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Chair: Mr. Joël Lightbound



Standing Committee on Industry and Technology

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.)): Good afternoon and happy Monday, everyone.

I now call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 135 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

Before we begin, I kindly ask all the participants here in Ottawa to read the guidelines on the use of microphones and earpieces. This is for everyone's health and safety, especially our interpreters, to whom I extend my thanks, by the way.

I wish to remind you that, pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, April 24, 2023, the committee is resuming consideration of Bill C-27, An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act, the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts.

I would like to welcome back today Samir Chhabra, director general, Privacy and Data Protection Branch, who is—

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): There's no translation.

[Translation]

The Chair: Apparently, the interpretation is not working. I'll continue speaking in French, just so that they give me the... okay, it's working.

As I was saying, with us again today, from the Department of Industry, is Mr. Samir Chhabra, director general of the Market Framework Policy Branch. With him is Ms. Runa Angus, senior director of the Innovation Strategies and Policies Sector.

[English]

Thank you very much for joining us again on this Monday afternoon.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It's not working.

[Translation]

The Chair: Is interpretation working now, Mr. Turnbull? Are you on the right channel? I'm trying to find out about the others.

Is it working for you, Mr. Perkins?

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm getting it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Very well.

As I was saying, we are now continuing our review of Bill C-27 where we left off. As you know, we were on amendment CPC-9.

Mr. Turnbull has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Chair.

In an effort to hopefully work very productively today and on other days, and in consideration of some of the other motions that have been put forward, in particular the one from Mr. Masse, which I think we all supported last time, I would like to move the following motion, which is to suggest a program or schedule for some of our time over the coming weeks.

I'll read it into the record, and then we will send it to the clerk. We will also send this all by email shortly after that, with translation in both official languages.

I move:

As relates to the committee's future business, it be agreed that:

- i. The committee dedicate its regular meetings on September 23 and 26, 2024, to consideration of Bill C-27;
- ii. The Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, and officials, appear at committee no later than Thursday, October 10, 2024, for two hours, on the subject of the minister's mandate;
- iii. Notwithstanding the minister's appearance, that the committee dedicate its regular meetings during the weeks of September 30 and October 7, 2024, to the study proposed by MP Masse, on the issue of credit card practices and regulations; and that witness lists be submitted by each party by Friday, September 27, 2024, by 4 p.m. EST; and,
- iv. That the committee resume consideration of Bill C-27 as of Monday, October 21, 2024, and that consideration of the bill be uninterrupted by any other study until the completion of clause-by-clause by the committee.

That's what I would like to propose. I think it accommodates two of the requests that were made by other committee members, which I thought were quite reasonable and around which I think we, as a committee, achieved a relative degree of consensus. One was the appearance of the minister for two hours, which, committee members will be happy to hear, we've identified we would be able to do before October 10. The other is to have no less than, I think, four meetings on Mr. Masse's motion on credit card practices and regulations, which we also agreed with and thought would be good, but we don't want it to take away from moving forward on Bill C-27, given that we've been at a bit of an impasse.

We are working and looking to hopefully use the time away from Bill C-27 for a couple of weeks to work with other parties constructively and negotiate a path forward on Bill C-27. All of us, over many months, have remarked how important that bill is, so we are looking to use that time constructively and, in the interim, to have the minister appear and also prioritize Mr. Masse's suggested study.

That's the effort here: to work constructively with all of our colleagues and account for some of the other priorities that were brought up in the last meeting. I hope the motion will be well received by the committee. We'll send it around by email.

Originally, we had in the motion that we would, hopefully, move past amendment CPC-9 temporarily, but given the way we worded it in our draft, we realized that wasn't going to be consistent with procedural practice because we would have to move past the whole clause, which we didn't feel was important. I have made the deletion myself. We'll send around the final wording to you in a few moments.

Thank you very much.

• (1540)

The Chair: Okay.

It's a fairly lengthy motion. There is just one thing about it, and we'll discuss it as a committee. For witnesses on the credit card study, ideally, if it's possible, send the names earlier than Friday, September 27. I know Mr. Masse has sent his witnesses, and Mr. Perkins is about to send his, so to the Bloc and the Liberals, please send the names of your witnesses as soon as possible. It gives the clerk more time to send the invitations for that first meeting.

I think the email is being sent around now.

Mr. Perkins, do you want to suspend?

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Yes.

The Chair: That is what I was about to propose so that members can read it and think about it. We'll come back in about five minutes.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1540)

(Pause)

• (1550)

The Chair: Colleagues, the white smoke has emerged, and I think we're ready to resume.

We still have the motion by Mr. Turnbull, so I'll recognize Mr. Masse and then Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to support the motion.

We had some informal discussions, and I know there's a concern about the last part and making sure we focus on that, but it won't stop us if there is an emergency or if something else comes up. I appreciate the parliamentary secretary bringing this forward, given that we could go around in circles on some of this material, and we'll be stopped from doing that.

Also, obviously, I'm very interested in the credit card study. It's something I've been after for a while in terms of having more accountability, and I appreciate the time that we'll put into that.

I also try to appreciate that we've worked a lot on Bill C-27. I think that all parties here have been trying to find their way through this. It's historic, especially the issue of artificial intelligence. That aside, we've done a lot of stuff on the privacy aspect and we seem to be stuck at one particular point on the tribunal. If there's time to fix that in a way that's comfortable, I think that is better than trying to work through it with the officials here in real time, as opposed to a proper plan coming back.

For those reasons, I'll support the motion. I appreciate the nature and tone of this discussion, because this committee has historically worked really well together. We've had some moments recently on a few things, but at the same time, I'd like to spend my time here wisely, and I think this is a good program for going forward, so I'll be supporting the motion. If we do have an emergency or something else pops up in the interim, this doesn't stop a member from raising that issue.

I get the intent and why it's in there, and we'll deal with it as we go forward.

With that, I say thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Perkins, you now have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, MP Turnbull.

From our perspective, obviously, we always say that the committee is master of its own domain. It can always change this if it wants to, and I'm okay with the first three items.

I believe we need to find time in the schedule to do two things on MP Masse's credit card study. One would be to have the time to determine whether or not we need more than four meetings, because we did say—and the motion for the credit card study says this—at least four meetings. I think we have the flexibility in this committee to say, “Okay, we have more witnesses and more testimony we want to hear.” Plus, obviously, there is the planning of the report; the development of that study needs to be built in as well.

On the fourth item, I would be more comfortable if, after the part of the sentence that says “uninterrupted by any other study”, I could propose an amendment that says, “unless otherwise determined by the committee” so that it's clear the committee has options and that we've not agreed to just block ourselves out ad infinitum on Bill C-27 when we have other items that come up on the credit card study or may come up in the future.

Mr. Chair, I would propose that amendment to this motion, just off the top of my head. I don't know if we have anything that we can send to the clerk so that it's in both languages.

• (1555)

The Chair: I think that's fairly straightforward. I don't think there needs to be anything sent in writing.

You've heard the amendment proposed by Mr. Perkins. Are there any comments on the amendment that has been proposed by Mr. Perkins?

Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Technically, I think it's a bit redundant, because it's already implied that the committee can do whatever it deems is its will, but I also don't think having it in there hurts or detracts from our getting to an agreement. I just think it's already implied. You already said it, but you're formalizing it in the actual wording of the motion. I don't particularly have a problem with it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm bringing back the fashion statement of suspenders and a belt at the same time.

The Chair: Okay, so I gather we have consent for this amendment around the committee table.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now we'll go back to the motion.

Are you done, Mr. Perkins?

I have Monsieur Garon up next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garon, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Very quickly, I want to say I intend to vote in favour of Mr. Perkins's motion. I think it's pragmatic.

I think what we experienced at committee shows that certain elements, such as amendment CPC-9 and the tribunal, are problematic. We therefore need time to think about it if we all want to attain the same objective, especially regarding the first part of Bill C-27, which protects personal data. We may have some differences of

opinion when it comes to the ways of attaining this objective, but I think we can do it.

I want to thank the parliamentary secretary, Mr. Turnbull.

I think it's a great sign of openness, especially since we will be able to use our time intelligently for a study that, in my opinion, is nonpartisan and consensus-based. So, that's already a very good thing.

I hope this spirit of openness on everyone's part will remain active so that we can find a way forward. We are all thinking about it. I still think we can do it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon.

Since no one else seems to want the floor, I concur that the motion as amended by Mr. Perkins is unanimously passed by the committee.

[*English*]

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Just so we are clear, by the terms of the motion, given that next Monday is the National Day of Reconciliation, we won't be sitting, so the first meeting on the credit card study will be next Thursday, unless the minister is available to appear—we'll take him when he is—so I'd appreciate it if parties could send the names of their witnesses at the earliest possible time, ideally by this Wednesday.

Now we're back to CPC-9 and Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It is about another matter. It's not yet related to CPC-9. I just want to ask to provide clarification.

I noticed earlier today that there was a communication that came in to the committee from, I believe, Paliare Roland. I don't know who that is, but I guess it's a law firm that sent a clarification to the clerk. I don't know whether all committee members have had the chance to review it.

It's from Ms. Verschuren. I think it clarifies that Ms. Verschuren did apply for her role as the chair of the board of SDTC, and I'll just note that point in case my colleagues across the way there haven't seen that communication.

If you don't mind, maybe I could just read that into the record, just so it's—

• (1600)

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have not moved the motion.

The Chair: We're on Bill C-27. I don't think, given that the communication's been sent to all committee members, that it's necessarily—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It was sent to all committee members, then.

The Chair: It was sent to all committee members and it's in the digital binder, so I would rather we proceed, if that's okay, but you gave the gist of it, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's not a problem. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, are we done with the—

The Chair: We're on Bill C-27, technically, but....

Mr. Rick Perkins: I gave notice of a motion that I'd like to move, which will allow MP Turnbull to read the letter into the record. That's how kind I am to my Liberal colleagues.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: You're so kind.

Mr. Rick Perkins: With that in mind, I move the following motion:

That, in relation to the committee's ongoing study of conflict of interest breaches at Sustainable Development Technology Canada (SDTC), and given that

(i) Minister François-Philippe Champagne has issued a press release stating that "effective immediately, SDTC will also resume funding, under a reinforced contribution agreement with ISED, for eligible projects"; and given that

(ii) the SDTC whistle-blower has told the public accounts committee that "new project approvals have now started" under these agreements;

the committee therefore orders SDTC and ISED to produce copies of each reinforced contribution agreement signed since June 4, 2024, without redactions, in both official languages, within 14 days following the adoption of this motion, in order to monitor the department's compliance with the Auditor General's recommendations.

The reason is that earlier last week, the whistle-blower gave information about the old secretive contribution agreements, which have not been released publicly yet, or ever. They're not available anywhere. Those are the agreements between the industry department and the green slush fund as to what they can and cannot spend money on. Part of the Auditor General's report dealt with the fact that \$58 million was spent outside of those contribution agreements. I believe we need access to more than those contribution agreements.

The whistle-blower testified not only that the new, interim, part-time, temporary board overseeing the fund had started to issue money again to companies; he also said the contribution agreements have been amended retroactively to include within the contribution agreement all of the projects that were previously illegal and outside of the contribution agreement. It's taking an eraser and trying to get rid of the old contracts that SDTC and ISED had agreed to and are refusing to release publicly, and we need to see this as soon as possible.

With regard to these agreements and having them out within 14 days, one presumes they're already written, since they've been done. The minister said that funding would start immediately. We need to make sure, since there has been a lot of discussion about repayment and payment of the money. The now-retired deputy minister—there are a lot of people retiring around SDTC—said that some of this money should be repaid, as have other parties at the committee. This morning the NDP were questioning and asking in the public accounts committee discussions why the money wasn't being repaid.

I would say that in order to ensure these companies.... We know that 82% of the board members who received this money were conflicted and that another \$58 million was illegally spent outside the contribution agreements. This committee needs to know, and Parliament needs to know, which companies that received that money are getting money once again. In other words, nothing has changed.

We don't know that—it may have changed—but we got rid of the old SDTC process. Apparently, the new SDTC process is not really that much different from the old SDTC process, except for one thing. If you go to the SDTC website, which I did a year and a half ago—which started this whole thing off—the old SDTC was very transparent. Every quarter, they updated an Excel spreadsheet there of every grant that SDTC had given out, with a great deal of detail about when and how and the industry the company was in. Since its founding in 2001, every single transaction was available.

In this open and transparent process we have now under the minister, there's actually no public list available anymore about what SDTC is doing in giving out money. In fact, we've had testimony from the president of the National Research Council, where SDTC eventually will be housed before it gets again punted to another organization after the National Research Council has it. At the National Research Council, they don't actually publish absolutely any of their grants.

• (1605)

They put out a quarterly report that says that they spent so much on this program and so much on that program, but they do not put out a list of where that money goes. The organization was actually disclosing what they were spending the billion-dollar Liberal green slush fund on, so you could do the work and find out which directors were feathering their own beds, as it were, to the tune of \$390 million, according to the Auditor General. Now, with the minister's open and transparent process, you can't even do that. You can't even see that on SDTC's website, on the NRC website, on anybody's website. It's a super-secret society. It looks to me like they're just trying to cover up everything that they're doing now.

We're asking for the basics here, which are the contribution agreements that have been altered in order to make bad wrongdoings positive, and also to understand what the new temporary interim board—before they punt it over to NRC—is actually spending money on now. That's the purpose of this motion. We need to continue to get to the bottom. It is one of the reasons I'm concerned about the previous motion we passed, and thank you for allowing the statement of the obvious to be put in, which is that the committee can interrupt deliberations on Bill C-27 if it deems it necessary, because we have to get to the bottom of this billion-dollar scandal.

I know that the government doesn't want us to do that, and I can understand that, since their appointees were found to be in conflict of interest. The chair was found.... I know it said two times in the Ethics Commissioner's report, but they also admitted in committee that the two were rolled up. It was 24 times that the chair hand-picked by the Prime Minister, Annette Verschuren, who—and I will introduce the subject so that MP Turnbull can introduce the letter—three times in committee when I asked her, said that she did not apply. I made it very clear and very simple. I asked, “Who contacted you?”

She said that Minister Bains had contacted her twice.

I asked, “Did you apply?”

She said no.

I asked if she was sure, because both the PCO and Minister Bains said that they only operate from lists of people who had applied.

She said that no, she had not applied. In fact, in the ultimate arrogance we often see from her, she said that she had never applied for anything in her life. It all lands in her lap.

Miraculously, a week after PMO had a chance to talk to their hand-picked appointee, her lawyer—not her—sent a letter saying something like, “Oh, I guess I was wrong when I said three times that I've never applied for anything in my life, including this job,” which she now remembers. She had her lawyer—not her—write a letter to the committee saying something to the effect of, “Oops, I said three times that I didn't apply, that I'm too important in Canada to apply for anything. Everybody comes to me and asks me to do things, including the Liberal government.”

I actually believe her original testimony, because it's consistent with what the former president, Leah Lawrence, said when she was before the hearings in committee on this. She said that the minister's office had directed specifically that Annette Verschuren be appointed over the objections of management of SDTC, who said that we cannot appoint somebody for the first time in our history who is conflicted. The Prime Minister's Office, through the Privy Council Office and Minister Bains, proceeded anyway, and Annette Verschuren admitted that they had hand-picked her. They moved outside the normal process. That is all—

Mr. Brian Masse: I have a point of order.

The Chair: One second—

• (1610)

Mr. Rick Perkins: —part of my motion and why we need to get to the bottom of this.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Perkins. There is a point of order from Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I'm sorry, Mr. Perkins.

Can we maybe release our officials? I don't think we're going to get to the subject that they're here for, even if we finish this.

I'm sorry to interrupt. I apologize. It's just that they're sitting here. They sat here yesterday, and I'm just wondering whether we should let them go.

I apologize again.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's fine.

Mr. Brian Masse: It just came to me.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm done anyway on this for now.

The Chair: I hope they didn't sit here yesterday, Mr. Masse. That was Sunday.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Brian Masse: Oh, yes, sorry.

The Chair: That would be terribly sad.

Mr. Brian Masse: Sorry.

The Chair: I hope they have better things to do on a Sunday.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes, pardon me. It was at the last meeting.

The Chair: Yes, it was the last meeting.

We still have an hour and 15 minutes to go. I'm not sure we're going to be debating this motion.

I'm looking around the table. Are you comfortable if we deal with the motion Mr. Perkins has brought forward and that we forgo the time of the committee if there are no other motions and the witnesses are not here?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have other motions—

The Chair: Do you have other motions?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have only one after that.

The Chair: It's only one other motion—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: There are two others that you have.

The Chair: I'd say that we maybe wait until 4:30. At 4:30, if there's still no end in sight to these motions, we'll release the witnesses.

Mr. Brian Masse: Sure, but I didn't.... It's just....

Yes. Thanks.

The Chair: I appreciate that, Mr. Masse, and I'm sure Mr. Angus and Mr. Chhabra do as well.

Yes, Mr. Perkins, you may resume.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, that concludes my initial remarks.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers?

I see Mr. Généreux and then Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to read the French translation of the amendment proposed after Mr. Perkins's motion. In the last paragraph, the proposed amendment reads as follows:

the committee therefore orders SDTC and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) to produce copies of each reinforced contribution agreement signed since June 4, 2024, along with copies of any contribution agreement signed during the Auditor General's audit period from 2018 through 2023, without redactions, in both official languages, within 14 days following the adoption of this motion, in order to monitor the department's compliance with the Auditor General's recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Chair.

I guess I'm having a little trouble understanding what the intention of this motion is. Perhaps Mr. Perkins can enlighten us further on his intentions here.

This particular topic has been studied and studied. There have been, of course, the Auditor's General report and the Ethics Commissioner's investigation and findings, and we've have had this particular motion introduced at public accounts as well. It's exactly the same and was adjourned. The committee there, I believe, adjourned debate on this motion. That's a matter of the public record, I believe, but what I'm interested in here is trying to understand the motives behind the motion.

We know that the board was dissolved, the CEO and chair resigned, the people who were at SDTC are no longer there and the organization is being folded into the NRC with rigorous oversight, which obviously could be an improvement for sure. What I'm trying to get my head around is what the objective is here. What are we trying to accomplish in using up more committee time? At the public accounts committee, the members decided not to move forward with a study on this topic. I find that kind of interesting. They could take that up at any point, obviously, since this was moved at that committee as well.

Here is the thing I'm struggling with. We know that the companies out there that are the mom-and-pop type of clean-tech companies across Canada rely on this funding to continue to scale up and do the work that they do, which is to grow their businesses in Canada. We've said for many years that they punch above their weight and that they need access to those funds. The funds had been stalled, or we pushed pause on those funds going out, for the whole time that all of these independent reviews and investigations were taking place.

This is now, I think, an intention to go after the small.... The companies are not the guilty parties here. The people who mismanaged the organization—or there were allegations of mismanagement—have been held to account. We've called them to committee numerous times. We've, in my view, studied this to death. I guess what I'm trying to get at is, what's the intention? Why are we now trying to go after the industry itself?

This seems to be an attempt to essentially have all of these.... This says that "new project approvals have now started". Well, that's the intention. The intention is that SDTC, which had been around for over 20 years, which was funded by the Honourable Michelle Rempel Garner.... In fact, when she was minister, there was \$300 million that went to SDTC. It's not as if previous Conservative and Liberal governments didn't support this organization. In

fact, we all did. Why? It was because we all know the value of supporting our clean-tech industry.

What I find hard here is that it seems as though the Conservatives are never satisfied with getting to the bottom of something. Our government has, over and over again.... The minister has been clear, I've been clear, we've all participated in these studies and we haven't fought you. We have said: "Okay, let's get to the bottom of this. We want answers too."

We've done that over and over again, and now the Conservatives are not satisfied. They want to do it more and to do it in a way that harms the clean-tech industry. Why would you want to harm the small mom-and-pop businesses out there that rely on this funding? Is it the intention here to eradicate the entire clean-tech industry? Is it to pull these people before committee and question their legitimacy as businesses? To me, that's unacceptable. I don't think we need to use committee time for that.

• (1615)

To me, if we've all agreed in the past that better oversight is needed, that there were some technical violations, as the Ethics Commissioner had said.... I know that the Conservatives keep pumping up their little misinformation campaign—

Mr. Rick Perkins: The Auditor General's misinformation—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: —in trying to call this more than what it is, but we know that the Ethics Commissioner said it was "a technical violation". That's what he called it. That was his term. I asked him very specifically about what the difference is between abstention and recusal, and he said, well, it's basically a technical violation of the act.

The Conservatives want to say that this is corruption and this person is a Liberal insider. They're saying it every day in the House of Commons and it's not true. It's false.

You want to continue to do that. I get it. I get that this is politics and you want your clicks and your little videos to put out on social media, but that's not what's actually happened here. I know that you want to make it seem like that's what happened, but I really don't think that we should be using committee time essentially to question small and medium-sized enterprises across Canada and jeopardize the funds they need in order to scale and grow their businesses. That includes businesses in Sherbrooke. It includes businesses in Calgary, Victoria and Thornhill. There's a long list.

I don't think the Conservatives—or I hope, anyway—are jumping to the conclusion that every clean-tech business in the country is now a target to be ripped down and torn down because of a few technical violations at SDTC, which have been accounted for. The individuals have been held to account and the organization has been completely transformed to have better oversight and a tighter governance model and framework.

To me, that seems like you got what you wanted, which was accountability. We all wanted that, but now you can't put it to bed. You've got to keep wanting to study it. I just don't understand the rationale.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We were discussing the amendment Mr. Généreux sent by email.

The next speaker will be Mr. Patzer, to be followed by Ms. Rempel Garner.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Let's start off with the fact that there were 186 contracts, I believe, that were in conflict. At this point, it's about making sure that now that there's funding going back out again, there wasn't just a pause and then a restart of funding to the same 186 companies that had irregularities in their applications and in their contracts. This is about making sure that taxpayers are not once again continuing to fund people who don't deserve to get this money. That's what it comes down to.

This is about the accountability piece that I was talking to you about last week when we were debating a different motion. It should absolutely be in the interest of every member of Parliament, regardless of political stripe, to make sure that any company, regardless of which government is in power, isn't ripping off the taxpayer.

The fact is that it's \$330 million on 186 contracts. That's where the counter is at with this particular fund since this government took over. If nothing has been done to remedy this and it's just going to continue on as it was before, then of course there are going to be substantive issues that this committee should be looking at and that every member should want to look at.

At the end of the day, it comes down to accountability. Has the minister been accountable to taxpayers to make sure that the adjustments have been made, to make sure that this process does not happen and that the companies that have already been found to be under a conflict aren't also continuing to get something when they shouldn't be getting it?

This is not about assaulting the mom-and-pop shop that might be looking to get in on something; this is about people who have connections, and they're using them to improperly further their own means.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patzer.

Before giving the floor to Ms. Rempel Garner, I want to tell Ms. Angus and Mr. Chhabra that they may leave the meeting if they wish, unless someone is vehemently opposed.

Lady and gentleman, thank you for joining us and taking part in this exercise.

The next speakers are Ms. Rempel Garner, Mr. Perkins, and Mr. Drouin.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to make the case for this motion in the context of some of the comments Mr. Turnbull made.

First of all, thank you for acknowledging the support of the Harper government for promoting clean technologies. As I mentioned in my introduction to the committee, I actually spent a lot of time, prior to being elected, commercializing early-stage university technology, but with a specific focus on clean tech—clean energy tech—and I'm familiar with this space. I think we're all in agreement that ensuring there are funds available, whatever the structure looks like, to help Canadian start-up companies in the clean-tech space is important.

I'm going to get to the point here. I'm not filibustering. This is for the benefit of my colleagues in the Bloc and in the New Democratic Party. If I may, I'm trying seriously to make an argument on this for my colleagues in the Bloc and the NDP. I don't see this as being anti-small company. I actually see this as protecting the small companies, and here's why.

There was a reputational risk exposure to these companies when the conflict of interest came out—there was—and in order for us as parliamentarians to continue to recommend to the government in violent agreement that there should be some sort of support for clean energy companies, we have to make sure that this reputational risk has been removed. For anybody who was associated with a potential conflict of interest, it's about making sure that their governance now reflects what's happened in this committee, right?

To me, that's why the production of the documents is a good thing here. It's just a check, like, "Yep, this has been...". It's so that after all of this exercise that's happened in this committee, anybody who's been involved in this conflict of interest is no longer in that position with the funds still flowing through to them. It's just a simple "Yes, there has been follow-up" or "No, there hasn't." That to me is....

For the government, if everything has been done, then there should be no problem with releasing this information. What I like about how this motion is structured is that it doesn't require a study. It's just a production of documents. It's just a "Yes, this has been done" or "No, this has not been done": check, check, check or not check, not check, not check. Also, the other thing is that if it hasn't been done, it will force the department and the minister to get it done.

For me, the insinuation that this motion is about hurting these industries.... No. This is about reputational risk that has been inflicted upon these companies by the malfeasance, frankly, of the federal government. By "malfeasance", I mean lack of oversight. This is to ensure that if there was any reputational risk, it through a lack of oversight by the department.

All we are saying with this motion is to just make sure that any governance issue that might have been lingering as a result of everything this committee has uncovered has now been rectified. Then we can go to the public and say, “Yes, problem solved, yes, we can go forward, and yes, this is working”, because there are still questions about what's going on here. This is not asking for a study; this is saying, “Where's the proof that this has been done?” Frankly, I think that if I were on the board of one of these companies, I would be saying that this is a good thing, that it helps us and it gets us out of the woods.

This is a situation very similar to the argument that if there are members of Parliament listed in the NSICOP report and that the names can't be released in public, there's a cloud that hangs over everybody. What we're doing with this is saying that if the governance issues have been rectified, that's great. Put it out there: check, check, check and we're good to go.

I think this is an elegant solution because it doesn't require more committee meetings that I'm sure the minister doesn't want to go to. Again, if it is done as it should be done—and as the parliamentary secretary claims—there should be zero issues in issuing this. I think we should get on with it and vote in favour of this motion.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I just want—

The Chair: Excuse me, I was supposed to give you the floor, Mr. Perkins.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: [*Inaudible—Editor*] hear what Mr. Drouin has to say.

To answer MP Turnbull's questions, which I think MP Rempel Garner did extremely well, this, for those watching, is called a motion for production of documents. It doesn't take up any of the committee's study time. It's just saying, “Produce these documents.”

Why are these documents important? That's essentially what MP Turnbull was asking. This isn't some sort of determination by this committee of who should or should not get money. The production of the documents.... There are two basic documents. One is these things that have been referred to in every hearing so far on this issue and called “contribution agreements”.

SDTC, the green slush fund, is a foundation. It was a foundation set up by the Chrétien government. As such, it doesn't receive parliamentary appropriations like a Crown corporation does; it receives large lump sum amounts, the last one being just about four weeks before Minister Champagne took over, when \$750 million was transferred from the federal government under former minister Bains before he went off to help raise cellphone rates for Rogers.

What does that do? Well, the industry department, which former minister Bains and Minister Champagne are responsible for, sets out an agreement with the board and the management of SDTC, the

Liberal green slush fund, to say, “This is what you can spend money on within the parameters of how Parliament has allocated it, and you're limited to this.”

Why is that important? Well, I know this is a difficult thing sometimes for government members to accept, but the Auditor General is an officer of Parliament and is neutral. In the Auditor General's report, the Auditor General said that \$58 million in taxpayer money.... That's a lot of money by anyone's standards. It's more than the sponsorship scandal under the Chrétien government, which was for \$42 million funnelled to Liberal insiders. This \$58 million is outside of the contribution agreement. That's not me: That's the Auditor General's finding, not just in a report, but in her testimony before committee.

Incredibly, former SDTC director Stephen Kukucha from British Columbia, who served in the office of former Liberal minister Anderson, who was also the organizer in British Columbia for Justin Trudeau, testified in committee that when he joined the SDTC board, they never gave him the contribution agreements to read—these secret documents. They're not out there. They're not available on the website. They've never done this. They've never released them, but yet the Auditor General is basing that \$58 million on the fact that it's outside of the agreement.

They didn't even share them with SDTC board members. Talk about corporate governance failure under these Liberals. Annette Verschuren, Stephen Kukucha, Guy Ouimet, Andrée-Lise Méthot—all these people were appointed, including the nine directors who were found in conflict of interest 186 times by the Auditor General in her select examination of 226 transactions, which represents about half of what was done in that period of time. Of those 226, 186 were conflicted.

We're asking for those documents. I don't know why the government wants to prevent them from being released to the committee without redaction. The minister has said, and the deputy minister of industry has said, that some of this money should be paid back. Well, how do we know that some of these companies aren't now getting more money, the ones who got it outside of the contribution agreement or were in conflict? The only way is through transparency and tabling the documents.

Those are the two documents we're looking for. We're not looking for 12 more meetings on this. There are other things we can do on this at meetings, for sure, but to me, transparency, as somebody once said, is the best...

What is it? Sunshine is the best—

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Disinfectant.

• (1630)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Disinfectant.

Why is the government not willing, if they have this great new process in place, with this great new board, to have that kind of transparency, at least the kind of transparency that the previous old SDTC green slush fund had? We have less now.

Those two documents are what we're asking for in the production of documents. It's not an issue of saying yea or nay on a particular company, as the Liberals like to imply. They see a bogeyman there. Maybe they are trying to hide the bogeyman. I don't know.

However, I can understand why every time we have a meeting, new evidence and new levels of incompetence and self-dealing are revealed. That's why this has gone on. Perhaps Liberal members should ask themselves why they are okay with that. Why don't they want to get to the bottom of it? Why do they keep saying...?

Every time we put forward a request for documents that have been revealed by testimony or every time we say, "Oh, look, the chair and the Liberal minister are contradicting each other, so let's have both of them here at committee to see who is lying", the government resists. That tells me that they're not interested in the truth. They're not interested in getting to the bottom of it. If they were, they wouldn't oppose this motion.

If they have nothing to hide, release the documents.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Drouin, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the two speeches by my honourable colleagues, but I do question their motivation. Just an hour ago, they were saying that time's up and it's time to go to an election right away, so I question whether they are even going to want to look at those documents if they are produced.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Release them and we'll see.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Perkins said something interesting about trusting the words of the officer of Parliament. There is another officer of Parliament: the Ethics Commissioner. I was at a meeting this morning at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, as Mr. Perkins well knows; he was there. The Ethics Commissioner cleared a board member, and Mr. Perkins proceeded to attack him, regardless of being an officer of Parliament—a non-partisan officer of Parliament—and he proceeded to attack him.

I'm questioning what the rationale is. What is the motivation behind this? Is it that their fundraising numbers aren't high enough?

Are they going to launch a video on Rebel News and fundraise even more off this issue? I'm just questioning the modus operandi behind this—

• (1635)

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's truth.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —because this committee is going to be seized with this question again, even though it was seized with it before.

Mr. Perkins said that we're not done at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts with this particular study. It's going on and on, despite the fact that the Auditor General has looked at this particular issue, that the Ethics Commissioner has looked at this particular issue, that there's been a third party investigation by McCarthy Tétrault and that there's been a third party investigation by RCGT.

Are we going to have investigations of investigations? Where do they see this ending? Do they want political interference in this decision-making, or should we let public servants operate within a governance framework that we've created? I'm just wondering.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Garon has the floor, to be followed by Mr. Masse.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: The Auditor General's reports on SDTC were worrisome. Today, we had Ms. Annette Verschuren and other witnesses before us. There are indeed several reasons to be worried. Furthermore, I think we should recognize that Minister Champagne did, to a certain extent, acknowledge his responsibility. It is true that we were lied to. In any case, when we had the former minister, Mr. Bains, before us, I think we were lied to. I think we were unable to get the truth during that testimony. Evading questions and not giving answers do indeed worry me. However, the current minister did indeed suspend funding, transfer responsibility for it to the National Research Council of Canada, or NRCC, requested an internal investigation, and so on.

That is why I think the motion—I'll come to the amendment later—has merit. Insofar as the current minister took responsibility and reestablished funding in another form, I think it is legitimate for the committee to look into new contribution agreements concluded since June. I may move an amendment, but I think the motion is valid.

I am now looking at the amendment. When it comes to the issue of documents, it goes back a long way. I am not saying it's without merit. I am not saying that looking into those documents is not a task for a parliamentary committee. However, to a certain extent, I concur with the analysis by my colleague, Mr. Drouin: committee time is supposed to be valuable. Its time is limited, and the more limited it is, the more valuable it is. In this context, my impression remains that, regarding the documents dated from 2018 to 2023 in the amendment proposed by my colleague, Mr. Généreux, it may be premature. I think we would be duplicating what the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is doing.

I have not yet decided how I'm going to vote. I do not want to presume to know anyone's intentions. However, I think we understand the analysis up to 2023. Even today, we received a document revealing that Ms. Verschuren changed her version. I don't know how many times a week she changes it. She certainly changes her version of the facts every time she comes before the committee. I think the work up until 2023 is the Auditor General's responsibility. If we want to look more deeply into it here, at Parliament, that falls under the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Garon.

Mr. Masse has the floor, followed by Mr. Turnbull.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I can understand why the motion's been put forward, but there are a couple of things I'm thinking of. First of all, public accounts is doing work on this. I had to fill in last week on that. It's almost as though we have a two-headed monster right now with regard to dealing with it. It's taking a lot of resources. I'm wondering whether it would be more appropriate for this to be there at the public accounts committee now, since from what I saw at the meeting I was at, they're actually delving into it quite substantially, more than we are here. That happened before when some of this was at, I think, the ethics committee. I'm sorry if my memory is hazy on this, but we've been going around this issue for a while.

Something I'm really worried about is the companies and their information that could go public. They didn't realize they had a process in place when they made applications, and I think a good point that was made here is that the SDTC problem wasn't from the companies applying to it but with the behaviour of the director and particular members of the board.

Why wouldn't we then just have this as the policy forever if that is the case? Some of the companies that have been captured in this have already expressed concern about their intellectual property and other matters and their competition from other, even foreign, companies on some of these innovations that are taking place. That's what has come back to me in the office as well.

I have a lot of concerns related to that. In the past when we've had these sensitive information requests, we've even taken the position that we would have the documents behind closed doors, so to speak, in camera, so we could look at them. I don't know if that's a path we would consider so we wouldn't actually victimize somebody by accident. We've done that for the auto sector in particular. It's not the best solution, but it's one of the potential solutions.

The difference, though, in this one is that we have so many other different files here. For all those reasons, I have concerns with the motion as it's presented right now. I don't know fully what happened at public accounts today, but I'm going to have to go back and take a look at where they're going with this. I think that's a bigger question for all of us.

I know there have been other issues that have been shopped around several committees. The auto file, much to my concern, was also shopped around different committees. These are all the things I'm thinking about on this.

In particular, I've been contacted by some companies that have expressed concern that they're being maligned because of the behaviour of SDTC's board members. That also affects the investment they put into it, as well as the investment the government and taxpayers put into it, because people see them as toxic for no reason of their own making.

I'm wondering, for anybody else at the table here, if you made an application for a bank loan or something, and then all of a sudden later on, retroactively, all your personal and company information was then made public, how you'd deal with that. I'm not sure why we wouldn't be more strategic or tactical on this.

Those are the concerns I have at the moment with regard to the motion.

• (1640)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Further to the comments made by colleagues, I tend to agree with Mr. Masse and with some of the points Mr. Garon made.

When we froze funding for SDTC, we heard very strongly about the impact that it had on the clean-tech industry in Canada. Those companies went through significant struggles as a result, and not necessarily through any fault of their own. Think about the large portfolio of companies that SDTC funds and the impacts on all of them from having their funding frozen because of a number of technical violations by board members who didn't recuse themselves but rather abstained. There have been significant effects on the clean-tech industry as a direct result of funds being frozen. If all of a sudden we are questioning every funding decision that's been made under the new structure and the new governance model, is that really our role? The contribution agreements contain information submitted by those companies when they go through the very rigorous process, and they are not thinking that information will be made public.

The other thing is that Mr. Généreux has already introduced an amendment to this motion, contrary to what was said here by other members, that takes the request for the production of documents all the way back to 2018. If this were really focused on moving forward, where we started from was 2024, and now you've introduced an amendment to gather and produce documents all the way back to 2018. That is not consistent with what the Conservatives made in terms of arguments here. I don't know what the motivation is. It seems as though it's to keep studying this and studying this and studying this to catch some headlines and make more news stories on their social media sites and to claim things that are untrue.

There's no doubt there were some technical violations by the board, and they should have been held accountable, and they were held accountable. The organization was dissolved and reconstituted and is now under a new governance model. I think this is what we all think should have happened, and it is what happened. I just wanted to make those couple of points. I'm sure we could debate this for a lot longer, but perhaps we can get to a vote on it.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Perkins, it is your turn to take the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There seems to be some confusion about what a contribution agreement is. I thought I made it clear in my two statements. There are contribution agreements signed by ISED, written by ISED and given to SDTC—and it's still SDTC. It hasn't been collapsed into anything else yet.

The contribution agreements lay out generally where they're allowed to spend money and where they're not. Members seem to be confused. This is not an agreement between SDTC and an individual company once a grant has been given. There's nothing about that. This is about the contribution agreement and the language of SDTC. That contribution agreement is the one set out by ISED. That's what this is looking at. It doesn't actually list a single company. All it does is set out where you are allowed to spend a billion dollars of taxpayer money. The Auditor General said that they went outside of those agreements in creating a number of other funds that weren't part of that.

In addition to that, the whistle-blower has said that those agreements have now been amended in the new governance structure, and none of them have ever been made public, including by the board members. None of them have been made public to outline those restrictions.

They've been amended, according to the whistle-blower. One of them has been amended to recategorize the \$58 million that was spent on COVID payments and other things to now be retroactively eligible. It's not a list; it's the parameters of how they spend taxpayer money and what they're allowed to spend it on. It's a very clear agreement. How they are to follow the contribution agreements set out by ISED has been talked about ad nauseam on the websites of both ISED and SDTC over the years. That's what this asks for. It

does not ask for any individual agreement with a company once a grant is made.

The second part of this motion just asks for a list of the companies that have received money, and how much, since SDTC has started up again. That's essentially the same thing SDTC was publishing every quarter on their website until the government froze their assets. That's all the motion is asking for. It's very simple: Be transparent, as you were before this thing got shut down, about who you're giving the money to and show us the contribution agreements going back to 2018—because they've been altered—between ISED and the SDTC board and management on what they can spend money on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Heard under that argument, though, why would you request those contribution agreements all the way back to 2018, if that were the case?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's because they've been altered, and I want to see what they looked like before.

I'm sorry. Can I answer that?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: When the Auditor General's report came out, the Auditor General said \$58 million was spent outside of those contribution agreements. Now, the whistle-blower said recently, this summer, that the contribution agreement has been amended, and it now makes all those projects eligible. The only way to know this is to see the previous version and the current version that has now allegedly been signed by ISED.

The Chair: I have Mr. Masse. We're still on the amendment by Mr. Généreux.

Go ahead, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I'll suggest this to help get us past this impasse: Why don't we see the documents in camera? If we find things that are a problem, we can then identify them and go from there. I think that might be the best way to move forward.

I appreciate what's being said here, but I'm having a bit of trouble. I don't want to victimize another company by accident.

We could then decide on yes or no. I can hear what's going on, and I understand the concern, Mr. Perkins, about not being able to talk about it in public. We could make that decision after we see the documents. It is a fair point you're raising, but I suggest that we do that to start with and then go forward. It's not a perfect solution to what you're seeking, for sure, but we could get to that point later, if necessary.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Masse.

Go ahead, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, the list of companies shouldn't be in camera. The list of companies was a public document before, quarterly, on SDTC's own website, so there's no reason for that to be in camera. Why should it be less transparent now than it was before the corruption?

With regard to the contribution agreement, I would agree to seeing it in camera as long as we're allowed to speak about it in public if there are anomalies. The problem with having it in camera is that your hands are tied. You cannot speak publicly about it.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes.

I don't want to take over the role of the chair here. Is it okay if I respond to that?

The Chair: Of course, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I can appreciate that argument too, because that's one of the reasons I didn't see the Volkswagen documents. I was concerned about my inability to advocate on auto issues. I get that it's not a perfect thing. We could do the listing that you're suggesting, but then have all the other documents in camera and go from there.

Mr. Rick Perkins: [*Inaudible—Editor*] speak about it.

Mr. Brian Masse: Well, if it's in camera, you can't speak about it until we agree in camera. We can set aside some of the meeting to discuss that so that you're not fenced in. I understand what you're trying to accomplish, and that's a fair point, but I guess what I'm still worried about is—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't understand why it's secret.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Masse, but so far, we're still debating the amendment proposed by Monsieur Généreux.

[*Translation*]

In the motion, there's no mention of going in camera, so this discussion is somewhat pointless.

[*English*]

The discussion is moot right now because there is no proposal. We're still debating the amendment by Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Turnbull is next.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I thought the argument the Conservatives were making for why this is necessary was to move forward and ensure that the organization was accountable and abiding by certain guidance, etc., from the Auditor General's findings. However, Mr. Généreux is now requesting documents going back to 2018. We also have another committee that's looking into this. I don't understand why we would need to do this in this committee.

We just agreed as a committee, and we all came together in consensus, on a motion about what we were going to study. Remember, we did this earlier. We allotted time for the request the Conservatives made in the last meeting, which was to have the minister for two hours. We said, "Let's make that a priority. Let's get the minister here." Okay.

They want to hear from the minister. In the last meeting, we had a debate. The minister is likely going to need to appear numerous

other times, but no, they wanted the minister on his mandate for two hours, so we made that happen. Then we had Mr. Masse bring forward a good-faith motion to study a topic we all said was important. We said, "Let's pause Bill C-27. Let's do some of these other things." Now, today, right after we finished that, we have another motion to go back to studying SDTC again.

Just a few months ago, the Conservatives called a Standing Order 106(4) meeting in the middle of the summer. Do you remember that? I don't know if you remember that day, but we all came together to have a meeting. It wasn't all that productive, I would say. We still scheduled the first meeting when we came back to have two hours with Annette Verschuren and an hour with the Ethics Commissioner. Again, we showed and signalled we were willing to get to the bottom of this and willing to work together as a committee

Where do we draw the line? We just keep going down this path of more and more. This issue has been studied. There's another committee looking into it. Why do we need to do this here? If public accounts is already doing this work, I don't see why we need to duplicate its efforts—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Is Rick Perkins not sure?

Mr. Rick Perkins: We're the ones accountable in Parliament for the money spent by this department.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, you don't—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I was asked the question.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor. Mr. Perkins, you don't have the floor, but I'll...

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I feel that we're spinning our wheels here. We had the officials here today. We could have been productive on Bill C-27. It's unfortunate that they're no longer here.

I understand that Mr. Perkins has more motions that he wants to pass. I honestly don't see the need for document production going back to 2018, which is the amendment Mr. Généreux introduced. It's counter to the whole argument the Conservatives were making in the first place.

What is this really about? It just doesn't seem like it's consistent with the arguments that were made at the outset, so it's making me question the motives behind this motion.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, I remember that, during the election in 2015, the Prime Minister very clearly said his government would be the most transparent ever to exist in Canada. Nine years later, there's still a problem with transparency. Every time we make request for documents, like this one—requests which are, between you and me, very simple—they are always challenged. We have to justify why we are asking for those documents.

Essentially, what we are looking for is the truth. We want to know if things changed compared to how they were done before, in a transparent way. It is simple. I'll stop there. Let's move on to the vote and move on the next call.

The Chair: That's music to my ears, Mr. Généreux.

I see that there are no other speakers on the list.

Madam Clerk, I therefore request a vote on Mr. Généreux's amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4.)

The Chair: We now come back to the motion as initially tabled by Mr. Perkins.

Do you have any comments on the motion?

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: I would like to move an amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Very well. Mr. Garon, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: I appreciate the point made by my colleague, Mr. Masse, to the effect that some of this information could be harmful to businesses which, in fact, did absolutely nothing fraudulent. As we know, there were problems at Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC, at the highest level, with the board of directors. It was documented. We were very hard on them, but it remains that SDTC is, in and of itself, a toxic name. The process requested here could be harmful to some businesses.

As I said earlier, I still think the Conservatives' request for documents is legitimate. Personally, I would be inclined to support it if the words "without redactions" were removed. In my opinion, the government needs the option to hold back any information whatsoever that could be harmful to businesses. The committee has the privilege of requesting those documents again without redactions if it determines it was excessive.

My proposed amendment therefore simply removes the word "without" before the word "redactions."

The Chair: It is therefore proposed to remove the word "without"—

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Indeed.

The Chair: Very well.

Did you all hear Mr. Garon's proposal to remove "without" from "without redactions"?

The debate is open.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm sorry, but maybe it's the French translation. I might be struggling to understand, so my apologies. I mean no offence to our translators. They're doing a great job, but I didn't quite understand whether—

The Chair: Basically, after "June 4, 2024," you would remove "without redactions". It allows for redactions if you remove these two words. That's what, in essence, Mr. Garon's proposing.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Then it's with redactions, essentially.

The Chair: If redactions are necessary, I guess it is, yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I mean, to me, if I were just to counter that, I would prefer the language "with redactions" rather than just deleting "without redactions", because I think that would be for greater certainty, just as we said earlier, and it would be helpful to have that in there.

● (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: It could be a friendly amendment that simply removes "without redactions." Mr. Masse proposed that we consult each other in camera, which would prevent parliamentarians from raising the subject, from referring to it, and so on. I understand that the Conservatives are seeking transparency. Mr. Perkins expressed that objective and I fully support it.

I therefore think the solution would in fact be to withdraw the words "without redactions," keeping in mind that the committee has the privilege of requesting unredacted documents, as required, if it determines that the redactions were intended to reduce transparency.

The Chair: Very well.

Thank you, Mr. Garon.

The proposal therefore consists of completely removing the words "without redactions."

Ms. Rempel Garner, you have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I think what my colleague from the Bloc is intending is not that it would be all black redactions of everything. However, the way that we word it, knowing this government.... It sued the Speaker of the House of Commons to prevent a document production order, and we've all had the black lines as responses to our Order Paper questions.

I'm wondering if there's a way that perhaps we could be specific about what the intention on the non-redactions would be. I'm just wondering if my colleague was trying to be specific about perhaps just redacting company names. Is that what we're talking about here? Otherwise, frankly, we know what's going to happen. If we say "with redactions", it's going to come back with the black Sharpie of destiny all over it, and of course the Liberals are going to vote for that.

I caution my colleagues. I know that it's a wonderful thing to believe in the government and to believe that it will do the right thing, but we all know that it won't. I would just ask my colleagues.... I see it as somewhat problematic to just invite the government to kill a few trees with black Sharpies.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Since I am now an official member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, of course, I would lean towards opposing this motion, because we are studying the same one at that committee. This motion is a little redundant.

That said, to respond to Mr. Garon's comments, and to set out a framework for those who will look into this, I would say that we would usually write "under the Access to Information Act." That way, when third parties are involved, it forces the government to ask them if they agree with having their personal information published. These are not people who work for the government. They could be regular citizens or representatives of private businesses that deal with the government, but they still have personal information, and I respect that.

So, instead of removing the words "without redactions," I would simply replace them with "under the Access to Information Act." I don't know if my colleague agrees, but I'm giving him a chance.

The Chair: So, we would write "under the Access to Information Act".

Mr. Francis Drouin: Exactly.

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

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: We can agree on making it a friendly amendment, so I will answer from that perspective.

I'd like to answer the question posed by my colleague, Ms. Rempel Garner. I myself have not seen the documents. If we remove businesses' names, all we have to do is look at the list of businesses—which is public—to know who they are. It would take four and a half seconds to make those associations. In the end, that means the documents wouldn't really be redacted. Mr. Masse proposed that we get the unredacted documents in order to review them, talk about them and determine what we need. As a committee, we cannot specifically decide what should be redacted or not. I have not seen these documents, so this makes me a little uncomfortable.

Now, as for the Access to Information Act, I am interested in hearing what my Conservative colleagues have to say about it. It remains Mr. Perkins's motion. That said, the main motion proposes a deadline of 14 days to produce the documents. We have to be realistic. The government will send notices to tons of businesses, and they will send them to their lawyers to get their opinion. We won't get a single document within 14 days.

Furthermore, Mr. Drouin says he is giving us a chance, but when you pull on the line, you catch a fish. I understand that he is acting in good faith, but if we go down this road, I have no hope of us getting any documents whatsoever. It could only be in the government's interest for us not to get any.

I would therefore lean towards maintaining the amendment as is, but I am curious about what my Conservative colleagues think of it. I am ready to listen to them.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

The amendment remains as is.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I thought MP Rempel Garner articulated very well the use and wearing out of black Sharpies. Without some parameters for what the government could or couldn't redact, the whole thing will get redacted.

I think MP Drouin actually proposed the Access to Information Act, which at least puts some fences around it if it's public and needs to be redacted. We're talking about the contribution agreements here, not the list of companies that have received money. Frankly, I don't see anything that needs to be redacted, probably, at the end of the day, because it's not about a particular individual company or a particular individual. It's just about how you spend taxpayer money: What can you spend it on? There wouldn't be anything commercially sensitive, so if access to information were used, I think that would be a fair compromise.

In terms of the document itself, the document is already in both languages or it wouldn't be provided, one would presume, as the directors on the board speak both official languages and the documents are already available in both official languages. The documents have been provided by the department to the foundation, so it should be a simple matter of asking, "Is there anything commercially sensitive in the contribution agreement?" I don't believe there is. If there's something commercially sensitive, that's what they can redact. If not, give us the documents. That's where access to information, I believe, sort of draws the line: around commercial sensitivity.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Could we have a quick suspension to discuss this among our colleagues?

The Chair: That sounds reasonable.

Let's suspend for five minutes.

• (1705)

(Pause)

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now resume the committee meeting; there are 12 minutes left before the meeting adjourns.

Mr. Garon has the floor.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Chair, around here we rarely get it right the first time, but I think we may have a solution.

I therefore propose that my amendment be amended, and that it be done courteously by unanimous consent of the committee.

I'll read the last paragraph of the amendment. I will read it in French, slowly, for our friend Mr. Turnbull.

We move that the committee therefore order SDTC and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, or ISED, to produce copies of each contribution agreement reached between ISED and SDTC, reinforced and signed since June 24, 2024, and that all references to company names be redacted.

The Chair: Did I understand correctly? I thought I heard you say "June 24".

June 24 is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: It's June 4.

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: In fact, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day is June 23, Mr. Chair. The following day is June 24.

The Chair: Is June 4 what you meant?

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Very well.

You've heard the terms of—

We had unanimous consent for Mr. Garon to withdraw his amendment, so he is moving this new amendment.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm sorry, colleagues, but I still don't understand.

I understand what Mr. Garon is trying to do. I thought we were in agreement with Mr. Drouin's suggestion that there would be redactions according to ATI Act. I wonder how we got here. How did we get to a point where we're now saying...?

My understanding, Mr. Garon, is that you said "without redactions", but I was expecting you to say "with redactions", according to what I thought we had agreed upon as a committee.

Maybe I misunderstood.

• (1720)

[Translation]

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

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: In fact, as I understand it, and I believe it is correct, when there is a contribution agreement, a mandate letter for a particular contribution is first signed between Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, or ISED, and Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC. Then, at the second stage, an individual contract is signed with the company.

However, we're not asking for that last contract; we're only asking for the contribution agreement, which means there's no need to

subject the redactions to the Access to Information Act. We are only asking for the mandate letter between ISED and SDTC.

Now, out of an abundance of caution, if there happened to be a specific company name in the mandate letters, we would propose that it be redacted. It would appear that these mandate letters do not include company names. The fact that we are not asking for contracts, but only for contribution agreements means that we do not need the Access to Information Act in this specific case.

Have I made myself clear?

[English]

The Chair: We've all heard the amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I think I understand correctly. It's the clarification on what's being requested. It's related to the contribution agreement between ISED and SDTC; that is really what is being requested here. Shouldn't it be subject to the same Access to Information Act in order to...? I don't know what's in that. I haven't reviewed that agreement, so I don't know what's in there, but to me, if there's anything that should be redacted, then it should be. It shouldn't be released to the public.

I just have a concern that if we say "without redactions", we're assuming what's in that agreement, perhaps. I think I understand that it's not going to include....

Monsieur Garon, you actually said that it won't include any references to any companies, which I think is a good clarification. However, shouldn't it also be subject to the same kinds of requirements that an access to information request would be, in terms of making sure that anything that could be revealing or sensitive should be redacted?

I felt pretty comfortable when we were going down that route. I was getting more comfortable with this. Now I'm feeling like I'm back to.... I appreciate the clarification on what's being requested, because I think there was a lack of clarity on that to some degree, but now I'm thinking about what else could be in there that might not be relevant but could be sensitive information to either SDTC or ISED. However, I'm not too sure what's in it.

I think Mr. Perkins said that he's really looking for what SDTC is allowed to spend money on. I think that's the intention here, but I'm not sure about the motion being as clear as it could be.

I'll have to think about that. I need another minute or two to confer with colleagues to see if we can vote in support of that, because I'm not sure we can.

The Chair: Given that we only have six minutes left, we can suspend for three minutes but no more than three minutes.

• (1720) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We're ready to resume the meeting.

[*English*]

Colleagues, I would like the attention of committee members.

Mr. Turnbull, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Chair.

I conferred with the team here and looked at what else an unredacted copy would be exposing that might not be appropriate. I need a little more time to think about that. I don't really feel comfortable with a fully unredacted copy of a contribution agreement, which is of the scale and scope that I think this would include, to be out publicly. I don't think that is necessary.

I think reviewing it in camera as a committee could be more than fine, but I really don't think that it's necessary to have an unredacted copy.

If Mr. Garon had said "with redactions according to the Access to Information Act", I probably would have been quite comfortable with it, but given the fact that he said he was removing all redactions, I'm now concerned that exposing such a contribution agreement in public might not be a good thing.

In fact, I think what we want to see—and what our job is, as Mr. Perkins constantly reminds us—is holding people accountable, and if that's our job, then we should be able to do that ourselves by reviewing that agreement in camera and by deciding how we move forward.

I think we'll be reassured by the agreement. I think that if we review it in camera, it'll show that there's a very robust governance framework and a system for making decisions, and that there are very clear guidelines. I think that will be clear to us.

I would suggest that maybe we take a little more time. I'm not sure whether we're going to get to CPC-9 anyway in our next meeting. I don't mean to sound overly pessimistic, but I have a feeling that we might have some other motions that come forward and that need consideration. Perhaps we can review this at the start of the next meeting and can hopefully have a way forward. Perhaps we can have some conversations between now and then to figure out a path forward on this issue.

I don't want to delay it, obviously, but we've had a good, robust discussion today. I just want to be sure in how I vote. I don't want to be voting in a way that compromises organizations out there, especially in the clean-tech industry, that have actually gone through a lot, a big impact, as a result of us freezing funds.

I know that we're out of time, Chair, but...

• (1730)

The Chair: Your timing is perfect, Mr. Turnbull.

If I were a betting man, I would bet that we will still be on Mr. Perkins' motion in the next meeting. Given that we are adjourning this meeting, we can resuscitate your motion on Thursday. We'll follow up with Mr. Garon's amendment then.

Thank you very much, colleagues.

The meeting is adjourned.

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