometres away. I've been in touch with Dominic LeBlanc and local officials, but it is out of control at this point, so I'll be relying on the clerk today. We have a good team on the ground there. The firefighters are working hard. There are, at this point, seven water bombers in the area. By New Brunswick standards, it's quite serious. Of course, it would pale in comparison to anything we have seen in western Canada recently, given their vast size, but because it's close to population centres, it is quite serious.

On that note, I'm going to return to committee business.

At the last meeting, Madame Sinclair-Desgagné gave notice of the following motion:

That the Committee request that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics forward to the Committee all documents and correspondence received from Ms. Pascale Fournier, ex-President and CEO of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

Why don't I turn to you, Madame Sinclair-Desgagné? Would you like to address this? We can discuss it to see whether we can come to any consensus.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Thank you, Chair.

It was brought to our attention that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, after meeting with Ms. Pascale Fournier, received some very interesting documents for its study on foreign interference and, more specifically, on the man-

agement of the Trudeau Foundation. That committee, which is examining the issue of foreign interference in general, has received a significant amount of information.

It would be more appropriate for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to look into the management processes of an organization that has received public funds, such as the Trudeau Foundation. We have therefore tabled this motion, because it fits in perfectly with meetings we'll be holding next week with representatives of the Trudeau Foundation. I believe it would be most pertinent for us to obtain these documents as soon as possible, so that we can do our job properly at these meetings.

Among the documents provided by the Trudeau Foundation by Madame Fournier, there are e-mails and correspondence that would be quite germane to our study. I therefore hope to obtain the consent of Committee members, who have already passed the motion to hear witnesses from the Trudeau Foundation. This motion is in the same vein. It's important to have access to these documents, so we can be well informed during these meetings.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'm trying to understand. These documents have already been submitted to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Everyone knows very well that I don't like committees duplicating studies. So I'm trying to understand the relevance of what's being proposed.

The motion before us asks that the Canada Revenue Agency investigate the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, in the public interest. I'd like to know whether the documents and e-mails in question pertain to tax issues or tax considerations in connection with donations. I believe our committee clerk could find out if the other committee already has access to those documents.

Personally, I haven't seen the witness list. Is Ms. Fournier being called to testify before us? Our committee is taking a turn that I've never seen, quite frankly. In my opinion, if we want to improve the effectiveness of our work, it's important to know more about the reasons behind these e-mails and exchanges with a former Foundation director.

My questions are along those lines. If we're not in a position to answer them today, we could set this aside and come back to it after we've made enquiries, especially with our colleagues on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

• (1105)

The Chair: I have two comments to make in this regard. First of all, Ms. Fournier is not one of our witnesses. In addition, the clerk informs me that, even if we request these documents, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics will have to discuss them and decide whether to agree to forward them to us. Personally, I have no idea what these documents contain.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I'm glad my colleague mentioned that we don't want committees to duplicate work. These documents are not the focus of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. That committee is studying foreign interference in general, and therefore cannot dwell on the documents provided by Ms. Fournier in a delayed response to questions put to her. Our committee, on the other hand, has decided to undertake a more specific study of the Trudeau Foundation, which is the subject of these documents. It is therefore highly appropriate that we should have access to these documents. To respond to my colleague's concern, the two committees will therefore not be doing the same work twice and, on the contrary, this will enable us to do our work.

As for the documents themselves, we obviously can't go into detail. For the time being, these documents are confidential, since the study was conducted in camera. However, we would like to have access to them to carry out our study on the Trudeau Foundation.

The Chair: Mister Fragiskatos, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a simple question for our colleague: To what end? How is this going to benefit the work of this committee? How will this allow us to carry out our role as members of a committee who sit on the audit committee of Parliament and have as a first obligation to review the reports of the Auditor General and then follow up with public servants, in particular, to understand what has been done to rectify challenges and problems that exist?

Of course, I wouldn't want to blame my colleague for politicizing this committee. That's not what I'm saying, although others might point in that direction. I'm not sure.

I'm struggling to see the overall goal here. What exactly is the aim in this motion, when other committees are very well placed and are looking at exactly the same thing?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Just a moment, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné. I know you want to speak, but I have to follow the list before me.

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair. My comment will be similar to what I said earlier, but I'm trying to understand what

you just said. According to you, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics has its own job to do. When documents are tabled there, they are not automatically transferred to other committees.

Everyone knows that Ms. Fournier, a former employee of the Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau Foundation, did not leave her position under the best of circumstances. We could get into an argument where it's one person's word against another's, but, as my colleague said earlier, it's really not the role of this committee to intervene in this kind of situation. It's a bit like the Committee interfering in a dispute between civil servants in a department and taking sides.

I believe that we should stick to information that has been verified and that will lead us, objectively, to salient facts and conclusions that are in everyone's interest to discover.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you now have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you.

Mr. Fragiskatos, whether my colleagues like it or not, the Committee has decided to conduct a study on the management of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. Let me be very clear: we are conducting a study of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. The purpose of this motion is for us to do our job, which is to conduct an in-depth study of the management of an organization that has received public funding. In the documents, there is indeed written evidence of certain facts that have been reported.

This allows me to answer Ms. Shanahan's question. As these documents are written proof, it would no longer be one person's word against another's. They will also provide us with answers to the questions we put to the witnesses. If the witnesses contradict each other, let's look for the evidence. Let's look at what's written in the e-mails and the documents that were provided. It's all about evidence, and that's exactly what's going to enable us to do our job of verifying what happened at the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, and what continues to happen since we still haven't had any conclusive answers. It was here, at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, that we decided to undertake the study of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. It's our duty to do it, and we're going to be able to do it. The public has a right to know.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Yip, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I feel that we're getting farther and farther away from our work of reviewing Auditor General reports, as well as looking at the time remaining and the schedule. We should really be wrapping up our draft reports.

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Shanahan, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: If you're going to do the same work twice, why not do it 100%? I imagine there are other documents about who did what in this case. That's really not my goal, as I prefer to stick to documents that have been professionally checked and properly written up, such as reports. We're interested in the financial management of the organization, not human resources management or anything else.

Once again, Mr. Chair, we could, through the clerk, ask the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to provide us with the other documents that were tabled by Mr. Rosenberg or other witnesses. We can all study them. As long as we're redoing the work of this other committee, let's go all out.

• (1115)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu, I do see you. I'm going to turn to Garnett in a second, and then Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

I'll just respond to Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Shanahan, I've heard that request. The motion is before the committee. I'm trying to weave it in, but at this point, I still want to hear from a few more people. Your request is to seek information from the clerk. I have heard that.

[Translation]

In addition, perhaps Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné would also have some comments regarding your question.

[English]

First, Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Very briefly, Chair, it's quite absurd to hear members of the government worry about spending time on this as a result of this motion. This motion is a request for documents that will aid us in our study of something this committee has already agreed to study and that members opposite eventually voted in favour of agreeing to study.

What is taking time is needless ongoing debate on this motion. If these documents have already been given to another committee and even one member feels that looking at these documents would be useful for this committee as well, I don't know why we wouldn't easily say yes to that.

Again, if people are concerned about the time this is taking, requesting the documents isn't taking any time except insofar as it's taking time because members of the Liberal caucus continue to try to delay the vital accountability work that we're trying to do as it relates to the Trudeau Foundation. We need to get to the bottom of what happened to the Trudeau Foundation.

We saw a filibuster last week on Mr. McCauley's motion and then a move to adjourn debate on requesting documents from CRA. We're just trying to get the documents that will allow us to do our work and find out what happened to the Trudeau Foundation, and it is mighty suspicious that we see continuing efforts to find excuses to not get these documents. It's particularly strange that the govern-

ment says, "Let's spend a long time talking about this motion to determine if we have time to do this."

We're just requesting documents for a study that we've already agreed to do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Sidhu.

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

With all due respect to my colleague, in terms of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu, I'm just going to pause you. Someone's throttled your Internet.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This might not be a technical issue; it might be part of the delay tactics we're seeing.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: We're not talking about women's reproductive rights around the world. That could go on for a few days coming from the Conservatives, but let's get back to what we're talking about here.

I want to talk about—

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu, could you start from the top again? Your Internet was throttled. We thought it might have been a delay tactic. Clearly it is working now.

Could you start from the start, as our Speaker in the House likes to say?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: I would love to.

I was saying, in respect to my colleague, that there are no delay tactics here. Every committee conducts important studies. When we see from my colleague.... We're talking about women's reproductive rights around the world. For those watching, go back and watch the colleague who just talked about delay tactics.

I'm going back to what we're talking about, which is our mandate. It's important for Canadians to know what each committee's mandate is. I think we need to stay on our mandate, and on our mandate, I'm reading from the House of Commons website: "The mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is to review and report on the Public Accounts of Canada and all reports of the Auditor General of Canada."

I know this study may be important to some colleagues, but I don't believe this is the committee to do it on. We have important work in front of us, and we need to stay and work towards the mandate that Canadians have given us on this committee.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mister Sidhu.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, it's your turn.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: My colleague was absent when this motion was adopted, whose specific purpose was to study the Trudeau Foundation. That's precisely the mandate Canadians and Quebecers have given us: to study in depth what took place at the Trudeau Foundation and to determine who received public funding. This work is exactly in line with the Committee's mandate and objectives. So I thank my colleague for his comments, but they weren't particularly relevant.

The Chair: I have a brief question for you, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné. Can you respond to Ms. Shanahan? She was asking that our clerk contact her counterpart at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics for more information.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: In order for the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to send us the documents, we must first make a request. That's the first step, which we are currently taking. Once the other committee has received our request, it will be able to send us the documents.

● (1120)

[English]

The Chair: I'm not sure who is next. I believe it's Mr. Fragiskatos, and then Mrs. Shanahan.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Our colleague across the way used the terms "odd" and then "strange" to describe our opposition to what Madame Sinclair-Desgagné has raised. There's nothing strange or odd, with all due respect, Mr. Chair, in having a challenge with this committee looking at documents that are already being looked at by another committee.

I think Canadians send us to this place to do serious work and not redundant work. That committee will be able to look at the relevant documents and draw conclusions based on those documents. I think we should be doing the important work that has been set out at this committee. Generally speaking—in particular, when this committee has not been politicized—we have been able to complete serious work in a timely way that has allowed us to live up to the mandate of the committee.

Unfortunately, yes, arguments have been raised in relation to a motion that our side did support, but there was nothing in that motion that said we would be carrying out redundant work. Another committee is doing this work already. I have a real challenge with, again, seeing the point of this motion, with all due respect. What is the efficacy behind going ahead and supporting this particular motion? I don't see the relevance. I don't see how it would help our work. I don't see how it would help to add to the motion that was originally put forward and supported by this side as well with respect to the Trudeau Foundation.

If I recall the original motion, we set aside two meetings to look at the issue. I don't have that in front of me, Mr. Chair. If you look at the amount of time we've expended on the subject—I'll be kind and I won't say "wasted"—we are eating up valuable time here that, again, could have been used to look at a range of issues as a committee.

I'll leave that there for now, Mr. Chair. I think Mrs. Shanahan had something to add too.

The Chair: I believe so.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I just wanted to answer my colleague, Mr. Genuis, who is still fairly new to this committee. The way this committee works is by consensus. That is really the best way to work. Mr. McCauley knows this to be true.

Because we're acting on behalf of all Canadians and all parliamentarians, I think it is supposed to be a committee that is non-partisan and objective, where we're looking at verified reports. Our work is to.... Sometimes documents, accounting statements and so on don't get amplified the way they should, and where we are able as a committee to explore—and we have taken the committee in a direction that I find very laudable, which is studying the environment commissioner's reports, which come under the auspices of the Auditor General—we've been able to lift up those reports and amplify those very important findings and conclusions.

That is why it's important for us to have these discussions, because if we're going to take the public accounts committee in a radically different direction, I would say to my colleagues who hope to form government one day that they will be saddled with the consequences of that, and I don't think it's a very positive direction for anyone who is represented here today.

That is why I think the discussion is important. It just seems like a laundry list to me of what we're asking for, a doubling of work spilling into other mandates and, quite frankly, I have to question the motives of some members here. I don't like to be in that position, because it has not been my position on this committee in the past.

Thank you.

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

● (1125)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'll just say that the three of us do support this motion. I think it's important for transparency.

To Mrs. Shanahan's comment, when we are in government, I do hope we are saddled with committees that are seeking openness, transparency and justice for taxpayers' dollars.

This idea of consensus seems to be "do it the Liberal way or it's not consensus" or "do what we say or it's not consensus". Consensus doesn't mean just what the Liberal government wants or wants to shut down.

I think if we go to a vote, you'll see that five of the members on this side from three parties support this motion. It's ridiculous to say that it's duplicating work. This is a very important issue that we're dealing with right now. It expands into other areas that we're seeing covered up by this government.

I think it's offensive to say that there are ulterior motives from our colleague from the Bloc. Her only motive that I've seen, from the day I met her, is openness and transparency for taxpayers' dollars. Coming from a Conservative, I can't think of higher praise that I can give to another member in this House. We want openness. We want to see value for money spent.

We fully support this motion. I thank her for bringing it forward and continuing to support it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Clerk, can you call the vote, please?

It's a tie. I'll cast my vote in favour of Madame Sinclair-Desgagné's motion. Thank you.

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

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, go ahead.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I have a couple of items, Chair. Thanks very much.

First of all, I'm going to read a motion to put on notice. I'm not going to move it right now. It is:

That, in the context of Service à la Famille Chinoise du Grand Montréal, a registered charity, and Centre Sino-Québec de la Rive-Sud, a registered not-for-profit, having been identified as hosting illegal Communist China police stations, and having both received over \$100,000 each in funding by the government, that the committee hold at least three meetings on the issue and invite the ministers and department officials from Employment and Social Development Canada, Public Safety Canada and Canada Revenue Agency to appear before the committee and answer questions.

The Chair: That is simply on notice. Thank you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, sir.

For the second one, I'm just tabling this motion: That the committee resume consideration of the motion moved and adjourned at meeting number 64 on May 15, 2023, regarding documents from the Trudeau Foundation.

The Chair: I'm just going to ask you to hold on. I want to see if this is a dilatory or debatable motion. Give me one second.

It is debatable. The floor is open.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, my understanding is that the resumption of a motion is dilatory.

It's fine, but maybe we can just get clarification.

The Chair: I will do that. Give me one second, please.

Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

There was a miscommunication here at the head of the table.

This is a motion to resurrect Mr. McCauley's motion dealing with the tax documents, which was previously adjourned. It's not debatable. We vote to bring it back, basically, to the floor for discussion.

There's a point of order.

• (1130)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order.

My understanding is.... Procedurally, wouldn't we go back to the Bloc amendment first?

The Chair: If we get to that point, yes, that is correct. This is first to bring it back.

Mr. Clerk, could you call the roll call quickly?

[*Translation*]

There is one member who hasn't arrived yet, but I think you can start the roll call.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): I'm sorry, but I'm a bit confused. Are we voting on the amendment?

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, this is just to bring this debate back.

When we last debated the motion to request some of the tax filings from the Trudeau Foundation, we had a discussion around it. After some time, members voted to end that debate, but the motion wasn't defeated. This motion is to merely bring it back to discuss it here.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I see.

The Chair: We have a tie. I will cast my vote to continue discussing this motion since it is on the docket.

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

The Chair: We're going to begin with the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Clerk, perhaps you can remind us where we're at.

I see Mr. Genuis, but let's hear from the clerk first.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Cédric Taquet): Members can follow on our website the minutes of meeting number 64. You have the motion, and the amendment moved by Madame Marie-Hélène Gaudreau. I can read the motion, but the motion and the amendment are clearly worded in the minutes of that meeting.

If the committee wants, I can read the amendment.

The Chair: I think it's probably a good idea as a refresher.

The Clerk: Madame Marie-Hélène Gaudreau moved:

That the motion be amended by adding before the words "All documents related to any audit" the following: "And, as requested by the committee in its Report No. 27 asking the Canada Revenue Agency to investigate the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation,".

That would be the amendment, and we are resuming debate on the amendment.

The Chair: Very good.

Do I have any speakers on that, please?

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Actually, at the meeting when this amendment was introduced, it was Madame Gaudreau who was representing the Bloc. I would like to hear from Madame Sinclair-Desgagné on this motion, because the questions I brought up at that time had to do with the pertinence of this amendment to this motion. It seeks to replicate a motion that has already been passed by this committee.

I would remind colleagues and those who are following this that the motion asked the Canada Revenue Agency to investigate the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. The committee believes it's in the public interest to prioritize this investigation. It was on that basis. At the time, I supported the motion, because it is fitting for this committee, as items of interest come to our attention, that we can ask any agency—normally we deal with the Auditor General's office—to respectfully, in their role as an independent agency.... I'll stress that, because it's not the government. Whether we're talking about the Auditor General or the Canada Revenue Agency, these are independent agencies. They are governed by professional standards. These standards are internationally recognized. It is only fitting that, if we see something we would like to bring to their notice, we can make that request. That is why we voted with that motion, because this committee works by consensus. When we have something of mutual interest, we proceed accordingly.

I'm always open to questions on whether a process, a procedure, or the implementation or execution of any of our policies.... When I say “our”, that is “our” as a federal government, not as one particular government in question. It goes to the trust and confidence Canadians have in our agencies and non-partisan public service. When there are any questions, however they come about, on any of our policies in law having to do with the collection of taxes, charitable organizations and the way our agencies function, it is paramount that these reviews take place in an impartial and objective manner.

As I said, that is why, for my part.... Even though, personally, I might not think there's a need for it—because, again, the work has been done elsewhere—in the interest of clearing the air, I think making a request of that nature is appropriate or fitting. It certainly comes under this committee's mandate, and we ask to prioritize the investigation.

• (1135)

Mr. Chair, as you know, we can ask many things, but it is up to the agency itself to decide what its priorities are. We heard very clearly, actually, from the officials here, that the moment they have any kind of report or red flag.... I think it's the tip line, as it's known colloquially, that Canadians can use to call the CRA and report an organization, an individual or a business that they have suspicions about, or if they feel there is something incorrect going out. In that way, all Canadians can participate in this mutual...keeping everybody sharp and in line. The officials assured us that when they get that kind of tip, it is investigated.

Indeed, it was also on that basis that.... For my part, it's already been brought to their attention and they're already looking at the documentation. They're able to work under confidentiality provi-

sions and so on, to work in a way that is not unduly injurious to third parties, whether directly or indirectly. Another thing we have to be wary of is that investigations become witch hunts and they're conducted in a way that is unbecoming of a country like ours. We are known internationally for our institutions and agencies that act in a professional and impartial manner, based on the facts before them.

At the same time, they are very sensitive to the concerns and perceptions of Canadians, and they will do their due diligence on their side for anything that comes to their attention.

I would like to hear from Madame Sinclair-Desgagné about why she feels it is necessary to include this amendment. I feel it's redundant, and I'm not clear on why this needs to be here.

I have lots to say on the motion itself, but I am limiting myself at this time to the amendment, as is fitting to do.

Thank you very much.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you. It is noted.

Go ahead, Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to speak on the subject. I'm always very happy to hear the Liberals talk about transparency in our beautiful democracy, because it gives me a chance to remind them that the main foundation of trust is transparency. Canadians' and Quebecers' trust in democratic institutions depends on transparency.

In this case, the motion proposed by our Conservative colleagues aims to obtain documents that Canada Revenue Agency refused to give us at the meeting in which we heard from its representatives. It was my colleague who proposed the amendment, but I was present when we asked questions of Agency representatives that they were unfortunately unable to answer. Requesting these documents will therefore help us in our quest to find out what happened at the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

As to the amendment more specifically, this one is quite straightforward. Its purpose is simply that this motion be included in our study of what happened at the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, and that the documents provided to us by the Agency on the Foundation may be used as part of our study.

So I'm repeating the same arguments I used for the last motion. If you want to talk about consensus, that's fine, because all of us on the Committee already have a mandate to study what's being done at the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. As part of this mandate, we need to study documents, both those provided by former Foundation executives and those provided by Canadian institutions such as the Agency. This is essential to finally shed light on what's going on at the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have two points to raise. First, to follow up on what I was talking about earlier, I see redundancy here. I don't see, again with great respect, how this particular amendment to Mr. McCauley's motion changes the substance of his motion in such a way that it would be worthy of all the time we've given to debating it. I don't see it.

I also see the bigger problem, and we'll get into it, I'm sure, whenever we get past this particular debate. There are an enormous number of problems with Mr. McCauley's motion, particularly in the way it would compromise the position of public servants, in this case at the Canada Revenue Agency. We heard very lengthy testimony on the part of the commissioner of the CRA, along with other senior officials, on the importance of the privacy provisions of the Income Tax Act. Our colleague from the Bloc has passionately shared with us why this amendment is so critical, but at no point have I heard her say how she feels about what was raised in that particular meeting with respect to privacy and whether or not what Mr. McCauley has called for compromises that, as I believe it does. Now, if she were to raise that here, you might call her out of order, because it's not directly on her amendment, but I still want to hear her point of view on that eventually.

I go back to the first argument, and this is entirely in order. Where is the relevance of this particular amendment in terms of the overall motion? I see it as being redundant, and I don't know how it gets us any further in terms of this committee's work. We did agree to two meetings to study the issue at hand, the Trudeau Foundation, and the Canada Revenue Agency was brought in. We've done a lot of work on that so far. I thought it was valuable to hear the position and concerns of the CRA.

Perhaps opposition colleagues were not satisfied. They seem to have been spinning their tires a bit and not able to get answers or, dare I say, provide material for things like question period, among other things. The CRA is certainly limited in what it can say about the status and the situation of particular charities. The issue on that day was not politicized, and it should not be politicized, but we continue to see a situation here where the Bloc and the Conservatives are aligning to take this issue and put it at the front and centre of the agenda of this committee.

I don't see it as appropriate. I had the list in front of me a minute ago, and it was on future work of this committee. There were a number of very important issues to be dealt with, including the consideration of draft reports. I know we will be hopefully getting into that later today, Mr. Chair. There are a number of important subjects that we have in front of us, including, I believe, testimony

from Correctional Service Canada, understanding the situation in prisons, and following up and putting forward a report on that.

This is critical work. Again, we don't advance the objectives of this committee by pursuing, with all due respect, amendments that are redundant.

I just wanted to put that on the record, Mr. Chair.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to say something to my colleague about the principle of transparency. There is another principle, that of the confidentiality of personal data. I've sat with her colleague Ms. Gaudreau on another committee, where there was a very intense debate on the importance of protecting Canadians' personal data. At the time, people were saying that government bodies were not sensitive enough to this problem.

I don't think it's my colleague's intention, but we could be opening a Pandora's box. Confidential taxpayer data could be revealed in parliamentary and, let's face it, partisan public inquiries. There is absolutely no reason to open such a Pandora's box. There are agencies that are capable of conducting such investigations and following up on them, whether by imposing fines or launching criminal proceedings against people who have contravened tax laws.

The main concern for my fellow citizens is that their privacy is not respected and they can therefore be scammed or become victims of identity theft. Many of my constituents are very happy to give money to all sorts of charities, but they are not necessarily aware of how those charities are run. When they donate to a charity that has a proper Canada Revenue Agency registration number, they have confidence.

Indeed, that number is now made public. About 15 years ago, this was really a problem, because people didn't know who they were dealing with. The fact that charity registration numbers have been made public ensures a degree of transparency. This measure has been very well received by the public and by the Canada Revenue Agency. Canadians now have more confidence in the organizations with which they do business.

However, this doesn't solve everything. Even if a charity meets all the criteria for a registration number, there may be irregularities in its management later on. It is at this point that the mechanism for notifying the Canada Revenue Agency of such irregularities becomes very useful. It was also very well communicated to the public at the time. If people had questions about a charity, it was explained to them how to go about notifying the Canada Revenue Agency.

• (1150)

If, on the other hand, the Agency were later to publish all the names and personal information of donors, this would cause harm to these people, who made donations in confidence and in a logical way. These people are not responsible for running charities.

So we need to put things in perspective. When we talk about privacy and personal information, I think it's up to an institution like the Canada Revenue Agency to deal with that. The agency is able to, under federal legislation...

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Chair, the rules require the member to be both on topic and not repetitive. The member can't simply make all of the same arguments that she made last meeting again and again, and they're not on the topic of the amendment, so, on both counts, I would ask that you either call her to order or go to the next person on the list.

The Chair: I won't jump to that, but I would ask the member to stay on track.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In fact, it was my colleague who talked about the importance of transparency. Transparency is the basis of her amendment; that's why she proposed it. However, it's very important to understand that in addition to the principle of transparency, we must also consider the principle of confidentiality of personal information. As part of this debate, it's our responsibility to remember that these two principles have opposing objectives, and that a balance must be found.

The goal is to ensure that charities, which have a charitable mandate, act in accordance with Canadian law. By law, the Canada Revenue Agency is responsible for conducting an investigation. We need to ensure that Canadians have confidence in these organizations when they make donations. The Canada Revenue Agency is also subject to its own legislation, criteria and constraints. No one would want a data leak at the Agency, for example.

Transparency is important, because it increases public trust and improves the way our charities are run. However, I don't think we should be irresponsible in wanting to make everything public, regardless of the consequences for third parties who are directly or indirectly affected. I've witnessed cases where committees have investigated transparency issues, but in the end, the company's activities were in full compliance with the law. Despite this, people were questioned about their political affiliation. If a Conservative works with a Liberal, their work is sometimes thrown out, because people think the two can't get along. This type of approach is truly unworthy of a parliamentary committee.

I am adamant: this proposal does not aim for transparency, but rather at making copy the *Journal de Montréal*.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Shanahan.

Mr. Desjarlais, you now have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thanks to my colleagues for being able to return to this important discussion.

I have two large questions in relation to this motion that I think would be helpful for us to have a discussion about. One is that it's in the public interest to ensure that we continue our investigation and get to the bottom of foreign interference and charitable donations.

I also recognize that it is a tremendous thing we're asking for. We're asking that the committee use its power and force to do something that I think has largely not been done in Canadian history before, which is to look at a private organization, a private group, and attempt to force the CRA to demonstrate documents so that we can review them in this committee. I understand what we're doing here, but I also want to find a way to balance the force we're using, which is a tremendous amount of force, and I think the public deserves accountability for that level of power and the benefit that doing this kind of procedure will offer us.

In order to maximize the benefit... I agree that we should do what we can to investigate the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, but I also think that there's a big question of whether this is the appropriate amount of power to be using to do this. I'm inclined to make it more worth our while, if we can, and maybe even look into other instances where charitable donations have been received by political parties. This is an attempt to expand this motion, if we have agreement across all our groups.

I think I've heard from everyone here who suggests that we are here for the public interest in investigating instances of foreign interference and other levels of interference in our electoral system by way of donations. There have been organizations, not just the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, that have engaged in this across Canada.

If we're going to be using this power, I see an opportunity for us to go even further and create more transparency for Canadians by including a list of other organizations, if we have, let's say, a week to give that to you, Chair, to make it even more worth our while. If we're going to be using this extraordinary power, why not?

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, my comments on redundancy in terms of the amendment haven't been answered. I'm happy to hear from our colleague from the Bloc on that specific point.

This is a question for Mr. Desjarlais. Could he expand on what he's talking about exactly? I am unclear as to what exactly he's looking at here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Desjarlais, I will come back to you. Your hand is still up, and I assume that was from before, but I want you to keep it up, because that question was directed to you.

Just to clarify, we have a study already to look at the Trudeau Foundation, and this motion relates to documents.

Mr. Desjarlais, if you do have a suggestion for a study or a sub-amendment to the amendment, I think members would be curious to hear that. Before I get to that, though, Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I think the proposition from Mr. Desjarlais that we would look at potential foreign interference in terms of large foreign donations to other major entities is interesting. I can think of one candidate in 2020 where it would be interesting to know what kind of foreign donations were made there. I don't doubt that there are small-c conservative organizations that people might be interested in asking the question about as well.

There are particular issues with the Trudeau Foundation. There's a particular reason why we're looking at it, and that is because the Trudeau Foundation is a public institution. As we've discussed before, it has this very odd governance structure. It spends some time saying that it's a charity and to leave these poor charities alone, but the reality is that it's a so-called charity that has gotten a massive endowment from the government and therefore is subject to various statutes, to access to information requests, to the Privacy Act and to the Federal Accountability Act. This is defined in various statutes as a public institution, actually, so it does have a different status, even from charitable or advocacy organizations that have, for various other reasons, relationships with people in government.

It's not unimportant as well that it shares the Prime Minister's name and that he remains—though listed as inactive—listed as a member of the foundation, as part of a small number of members of the foundation with governance powers. He apparently chooses not to exercise those powers for the time being, but he has not resigned as a member of the foundation and remains a member of it.

The relationship between the Prime Minister and this foundation, the attempts of foreign interference that we know occurred, and the public nature of this foundation make it a very different kind of beast.

I think the questions the member raises are interesting and, in fact, worthy of study, but there are particular issues with the Trudeau Foundation, and we do have to define the scope of our work to some extent. I might just suggest this: Let's proceed with this work but let's continue the discussion about what other areas of study are merited as well, because, again, I think it's a very legitimate point to raise.

The Chair: It's back to you, Mr. Desjarlais.

• (1205)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thanks for that, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to know that there is some appetite to look at this, because I think the nature of our motive behind this work, which is the part of the motion I agree with, is that we're trying to get to the bottom of foreign interference. To me, that is one of the most in-

credibly important purposes and why this motion is something that I'm in favour of, but the part I'm trying to balance with the desire to get answers on foreign interference is that it does not seem appropriate to exclude other instances where we do have credible public interest motive for other organizations.

I think it also creates a fairness regime to look at for a period under the last government. Mr. McCauley made a really good point earlier saying that when—or if—a Conservative government was to ever take place in Canada again, they'd be very open to looking at any organization to which this kind of accusation would apply because transparency is important and sunlight is the best disinfectant.

On that principle, I think it's shared between myself and the Conservatives that we need to get to the bottom of these things and actually find ways to expand it. I want to make it worth our while. If we're going to be able to exercise the incredible force of having the CRA give us documents related to a study on foreign interference, it would seem negligent not to look at some other key organizations to determine whether or not there's a pattern here, whether or not it's affecting all parties. If we're talking about foreign interference, don't you think that it affects more than one party? I think it's an opportunity for us, should the opposition agree, and maybe even the government would agree, to expand this.

It's no secret that during Harper's era, for example, there were many concerns when the Fraser Institute received some \$4 million in the last decade from major American foundations. That went relatively unheard of during that time, and that's a large sum of money. Mr. Chair, these things exist as well on the opposite side, and given Mr. McCauley's position on how willing the Conservatives might be to see a study similar to that, I suggest that we include the Fraser Institute.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I never like to interrupt, but I was reminded that we are addressing the amendment to the motion. Your concerns are valid.

I'm looking for some direction from the committee here. I'm going to recognize Mr. Genuis in a second. I'll look to the will of the committee. Do we want to continue debating this amendment and the motion, or do we want to refer this to the subcommittee, because we are getting well outside the amendment? I am going to begin to focus us back on that, unless I get direction from the committee.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we are seeing some delay tactics from the government side. We want to get this done, so I would not be in favour of adjourning this again. Let's just proceed on this. We have an amendment from the Bloc on the floor.

I want to say, in terms of the Conservatives, that it is of course true that foreign entities have tried to target all parties, but it is also true that there is no equivalent Stephen Harper foundation. There is no Stephen Harper foundation that got \$125 million from taxpayers and where his children have privileged roles in governance. If there were such a foundation and if, at some future point, one of Stephen Harper's children became the prime minister and there was a massive spike in foreign donations at that time, I would think we should study those events. However, those events have not occurred in the case of Conservatives, so we're looking at a particular series of events.

I don't think it makes sense to necessarily try to associate purely private organizations, as I said, with the particular issues around the Trudeau Foundation. I also think it is legitimate for this committee—if it wants to, at some point—to look at the broader issues around foreign contributions to influential private organizations in Canada, and do so on a broader basis. The reason for looking at the Trudeau Foundation is particular to its nature as a public institution and its relationship with the Prime Minister and the government, as well as the fact that this committee is already studying those public issues. There is no equivalent forum for them to be studied at a public institution, because the Auditor General has already spoken about her limitations in that regard.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, seeing the clock and knowing the consideration of draft reports was scheduled for 12 p.m.—we're well past that now—I move that we now proceed to the consideration of draft reports, scheduled, as I said, for 12 p.m.

The Chair: The debate continues.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Was there something more?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I said, “I move”.

The Chair: Oh, okay. I missed that. I thought it was a suggestion. In fact, you're moving to adjourn this debate.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: “Move” was, I thought, pronounced.

The Chair: All right.

Could you take the roll call on that, Mr. Clerk? This is to, once again, adjourn debate on this motion and the amendment.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It is to proceed to the other item, which has the effect of adjourning. Is that right?

The Chair: How do you want to proceed, Mr. Fragiskatos? I guess you tied it all together.

I'm going to check with the clerk, as well. Hold on.

Mr. Fragiskatos, are you looking to adjourn debate and move us into line-by-line?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I move to proceed to the consideration of draft reports.

The Chair: Okay. That's what I understood, and that's what we're going to do. The effect of this would be to end this debate and then move us in camera to discuss the reports line by line.

We have a tie. I vote to continue the debate.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am disappointed that we are not moving on to the draft reports, because by my count, I think we're at five draft reports that we have yet to review, and I think there are even more on the way. That is the work of this committee: the producing and tabling of reports to Parliament.

I must also address the remarks by Mr. Genuis regarding the Trudeau Foundation and that it's somehow a vehicle of the government. I find that horrendous. From my knowledge, that was a foundation that was established by Parliament after due debate, votes and that kind of thing, for the purpose of furthering education and exchanges on the part of young people, and it holds the name of Pierre Elliott Trudeau because, quite frankly, that is a name that resonates with young people.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

I must say that the people in the municipality of Saint-Rémi, in my riding, are very proud that the Trudeau family had its beginnings in their region. In fact, at Pierre Elliott Trudeau's request, he was buried in a very modest cemetery in Saint-Rémi. This is a source of pride for our people. Half of them are related to the Trudeau family, but not everyone shares Pierre Elliott Trudeau's views. That said, the reason we're here is to talk about the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

My colleague is trying to draw a direct connection to Mr. Trudeau's son, but the son is not the father. The reason people chose the name “Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation” is because it's a well-known name, like John A. Macdonald, Wilfrid Laurier or Lester B. Pearson. These are all long-gone historical figures, but I think everyone will agree with me that their names still mean something.

Is it always a good idea to do this? In some cases, we've had to make readjustments after new information came out. It's always possible to give an organization or foundation a new name. The fact remains, however, that the purpose, mission and *raison d'être* of the organization or foundation remain the same.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he is no longer involved with the Foundation, which is absolutely correct. This meets the criteria of the Ethics Commissioner. The Prime Minister has set his ties with the Foundation aside.

Those who are interested in anything to do with the Trudeau family could have listened to the testimony of Alexandre Trudeau, who testified before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, if memory serves.

So, for those who are curious and want to know all about the Trudeau family, it's a family that has played a very important role in our history and our political evolution. Of course, there are other foundations named after Conservative figures. I could ask my colleague to tell us about them, but I wouldn't go that far. Incidentally, this isn't the first time I've said this, but I myself was a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, in the days of Joe Clark and Brian Mulroney, and I took part in a number of activities. I loved the work of Flora MacDonald, for example, and I could support a foundation named after her. She was a truly remarkable woman.

The point is that there are values and contributions that go beyond partisanship. One day, there might even be the name of a Bloc Québécois leader. I'm always impressed by how my Bloc Québécois colleagues participate in parliamentary debates. They know the rules very well. It's a laudable way of contributing to our democracy. I always tell my fellow citizens how active my Bloc Québécois colleagues are in Parliament and how much they enjoy coming here to Ottawa to engage in debate in our beautiful federal Parliament. It's a compliment. Whether we are debating human rights or the environment, we're entitled to different points of view. Of course, the same goes for our colleagues in the New Democratic Party, with whom we also share progressive values. Jack Layton was a great Canadian.

So, whether we want to honour any one of these figures, Parliament might consider doing so at some point, but it shouldn't involve any partisanship. When a foundation chooses a certain name, it's a badge of honour of sorts. It's because it wants to represent the same values as the person who bore that name, which is perfectly fine.

Now, is it important that people feel the foundation is fulfilling its accountability obligations regarding the source of its donations, the execution of its mandate and its compliance with laws and regulations, and that its activities are beyond reproach? Yes, and there's a reason we have agencies to monitor and investigate all of this. These agencies can call for corrective action, impose fines and go as far as laying more serious charges.

● (1220)

In the beginning, Parliament had no framework for investigations. It was in response to very difficult situations that governments, both Liberal and Conservative, saw fit to set up first one agency, and then others followed. These agencies were given the mandate and power to conduct confidential investigations, which would later be made public if they uncovered something important with regard to protecting the public. One of these agencies is the Canada Revenue Agency.

On this committee, I prefer to work with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, which has nearly 600 professionals with all the skills needed to conduct proper investigations.

My colleague said that the Auditor General had been asked to investigate foreign donations. However, she is not in a position to

conduct such an investigation, as it is not part of her mandate. She therefore rightly refused to undertake one.

My colleagues still have questions and have brought up the Canada Revenue Agency. We've already heard testimony from officials, including Mr. Bob Hamilton, Commissioner of Revenue and Chief Executive Officer of the Agency. They've assured us they have the tools they need to follow up on a request to investigate, for example, the solicitation of donations and revenues by a foundation or charity, or an individual's tax returns. They know exactly why they're there.

Are we aware of everything they do? No, and with good reason. Our job is to ask ourselves whether duly mandated public servants have the tools they need to carry out their responsibilities. We're not there to do the work for them; they're the ones who have to do it. We're lucky to have such professional people, who are respected and recognized around the world. Witnesses have told us that organizations in other countries often seek advice from these professionals and ask them to share their best practices.

● (1225)

We can therefore be proud of the institutions that have been duly established by our democracy and that work for the well-being of all Canadians.

I think we're still talking about Report 27. We asked the Canada Revenue Agency to investigate, and it was absolutely the right thing to do, because the officials had assured us directly that, if we made a request, we would receive some sort of response. They couldn't confirm anything, and I know some of our colleagues would like to know everything about everything, but we had no reason not to believe them.

If there was another situation where people were telling us that they had reported a problem with an organization to the Agency, but the organization was carrying on and the Agency wasn't doing its job, then we'd be in a position to ask the officials outright what they were doing. This committee would probably not be the one questioning them, because I think there are other committees better equipped to work directly with the Agency. However, in such a case, we can certainly work with the Auditor General, who has a mandate to oversee what goes on in all agencies and departments, regardless of the work they do. She and her team choose whatever programs or activities they want to examine, sometimes under a specific theme, and then publish reports that are scrutinized by everyone.

There are press briefings where the media is out in full force. The reports make headlines for a period of time, and rightly so, because we remember the studies the Auditor General has done in the past on systemic shortcomings in some agencies and departments. Take Indigenous Services, for example, where there were major shortcomings. I was very reassured to know that the mandate for the audit had been passed on to the Auditor General by her predecessor, Mr. Ferguson, one of your colleagues from New Brunswick, Mr. Chair. Mr. Ferguson told us how much of a priority it was for him to get to the bottom of this. We also know that it remains a major priority for our NDP colleague, Mr. Desjarlais.

• (1230)

It follows that we have work to do on some very basic issues. Instead of duplicating the work of an agency or another committee, our committee should work efficiently and ensure that Canadians get value for their money. Let me remind you that our committee has reports that have yet to be published and tabled in the House, and they're piling up. In my opinion, the committee's priority should be to do the job it was mandated to do by Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Shanahan.

[English]

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

In fact, I'll yield to Ms. Yip, and then I'll speak after her.

The Chair: Ms. Yip, go ahead.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you, Chair.

My colleague, Mrs. Shanahan, has brought up a valid point about this being the former prime minister's name on the foundation. It really is such an honour to remember our former prime minister. In fact, because of him, my family has always been a fan of the former prime minister. Because of him, our entire family has always been in support of him and his work.

The foundation describes itself as independent and non-partisan. I don't believe we've really looked into the type of work, the excellent work that it does. Lately, the whole process has been really politicized, and that's unfortunate. The foundation does amazing work. It helps to fund and promote academic and public interest research, and—

• (1235)

The Chair: Ms. Yip, I'm going to interrupt you.

The debate is on the amendment to the motion. Mr. Genuis did open the door with regard to the discussion on the Trudeau Foundation. Mrs. Shanahan addressed that at length. I would ask you to focus on the amendment to the motion, please. That is the discussion at hand here.

Thank you.

Ms. Jean Yip: Well, I don't believe we really need to go into that amendment. I feel that—

An hon. member: Let's vote.

Ms. Jean Yip: No. I'm not done yet.

We don't need to repeat what's already been done here. We should really focus on the work at hand. We have a busy schedule, and there's not that much time left. I've said this before. There are a number of reports that haven't been done. We don't want that sliding into the fall. After all, Canadians expect us to review the Auditor General's reports. In fact, some of the newer reports, which we were supposed to look at, don't even make this term's schedule. In fact, some of the reports are now being placed into the fall.

I don't believe these additional motions are very helpful to what we actually do on this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will make a quick comment. Mr. Desjarlais has raised some good points here, and he's looking for answers to his questions. I'm not sure, and I won't speak for Mr. Desjarlais, but I don't think needlessly talking around it is helpful to address his concerns and perhaps win his vote.

Mr. Fragiskatos, on that note, I'll turn it back to you.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

I have a couple of points. One is directly on the amendment.

Mr. Genuis is excited that I'm talking about the amendment. We've all been talking about the amendment, whether or not my Conservative friends on the other side recognize that. All of the points have related back to that amendment, as you've seen, Mr. Chair.

Regarding the amendment, there's an unintended consequence here, and that is something I pointed out before, but let me be more specific. This is taking us away, again, from the vital work of the committee. We are slated to study—I hope it's not going to be interrupted entirely—connectivity in rural and remote areas. It's something that I know Conservative colleagues have raised in the past, quite rightly. It is something that is impacting the country. I don't come from a rural area, Mr. Chair, but just outside London, Ontario, there is a huge agricultural region, very rural, and connectivity continues to be a challenge. The government has, I think, made very important steps in this direction in terms of ensuring greater connectivity. I think we're getting there, but I would like to work on that. I know that certainly colleagues on this side feel the same way. I hope colleagues on the other side feel that way as well.

In addition, I see that we're slated to look at access to safe drinking water in first nations communities. I think this is a moral obligation, in addition to being a parliamentary obligation.

Again, we've spent a lot of time on this amendment. I've made the point before that I don't see its value in terms of helping this motion become stronger or in line with an outcome that would ensure that public servants do not break the law. It is having another unintended effect, of course, and that is delaying us from our work.

That's the point I wanted to make, Mr. Chair, in general terms, again, on the unintended consequence of our colleague's amendment.

I do want a point of clarification, though, Mr. Chair. I'll ask Mr. Desjarlais if he wishes to go on the record again. I'd want more information on what exactly he's aiming at and what his concerns are. He mentioned the Fraser Institute, for example. It's an interesting point. Perhaps I've missed it, but what is the thinking behind what he's raising? Again, Mr. Genuis himself admitted that it's interesting. To me, that shows an openness to what Mr. Desjarlais is saying.

If Mr. Desjarlais could expand on the point that he raised earlier, Mr. Chair, that would be very appreciated.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Desjarlais, I'm going to ask you to expand on that without repeating. I do want to try to keep this moving forward.

I will just highlight again that I'd ask everyone to refer to both the amendment and the motion itself. This is a request for documents. Discussing broader topics is something we can certainly do, but it's suited for either other committee business or subcommittee business.

It's over to you, sir.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Chair.

This is how I see the order of events in my mind. When we say “in relation to the motion”, the motion we're talking about is the motion that was passed, of course, in a consensus fashion, tabled by me and the New Democratic Party, to look into foreign interference as it relates to the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation. Events that have transpired since then have left it so that we have little recourse to find ways to get to the bottom of foreign interference.

Foreign interference, to me, is the most important aspect of this investigation, Mr. Chair. It's not that we find ways to create an affiliation between the Liberal Party and the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation. That's a partisan interest that I definitely have an appetite to pursue, but of course our job here is to make sure that we get to the bottom of foreign interference. At least, that's how I enter this discussion, with the hope that we'd have support towards that.

Looking at foreign interference in Canada and the fact that we have an example—the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation may be one where foreign interference has taken place by way of donations—it is not unreasonable to suggest that there are other organizations in Canada that are part and parcel of this industry. I say “industry” because, in my perspective—or at least in the media's perspective—it's not only the Liberal Party but also the Conservative Party, maybe even the New Democratic Party or the Bloc Québécois. I think it's incumbent upon us that we take that kind of fairness approach if we're going to be using this kind of power to have the CRA give us documents, the power to secure and second documents of a private organization.

I do accept what Mr. Genuis has said in relation to the unique nature of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, but I also believe that there are unique aspects to other organizations that have found ways around that. For the benefit of a study, should we really be interested as a committee in tackling foreign interference, we would take all available information toward that study, should we have

confirmation that the Auditor General, which we do, does not have a mandate to pursue this, or the CRA. As evidenced by our investigation thus far, the CRA has been clear that they have to hold an independent aspect towards this throughout their investigation.

Those things together, Mr. Chair, all of those factors together lead me to the position that we will not get the answers we are seeking in relation to our request for clarity on foreign interference, should we not take the opportunity to expand our investigation.

If we really want to get down to that, why not take the opportunity right now? I understand there could be fear by the Conservatives to expand this, but Mr. McCauley made a credible argument at the very beginning that if the Conservatives were to form government, they would be so happy and open to having this investigation done. Because we're dealing with such an important issue as foreign interference, why would we wait for an election to do that, considering how sensitive this process is?

Since there's been a filibuster here at the table on this pretty much all day, it's my suggestion that, with the 15 minutes we have remaining, Mr. Chair, we try to sort out what kind of possible amendments we can make to this motion that would get to the bottom of what we want to see here, which is foreign interference.

If I could bring the attention of the committee back to how important the study really is to the transparency of how organizations participate in Canada, that would be my objective, but I'm not okay just going down a random witch hunt on one organization if we're not going to get the results that we need on a study on foreign interference.

I'm sure many of my colleagues around the table would see that clearly.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fragiskatos, I am going to give you the floor, but I'm going to press that we stay focused. I think you can do that. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm very focused, Mr. Chair.

I move to adjourn debate.

The Chair: We'll do the roll call, please.

As it is a tie, I'm also going to cast my vote to end this debate, committee members. We can come back to it another time.

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

The Chair: Let me turn to another item that I would like to discuss with you all. It involves our meeting a week from today.

This will also allow members to meet amongst themselves about next steps for this motion in particular, because I'm sure it's going to come back to the floor. I'm going to be more vigilant in the next meeting about staying on that amendment. If you want to have discussions amongst yourselves about next steps, please have them. When we come back to this motion, it is going to be on the amendment and the motion itself. Of course, members can talk at length on that, but it will be a focused discussion when this comes back.

Next, we have a meeting scheduled for a week from today with individuals who have involvement with the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. I regret to inform you all that three have declined. They include the Right Honourable David Johnston, Mr. Edward Johnson and Mr. Mel Cappe.

I'm looking for your instructions or direction on this, or comments on how we should proceed.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thanks, Chair.

It's frustrating that we're not getting documents because of filibusters and we're not getting witnesses wanting to show up either. We have a job to do, to try to get to the bottom of what has been happening at the Trudeau Foundation. We're not getting documents and we're not getting witnesses. That is repeated stonewalling, which is enabled, it seems, by the government and also the people involved. I will try again to help us get to the bottom of this and we'll see if we have more success on this.

Chair, I would like to move that in relation to its study of the Trudeau Foundation, the committee authorize the chair to summon witnesses on its behalf. I think we can trust you to exercise that power judiciously and to try to ease up to that, but we have one week. It seems there is almost nobody who has agreed to appear, so empowering our chair to act on our behalf in this regard will ensure we hear from the witnesses whom members have requested to hear from.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

You are correct. At this point, we have no one willing to appear.

Mr. Desjarlais, your hand is up. You have the floor, please.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Hold on one second, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Genuis's motion is on the floor. It is in order and it is debatable.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Sorry, can I speak to two things, Mr. Chair?

First, could we have the motion in writing and in both official languages, for Nathalie?

The Chair: Sure. We will endeavour to get it out in the meantime, and we will have it read out again. Interpretation, I'm sure, will assist with that.

I'll go over to you, Mr. Desjarlais.

• (1250)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I agree, first of all, with the comments made by Mr. Genuis.

I disagree, of course, with other forces—that force being yourself, Mr. Chair. We can go back to three minutes ago and know you broke a tie in this vote. I want to be clear that as the Conservative chair in your case, Mr. Chair, it would be yourself who broke the tie there. I want to make certain the facts are all very clear.

On the actual motion itself, when we do get the translation back, I think it would also be important that we maybe even find a way, in the original motion that Mr. Genuis just read out, to clarify the first fact you mentioned and state that it is because we received a no to our invitation that we have this motion. I think it would be important to the narrative of that motion. That's, of course, extraordinary power that we're going to be using only because of the adverse reaction of those witnesses to coming here. I think the reluctance here is an important piece to demonstrate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, I'm sorry. I noticed you a few minutes ago, and I apologize for keeping you in suspense with your hand up. You will have the floor.

Colleagues, I am going to look for your permission to adjourn this meeting at one o'clock. You're welcome to reject that, in which case I'll turn the chair over to Ms. Yip, but I do have to turn my attention to my riding after this.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, please let me extend my good wishes for everyone in your riding. As you know, I have family there as well, and I'm in communication with them as well. Yes, this is very disturbing.

On the summons, again, this is not something that we typically have in this committee. It does seem like a drastic step, so I would like to understand more about the reasons. Sometimes the witnesses provide reasons as to why they don't wish to appear, and typically committees try to work with witnesses around those reasons, because we would, of course, prefer to have willing witnesses rather than otherwise.

That's a question that I have for the clerk. I want to have a better understanding of whether there is more of a step-by-step process rather than going dramatically to what I believe is usually the final step in a step-by-step process. It's clear to me that we need more information and discussion on this step.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, let me respond quickly, and then you can take the floor.

I won't get into particulars, but it has been frustrating. We had one witness who we were told was away, at which point I changed the meeting date by a week, and the response came back "no". We made every effort to change our schedule to accommodate this witness, but when we did so, the response was one I had not expected. Another witness simply did not respond, and another just indicated that they had nothing to contribute due to a change in role.

That's it in a nutshell. I'm happy to go back to them with your direction.

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

All of us take parliamentary committees very seriously, and when witnesses are called, there has to be a seriousness attached to that; however, a move to summon witnesses, as this motion calls for, I think is a giant leap in the wrong direction. I don't see the need for a formal summons at this point.

Perhaps, Mr. Chair, you can go back again. Not everybody will understand the nature of parliamentary committees and their importance in terms of our overall governance, if I can put it that way. A summons at this point in time doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I can also recall, Chair, not on this committee but on previous committees where something similar transpired, that a point of clarification was sent to the individual or individuals the committee wished to hear from. Things are resolved at that point in time without a summons, without anything like that.

We also have to think long and hard about what kind of precedent this committee sets, of course, to other committees. If we are going to be summoning witnesses left and right, it doesn't really make for a co-operative, good relationship between parliamentary committees and prospective witnesses. I can only recall once in my time as a member of Parliament when I've seen a formal summons issued. As I said, it represents an extraordinary step, one that, even based on what you just read, Chair, I still do not think is warranted at this point in time.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

My frustration today is that we've really gotten nothing done. We have tried to request documents related to our investigation into the Trudeau Foundation. Liberals have filibustered it. We're now trying to create a mechanism by which we can get witnesses for our investigation into the Trudeau Foundation. The Liberals have excuses.

I don't have a great appetite to go past our scheduled time. Either the government is interested in doing this or not, and we have to keep coming back to it in subsequent meetings.

I will say very clearly to Mr. Fragiskatos that the motion I put forward does not summon witnesses. It authorizes the chair to summon witnesses on our behalf to ensure that we get witnesses by next week. I suspect what the chair will do is follow up with these witnesses. He will inform them that the committee has authorized him to summon them and that it is important that they provide more

serious explanations or come. This motion provides the chair with the means to ensure that we have witnesses related to the Trudeau Foundation. It does not jump the gun. It does not prescribe that the chair will immediately jump to a summons. It is right and reasonable that the chair might try to engage in some dialogue first.

However, if the committee insists on prescribing every single step, I would submit to you that this is an obvious delay tactic. We don't come back until Thursday. If we decide today that we're going to ask the chair to send a letter and then we don't get a response to the letter by Thursday, then we have to have another motion to order the summons. I suspect we'll see more of this delay tactic from the government.

Again, either members are willing to help us get documents or witnesses, or both, or government members are continuing to put up roadblocks. The motion is clear. It does not summon witnesses; it gives the power to the chair to summon witnesses as may be required to ensure that we hear from witnesses.

I hope we're able to go to a vote on this today. If not, again, the posture of the government will be clear as they continue to disrupt this committee's ability to investigate the Trudeau Foundation. Paradoxically, they say it's because we have all these other things to study. Well, if we have all these other things to study, great, let's get to votes on these motions in a reasonable time frame so that we can complete the business we have in front of us.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Fragiskatos, and then Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll yield to Madame Sinclair-Desgagné, and then I'll speak, Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: All right.

You have the floor, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I just wanted to point out that I'm in complete agreement with what my colleague Mr. Genuis just said. It's a motion that gives our chair all the flexibility he needs to call witnesses, if necessary. It's important that we get to the bottom of this matter.

We all voted in support of this study on the Trudeau Foundation and the witnesses need to agree to come. I would remind you that the list of witnesses was put together with the input of all MPs here. So I don't see why we shouldn't authorize the committee chair to talk to the witnesses and tell them that they could be called. That would surely help convince them to come and testify.

I therefore support the motion. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have the floor again.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I did not register my concern and regret to hear what's happening in your riding. I know Ms. Yip and Ms. Bradford will certainly feel that way. I don't know that they're on the speakers list, but I'm going to speak for them. I've been to New Brunswick. I've been to your riding. It is a beautiful place, and I hope everything is all right in the end.

Chair, I don't sense that we're going to get resolution. I emphasize the point that I made before. I don't see that it's any different from what Mr. Genuis pointed to in nuance. I still maintain the point.

With that in mind, and knowing how difficult of a day it is for you, I move that we adjourn the meeting.

An hon. member: On division.

● (1300)

The Chair: On division, the meeting is adjourned.

Thank you.

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