



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 067

Thursday, June 1, 2023

Chair: Mr. John Williamson



Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Thursday, June 1, 2023

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting no. 67 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[*English*]

First of all, I want to thank Ms. Yip for filling in for me yesterday on the subcommittee with respect to the committee business. I had a conflict and I appreciate your being there.

We have several motions before us, at least three by my count, as well as committee reports to get through.

I'm going to recognize Garnett Genuis.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

We experienced a number of efforts to delay or block motions, and I'm hoping that today will be the day we get something done.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, sir, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: We've had our hands up. It was very clear that we wanted to speak. I don't want to raise a point of privilege here, but we've been here, and you've seen our hands. For some reason you haven't recognized us.

The Chair: Oh, I will certainly get to you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No, no, we had our hands up first.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Just let me hear this one first and then I'll come back to you, Mr. Genuis, on the point of order.

Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: We had our hands up first. We would like to speak. It is our privilege to do so and it is well understood that the member who has their hand up first should be recognized first.

The Chair: I'll hear the point of order on this side, Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It seems that Mr. Fragiskatos may have been sitting here for half an hour before the meeting started with his

hand in the air. There is no precedent for the claim that a member can raise their hand to speak prior to the meeting beginning. I had my hand raised when the meeting was beginning and I called for the chair's attention, and it's up to the chair to identify who caught his eye first.

The idea that some precedent is established by raising your hand prior to the beginning of a meeting is absurd and has no basis in the rules. There is no doctrine of privilege that one member who wants to be recognized ahead of another member who has caught the chair's eye first has that right. I think the member might wait his turn.

The Chair: That is my view. I'm going to check with the clerk here, but I have members who approach me all the time about committee business and raising issues, and my view is that when the gavel is dropped, it's the first person who catches my eye. I do see that all the government members want to speak to this, but I'm just going to double-check this to make sure I'm on solid ground, because if it is challenged, I at least want to be in the corner with the clerk. Just wait one second, please.

I am going to maintain my ruling here and return the floor to Mr. Genuis.

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

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's not my intent to continue to raise points of order. However, we did speak before. You saw us as you came in, and you committed to us that we would have the opportunity to speak. It's clear you saw our hands. You knew our hands were in the air. You knew we wanted to speak.

This is a point of privilege now. This is something I have not seen before at committee, when we have members who have expressed an intent to speak and made that clear to the chair in advance of the meeting. Granted, it was not a day ago. It was at the beginning of today's meeting. When you walked in, you saw our hands and committed to us verbally that we would have the opportunity to speak first. Now, suddenly, you have turned around. I would have expected more. I'm quite surprised at the approach that has been taken. I think this taints, without question, the way this committee will operate from here on out.

Mr. Chair, you've been fair as chair of this committee. You say Mr. Genuis caught your eye first. You looked at us with our hands in the air. Clearly, we caught your eye first, but you made the decision—and I emphasize “decision”—to look towards Mr. Genuis when it was very clear we had your attention. I can't help but emphasize this point. I will continue to argue it until our side is given the opportunity to live up to our roles here as members of Parliament, in keeping with the established precedent that I've seen at committees and that we have all lived by. When members have their hand up, they are recognized.

We did catch your attention. We did “catch your eye”—if you want me to use your words exactly—because you looked at us and told us we would have the opportunity to speak first. Then, you changed your decision. It's not fair. It's not in keeping, again, with the role of a chair, who is supposed to be a neutral arbiter of procedural rules relating to committee.

I respectfully ask that I be allowed to raise the point I wanted to raise, followed by Ms. Yip, Ms. Bradford, Mr. Sidhu and Mrs. Shanahan. They came here in advance, had their hands up, were ready to speak and wanted to speak. You committed to us that we would have the opportunity to speak, and now there's been a different course taken.

• (1540)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You will have the opportunity to speak, of course.

I take exception to.... You seem to think that my talking to you before committee means I committed that you would speak first. I did not say that. We were having an informal discussion. I asked you whether you wanted to share with me what the business at hand was. You chose not to do that, which is your right, but you made a statement that I challenge: that I committed to your speaking first. I did not do that. I had another opposition member speak to me in the House of Commons, who was also looking to speak first. I do not commit to anyone about speaking first in this committee. You can come here 10 minutes or 10 hours before and put your hand up. Until the gavel goes down, I see nobody. I see nobody until this meeting begins.

Now, you can take exception to whom I saw first, but I'm recognizing Mr. Genuis, because he caught my eye first.

All right, I'll stop there, because I see there are a few other people who want to speak to this point. I'm not sure whether Mr. Genuis or Mr. McCauley was first.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'd be happy to proceed. I think we're seeing delay tactics from the Government of Canada, which doesn't want to allow us to get to the bottom of what happened with the Trudeau Foundation. I have a lot to say on this matter, but I'd be happy to just move on, because—

The Chair: Okay, you have the floor, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I'd like to move that the committee resume consideration of the motion—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I have another point of order.

Yes, go ahead, Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're going to have a lot of points of order.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): To my colleague across the way, it's not a tactic to delay. It's about a level of respect among colleagues. I believe that's what the issue is here.

The Chair: That's not a point of order. What is your point of order?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: My point of order is that I don't think the chair recognized that, when we're online and we put our hands up.... There's a precedent set about who speaks first, I think, on the Zoom systems. Whether I'm in the room or online, my hand is up.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The rules existed for hundreds of years before the existence of Zoom.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Mr. Chair, when we put our hands up on Zoom, there's an order that's set. I was speaking—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Zoom does not set the precedent. The committee's rules predate Zoom by hundreds of years.

The Chair: I will perhaps put our acting clerk on the hot seat.

I'm sorry about this, but could you perhaps explain the procedures, as you just explained them to me? The members won't just be challenging me; they'll be challenging the committee as an institution.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Audrée Dallaire): Yes, it's up to the Chair to determine who has the floor first.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I move that the committee resume consideration of the motion that I moved at the last meeting.

The Chair: This is the motion:

That in relation to its study of the Trudeau Foundation, the committee authorize the chair to summon witnesses on its behalf.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes.

The Chair: All right. Do you have anything else to say about that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's dilatory. I can't say anything else even if I wanted to.

• (1545)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Sorry, Mr. Chair, but I missed what motion this is.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, this is a motion that would allow us to return to discussing, debating and hopefully ultimately voting on the Trudeau Foundation witnesses, who have so far either declined or been silent, to see how we proceed as a committee. This vote is not on the motion itself, but it is to return to the discussion.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, there are five in favour and five against the motion.

The Chair: I vote that we resolve the matter, so I vote yes.

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

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Chair, can you clarify what we are discussing at this point, because I have many things that I want to discuss?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, correct me in case there's been a change that I'm not aware of. The motion is this:

That in relation to its study of the Trudeau Foundation, the committee authorize the chair to summon witnesses on its behalf.

We are discussing this because we have a meeting scheduled for Monday, June 5, and the Right Honourable David Johnston and Mr. Mel Cappe have either not responded or declined the committee's invitation. In the last meeting, there was some discussion about how to proceed. I thought Mr. Genuis tried to bridge the gap between an immediate summons and a firm request that they appear, and that's where we are.

If I've misstated that, Mr. Genuis, I will come back to you after Mrs. Shanahan.

That's where we're at, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Indeed, Chair, you are reminding me of some of the discussion we had around this motion and how it is going too far too fast when there are intermediate steps that could be taken. Indeed, I think it behooves us as a committee—especially as the public accounts committee, which is already going into ground that is not normally that of the public accounts committee—to treat potential witnesses with all due respect.

I think at that time I had asked for the clerk to advise us, through you, Chair, as to what steps had been taken and what the responses were from the potential witnesses. Indeed, I would prefer to see the chair—and I have been in this position before on other committees—having a discussion with the witnesses individually regarding the modality of what would work, because to be summoning witnesses—and I have seen that now on this same topic in other committees—seems premature. Witnesses have been making themselves available, and there may be good and reasonable grounds as to why a witness for personal or professional reasons or for matters of mandate would not wish or would decline to appear before this committee.

The first reason I can think of is that they would not be dealing with the proper and normal authority we deal with in this committee, which is the Office of the Auditor General. Indeed, it would be her office that would most appropriately be in the position to meet with these individuals, if indeed she chose to do so and if indeed an investigation was appropriate to her office. I see members wonder-

ing why I'm putting so many qualifiers around my statements. It's because, of course, I don't think it is appropriate that this committee, in essence, investigate individuals who represent professionally or personally a charitable foundation, an organization that has been conducting its affairs.

I mean, what would be next, Chair? Are we going to start investigating—I don't know—Food Banks Canada? Are we going to be investigating the Heart and Stroke Foundation? Where are we going with this? This is over and above and outside the purview of this committee, so it is not surprising to me that these witnesses....

● (1550)

I believe—but I can be corrected—they have already appeared before other committees. They've already provided testimony. I hope there are Canadians watching this, ordinary Canadians, those Canadians with the common sense that my colleagues so often vaunt. They say, “Why would it be that the public accounts committee, which has to do with audited public financial statements, with performance reports, with value-for-money reports on departments that provide services to Canadians, is calling individuals to testify before it when there are other committees and other agencies that are better fitted to do so?”

I have seen committees call people in—ordinary people going about their own business—just because of some tie they had to some partisan point that the opposition wanted to make, and those individuals were grilled. They were publicly humiliated. They were subjected to harassment, both online and physical harassment. They were people who were running a business. Speakers Spotlight is the group I'm thinking of. Their employees were harassed in their offices, and the individuals themselves, the owners. Why? They happened to book speakers that happened to be in some cases related to our Prime Minister. Of course, they booked many other speakers as well, but that point was lost in all of the publicity.

I think that when ordinary Canadians saw that, they were horrified. That's just one case that I remember vividly. Of course, there were other cases of people being subjected to a witch hunt for partisan purposes. It had nothing to do with any kind of governance issue, nothing to do with any kind of proper execution of the work of the parliamentary committee at that time, when there was also an independent commissioner who was charged.... We're talking about ethics. We're talking about the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. That work is done properly through that channel.

Now we're dragging that kind of dirty politics into this committee, where we're going to be dragging people in front of this committee. We're not even giving them a chance to explain to us why they decline to appear before us.

Chair, it is more than disappointing to see this committee being dragged to that level in what is essentially a partisan witch hunt. I say that because if there were real concerns about the Trudeau Foundation and how it operated and how it conducted its affairs regarding the collection of donations, regarding how they accounted for those donations, regarding how they issued receipts, regarding anything else in the line of what this committee is occupied with, which is, of course, good governance—

● (1555)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

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

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm concerned that there may be an error in the minutes of the April 24 meeting. It's important that we have accurate minutes, of course. I'm reviewing the minutes of the April 24 meeting. It says that all members present, including the Liberal members, voted in favour of the motion to study the Trudeau Foundation. I'm wondering if there's an error in the minutes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I will return to Mrs. Shanahan.

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

We, indeed, started that study. We said, "Let's meet with CRA officials", and we did, in camera. The CRA officials were here. They answered the questions posed to them to the best of their ability.

Of course, they are governed, and rightfully so, by legislation, which prevents them from divulging confidential, private information. This is legislation that was duly passed by Parliament for the protection of Canadians' tax information. These officials, in fact, are duty-bound. They risk criminal charges if they divulge personal information here, at this committee, to anyone outside the bounds of where they are able to work.

However, these officials were able to tell us that the moment anyone raises a flag about any organization or about any taxpayer who may be engaged in improper activities—it doesn't matter how small, what kind, or what distinction—they do investigate. Could they confirm they were investigating the Trudeau Foundation? No, because that brings them into the area of divulging information that they are legally bound not to.

Do we have any doubt? Is there anyone here who has any doubt that if the CRA has information that could lead to a proper investigation on its part and the recovery of...? It usually has to do with improperly reporting revenues, expenses, somehow benefiting from the tax system, or somehow allowing others to benefit from the tax system.

We've all had that experience, whether it's us or a family friend. I've worked in this area, and I certainly saw it happen. When an individual gets a letter from the audit department of the CRA, it's serious business. The CRA certainly take its work very seriously.

If the individuals this committee is looking to summon as witnesses have good reason, I would like to learn more about that. They are already, perhaps, dealing with the CRA. We don't know. There is scope to think that if we want to... Again, I am open to learning whether there is reason to be concerned, but I want the

proper agencies, the proper authorities, doing the job of the actual investigation.

I am going to ask you, Chair, if you can inform the committee of any developments in this regard. I'd also like to hear about how you go about asking witnesses to come. Normally, in public accounts, it's not an issue, because normally, the witnesses we invite here know that they're going to be invited, and there's no issue about that. It's the Auditor General. It's her staff. We've gone a bit out of the box, and there has been support around that, in pursuing a follow-up to Auditor General studies and questioning department officials. Department officials certainly know they are going to be called to this committee, and they are certainly here.

● (1600)

In fact, I can remember my NDP colleague's predecessor, David Christopherson, recalling that there was a time not that long ago when we couldn't get deputy ministers to this committee. We insisted that, indeed, that had to be the case, because, while the minister is in charge of the policy part, it is the deputy minister who is in charge of the execution of the policy, programs and so on, and that was where we were digging in as far as the public accounts committee was concerned.

We wanted to know—I've heard members here question deputy ministers repeatedly, and those questions were very on point—what the measurement system was, what the timeline was, what their action plan was, why it is that they didn't meet that objective, how this money got spent and we're not seeing the results. Those are the kinds of questions, the kind of material and the kind of output that are expected from this committee.

Chair, when you, with the clerk, are inviting witnesses, I don't think it is difficult to obtain those witnesses. That has allowed this committee to be an extremely productive committee, and it has been a point of pride that we have been able to address and question witnesses and write reports.

We have about five or six draft reports now on hand, as I speak, that I'm sure the chair would like to be able to table before we rise for the summer. I'm very hopeful that we'll get to those reports, but in the meantime, the odd time... I'll say that on some very important occasions, when colleagues have raised a concern about the environment commissioner's reports and that we should be looking at those and amplifying those—that would have been from my colleague Madame Sinclair-Desgagné—or indeed that we have a minister come...because there have been repeated Auditor General reports on the same topic.

We were in agreement with asking the minister to appear before us. We were certainly in agreement with asking the commissioner. I know that in the past, it was something that was not agreeable to the Conservative side, having the environment commissioner here to further amplify his reports. I would like to have more discussion on that, perhaps at a later time, because there now seems to be some dissension as to whether or not our Conservative colleagues accept that there is climate change and accept that something needs to be done about it—but I digress, Chair.

I wonder if you can now tell us about what the status is of discussions with the witnesses.

• (1605)

The Chair: I'll speak to these points.

First of all, I want to clean up the list of speakers, of which I'm sure you're one. I just want to confirm that we have Ms. Yip, and then Ms. Bradford. We also have Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

I'm going to take a step back very briefly. We're doing what I'll call typical, regular committee business. We do have exceptional witnesses who come. It is by no means automatic. In fact, the superb team at this end have to send notices, follow up and often remind officials that they have not only a request to appear, but a statutory obligation to appear as accounting officers. Even then, it still requires some light cajoling and reminding them of their obligation to appear as a matter of law. It is by no means automatic. The clerk, in particular, is part greyhound, part diplomat, and always does a good job. He is informed wisely by the two analysts to ensure we have the proper and best witness possible.

I'll now turn to the steps we took in this matter.

First of all, I'll say, Mrs. Shanahan, that you are entitled to state and believe all of the things you did as a duly elected member of this House and a member of this committee—your concerns about witnesses and why they've been asked to appear and reservations you might have. I will say, though, that witnesses do not have that right when they are asked to come before a committee. If we extended it to witnesses, the system would break down, if we allowed witnesses to defy a request because they had a concern or an issue.

To inform members, I'll turn now to some of the reasons that I received. These are the steps that were taken. I requested witnesses from all members. They came in. Those were sent out. I then proceeded to compile witnesses based on who had made a request. There was some overlap. There were some witnesses who were requested by three parties. There were some who were requested by one or two, and I worked with the clerk to balance it out and send that list out. There was no objection to it.

The clerk then proceeded to invite those witnesses. I won't name names, but I'll say the same thing I said the other day. One witness said he was unavailable because he was overseas. I proceeded to change the date, because that witness was requested by three parties. We changed the date, we sent the invitation out, and we were just told he was unavailable and someone would appear on his behalf. Another witness has not replied, and the third has just said he has nothing to add. It is not up to the witness to decide whether or not he or she has something to add. He's been invited to appear before the committee.

That is where we're at. Since then, there has been no further communication with them. I have sought direction from this committee. Here we are, with this motion looking for direction about three witnesses who have provided either very little or no good reason, frankly, as to why they should not appear before the House of Commons standing committee.

On that, I will turn to Mr. Fragiskatos.

• (1610)

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

Mrs. Shanahan, as she always does, puts into sharp focus the issues at stake in front of the committee. A summons is an extraordinary step. If I've understood what Mr. Genuis is exactly getting at, the motion says, "That in relation to its study of the Trudeau Foundation, the committee authorize the chair to summon witnesses on its behalf."

This is not something I've seen this committee consider before in my experience of sitting on this committee for some time—others will have sat on it for longer. I'm not sure how it's come to this point. I hope that this committee has not been politicized to a point of no return. I think there is enormously beneficial work that we can do as committee members, as I've said many times in the past and as we have shown in our actions and in the questions that we've asked witnesses. It's a committee that, where it's found the opportunity—and there have been many opportunities—it's worked. It's worked in a direction of non-partisanship. It's worked in a direction that's underpinned by collegiality.

But here we have in front of us a motion that even those who have presented it on the opposite side would admit—as push comes to shove—is motivated by politics.

This is the audit committee of Parliament. We are now looking at a motion that is calling on summoning witnesses. Yes, it is true that under the rules of Parliament, committees and their chairs in particular have the ability to do exactly that, but I don't think we have to do that in this case.

First of all, it would set an awful precedent, not just for this committee, but for other committees. I remember only one particular instance where it reached—I used the phrase earlier, Mr. Chair—a point of no return. That was a few years ago, when we had a long-standing public servant who was brought before Parliament—still unnecessarily, in my view. It really poisoned the debate around what happens at committees. This is not something that we should see happen again. I think there are other ways to communicate the desire of the committee.

I understand, Mr. Chair, that you've attempted to do that. Forgive me if I'm wrong, but I don't think you're the first chair who's asked witnesses to appear and has received a negative response. This is not out of practice. This does happen. We all sit on parliamentary committees. Some of us sit on multiple parliamentary committees. It's an extraordinary privilege to do so. However, Mr. Chair, I point to the fact that where it has happened—I'm talking about a summons—it's deeply unfortunate. Where it does happen that there is a negative response, there are other avenues. There are other avenues to pursue rather than going to the extreme. It would be tantamount to an effort that would see someone who doesn't get their objective to begin with or doesn't reach their goal to start with going to any extreme to achieve what they want. That's not in keeping with the collegial nature of what committees should strive to be. I think we also have to keep that in mind, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps it's the time of year. This is almost my eighth year of serving in this House as a parliamentarian. I know you've served many years yourself. Today is June 1. Without fail, Mr. Chair, the months of May and June are the hardest months. It gets heated in here. We saw that, unfortunately, in question period today. The Speaker, who I think we'll agree is a good Speaker and is someone who's calm, raised his voice in a way I haven't heard before.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's not relevant, Chair.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's quite relevant. It relates to the point, Mr. Chair. My colleague will have to allow me to finish the sentence, and then he can judge on relevance.

• (1615)

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

Mr. Genuis, Mr. Fragiskatos has the floor.

Would you like to be added to the list?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, I would just like you to call to order members who are not following the rules.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I am following the rules.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I'm prepared to hear Mr. Fragiskatos out.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: If I've touched a nerve, it's not my intent.

The Chair: I'll say there's a lot of that today.

Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's not my intent to touch a nerve, and now I'm being interrupted by my colleague. I don't want to have to ask you, Mr. Chair, to call him to order. That's not what I'm about. If I've touched a nerve, I apologize. In fact, I've worked for many years with the member opposite and enjoy the back-and-forth we've often had, but I'll leave that aside.

I was pointing out the fact that, in question period today, things were especially heated. I hope we don't see the same thing happen at committees. One thing that could take us down that path, Mr. Chair, is—with all due respect to him—motions like the one that has been put forward by Mr. Genuis. It is something quite extraordinary.

There's the issue of this committee's mandate, which we have explored. I have spoken about it—the work we do here. There's the issue of the need to remain non-partisan. One thing I have not put on the table, which I am putting on the table now, is the direction this committee could go in if we were to pursue a motion like this. I think it would challenge the work ahead. Yes, we only have a few weeks here, but I'm thinking about the fall. I'm thinking about the months to follow. Once a committee sets a precedent like this, it's a poisoned chalice. It influences, in the most negative fashion, everything that follows.

I would ask my colleagues—not just Mr. Genuis but all colleagues—what exactly is the motivation here? Is the motivation to score political points, as it were? If that's the motivation, you can do it in the House of Commons, if you wish. At the public accounts committee, we are obligated to look at issues in a serious way and reach consensus as much as possible.

On that point, let me simply speak, in a very positive way, about what Mr. Desjarlais has brought to the table, because he is always looking to find compromise. He's always looking to, as much as possible, reach a point, in terms of the committee's opinion, where we emerge and can put forward, if not a unanimous point of view, certainly one based on consensus. I've never understood “consensus” to mean “unanimity”. Either way, we have a motion here that is proving to be extremely divisive.

I also ask us to consider what our constituents would want, when faced with a choice between a decision to look at, for example, the situation in our prisons—something this committee has explored in detail—and whether or not we will further examine the plight and position of indigenous peoples on reserve, the drinking water situation and boil water advisories. Yes, there's been enormous positive movement on that file, but there are still lingering challenges that exist, to put it mildly. We could look at all of those things.

Instead, we are now caught in a debate, one with which our side is prepared to continue because we think it's so important, for all the points already mentioned. We're caught in a debate that would prevent us from going forward and doing the serious work with which this committee is tasked. A summons is not something that is going to allow this committee to work in the direction it always has, or almost always has. A summons is going to take us back. I wonder whether there has been thought given, among members, to any kind of compromise—some kind of compromise that would lessen the heavy-handed nature of the motion and what it ultimately seeks to put forward.

I know other members have something to say, and I don't want to take up their privilege to do so, Mr. Chair. I have further thoughts, and I'm going to ask to be added to the speaking list once more. I see your pen moving. I hope you're writing my name. That's perfect.

That time, he saw me.

• (1620)

The Chair: No, I didn't. I heard you.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's a point to be revisited, perhaps, in the future.

I will leave it here for now. I know Ms. Yip has been anxious to speak, so I'll turn it over.

The Chair: I have Ms. Yip, Ms. Bradford and Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

Ms. Yip, you have the floor.

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

I'm concerned about summoning witnesses. Witnesses are usually invited. They take the time to prepare their notes and to put aside their busy schedules to come. It's not easy for witnesses to speak and to answer any type of questions, because they never know where we're coming from, so it does take some courage to come, and we want them to come voluntarily. Summoning the witnesses takes it a step too far.

As I mentioned, and as my other colleagues have mentioned, we want them to come voluntarily. We want to invite them. If there is a compromise about the wording, that would be welcome.

Right now, we're hearing that committees are finding it very difficult to get witnesses to come. Sometimes it's just one, or sometimes it's none. It just doesn't bode well for the future. We want to encourage people to come and to share their expertise and their experience.

There's been so much change in how this committee has evolved this session. We've asked ministers to come, which has never been done before, or rarely. We are entertaining motions that have gone too far from our public accounts mandate. I am disappointed with the politicization of this committee, which has had a long-standing tradition of producing unanimous reports with all parties. I am sure Mr. McCauley will recall those times.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Jean Yip: My apologies. It was OGGO that we were on together, and it was always fun there.

In any case, all parties, before, worked together to look at the draft reports and to come to an agreement. At this time, normally, we would still be looking at new studies and new reports. I don't think we've even touched on the spring reports, which were tabled not too long ago, in March and April. I also want to note that we've never, in the history of this committee, had so many motions brought forth all at once.

We should try to find some other means and come to a compromise. We should be more progressive in our steps, rather than jumping right to a summons. Perhaps we could see how other committees go about inviting witnesses, and perhaps we could change the wording. Instead of "summon", we could say "invite". It's something to consider.

• (1625)

The Chair: You'll be up soon, Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

Ms. Jean Yip: Well, let's try again in a different way to invite them but not go towards a summons.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My concern is that the public accounts committee has completely come off the rails, and we are straying further and further away from the mandate of this committee, which is to review the reports of the Auditor General. There are certainly more than ample reports for this committee to review and to comment on. In fact, we have a number of reports we need to be reviewing, and hopefully we will be tabling them in the House before it rises later this month.

When we talk about calling witnesses before us, I feel that it's very important that we treat all these witnesses with respect. On another committee I serve on, earlier today, we had two panels of witnesses lined up. One of the witnesses flew all the way in from Saskatchewan. The Conservatives hijacked that committee by introducing a motion and by filibustering, and not one question was asked of any of the witnesses, which I think is extremely disrespectful.

The Chair: Was that this committee or another committee?

Ms. Valerie Bradford: It was another committee.

The Chair: I think it's best to leave that.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Okay, but I'm just showing how badly these things can go.

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: More recently, when we were dealing with the COVID vaccine study, we sent out some requests, I believe, to all the manufacturers of various vaccines to appear before the committee, and not all of them came before us. It's not unprecedented that sometimes witnesses, for whatever reason—and sometimes apparently they don't disclose—choose not to appear. I did—

The Chair: I'm going to correct that. Committees will make that decision. Witnesses do not. This committee made the decision in that case that we were not going to press it. That was our decision, not the witness's. Let's be very clear on that: Witnesses don't excuse themselves because they don't feel like coming.

Thank you.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Let me clarify. I don't believe that our committee has ever summoned witnesses before this committee, and I don't feel that we want to go that route. As I said, I unfortunately experienced, a couple of hours ago, witnesses being badly disrespected by a committee through process.

First of all, Mr. McCauley's original motion was that we would demand 10 years of unredacted tax returns, information on a charitable organization—the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. That particular motion would put the CRA employees at a great risk—

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): There is no relevance, Chair. That's not the motion we're discussing.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Okay, but I'm just saying how this has now blown.... First of all, that would put those employees in great jeopardy for prosecution, including fines, up to imprisonment, and now Mr. Genuis's motion is now saying that we want to—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Chair. I don't mean to interrupt my colleague, but I did see that our colleague had a bit of an accident with his coffee. I don't know if he's burned. I just want to make sure he's all right.

The Chair: Thank you. We appreciate that.

• (1630)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Enough with the delay tactics.

The Chair: Some like it hot.

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: I hope everyone is okay over there.

It's a bit of a heated discussion, so we don't want anyone getting burned in the process.

The Chair: Literally.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Yes. There's concern for my fellow colleagues here.

Now, I just feel that we're getting.... First of all, we were asking for unredacted records of tax returns of a charitable foundation, and now we're asking in this latest motion that Mr. Genuis has put forward to authorize the chair to summon witnesses.

Again, we've never done that. We invite witnesses. We encourage witnesses. We, hopefully, compel them to comply. I just feel that summoning witnesses goes beyond what we have historically done. I just don't see how summoning someone would add to what we're supposed to be doing—as I've said, reviewing Auditor General's reports. We seem to be getting further away all the time. At every meeting, we're straying from our mandate and what we're supposed to accomplish. Meanwhile, some of the things we've worked on for weeks may not even make it to the House and get tabled because we're going down other rabbit holes or branches.

That's my feeling. I just think this is inappropriate, both in context and in approach.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to turn it over to Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

First, I want to say something. It's very valid to discuss the rationale and the mechanisms we have before us. The study itself was passed unanimously. I'm going to corral back to that.

I'm going to make a quick point for some of our members. Of note, Mr. Fragiskatos and I have a unique experience. We were both on a committee that summoned a witness. Ms. Bradford, you are right: It is an exceptionally rare occurrence.

I've had one member ask me about the steps and the difference.... When we invite witnesses, it is the committee's request that they appear. Of course, generally people comply with that. That is something we do as a matter of courtesy, but it's one where we're appealing to people to appear before Parliament and the standing committee. Elevating it to a summons is a demand, and it is a demand that is rarely rejected, because it's akin to a court appearance. It virtually obliges the individual to appear. Now, of course, people can still not appear before that committee, at which point the committee can discuss it, and if it chooses to, elevate it to the House of Commons.

That's what we're debating here. I know that one member was looking for a point of law.

Am I right, Mr. Clerk? Is that a fairly accurate difference between them? An invitation is a “we hope you'll come” and a summons is a “we expect you to come”. Yes, that's accurate.

On that note, Madame Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor, please.

[*Translation*]

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

What I'm going to assume right now is quite major. All of my colleagues here, including those across the way, want to get to the bottom of this, because they voted in favour of doing a study on the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation to understand what's happening now and what's happened there.

Given the circumstances, we need to consider the fact that, after this week, we have three weeks at the most to go before the summer break. We know our time is limited, and we need to be able to take action so we can do what we were mandated to do, which is to conduct a study on the foundation.

Therefore, I come to you in good faith.

Can we agree to amend this motion—and I'm not moving an amendment, I'm approaching my colleagues in a friendly manner—to call representatives of the foundation again and show them how important it is that they appear?

I must say that I have complete and utter confidence in our chair and in his ability to assess what constitutes a valid excuse, such as illness or a prior engagement too important to miss. He has already shown some flexibility in terms of the schedule.

A week after the invitation is sent, should we get a refusal or no response, we would authorize the chair to summon them to appear, given that we have very little time left to hold the two scheduled meetings.

I'm proposing a method that's meant to be a compromise so that we can move on to something else. If you really want to move on to something else, that's what I want too. I feel that's what a number of my colleagues here want.

In my opinion, what I'm proposing is a happy medium. We're inviting representatives of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation to appear again. It's important that the witnesses selected testify before the committee and answer our questions. Some members of the foundation have already been called by three of the political parties on the committee, and together they make up a majority in Parliament.

One reason we're inviting them again is we've noted some serious contradictions in the testimony we've heard to date. It will be up to us, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, to determine the truth about what really happened.

It's important that we hear from these witnesses. I understand that you want to turn the heat down and not call them immediately, so be it, but we could give them extra time to respond to the invitation in good faith. However, if we unfortunately don't hear back from them within a week, we would authorize the committee chair to issue a summons for key witnesses.

I put forward my friendly suggestion to the committee as a compromise. I'm appealing to the good faith of all my colleagues in attendance.

Thank you.

• (1635)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, you happen to have the floor next, so you can respond to that if you would like.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Sure, Mr. Chair.

Our colleague says that she is open to presenting a compromise in a friendly way, which were her words. I would say this to anyone, not just her. Our side needs to see wording. I wonder if we can take a short pause for wording to be put together, and then we can come back.

The Chair: I think that's a fine idea. I just want to make sure that there is wording that can be discussed before taking that recess. I'm looking for consensus here.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do we have wording on the table?

The Chair: No, there's nothing on the floor. Have there been any discussions?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Let's take a short recess. I don't want to see this be a.... We have other business to deal with. Let's take five minutes.

The Chair: We'll have a five-minute recess.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1705)

The Chair: I'm going to recognize Mr. Fragiskatos again. He had the floor before we suspended.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have the floor, and there is a speakers list.

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

I think there are colleagues on my side who also wish to get on that speakers list, because they have a perspective they wish to share. There was, in the discussions that have taken place, perhaps some progress. I don't think we're quite there, but I think there has been some progress in a positive direction.

I'm tempted to ask for another five minutes, but I doubt you would give it, or maybe you will give it.

The Chair: I think we need to hear a little more. I think we need to have a public discussion. I'm not sensing we're close enough for that.

There is a list, though, Mr. Fragiskatos. I can put you back on again if you're yielding. The next person is one of your colleagues as well.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Various sides, Mr. Chair, will perhaps be able to put pen to paper to identify a potential compromise here, an amendment. You can even call it a friendly amendment if you want, because the substance of the motion, I hope, remains intact.

Let me make it clear that I think this motion is not in line with what this committee should be looking at or the mandate, but if this is the direction we're going to go.... Again, it's a minority Parliament and opposition members will try to take the steering wheel. I think it's incumbent upon us to restore a sense of responsibility in terms of what the committee should be looking at.

I'll leave it at that for my comments on the committee's direction.

As I speak, I think perhaps members could be, again, taking pen to paper and putting something together that could work as far as a compromise is concerned.

In the meantime, let me return to some of the points I had put on the table but didn't finish. First of all, there is the point of the summons, not only in terms of its place in this particular debate but also in terms of its place within the wider Westminster parliamentary tradition. Mr. Chair, you're a student of history, and I know you're interested very much in history because we have worked on committees before. You will know that the move towards issuing a summons within the Westminster tradition is itself extraordinary.

When members on this side communicate a strong concern, to put it mildly, about the possibility of a summons being issued towards witnesses, this is not something that's unique to this particular question, and it's not something that's unique to Canadian democracy at the federal level in the moment we find ourselves. This is something within the broader tradition of Westminster we borrow from that is considered problematic from start to finish. I think that is something we have to pay attention to. We can't ignore that and, for that reason as well, it is extremely important that we live up to our responsibilities as parliamentarians in this regard.

I wonder what the aim is in terms of the summons that can't be achieved by reissuing a letter and communicating a firmness in tone. Perhaps, Mr. Chair, you can be more firm in your letter. You're a polite man. You're a good guy, I think, and—

● (1710)

The Chair: Easy, easy....

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I say it in the best sense. We don't know each other extremely well, but everything I've seen from you, Mr. Chair, though we might disagree from time to time on certain points.... The point remains that I respect the fact that, as committee chair, you have the ability to issue a letter and to make it as stern as you want.

In line with that, again, I go back to the possibility of you simply reissuing a letter that's sterner and seeing where that goes. That's not something we've considered at this point. Instead, we want to go from a request being made to a request being turned down and then to a summons. It's not something that's been done before, in my experience. You mentioned it yourself. It is relevant to say again that in the committee you and I worked on, when a summons was eventually put forward, it came after a long time. It was not immediate. Here, we're rushing immediately to that outcome, which I have a huge problem with.

What does it say about this committee if we, through you, Chair, tell witnesses to come, they decline and we say that now we're issuing a summons? In other words, it's the most extreme kind of response that a committee can give. It's not good for this committee. It's not good for the reputation of this committee. It's not good for the reputation of members of Parliament, specifically us. I think that's something that can't be dismissed either, Mr. Chair.

Again, we have shown ourselves to be able to work together toward reaching a compromise. I wonder if members are still interested in pursuing that and wish to put that forward. I'm open to it. Liberal members are open to it, but of course, it depends on the wording and the precedent that it would establish. I don't want it to negatively affect any subsequent meetings that we would have at this particular committee or that other parliamentary committees would

have, pointing back to that time in the summer of 2023 when the public accounts committee decided thus and so.

I know there are other members on the list who wish to share something. I'll leave my comments there for now and yield to them.

The Chair: Very good.

I have Mr. Sidhu, Mrs. Shanahan, Mr. McCauley, Mr. Desjarlais and Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Sidhu, you have the floor, please.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't want to get into this coffee spill, but I want to make sure that the carpet is okay. Coffee does stain, and I want to make sure that the call was made to the janitor. I know there was an accident over there. I have great respect for public property and this sacred institution.

● (1715)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We'll appoint a special rapporteur for it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Getting into the discussion here on the floor, I'll speak to what my colleague mentioned. We are going really fast from inviting to summoning somebody. What I've seen in some of the other committees I've been on is that sometimes invitations don't work for the person. We should be a bit flexible and humane. There could be some circumstances we're not made aware of that we need to look into. It could be for health reasons; it could be for travel. It's important we do give the witnesses another chance to get back to us before we demand or summon. Through you, Mr. Chair, it's very important to make sure we do remain flexible. We want to be respectful and give them that chance.

What we're discussing now is the motion at hand. I don't believe it falls within the mandate of our committee. We're here to review Auditor General reports and report back to the House. I know there are many, many reports pending. The list is growing very long. We have colleagues in the House asking us when we'll be getting to certain reports they're interested in.

I believe there was one on indigenous drinking water, before I got on this committee. That one is very important to some of our colleagues here, as well, and important to me. We have constituents who have reached out on that one, as well. I know that within our mandate.... My wife is a teacher, and her students discuss indigenous drinking water availability, so it is important to my constituents. Students have written to my office about this. That's something I know is very important to so many of us.

Going back to the motion at hand, I don't think it falls within our mandate. We need to stay on track here to make sure the committee is focused on the mandate we're given. We should focus on the reports we're tasked to review. It's very important to have that on the record, for those who are watching, that we need to focus on our mandate. We need to focus on what we're put on this committee to do.

I know many of my colleagues here will have more to add to this, but I do believe we need to give witnesses another chance before we demand or summon. Sometimes, as I said, the circumstances may not have worked the first time. There are other committees where we ask witnesses to come, and they're not available. Sometimes we select 20 witnesses, and 10 are not available. We figure out a way. We need to remain flexible in terms of asking our witnesses to come. That's what we should be going forward with, having that invitation sent out again to see what the flexibility is and what we can do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Yes, I think we quickly came to a decision during the break.

I salute my colleague Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné for expressing her thoughts on this subject. I know that she wants to find a compromise that will allow us to respect the witnesses. It is a huge step to go directly to this stage, that is to say the summons to appear. I think it was the clerk who taught us that technical term. I'd like the clerk to comment on that.

What I've been told is that, in other circumstances, as soon as an individual receives a request like that—I believe that the request is made by letter, like a summons to appear—there are legal consequences related to the person's decision on that summons. People seek legal advice themselves in those circumstances, which is reasonable.

Before we get to that, a truly extreme approach, we have to consider certain things. It seems to me that we're insinuating the witnesses have something to hide. We can't say their names, but we know that some witnesses have already testified before other committees. Therefore, we can't say that they haven't cooperated in the past. They may have very legitimate reasons for hesitating.

In the past, the chair sent a letter that he had drafted. Let's not forget that he represents the committee members. It's not up to the chair to make decisions of this magnitude. I believe that's not the case. If it were a chair from another political party, that would be considered bad faith by opposition members.

The usual practice is that the chairs, whether they're on the government side or the opposition side, always have to check with committee members before proceeding or making such an important decision. In that sense, we did discuss various ways of looking at this motion to add an intermediate step.

• (1720)

We can say that the chair will still point out to potential witnesses that there will be consequences for their actions, similar to any disciplinary procedure or anything like that. Everything works better when the people in question know the first step and they know that if they don't comply with the request, they will face consequences. It gives people the choice to voluntarily respond to the request.

When I look at the original motion, it's really not clear which witnesses we're talking about. Since the meeting is public, we can't mention any names. However, there seems to be some openness in that regard. Are we going to start calling witnesses left, right, and centre? We don't know.

Again, Mr. Chair, I don't think you would want to do this on your own. On other committees, in the absence of consensus—which is ideal—I know that the chair makes sure that their actions reflect the will and support of the committee members.

The chair told us about three witnesses who were called and didn't appear for reasons that have already been cited. For example, they had gone on a trip or they had nothing to add. I can't remember the third reason, but maybe you could remind me.

At first glance, I get the impression that the witnesses don't realize how important this invitation is. In that sense, I think an intermediate step would be entirely appropriate. I hope that we can work together to find a way to help our chair prepare a letter or move ahead so that he can win the support of everyone around this table. It's important to me that this be clear to the witnesses in question and that the committee continue to work with the chair at every stage.

I understand that there is a concern about timelines.

• (1725)

It's also possible to set a deadline for responding that we consider acceptable for an invitation, but also mention that a summons is possible. However, I don't feel we should be playing that card right now. I see that you agree with what I'm saying, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate that.

I'd like the clerk to tell us what the consequences are for an individual—a Canadian—who refuses to comply with a summons like this one.

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair: I just double-checked, but my memory served me correctly. It would, of course, come back to this committee for consideration, at which point the committee could take any number of steps, including referring it to the House or deciding to do nothing. Those are the two poles.

Mr. McCauley, you have the floor.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your time. I won't be long.

I'm disappointed. This is a motion we all agreed to unanimously. It's funny. I'm hearing right now that people are saying it's not within our mandate. The same people who voted for this motion are now saying the motion they supported is apparently out of order.

We hear repeatedly that we have other things to do. I think we should just vote and get to this. I don't think it is a great use of our time to continue to filibuster out witnesses whom we, the committee, agreed to have appear. I don't think it's an issue of one or two. There appears to be a concerted effort by all of the witnesses to refuse or ignore our committee. I would ask the government to stop delaying and allow this to get to a vote. If they're so willing to work on consensus or as a group, we should put it to a vote and see what the members of this committee think.

I'm very happy to leave it in the chair's hands. The amendment is suggesting that we give them one last chance and if they do not agree, we leave it to the chair's discretion to proceed from there.

That's all, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm also disappointed that members didn't show the same concern for my jacket that they did for the carpet.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

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

Thanks to my colleagues.

It's always a fascinating experience at the public accounts committee, having to balance the important work in the interest of the public, which is to have some evidence to suggest what Canadians are worried about in the presence of the issues related to the contributions of the Trudeau Foundation, as that work continues in other committees. I think this committee has a role to play in relation to finding out how the CRA—we did that last week—and other entities within the government's oversight mechanisms are going to do this work.

I think that, given the gravity of the situation... The absence of some of the witnesses we've requested to appear further motivates mistrust. I believe this is in the public interest, so I agree with many of my Conservative colleagues who spoke previously. I agree with the need to see these folks appear. I also agree with our Liberal colleagues that going straight to a summons is obviously something this committee is not entertaining. That, to me, is why we're having this filibuster right now.

As a way of attempting to end this filibuster and getting to the work this committee is interested in doing on behalf of Canadians, I'd like to table an amendment to this. Perhaps I can send it over to the clerk.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, do you have wording that you want to read? Then you can send it over, or do you want to send it first?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Let me know when you're ready.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: The amendment would be:

That in relation to this study of the Trudeau Foundation, the committee requests the following: Edward Johnson, David Johnston, Mel Cappe be invited to this committee.

Additionally, given the gravity of the issue, the committee reserve the right to consider a summons.

I am open to amendments.

The Chair: We now have an amendment to the motion.

Mr. Fragiskatos, I have you down. There is a speaking list, so I will come to you.

• (1735)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is there a speaking list on the amendment?

The Chair: Well, I am going to maintain the speaking list.

Mr. Desjarlais, could you email the amendment to the committee email, please?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes.

The Chair: Are you done, Mr. Desjarlais? Okay.

I had Mr. Genuis down, but he has stepped out.

Mr. Fragiskatos, do you want to speak to this briefly?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you to Mr. Desjarlais for the amendment. However, I would like to look at it more closely, and so would my side.

If we could take five minutes, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Can we keep it to five?

The Chair: It will be five minutes.

Thank you.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: We're back.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you still have the floor, if you would like it. Then I will look for others or, heaven forbid, call a vote.

There's an amendment to the motion. They're still working on the translation. I could have it read again, if you would like. It is on its way.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Since colleagues have not had a chance to look at what's been suggested in written form, can we just wait a few more minutes until it has been emailed?

The Chair: Yes. I'll just check with the clerk.

I want to have Mr. Desjarlais read it again, and then I will suspend.

Would you mind reading it again, Mr. Desjarlais?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Sure. Did it not go to the right committee?

The Chair: No, they have it. We're working on the translation now. That just takes a few minutes.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Oh, I understand.

The Chair: I'm going to have you read it, so I can internalize it again, because I actually don't track my emails as closely as I should.

Please read the amendment while the clerk is working on the translation. Then I'm going to suspend right after you read it.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Sure. The amendment says:

That in relation to this study of the Trudeau Foundation, the committee requests the following: Edward Johnson, David Johnston, Mel Cappe be invited to this committee.

Additionally, given the gravity of the issue, the committee reserve the right to consider a summons.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend.

• (1740) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1745)

The Chair: We're back.

If you all want to check your emails, you should have the motion in both official languages.

Is it an attachment?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I got an email, but I don't think it had an attachment.

The Chair: We're checking this right now. Stay tuned.

I'm going to repeat it here:

That in relation to this study of the Trudeau Foundation, the committee requests the following: Edward Johnson, David Johnston, Mel Cappe be invited to this committee.

Additionally, given the gravity of the issue, the committee reserve the right to consider a summons.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Just so we're on the same page, that would also require deleting the end of the motion.

The Chair: Yes, it's an amendment to delete and replace it with this.

Mr. Fragiskatos is next.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I want to thank Mr. Desjarlais for putting forward an idea, a suggestion, that I think moves us forward in a positive way with respect to this debate.

I think it's important for us to consider what has been said and the ramifications of this entire motion—leaving aside the amendment, this entire motion—in that, again, I think it has created a situation whereby a precedent is being set, Mr. Chair, and we can't decide these things without keeping in mind what that precedent means.

I know that Mrs. Shanahan wants to make some comments as well, so I'll yield my time to her to add some thoughts to that.

The Chair: I have a speaking list. I'm happy to recognize you afterwards, Mrs. Shanahan, but I'm going to go to Mr. McCauley.

Would you like the floor after Mr. McCauley?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It was concerning the deletion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll continue, then. I'm not going to speak to the amendment here. Let me just speak to the motion overall.

Again, Mr. Desjarlais has done his best to reach a compromise. The challenge, of course, is that we continue to focus on a summons. That, for me, is a situation whereby this committee creates a scenario that establishes the kind of precedent that sets us back in a very unfortunate way.

Chair, let me simply remind you—you know this, but it's important to put it on the record once again—what this committee's mandate is all about. I'll make it clear and read directly from our mandate letter—not our mandate letter, but our overall mandate. The mandate of the public accounts committee is to “review...and report on the Public Accounts of Canada and all reports of the Auditor General of Canada”.

Where in the motion that Mr. Genuis has put forward are we debating anything that relates to the overall mandate of the committee? I don't see it. I only see a motion that's come out of left field and that does not push us in any direction that would allow for the mandate of this committee to come to life.

It's problematic from start to finish. Again, there's nothing in here about a certain foundation or any particular charity. The Auditor General has no role in any of this. The Auditor General has emphasized that she doesn't have a role when it comes to the governance of particular organizations like the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, but here we are, discussing and debating a matter that we don't need to be debating. Unfortunately, that's exactly what we're doing.

I have a challenge with that. I think members on this side have a challenge, as well, with what's happened here.

Is Mrs. Shanahan on the speaking list?

The Chair: She is after the next speaker.

• (1755)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll hear from Mr. McCauley.

I'd love to hear what Mrs. Shanahan has to say too.

The Chair: Very good.

In the last meeting, on another motion, I reminded you that we're to speak to the motion. I appreciate the view that members are not satisfied with this study, but I will go back and highlight that you all voted. This passed unanimously. I'm going to sharpen the debate on the amendment to the motion at hand. We're all in this together, because we all voted for this together.

On that, I will pass it to Mr. McCauley. You have the floor.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm a bit lost, which is not an uncommon thing in this committee or other committees.

On Mr. Desjarlais' motion, I appreciate, as always, his middle-of-the-road interventions to try to move the committee forward.

There's nothing in this motion that satisfies us in forcing a summons. I'm left with the impression that the government side is just filibustering for the sake of filibustering to kill off the committee. Mr. Desjarlais's motion just says to reinstate, and the committee reserves the right to summons, which means that we would actually have to vote on it, which means we would have to debate it, which means the Liberals could block it.

I know Mrs. Shanahan is next on the list. Maybe she could fill us in on their intentions because, again, Mr. Desjarlais' motion, if they support it, would achieve their goal, which is to not force a summons. Maybe the government side could enlighten me on what their intention is for the continued filibuster on a motion that seems to be what they've been proposing from the beginning.

That's all. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the amendment that has been put forward.

That being said, I move that this meeting be now adjourned.

The Chair: That is a non-debatable motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I have a point of clarification.

Can you confirm that this is to adjourn debate on this particular motion, not to adjourn the meeting?

[*English*]

The Chair: This is just on this motion.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm sorry. Was it on the debate or the meeting?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, I misunderstood. The motion is to adjourn the meeting.

[*English*]

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>