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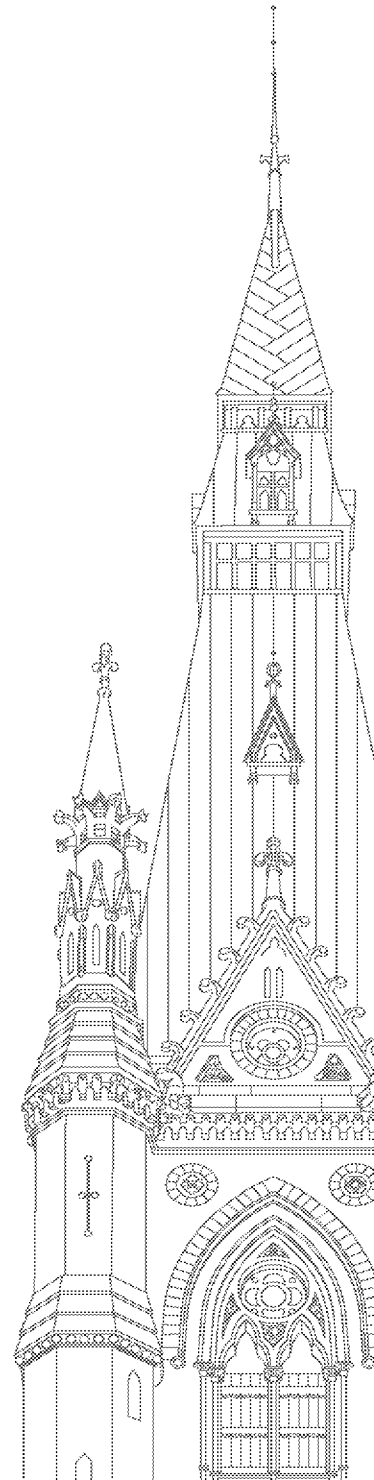
Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

EVIDENCE

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Wednesday, May 3, 2023

Chair: Mr. John Brassard



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• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 69 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, December 7, 2022, the committee resumed its study of foreign interference and threats to the integrity of democratic institutions, intellectual property and the Canadian state.

I would now like to welcome our witness today, Mr. Alexandre Trudeau, a member of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

Mr. Trudeau, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau (Member, Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have been a volunteer working on behalf of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau foundation for 22 and a half years. My work began in the days that followed Pierre Trudeau's death. In response to all kinds of proposals whose purpose was to mobilize resources in tribute to Pierre Trudeau, I suggested that the man be remembered not for the causes of his death or even his political career, but for his service to intellectual life. If there were to be a monument in honour of Pierre Trudeau, it should be a living legacy that reflects and continues his tireless and varied intellectual work.

At the invitation of the government of the day, I therefore joined a small group of senior officials as a volunteer to come up with ideas for the foundation's programs, which were responding to a pressing need for support in social sciences and humanities research in Canada.

[*English*]

Always as a volunteer, I served as a corporate director and a member of the executive committee of the foundation until September 2020. I also participated in the different committees that selected the four presidents of the foundation.

For more than two decades, I have given everything I possibly could to the foundation and its important mission. One of the greatest privileges of my life has been to serve alongside the many extraordinary Canadians who volunteered in the governance structures of the foundation. Though these volunteers came from very different walks of life and extremely varied ideological back-

grounds, everyone shared the belief that rigorous intellectual activity and excellence in academic research are of capital importance for the prosperity and even independence of our country.

Since its creation, the foundation has granted several hundred scholarships to our most brilliant researchers and has given them the tools and training to make their important work more accessible to Canadians at large. The scholars, fellows and mentors that I have had the privilege of getting to know personally have all made me very proud to be Canadian.

[*Translation*]

Thanks to them, I can state that Canada, in spite of everything, is still a proud bastion of reason in a world that appears increasingly lost every day.

[*English*]

It is precisely as a bastion of reason and tolerance, as perhaps the last refuge even for a universal humanism, that Canada has become the target of foreign interference.

[*Translation*]

Foreign interference is a serious problem that affects the operations of our institutions and our democracy. Numerous foreign powers would like to have a perfidious influence on the Canadian state.

[*English*]

However, today I must insist that there was no foreign interference, no possibility of interference and no intention or means of interference at or through the Trudeau foundation.

[*Translation*]

No state or individual ever attempted to influence the Canadian government through the foundation.

[*English*]

Then why are we here today?

[*Translation*]

It's not a matter of interference, but rather a management crisis caused by serious errors committed by our former president. In her evidence before the committee last week, and in her actions over the past few months, she has raised several questions that could perhaps lead people to believe that there had been attempted interference. Let's analyze these together.

[English]

One is that there was an intent to influence the Justin Trudeau government by a donation to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation; two, that there is a mystery around the identity of the donors or their affiliation; three, that there was something illegitimate about my signing of the donation contract; four, that there were irregularities around the issuance of the charitable receipt;

[Translation]

Five, that the donor gave inappropriate or unusual instructions to the foundation. Six, that some of the board members refused to recuse themselves from an investigation into the donation. Seven, that in the foundation's lawyers' legal opinion, some members of the board were in conflict of interest and changes in governance were required. Eight, that the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation sought to influence Justin Trudeau's government or was in some way linked to it.

The answer to all these questions is resolutely no.

• (1635)

[English]

My hope is that we can now take up these questions one by one to carefully shed light on how the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation has not been a part of any foreign interference attempts.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau, for your statement.

You're below time. I appreciate that and I know that the committee does.

Before we begin, I will say for the benefit of the committee that yesterday we had some sidebar discussions happening, and they were impacting the interpreters. If there are any sidebar discussions to be had today, please take them to the extreme back of the room and not near the interpreters. That's all I ask for today.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt.

I just have a quick point of order. We don't have a screen in front of us on this side, and it's a bit harder to see. I don't know if we can fix that.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, would you look after that?

I appreciate that, Ms. Hepfner. Before we begin, we'll make sure we get that corrected.

It's there now. Wonderful.

We're going to begin our first round of questioning. There are six-minute rounds for each party.

We are going to start with Mr. Barrett. Go ahead, sir, for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thank you for coming here today, Mr. Trudeau.

You asked why we're here today, and you listed some reasons. We're here today because The Globe and Mail reported that CSIS

had uncovered an influence operation targeting Prime Minister Trudeau through donations to the Trudeau foundation.

You listed a number of questions. I hope I can help afford you the opportunity to answer some of those, but I have limited time. I would appreciate your help in keeping your answers concise.

How many donations did you sign donation agreements for at the Trudeau foundation?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Apart from the times I've donated myself, it was only the single time that was mentioned.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's only once. In 18 years it was just the one time.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's correct—in 20 years.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's exceptional, wouldn't you say?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The circumstances were such that I needed to sign.

Mr. Michael Barrett: They were such that you needed to sign. I'm glad that you mentioned that.

Were you involved in the negotiations for other donations?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Let me think...not really. I was, a little bit, for the John MacBain donation, but not in any formal way. Negotiations for donations are sometimes started by governance members, but usually they're taken on by the president of the foundation.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay.

We know that Beijing had consular officials who were part of the deal from the beginning, to the extent that they were in meetings with the foundation to arrange this funding. Is that correct?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I wasn't at any meeting. Maybe there were, on the signing ceremony.

One of the issues that you have to understand is that the donors, Mr. Zhang Bin and Mr. Niu Gensheng, don't speak a word of English. A lot of the time you're thinking that they are using consular officials as basically free and appropriate translation services, as opposed to getting someone who's not trained in that kind of diplomatic translation. These men took their donations seriously.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Was it more than just the signing ceremony?

I ask because we have access to documents that demonstrate that there were consular officials in the meeting with Mr. Rosenberg, and several other people, including the executive director, Ms. Comtois, and that the action coming out from that meeting was that your approval, Mr. Trudeau, was required.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You understand why: I was giving the approval for the Université de Montréal to use the name of my father. I was acting as a family member to say that the Université de Montréal could use the name of Pierre Trudeau to launch a scholarship program.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The desire of Beijing to get access and influence with a leader of a G7 country is well documented. We know that foreign influence operations are perpetrated on many countries, if not every country. In this case, we saw that the donation by way of these cut-outs—people acting on behalf—as the wiretap information demonstrated, was going to be refunded by the CCP—

• (1640)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Have you heard the wiretap evidence?

Mr. Michael Barrett: It was reported in The Globe and Mail, sir.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Reports on single sources—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, if I can...?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: My apologies. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I haven't interrupted Mr. Trudeau and I would ask for the same courtesy.

The Chair: Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Barrett is asking questions. At a time that he requires a response, please respond appropriately.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett. I did stop your time. You have two minutes left.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The desire for them to run an influence operation was evidenced in that reporting in The Globe and Mail, and within five months of this donation being signed, both gentlemen were given direct access to the Prime Minister.

That's quite a deal for \$140,000, I'd say. They were both able to access the Prime Minister.

In the situation around it, we have consular officials from the People's Republic of China directing how the donation is to flow. We have the involvement, for the first and only time in 18 years on the foundation, of the Prime Minister's brother—you, sir—signing that donation agreement. It culminated in those cash-for-access events with Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister. That raises incredibly concerning questions for Canadians.

At the start of my questions, you said you had to sign. Why did you have to sign?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was because it was a three-way agreement—four, in many ways—between the foundation; myself, representing the Trudeau family; the Université de Montréal; and the donors.

The main reason I signed is that Morris asked me to. I also had signing authority at the time. I was regularly signing cheques at the foundation.

I imagine I could have given a procurator to Morris to sign for the family, but it was his suggestion for the views of the ceremony and for honouring these men. By the way, I still have no reason to believe their motives were not honourable.

That's why I signed. It was in that capacity as a family member giving the permission to use the name.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Barrett.

Next up, for six minutes, we have Ms. Hepfner. Go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, sir, for being here with us today and for answering these questions.

You publicly expressed a desire to appear before this committee to give your input on the issues of foreign interference and the foundation. You said, in fact, that it was “urgent” that you do so. I find it somewhat unusual. We don't typically have people clamouring to come to testify before this committee.

Please explain to us why you thought it was necessary to be here today.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was because I felt that the reputation, and most importantly the work, of the scholars.... This foundation is really not about its governance structure, the politics around it or the interpretations that we make. There are a lot of very fine people doing very serious work. They were asking questions.

I had hoped that the Auditor General, perhaps, would look at us with the impartiality and all of the rest, as the chair of our board had requested. I felt that this was a forum in which the truth could be addressed and made clear and doubt cleared up. I thought it was important. I knew I would get the attention that was perhaps necessary to make important corrections to the record.

There was a lot of misinformation from the start, I would argue even in The Global and Mail article. I find journalism on the basis of one single anonymous source to be poor journalism. The facts of that report were problematic since never, at any point, was it questioned that those donors gave a million dollars to the Trudeau foundation.

Why is someone claiming that they were going to be reimbursed? These men, with in their standing in China.... Niu Gensheng, for instance, is well admired for his philanthropy. There are not a lot of huge philanthropists at the level of Niu Gensheng. They're admired in China.

There were a lot of things that I felt needed to be corrected for the good work of the foundation to continue and for all the doubts that are being thrown around about it to stop.

• (1645)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: At the end of the day, as you say, this is an independent, non-partisan charity that gives scholarships to young people. It provides mentorships. It helps them give back to their communities.

I understand that this must be very personal to you, in fact. This is a foundation created in your father's name. It serves to honour his legacy. Maybe you could speak a little bit about the work you've done with the foundation over the past 20-odd years.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Thank you.

As I described, I've been one volunteer among many. I'm by no means more prominent than others. I've served on most of the committees, although perhaps not the finance committee. I've been part of the foundation from its earliest days.

It is really not about us or what is being said; it is really about the work. It's research, and it's not just research; it's helping researchers find new ways to get their work out and help them to understand realms that are outside of the university.

We've heard a lot about meetings with civil servants. That's something the foundation is very proud of. It's one of the reasons we were so excited to bring in a man with the stature of Morris Rosenberg: It was precisely because he offered a window for brilliant Canadian researchers into the functioning of our government—not in a partisan way, not in a partial way and not about any kind of influence, but so that our smartest minds could understand how our government works and how they deal with ideas within the civil service.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: You mentioned a couple of points that you felt were inaccurate in media reports about the 2016 donation. Is there anything else you'd like to correct for the record?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Oh, there's a lot. I was going to work through the points.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: You have two minutes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Okay.

Well, as I said, these donors, before they came, when they first approached me.... It was the Université de Montréal that approached me. They wanted a donation to them to commemorate Pierre Trudeau as a student there, and as a teacher, frankly. These donors had given the University of Toronto a medical grant of \$800,000—or this donor, Zhang Bin, at that point—to commemorate Bethune.

If you know China, especially if you've travelled through China and dealt with elderly Chinese, you'll know that there are two things they'll tell you: “Canada good, *Jianàdà hao de*” and “Bethune, Trudeau”. They'll say that these were people who were friends of China. We're not talking about the Chinese government; we're talking about the people.

So there was no surprise to me, and it was an honour to have someone say, that they wanted to create scholarships for Pierre Trudeau. Again, the pretenses that they had first started with the Université de Montréal, that they were going there and were going to use the Université de Montréal to somehow influence a non-existent Trudeau government that would come....

My first contact was in December of 2013, when a secretary from the law department wrote me about this. It was a long way from any notion of a Trudeau government, even a Trudeau opposition leader.

Again, the idea that there was set-up here I just think is patently false.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: I have only 30 seconds left, so just quickly, just to clarify, there was no relationship between your brother's government and the Trudeau foundation.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: There never has been. No. It's an academic institution that does scholarship work.

Of course, there is the relation to the ministry of innovation, as it's now called. As I remember it, it was the industry department when we started. It's a reporting duty, which we do. All of those are available and all the rest, but that's a civil service relationship monitoring the contract that was granted to the foundation at its creation to administer these scholarships, fellowships and mentorships.

That's the relationship. There is no political relationship and there never has been.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau and Ms. Hefner.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Trudeau, thank you for being here.

I'm going to ask brief questions, because my speaking time is limited.

Before getting into the substance of things, I'd like to know whether you were asked to come here today.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Mr. René Villemure: Were you prepared by the Office of the Prime Minister, for example?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Of course not.

Mr. René Villemure: Okay. It's always better to ask. Thank you.

You left the foundation in 2020. Is that right?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, I didn't leave the foundation, but rather the executive committee and the board of directors. I'm still a member of the foundation.

● (1650)

Mr. René Villemure: All right.

Why did you leave the executive committee and the board of directors?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: To be honest, I felt that I needed a break; I had been very active in the foundation for 20 years.

Mr. René Villemure: Right.

In your opening address, somewhere around the seventh or eighth point, you mentioned the circumstances described by Ms. Fournier concerning the departure of members of the board of directors. You were no longer there at the time, were you?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, I wasn't.

Mr. René Villemure: From whom did you get this information?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: From direct witnesses. I was also just recently provided with a very detailed account of all the events.

Mr. René Villemure: Are the things reported by Ms. Fournier false?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Some of them are, yes.

Mr. René Villemure: What led to her departure?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was as a result of a management crisis, a misunderstanding.

According to my notes, it appears at the outset that people were getting nervous about the story in the *Globe and Mail*. Almost immediately, the chairperson of the board wanted to conduct an independent inquiry, which Ms. Fournier attempted to administer on her own, which was not in keeping with governance principles, at least according to most of the lawyers on the board. They were adamant about having an independent committee made up of people from the outside.

According to the board lawyers, Ms. Fournier also accused some members of the board, including the chairperson, of being in a conflict of interest position, and suggested that they should recuse themselves. Once again, I was not a witness to this, but was very much aware of what was happening because it was in writing. When the board requested evidence or opinions from lawyers, they clammed up. As a result, there was a crisis of confidence, it must be admitted, about the fact that she was saying something very serious was happening that involved major changes in governance, which was not the case.

Mr. René Villemure: What you are saying in your version contradicts her version.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's right. I believe that the chairperson of the board will be coming to testify, and he'll be able to provide more details.

Mr. René Villemure: She mentioned that she wanted an independent inquiry to be conducted by a law firm and forensic lawyers, I believe, who were not involved in the affair, and she said that she had asked the board members involved to recuse themselves, which is proper governance practice.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: None of the directors refused to recuse themselves. On the contrary, they were trying to make an effort to introduce an independent committee of directors who had not been there at the time of these events. In the end, even in the days just prior to Ms. Fournier's resignation, the board had reached consensus on striking a committee and getting on with it.

Then all of a sudden, she resigned. I think trust had disappeared when she falsely reported the lawyer's opinions to the board. She basically wanted to install a new chairperson of the board, for reasons that were never put in writing.

Mr. René Villemure: Okay, I accept your reply, but it contradicts what she said.

Do you feel that she was treated appropriately when she left?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Right up until the very end, no one expected her to leave. The chairperson of the board thought there was a consensus on how to move forward. It was Good Friday. On Easter Monday, without any official communications between board members, all of a sudden people were resigning, as she did too.

Mr. René Villemure: She and eight others resigned.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: In fact, everyone resigned except for three people.

Mr. René Villemure: Everyone left except three people.

She mentioned that she had been visited by people from IT services, who spent six hours at her home looking through all her computer equipment, which looks to me like a search. Do you know anything about that?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's the first time I've heard anything about that. As there had been some duplicity and there was concern about disinformation, I think the foundation decided to take back its computers and its information.

• (1655)

Mr. René Villemure: You mentioned earlier that you had signed for the donation in question. We understand the circumstances. However, according to Ms. Fournier, you did not have signing authority. There was no delegated authority as such. Perhaps that was done because of the name, which is another matter.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: As I was explaining, it was a four-party contract; no one else could have signed. When the chairperson asked me to sign, I didn't see any problem with it because I signed all kinds of things all the time.

Mr. René Villemure: So you have signing authority for other matters.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, I signed pay cheques, for example, because two signatures were required. I live near the foundation and I sometimes signed.

Mr. René Villemure: When a donation comes in like that, out of left field, as it were, whatever the source may be, are there circumstances that would require donors to meet you?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Don't forget, as I explained, that the donation was not offered to us. It had been organized with the Université de Montréal's faculty of law. When Mr. Jean-François Gaudreault-DesBiens, a law professor at the faculty, came to see me on behalf of his dean, I told him that ever since the foundation had been established, all efforts to collect funds in the name of Pierre Elliott Trudeau had to go through the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. We felt that we had a monopoly, but they had a truly interesting opportunity. I met him in 2014, on the 10th or the 16th of January. At that time—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau. Mr. Villemure's time is up.

[*English*]

Mr. Green, we're going to you for six minutes.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

Welcome to the committee. I will say that in a previous meeting, I attempted to not have you involved here, but you volunteered to come before the committee. You're here before us today and hopefully you are able to shed some light.

You had in your opening remarks a list of eight points. At the appropriate time, would you be willing to submit those points to this committee?

Am I correct that you probably watched the other testimony? Yes. There were a lot of statements made. Now is your opportunity to rebut some of those.

On the issue of recusal, I think that's your point six. If you could, please expand on the point of recusal and why you didn't think that was an issue.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I should note that the chair, for instance, was the corporate secretary of the Power Corporation of Canada for decades. This is a man who I would say is one of the premier experts in this country in corporate governance. This is a man to whom board conduct is second nature. That was his job at one of the most meticulous private companies in this country. His sense of decorum and respect is incomparable. He's certainly a very dignified gentleman.

Immediately that there was the notion that there were these doubts, we all wanted clarity. We all wanted clarity to get out immediately that there was nothing there. Please investigate us, anyone who would want—

Mr. Matthew Green: Who were the other people who would have been named as a potential conflict of interest?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Pascale claimed that the lawyers told her that anyone active in the governance structures in the years of the donation would.... That was false. No lawyers told her that. When they came to the board, they said, “No, of course not. It's way too early for these kinds of opinions.”

The essence was setting up an independent committee before this even happened—

Mr. Matthew Green: Of board members—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: —of board members, because in our bylaws, external lawyers and experts all answer to the board, not to management. It's part of, quite frankly, normal governance practices.

The chair immediately tried.... As soon as there was this notion that there was a crisis of information going on, he had to set up an independent inquiry and wanted three board members who were not present at the time. This was his instinct—his second nature—and he did that.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm going to interject, because I am also quite surprised, given the nature of the people who are on that board, that you ended up in what appears to be a bit of a crisis management problem. That's given the high-calibre people who were there and, quite frankly, given some of the conflicting testimony that has been presented at this committee.

Having served on a local community foundation board myself, I'm not sure how you guys got there, but that's not what is at issue here. What is at issue is the foreign interference stuff. With this idea and the allegations that were made, I think it's important that you have a chance to respond.

In a *Le Devoir* article on the climate within the foundation, you stated that there was “a management crisis”, which you attributed to errors of judgment and serious misconduct.

In your opening remarks, you also stated that you were part of a committee that hires a president. Is that correct?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's correct, yes. All four.

Mr. Matthew Green: You would have been involved in hiring Ms. Fournier.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: She was also a former fellow. Is that correct?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: She was a former scholar of the first round.

Mr. Matthew Green: How long a relationship would you have had?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I have known her for 20 years.

Mr. Matthew Green: What went wrong?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I can speculate on it, I guess.

The climate at the foundation had grown more difficult. She had some very good skill sets, and from the point of view of the board, she managed our programming quite well, and it's complicated, but the staff environment.... The board was realizing that there was more and more....

I'm a member, so I have some custodial involvement, but I'm not directly.... Even I was hearing that there was an enormous amount of turnover in the staff.

• (1700)

Mr. Matthew Green: There were also allegations that there was a hostile climate at the board level, with intimidation, bullying, conflicts, internal—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: At the board? No, never.

There were a very tense few weeks at the end, when there was a fight over management trying to set up an investigation itself and making false representations to the board.

Mr. Matthew Green: Are you aware that she has offered to provide some documents that may offer accounts conflicting with what you're presenting here today?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I'm all for all the documents to come forward. If the chair of the board comes forward, I would like to submit the resumé from the directors of what happened.

Mr. Matthew Green: In her testimony, Ms. Fournier stated that she did not use any money associated with the donation because it had nothing to do with her mandate and it wasn't a part of the previous mandate either.

Given that you were involved in the conversations and negotiations with donors who established the conditions that the money must be used to organize lectures regarding China, why did you agree to these conditions for the donation, despite the fact that they did not align with—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I signed the contract, but I did not negotiate the agreement.

Mr. Matthew Green: But you were involved in the agreement.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: When I was contacted by Jean-François Gaudreault-DesBiens, we were in an interim period. Our president had left and we were in a—

Mr. Matthew Green: You were involved in the negotiations.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I was not involved in negotiations, no. I was—

Mr. Matthew Green: According to a *Le Devoir* article—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: —kept informed.

Mr. Matthew Green: in 2019, the University of Montreal dean of the faculty of law, France Houle, wrote that the Trudeau foundation wanted to give the faculty of law of the Université de Montréal a \$200,000 donation. She was referring to a discussion that her predecessor—Gaudreault-DesBiens, whom you have referenced—had with you, Alexandre Trudeau, in which you mentioned that the foundation wanted to do that.

Do you recall that?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I met with Gaudreault-DesBiens. I even met with the donor on June 2, but at that time my communications to them all the time, as I said, were interim.

In June, when I finally met with the rector of the *université* and the donor, I told them all the same thing, which was that we had just chosen our new president and that it was his mandate to manage and negotiate donations.

Mr. Matthew Green: In retrospect, do you wish you had just given it to the university?

The Chair: Mr. Green, I'm sorry. I hate this part of the job, honestly, of having to cut people off, but I do have to stick by the times. We did go a little over.

That concludes our first round of questioning. We should be able to get the entire second round in.

We're going to start with Mr. Barrett for five minutes. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Trudeau, you said that your involvement came in December 2013. That's eight months after your brother became the leader of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I missed your question. Sorry, what was it?

Mr. Michael Barrett: I was recounting that you had said you first became involved with this through the university in December of 2013. Is that correct?

• (1705)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That was eight months after your brother became leader of the Liberal Party.

Then in September of 2014, regime officials participated in a meeting with the foundation to negotiate this donation.

Then in September of 2015, weeks before the federal election, there was a massive push—a rush, with less than a day to complete the signing of this donation, but it didn't come to pass.

In May of 2016, two weeks before the donation contract was signed, China Cultural Industry Association representatives met with the Prime Minister in the residence of Benson Wong, who is the chair of the board of directors of the Chinese Business Chamber of Canada.

Then the donation was finalized in June, and in July of that year the CCIA confirmed that the payment of the first installment of \$70,000 had been made.

Then in October, Justin Trudeau met with Mr. Gensheng.

This process has gone on for years, but there seems to be urgency for it only around political events involving the now Prime Minister of a G7 country, and there is direct involvement by officials from the dictatorship in China.

When did you first meet Zhang Bin?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I met him June 2, 2014.

You realize the money was never spent, right? The donations came through in two parts, and then the third part was basically refused and we never launched the program or spent the money.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you.

When did you first meet Niu Gensheng?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I met him only at the signing ceremony at the Université de Montréal.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That was in 2016?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I believe so, yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: When you met with Mr. Zhang, what were the discussions? Was it specifically about the mandate of the foundation? Were political affairs discussed, the culture in Canada?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: When I met him in June, I seem to remember he said that he was really excited about.... Again, the consular officials were translating his words. I don't remember if they were.... Anyone there was very junior, but he was excited about what he had done at U of T and he was excited about doing something similar at Université de Montréal.

I think Monsieur Lefebvre reported at one point how he was a little bit irked that the Trudeau family was suddenly involved in the Trudeau foundation. He wanted to apply the same model he had applied at the U of T at Université de Montréal.

He was friendly, but not overly so, and I told him what I was telling Mr. Green—that we had to wait for the new president to come in to start negotiations.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did this donation and its connection to the CCP ever raise any red flags for you?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You said the connection to the CPP. This donation came from a private company in good standing in Canada. This is a company whose bank account is with the Bank of Montreal, which is governed by very strict rules on money laundering and all the rest.

Mr. Michael Barrett: So the answer is no.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I checked it as soon as I knew that he was in.... What is this Chinese cultural industry association? I wouldn't call it the British Council or the Goethe-Institut, but these are paragovernmental—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have to take my time back; I have 30 seconds left.

The CCIA is established as being a soft power arm of the Communist Party of China. That's an established fact.

When did you become aware that Canada's intelligence services were investigating this as an influence operation? When you found out, who did you talk to about it?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Like others, I only read it in The Globe and Mail, and I questioned the veracity of it right away. I don't think this is accurate information.

Mr. Michael Barrett: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: Your time is up. Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Trudeau, the next question is from Madam Martinez Ferrada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Martinez-Ferrada, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Trudeau, for being here.

I wanted to give you an opportunity to answer some of the questions you raised in your address about these key eight points. I get the feeling that you haven't given certain answers to the committee. You addressed the issue of influence to a some extent. You also explained the matter of the allegation concerning the signing of the donation. However, you didn't say anything about the alleged irregularities around the issuance of the charitable receipt. I wanted to give you a chance to answer that question.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's important because this matter of the receipt was central to the testimony of our former president, along with the fact that I had signed it.

The first two payments for the donation came from the same bank account, a legitimate account at the Bank of Montreal for the Millennium Golden Eagle Canada company. As I was explaining, banks are governed by rather strict legislation on money laundering. So when a bank says that an account is legitimate, it means that the company is complying with Canadian standards. As the donations came from the same account, the receipt was issued in the name of that company.

I'm going back to the first question about possible instructions. My understanding of how charitable organizations work is that is that individuals often order or encourage their companies to make donations. That's exactly what happened here. Two members of the same family, Mr. Zhang Bin and his partner, who is his uncle, encouraged a company that is well established in Canada, and conducting legitimate activities, to make a donation. The receipt was issued to that company.

For example if at some point they had given instructions to the China Cultural Industry Association, which is what Mr. Barrett was talking about, I believe it was about translation. As a member of this association, Mr. Zhang had dealings with them to translate important documents and instructions, such as sending a receipt to a company address in China. There's nothing more to it than that.

I would have liked the Auditor General to look at all that, but of course, we're doing it here.

● (1710)

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: So you would have liked a proper independent inquiry.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes. There is absolutely nothing problematic in this entire matter.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Okay.

I'm going to ask you the same questions I asked other witnesses who were here, about relations between the foundation and the government, or rather with governments generally, because prior to 2015, the current government was not in place.

According to you, is the foundation partisan in any way?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Zero.

When the foundation was established, the officials created three categories of members: members of the family, that is to say three individuals; ordinary members, of which there are 19; and six members for the government. The first and only government to have availed itself of this category of membership was Mr Chretien's. After that, no other government appointed members or directors. The foundation kept on those who were there at the time. At the moment, there are only two directors left. In other words, the Trudeau government and the Harper government have hardly ever availed themselves of this prerogative made available to them when the foundation was established.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Did you ever speak to your brother about this donation?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. However, I spoke to him about the foundation before he went into politics, because he sometimes attended foundation meetings. My brother told me one day that he trusted me in matters pertaining to the foundation. As he had other things to do, he did not get very involved. That was the case even before he wrote his letter saying that, as the leader of the Liberal Party, he would no longer be able to participate in its activities. From the time he became Prime Minister, we have never discussed it.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Do you think that the situation we are in at the moment, with respect to relations, interference and the geopolitical situation, is why you find yourself here today? These questions had previously been raised in 2016 in some newspaper articles. Why, in your opinion, are you here today?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: We are here today because of a management crisis. We wouldn't be here if the president had not insisted on spreading disinformation to the board. It's true that the geopolitical climate has greatly changed, several times. I understand full well that this committee is responsible for investigating matters considering interference and China. That's why I am appearing before you and doing so in good faith.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau. Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

I am now giving the floor to Mr. Villemure for two and a half minutes.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Two and a half minutes is not very long.

Mr. Trudeau, how would you explain Ms. Fournier's claim that the foundation's annual reports for 2016-2017 gave conflicting information about the source of the donations?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I think it's false. I would have to see the annual reports, but it's just not true. With respect to the source of the donations, Ms. Fournier was attempting to interpret the addresses of the company as something abnormal because, I believe, although it was based in Dorval, the owner was a Chinese citizen.

She attempted to raise this point, which is all very well, but it could have been dealt with as part of an independent inquiry. What Ms. Fournier was doing was prejudging the information and using it to attract attention. That's why we came here.

Mr. René Villemure: Just to clarify everything, I understand that the use of an independent committee by the board of directors is a common practice in the world of governance. In this instance, however, it was suggested that a further step be taken to show that things were whiter than white, by using a forensic accountant and a law firm. That was turned down by the three remaining members.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, not at all, that's what they wanted.

I'd like to submit an account of everything that went on, according to direct witnesses. It will be broken down by the dates for each event and reflect the minutes of everything that happened at the board.

• (1715)

Mr. René Villemure: Please do submit it.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It will clarify a lot of things. From the very outset, the chairperson of the board definitely wanted to set up an independent committee to study the situation and to call upon a firm of lawyers and accountants to conduct an inquiry. We want all the truth to come out properly, because we know that there is nothing wrong.

Mr. René Villemure: So there's a contradiction between Ms. Fournier's allegation and your version of things.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: There is a contradiction.

Mr. René Villemure: All right. We noted that donations to the foundation for the previous year and the following year were around \$20,000 or \$25,000. So the \$200,000 amount represents a significant donation.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was \$140,000, and wasn't all that huge. Indeed, at one point, the chairperson of the board, John McCall MacBain, had made a donation of \$3 million.

It's true that back in 2013, the idea of academic diplomacy was still something of interest for the foundation, as it is in other countries to this day. As soon as my brother became Prime Minister, however, it became problematic for the foundation to get involved in this form of academic diplomacy with China, for a number of reasons that the committee will no doubt understand.

Mr. René Villemure: In 2013, it was already known that Chi—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: In 2013, academic diplomacy with China was very interesting. Having Chinese researchers come and participate in events at the foundation was promising. The goal was to create ties, and the Université de Montréal had very good contacts with—

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci, Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Villemure.

Mr. Green, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Mr. Trudeau, you can appreciate the sensitivity. I'm sure you grew up in a lifestyle that would have had a lot of attention, to say the least.

What precautions did the Trudeau foundation take to ensure that there was an appropriate firewall between you and your brother—between the political partisan work and the foundation's work?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was always raised, especially in the early days. First it was the paperwork to make sure that it was well documented, frankly, long before he became Prime Minister.

Mr. Matthew Green: Was it documented through policies—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was documented through a letter from him and acknowledged by both the board, I believe, and the members that it was on the record. The bylaws on the foundation are a little bit odd, and in fact they've stipulated that three family members are the executors of the testament. This came from the civil servants who wrote the bylaws, so, by force, Justin Trudeau is and was an executor of the last will and testament of Pierre Trudeau, so we had to be corrected.

Right after the fact, basically at every meeting, we said these were new times now and—

Mr. Matthew Green: Did you have written policy and procedures?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I'm not aware of any.

Mr. Matthew Green: We're going back to the question of governance. We're going back to the subject matter experts around the table—high-powered lawyers, Power Corporation people—yet there were no policies and procedures, nothing in writing that you could submit to this committee that would create an assurance to us that there was a process in place whereby, should politically sensitive situations occur, there would be a firewall between the now Prime Minister and the foundation.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The firewall was constantly affirmed and constantly reiterated to the public and whomever that we are a non-partisan organization with no political links.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll give you the opportunity just to clarify and put it on the record. You don't have to name names, but is it safe to say that you probably had appointees from many different political backgrounds and parties?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Absolutely. There were very fine individuals from many different parties.

Mr. Matthew Green: With regard to the question of the donation, do you believe that the donor on the tax receipt was the true donor of the \$200,000?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The tax receipt was for a company, and the true donors were these individuals. As is normal practice since, I believe—as I was explaining—*Hamilton v. Bank of Montreal* from the 1920s, corporations are empowered to make donations on behalf of individuals.

Mr. Matthew Green: In our last committee meeting, an article from *La Presse* was referenced that stated that in 2016, a board member made a senior staff member aware that the real donor wasn't the same donor as on the tax receipt. That's an allegation that was made. In her testimony, Pascale Fournier stated that the board member in question was Farah Mohamed.

In 2016, were you made aware that the real donor was allegedly not the donor listed on the tax receipt?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It's absolutely false—that's one of my points—that there was any confusion around these donors. It was always this company, with multiple addresses—which allowed our ex-president to make some confusion around it—and these two individuals. There was no confusion about that then, and there never has been.

The Chair: That concludes the time. The only reason I allowed it to go a little bit further is because you mentioned *Hamilton*, Mr. Green.

• (1720)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: He mentioned what?

The Chair: “*Hamilton*”. That's the word of the day.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Trudeau, for being here.

You said that you were worried about interference by the communist Chinese regime in democracies. How long do you believe

the communist Chinese regime has been attempting to meddle in universities and democracies around the world?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You would know better than I, but I do know that all the major powers in the world are trying to interfere in one way or another. China, based on what I know, is fourth on the list of countries that represent the greatest threat in terms of interference.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You know China well, and have studied it for years.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, definitely.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You therefore know that this regime has been attempting to interfere in western democracies for a long time.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It may not be a matter of interference. The greatest danger lies with business acquisitions.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

In view of the long-standing relations between the Trudeau family and your father with China, your brother Justin's admiration for the basic dictatorship of the communist regime, as he himself stated—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: He spoke with—

Mr. Luc Berthold: —and your own relationship with China and the current regime, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation became a choice target for a regime seeking to extend its influence around the world, as you yourself mentioned. Canada itself became a target owing to the political position filled by your brother, who at the time was the head of a political party and who is now Prime Minister.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: What's your question?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Do you think that the Trudeau family was becoming a choice target for a regime seeking to influence a country and spread its tentacles.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. That may have been the case for my brother, though I can't speak for him, but neither I nor the foundation ever saw the slightest evidence of attempted interference.

Mr. Luc Berthold: With all your knowledge and everything you've written about, did you never think that Canada might become a target?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I would imagine that it was theoretically possible, but I was there for all of the foundation's activities, at the time at least, and I didn't—

Mr. Luc Berthold: The Trudeau name never—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I refuse to believe that these people intended to interfere. If they had, why didn't they keep in touch with me?

Mr. Luc Berthold: The only donation you were ever involved with was the one from a company in China. The only contract you signed was a contract with a Chinese company.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It's the only donation that involved another party.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Was that the only signing ceremony you ever attended for a donation?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: As I was saying before, it's the only donation that involved other parties. There were three or four of them. If there had been other donations in which the Trudeau family had to lend its name to another organization, I would have signed those as well.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You didn't understand that these people wanted a representative of the Trudeau family at the signing.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

As I said before, the lack of interest in the Trudeau family was pretty noticeable at the first meeting.

There was recognition for the father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, but they did not, it would appear, want the involvement of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, because it didn't align with their model.

Mr. Luc Berthold: A letter from Mr. Guy Lefebvre addressed to Mr. Rosenberg on September 20, 2014, states the following:

Among other things, Alexandre suggested that Mr. Bin Zhang could help us create a larger-scale project that would enable a number of Canadian universities to receive donations from China in memory of Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

So you had expectations.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: At the time, I was not hiding the fact that I felt it was important for Canadian universities to get involved in academic diplomacy.

Mr. Luc Berthold: People knew that already.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: We all wanted China to evolve towards a state based on the rule of law. That would have been the best outcome. However, it's always very difficult to deal directly with the Chinese government.

Mr. Luc Berthold: It's there in your book; you personally even defended the communist Chinese regime.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. I did not defend it. It's nevertheless necessary to acknowledge some of the regime's accomplishments. Frankly, China has to be compared to China, and not to France or Canada.

In China, for example, during the period that followed Mao Zedong, the early years of the revolution were terrible from the humanitarian standpoint. However, after Deng Xiaoping took over, there was the period that ended with the arrival of Xi Jinping.

Mr. Luc Berthold: The new China is a China that is attempting to have influence, to interfere and spread its tentacles around the world.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: As other countries do, including India and the United States.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'm not talking about other countries. I'm talking about China, because you are a specialist in China, Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes. You're absolutely right. I would have been the first to see any attempts at interference, and there were none.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So you feel that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service is completely wrong.

• (1725)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I don't know about that, but I think that the Globe and Mail's story is false.

Mr. Luc Berthold: And yet, according to the same source, only yesterday the Prime Minister organized a meeting with a Conservative member to tell him that there were attempts at interference by a Chinese diplomat. That's probably the same source who provided the information about the Trudeau foundation, Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: We don't really know that, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You can't just pick and choose the information you want.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: We don't know it, Mr. Berthold. It's all—

The Chair: The five minutes are up.

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Bains, you have the last five minutes of this round. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Trudeau, for joining us and adding a lot of clarity to the situation here.

As a university educator myself, I understand the value that a scholarship can have on a young person and their family. I want to ask you a little bit about that. What are the short-, medium- and long-term impacts of investing in students and their futures through scholarships that you deliver?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Thank you, Mr. Bains. That goes to the heart of why the Trudeau foundation was created.

Our country is well served by having as many of our leaders as possible being well educated. The scholarships at the Trudeau foundation, especially the way they are joined with the mentorships and the fellowships, are aimed at having.... They're already brilliant university students when we choose them, but giving them an exposure to how ideas can percolate and move outside the university world is core to the experience of the Trudeau foundation.

As I was explaining, they were regularly exposed to round tables with senior civil servants to understand how civil servants take problems and try to digest them and then turn them into policy. With these kinds of business leaders, activists, with the courts, in many ways the foundation was trying to amplify and extend the university experience into other realms so that these scholars were empowered, even if only as university students, to be much better versed in communicating outside their departments and in engaging in the world outside. Now we're seeing that the first rounds of scholars are prominent Canadians—many in universities, some outside. Some have become mayors of towns in Canada. The experience is one of creating leaders, creating people who serve the country through and because of reason.

Mr. Parm Bains: They're the future leaders of the country.

How much is the average scholarship?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I think it is a \$60,000 scholarship with a \$20,000 travel allowance.

The goal in the creation of the foundation was to allow university students—who, our ex-president even said, are trained to be ultra-specific—to have a range outside their departments and participate in academic events that they wouldn't otherwise be able to reach. That's part of the travel allowance.

Mr. Parm Bains: You've mentioned the areas of research. At the end of the day, it's important that this work continue and that the charity be able to continue to support the young people. What do you see as a path forward here?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I would take this opportunity to put a message to them that this has nothing to do with them. This is a political crisis and a management crisis.

On the management crisis, the good news is that it's over. The foundation is already building up again and about to announce the next cohort of scholars. These people have to continue with their amazing work and why they were chosen to do this work, which has nothing to do with what we're discussing today. It has been a painful distraction to them.

That's probably the main reason that I've come here. It's not about what the foundation does. The foundation is about supporting leaders in academic research.

Mr. Parm Bains: To your point there, we've heard from two experts, Artur Wilczynski and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, who sort of echoed those statements, saying that if we're studying foreign interference, we need to do it in a non-partisan way.

Would you agree that it's important to investigate foreign interference in a sober and non-partisan way?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It's more important than ever. The impact of foreign interference on our country has already been significant.

I do think China has a lot of catching up to do. It's a very internally driven country. It doesn't really understand democracies and all the rest, but the danger is certainly there. I've been hearing reports of the Russian use of social media to create doubts around vaccine use long before the pandemic. We've seen what health misinformation can do to democracies. I mean, this committee should probably meet every day, every week, every year, because the number of things....

I'm sorry to say that frankly, this is a waste of time, because there is not a foreign interference issue here at the foundation. I know that the documentary record will make that clear as it's disseminated.

• (1730)

The Chair: I think that's your time, Mr. Bains.

That concludes our first round.

For the record, I'm prepared to meet every day, if we have to, to get to the bottom of this.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: As we've done with other witnesses when we've had them for two hours, we will reset the clock. We'll start on our six-minute rounds to be fair to every party at this committee.

Our first six-minute intervention will go to Mr. Cooper. Go ahead, sir. You have six minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Trudeau.

Let me say at the outset that your assertion that Beijing diplomats were present at meetings with the foundation in the negotiation of the donation to provide translation services to the donors is completely unbelievable. It simply is absurd.

You further stated that Millennium Golden Eagle, the source of the donation, is a Canadian company in good standing. This is a shell company based out of a house in Dorval that is controlled by the China Cultural Industry Association, which is part of the United Front Work Department. Receipts were sent to Hong Kong and then Beijing, to the very same address of this United Front Work Department-controlled company.

Do you consider this company to be one of good standing, really?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I take the Bank of Montreal's belief in the matter quite seriously.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I don't think any Canadian who's serious about Beijing interference would view such a company to be a company in good standing. They certainly wouldn't consider it to be a true Canadian company—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: If they had wanted to interfere, I would have seen traces of that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Trudeau, I control the time. I ask the questions; you answer them.

Mr. Chair, changing gears, on September 10, 2015, Elise Comtois, executive director of the Trudeau foundation, sent an email to the executive committee hoping to quickly organize a signing ceremony on Monday, September 14, 2015. In that email, you were specifically mentioned to represent the foundation's board and the family. This rushed meeting of the signing ceremony with the donors just happened to coincide with a time when your brother and the Liberal Party were surging in the polls and when your brother was realistically on track to become the Prime Minister of Canada, which he did a month later.

That signing ceremony did not take place. On Friday, September 11, 2015, Natalka Harris of the Trudeau foundation emailed you to explain that there were still outstanding issues, not between the Trudeau foundation and the donors but with the University of Montreal. Nonetheless, she asked that you fly from Vancouver over the weekend to meet with the donors anyway to express appreciation for the forthcoming gift.

Did you have that meeting? Did you fly to Montreal?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I live in Montreal, so there's an inaccuracy....

• (1735)

Mr. Michael Cooper: But you were in Vancouver at this time.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, I don't remember that meeting.

I remember watching that debate in September when I suddenly realized, my God, my brother's going to become Prime Minister. It was a moment I will never forget, but no, I don't remember that meeting.

I can even share the emails. The first time the Université de Montréal contacted me, there was an urgency. They wanted immediately to meet with these donors because they wanted immediately to get the money to launch a million-dollar scholarship at the Université de Montréal.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You said that you met with Zhang in June 2014. How many times did you meet with Zhang after that?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I met him at the signing ceremony, the second time.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay, so you did not meet with him in 2015.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: In 2015, it didn't work out. As I say, there was great urgency in 2013. The first email I got was that there's a great opportunity with serious Chinese people who want to donate to the university, so please meet us at your earliest convenience.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

On May 19, 2016, Justin Trudeau held a cash-for-access dinner in Toronto attended by Zhang Bin. Were you in attendance?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, I was not. I heard about it, like many of you, in the newspapers. It was a moment of realizing "You know what? No more academic diplomacy at the Trudeau foundation."

Mr. Michael Cooper: Why would Zhang Bin be at a fundraiser for Justin Trudeau—a cash-for-access event—even though he is not a citizen of Canada? He's a Chinese national who is unable to donate. Why would he be there?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I bet you he wanted a photo with the Prime Minister to show to his friends.

Mr. Michael Cooper: A photo of the Prime Minister—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You'd have to ask him. I have no reason to doubt.... This man never tried anything that would look like interference, so as far as I'm concerned, he's an honourable man.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You saw nothing that would look like foreign interference, and then less than two weeks later, there's suddenly a \$70,000 cheque to the Trudeau foundation.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The process of that had started in 2014. They had wanted to get everything done very quickly at the beginning, as I was saying. They had wanted to do that at the Université de Montréal. The Trudeau foundation, from his point of view, was an unfortunate add-in.

Here's a new Prime Minister. He's a rich guy who likes being at fancy occasions. I think he wanted his photo with him.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Suddenly he's there at a cash-for-access event.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Do you think he discussed policy?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes, I'm sure he did.

The Chair: You have five seconds, Mr. Cooper.

Thank you.

Mr. Fergus, I believe you're up next, for six minutes. Go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Trudeau, for being here today.

I found the eight questions that you raised in your opening address very interesting. I'd like to know more about some of them because the role of this committee is really to look into these questions.

First of all, is there a link between the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and Justin Trudeau's government? Are there instances of attempted interference? I'd like to have your opinion on that, because we've heard such things from other witnesses.

You began answering the first question. I'd like to continue by asking a few questions that I've asked other witnesses, including Mr. Rosenberg and Ms. Fournier.

Were there any meetings between the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and the Prime Minister's Office?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Of course not.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Were there any with the Prime Minister?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Were there any with his staff or people with direct or indirect ties?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Hon. Greg Fergus: So there was no connection between the two.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. As I explained to Mr. Green, that was the mantra, particularly at the outset. There should be no contact between them, nor even any appearance thereof. Even during the Harper era, there was the impression, including from the leader of the opposition when he arrived in the House, who wanted to politicize the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

As I explained at the outset, the foundation's orientation is academic. Its purpose is to recognize that intellectual work is perhaps the greatest service people can render to our country, as Pierre Trudeau did, both before and after his life in politics, as an intellectual. It was not so much commemorating his ideas, but supporting this conviction that Canada is a country with many varied and changing ideas. Supporting university work is good for the country.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

I'd like to return to the accusation that there was interference by donors.

What conditions were attached to this donation?

• (1740)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: There were no conditions. They had agreed to create... This was suggested by Mr. Rosenberg. As I explained, it wasn't their idea to make a donation to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

Hon. Greg Fergus: You said that you had received an urgent email asking you to go to the Université de Montréal. Can you tell us more about that?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I gave the committee an article from the University of Toronto explaining just how proud they were to receive money from this donor in commemoration of Dr. Bethune.

When I met the donor in June, he told me that this particular moment had made him so proud that he wanted to do the same thing for the Université de Montréal, a francophone university, in commemoration of someone whom the Chinese believed to be another great Canadian, Mr. Pierre Elliott Trudeau. He wanted to do this in the fall of 2013. I imagine that there had been some agreements with Mr. Lefebvre. Since the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation already existed, they no doubt thought that it would be better to begin by consulting Mr. Trudeau's family.

Hon. Greg Fergus: You said that you had been asked to get involved with the foundation because you stood for the Pierre Elliott Trudeau name or brand.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Well, my brother couldn't do it because he had other things on his plate. By default, I was the one who was handling private matters on behalf of the family. I'm still doing so, moreover.

The donor and the Université de Montréal wanted it to be done very quickly and for me to give them the green light. At the time, I was writing a book about China and thought it would be great for Canada to contribute to China's education, if I can put it that way. I felt it was important for Chinese researchers and the people of China to understand how things were done in Canada and why the Canadian model is the best in the world, which is something I truly believe.

The people of China trust us, because of Dr. Bethune and Mr. Trudeau. Back in the day, the people of China said that Canadians were westerners they could trust. I don't think they are still saying that now.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I would appreciate it if you could briefly answer my last question, because I don't have much speaking time left.

Who first suggested that the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation could be a vehicle through which the contribution could be given to the Université de Montréal?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I told the Université de Montréal that normally, all university donations should go through the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. That's not what they wanted to hear, but I asked them to wait until a certain senior official took up the posi-

tion of president. After all, if anyone understands what democracy is all about, it's Mr. Rosenberg. At a briefing, he said that there might be some interest in establishing a program of donations that would involve the Université de Montréal, and perhaps the foundation. That's also what I said to the donor and the Université de Montréal.

I wasn't involved in the negotiations, because that's not the role of volunteers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Trudeau, if Ms. Pascale Fournier was the problem at the foundation, why do you think the eight other directors also resigned?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Some of them believed what she was saying. They probably meant well, but they were afraid. When the president herself referred to herself as a lawyer... They would have been wiser to have waited for the inquiry.

Not only that, but the final email sent prior to Ms. Fournier's resignation said that there was going to be an inquiry. I would imagine that the former president was frustrated that the inquiry would be independent of the administration.

Mr. René Villemure: Nevertheless, quite a few people resigned at the same time.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Don't forget that several of them were volunteers. Who wants to do volunteer work in a stressful environment with battle lines drawn? That's why some resigned from the board of directors.

Mr. René Villemure: You know, there are all kinds of points that don't match up in the two versions.

Why should the committee believe you rather than Ms. Fournier, for instance?

• (1745)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You'll be hearing testimony from the chairperson of the board.

Ask Ms. Fournier to tell you about the opinions of the lawyers who supposedly said there was a conflict of interest. She won't be able to, because the lawyers themselves said that there was none.

Of course it's only my word, but there is evidence to back it up. You'll be able to find it in the documentary evidence you will be receiving, and elsewhere.

As I said earlier, I was not a director, but the directors who will be coming to testify will present it to you.

Mr. René Villemure: We won't find evidence of a conflict of interest. Is that what you mean?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You won't find any evidence to the effect that lawyers said there was a conflict of interest. You can even call upon those who were involved because they were in court. Anyone you decide to call upon will tell you about this issue.

Mr. René Villemure: What law firms were involved?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The firms were Borden Ladner Gervais and Miller Thomson.

Mr. René Villemure: I know that you have a keen interest in China.

Where did this interest come from? How did it come about?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: In 2005, Mr. Jacques Hébert, who had written the book *Two Innocents in Red China* with my father following a trip they made in 1960, had basically said that China may have been poor, problematic and so on, but that one day, within a few decades, it would become something important.

In 2005, a Shanghai publishing company wanted to publish the book. China had indeed become richer, and it was doing these sorts of things at the time. People there wanted to read what foreigners had written about China and as a result, for the first time, the book *Two Innocents in Red China* was translated into Chinese. The company invited Mr. Hébert to come to China and they asked me to write a preface, as the son of Pierre Trudeau, and a writer, which I did.

It was not my first time in China. I went there for the first time in 1990, when I was 17 years old.

Mr. René Villemure: Did you go often?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes I did. Starting in 2005, I went there once or twice a year over a 10-year period.

Mr. René Villemure: Did you ever go to China with Mr. Chrétien?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Mr. René Villemure: No? I thought he really liked China.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: He may have liked China, but the sorts of trips I was making were not the same as the political trips made by politician or heads of state. I was interested in ordinary people, and wandered about in China and saw things that were not ordinarily—

Mr. René Villemure: You were interested in what was behind the scenes.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, I wanted to go off the beaten path and meet real people.

Mr. René Villemure: Did you ever meet with the Chinese consul in Toronto?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Mr. René Villemure: What about Montreal or with any Chinese consuls or ambassadors in Canada?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I recall an event, also attended by many politicians, at the National Arts Centre, to celebrate the anniversary of relations between China and Canada. I think there were also diplomats in attendance.

Mr. René Villemure: Did you have any meetings in China, with Chinese diplomats or Canadians?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I did meet some Canadian diplomats in China; in fact, I have a lot of friends who are Canadian diplomats in China. As for Chinese diplomats or senior officials, I have indeed met some in China.

Mr. René Villemure: Do you know Mr. Guy Saint-Jacques?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, I know him by name.

Mr. René Villemure: He said in this morning's paper that you were a useful idiot.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I'm surprised to hear that from a man who is supposedly serious.

He has obviously not read my book. If he had, he would have seen that the approach is much more subtle than that.

Mr. René Villemure: It's nevertheless surprising.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You know as well as I do that the Journal de Montréal is not exactly the best forum for serious commentary.

I'm not at all sure that Mr. Guy Saint-Jacques actually said that. If so, he should give me a call. What was his reason for saying so?

It's frankly unfair. I wrote a serious book about the people of China. I'm not an apologist for the communist Chinese government. For starters, it's no longer even communist, and secondly, it's an imperial government. That's what people need to understand.

Mr. René Villemure: But you do know Mr. Saint-Jacques.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I know him by reputation, yes.

Mr. René Villemure: Have you ever encountered him?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Probably, yes.

• (1750)

Mr. René Villemure: At any rate, he has apparently somehow formed an opinion.

What's your political stance on China now? You are certainly aware of its history, but now, today, what do you think?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Xi Jinping's Government is a big problem for China and the whole world. It marks a transition from what I would call the Deng Xiaoping period, one of openness and diplomatic modesty, to a highly imperialistic and hardline era which is in fact a response to a hardening world. He's a strong man who doesn't tolerate...

It's sad, but in terms of freedom—we would all like to see the Chinese people achieve freedom—China will never reach the same level that we have in our country; few other countries will do so. The height of freedom there, in my opinion, was in 2010. Since then, there has been a decline.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Villemure has reached the end of his speaking time.

[*English*]

Mr. Green, you have six minutes, sir. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

I'm going to go back to the issue of governance.

You've heard the questions today, the allegations that have been made at committee, the confusion around what's been written policy. The former president, Pascale Fournier, stated that when she came on, she had to institute a bunch of written policies. Is that true?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Weren't there any prior to that?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. There were some, but we needed more policies. That's for sure.

Mr. Matthew Green: Would you agree that's a bit strange, given the types of people, the calibre of people, who were on the board, that they didn't have basic written policies on some of this stuff?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Well, no. Partly these policies were about a natural evolution of our... When the board started, would we have had a policy on...? When you're starting, when you're building on sexual harassment or kinds of things that are germane to academia, but—

Mr. Matthew Green: To get into the specificity around the political risk that the board was carrying with a former prime minister and his son, who is a current politician, who became leader and became Prime Minister, and his brother, it strikes me as unusual that there was no policy around that.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: All of my colleagues know the type of relationship I have with my brother, which is a fraternal one.

Mr. Matthew Green: Sure, but the public doesn't.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The public doesn't, which is another reason I'm happy to be here. They probably would never believe that my brother and I... I'm one of the few adults in this country who can offer him a world outside politics.

Mr. Matthew Green: Fair enough, but you mentioned something. It was in the questioning from the Conservative member who talked about the cash for access. You said there was a moment of realizing that there should be no more—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Academic diplomacy.

Mr. Matthew Green: —academic diplomacy.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: At least not with China or—

Mr. Matthew Green: When that happened, did you text your brother, reach out and say, "We may have crossed the line here"?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. There is one exception, but I do not discuss public affairs with my brother. I never do. I don't by text, nor when I meet him—

Mr. Matthew Green: On the run-up to this you never—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: On the run-up to this, we did not discuss anything—

Mr. Matthew Green: Did any of his advisers from the PMO—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No—

Mr. Matthew Green: Did anybody advise you and prepare you for this?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. I have had no contact with the PMO. I haven't for the duration of his government, except that lawyers from the PMO once asked me about joint property, but this is a private matter.

Mr. Matthew Green: I want to give you the opportunity as it relates to CSIS. I'm assuming that if you're under investigation or what have you... At any point in time, did anybody outside the foundation flag for you that the foundation might be a target of foreign interference?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Again, as Mr. Rosenberg said yesterday, if there were someone who would be briefed on that at the time, it would have been him. Again, it's why I doubt the veracity of that report.

Mr. Matthew Green: You've talked about your nuanced book, your appreciation, your understanding on China. We've spoken about the China Cultural Industry Association. When you look on their website, you see that the founder of Alibaba, one of the richest people in the world, is on it.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, there's Evergrande—

Mr. Matthew Green: Evergrande is probably another conversation for another time, but did you do due diligence? Did you know with whom you were dealing?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, absolutely—

Mr. Matthew Green: Were there reports to the board?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Let me go back to academic diplomacy—

Mr. Matthew Green: No, sir. I have three minutes.

Were there reports to the board on the due diligence that was taken on this particular donation?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. To Morris, it's what I discussed. I said, "Look, this is—"

Mr. Matthew Green: Would Morris have provided, in writing, any documents that would have provided an analysis of due diligence on what is one of the most significant gifts—

• (1755)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, it wasn't a significant gift. There were more significant gifts—

Mr. Matthew Green: Sure, but \$200,000 is still significant.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: At the earliest onset of the gift, this was about opening up academic diplomacy in the view—

Mr. Matthew Green: In your time doing your background work on your book, you would have been aware of the Confucius Institute, would you not?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I have been aware of it.

Mr. Matthew Green: You're aware of the allegations, or at least some of the public statements, that they were actually a propaganda arm of the Chinese government.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, especially more recently, absolutely.

Mr. Matthew Green: But at the time even they were pretty controversial.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Again, they are similar to....

China has a long way to go on civil society organizations, for sure.

Mr. Matthew Green: Where I'm getting to, sir, is that I don't believe you to be a useful idiot. I think you're somebody who has taken the time to understand and know the culture you're dealing with. I'll still state—and I stated this to Mr. Morris Rosenberg—that it is the west's naïveté in thinking that they will engage in China and somehow change China, and not the other way around, that has brought us to this place.

Again, that's a political statement, not one that's germane to interference.

If you knew about these criticisms of the Confucius Institute, if you knew the Chinese government has an active way of using this type of cultural influence, academic influence, why were you not better prepared at the board level, given the nature of the foundation, given the fact your brother is a prime minister? Why was there not more duty of care at the board level to safeguard yourselves against this?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: As I said, I was more involved earlier. I barely heard about the Chinese donation until it was time to sign it, whatever the date was. It happened in 2016.

Morris had, and still has, my complete trust as a high-level civil servant who knows how to manage these things, so I felt that we were in good hands.

Mr. Matthew Green: In closing, I'll say this, sir. There's probably going to be additional testimony. Some of it will likely conflict with yours. I want to give you the opportunity and invite you to provide back to this committee in writing any rebuttals you might have to that, as well as an expansion on any of those eight points that you feel might provide more clarity around the issues represented here.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green

That concludes our first round of questioning.

We are now into the second round, which we're going to start with five minutes.

Mr. Genuis, you're first for five minutes. Go ahead, sir.

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

I know there is a conflict of facts that's come out in your testimony. You've said that Ms. Fournier is wrong and The Globe and Mail is wrong. You've implied disagreements with CSIS as well. The committee and the public are going to have to decide what they believe in terms of the facts.

I've read your book on China and I know you've done a lot of thinking about China. There are two things I find particularly unbelievable in your testimony.

The first is about foreign donations to the Trudeau foundation skyrocketing as soon as your brother became Prime Minister. The allegation isn't that the foundation was taking policy positions, but that people were donating to the foundation with the intention of currying favour with the Prime Minister as a result.

Even without all the other facts, it seems suspicious on the face of it that there was a massive spike in foreign donations as soon as the Prime Minister took office, yet it seems that you're contending this was a coincidence.

The second thing, from what you're saying.... We're talking about different meetings. People are coming to those meetings who are from the consulate or who are affiliated with United Front-backed organizations. You're saying that in every case, they're probably just there for translation.

The implication of your comment, sir, is that there aren't qualified translators available in this country who aren't affiliated with the Chinese government, or that it's somehow normal for apolitical Chinese people in Canada to go to the Chinese government for assistance with translation services.

Isn't that unbelievable?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: There are two questions there.

First, on the spike in foreign donations, there was no spike in foreign donations. We had a new chair come in at that time, coincidentally. It was John McCall MacBain, a very wealthy and philanthropically inclined gentleman who happens to live in Switzerland and who made a sizable donation. That was the extent of the spike. It was our board chair, a prominent and highly respected Canadian, who made a very generous donation.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think the numbers will show something different.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's the spike. It has nothing to do with politics.

Your second question, I believe, was—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is it your contention—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, China works that way. The notion of....

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, we're not talking about China. We're talking about Canada. We're talking about the idea that if you need a qualified translator between English or French and a Chinese language, it would be normal for people to go to the consulate or a United Front-affiliated organization and ask for help with translation.

Isn't that absurd?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I don't even know whether they were translators. I'm saying you have to take that into account in your understanding of how Mr. Zhang Bin operated as a non-English speaker and non-French speaker—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The issue is that you had people from the consulate who were there. You had people from these Chinese government-affiliated organizations—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: We had consulate officials from other countries at moments. It's a good thing to do academic diplomacy. It is a good thing.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This isn't just any other country, sir. This didn't trigger—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: At this time, in 2015 and 2016, China was not the hard place it has now become. We were not on our guard in the same way. No one was. Even our CSIS agents will report that. Things have changed greatly.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, I think it's fair to say that there has been a shift, but I think there were many people who were aware and had concerns.

You've also taken a lot of speaking engagements, personally, with the Confucius Institutes in Canada—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: A lot?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I want to ask if you have been compensated for any of the work you've done with the Confucius Institute.

• (1800)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I think I spoke once at the Confucius Institute as a sidebar event, because I was in....

First of all, I'm a reader of Confucius, so the Confucius—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, as am I. The Confucius Institutes have nothing to do with the work or legacy of Confucius.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, Chinese culture is—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you answer the question, though? Were you compensated for any of that work you did for the Confucius Institutes?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I don't believe I was, no.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Have your film production companies ever received funding from individuals or institutions in China that are China-based?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I think my book was translated into Chinese, and I received a payment from a Chinese publisher. It was quite modest, frankly.

Yes, I have sold things into China, namely my book. In terms of my films, I've never made a film that was sold in China.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Have you had Chinese government-affiliated institutions, institutions based in China, fund your work at any point?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

You said in your book that you still occasionally defend the CCP. For one thing, you said that you don't think China could have come so far so quickly without the unity and organizational power that it provided.

Do you still believe that?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's the key point to understanding recent Chinese history. You need to compare China to China, really, to do a proper analysis of China.

The unifying principles, especially after, as I said, the Deng Xiaoping period, caused by—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you still believe that contention, though? Does that still reflect your world view?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Do I believe that the Chinese government made considerable economic achievements? I do, yes, in a certain period.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you think that the CCP, that China, could not have progressed in this way without the unity and organizational power provided by the CCP? That's your argument in the book. Do you still believe that?

The Chair: Could we have a short answer, please?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's a hypothesis. It's hard to know, but I think one has to say in a positive sense that the organizing principles of the Chinese Communist Party made a significant economic impact on the country. That's correct, yes.

The Chair: That's it, Mr. Genuis. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Housefather, welcome to the committee. You have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Trudeau, for being here today.

I want to tie up some loose ends, because we're getting later on in your testimony.

I'm on Corporations Canada's website, and Millennium Golden Eagle International Inc. in Canada is a company in good standing, according to the Corporations Canada website, and has been since April 20, 2012. Do you feel that you should be able to rely on Corporations Canada's website to determine whether a company is in good standing or not?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I would say so, yes. I'm not an accountant or a financial expert, but that's a good start.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: As you mentioned, the Bank of Montreal held their bank accounts, so there are obligations on the bank in terms of diligence on companies before they would open such an account. As well, you would be able to rely on something like that.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It's also a very good sign.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Excellent.

Then we're get into the question of the donation. People have been throwing around different figures. I've heard \$200,000 many times. It was \$140,000, correct?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The contract was for \$200,000 to do conferences, but the payouts were in two portions. The payout of \$140,000 was made, and it was decided for political reasons that we weren't going to take the last portion because we weren't going to do the program anyhow.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Exactly, so when when I get to that question of \$140,000, how material was that? How much money was in the bank account of the Trudeau foundation at the time? How much money was there?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Well, it was somewhere around \$145 million, perhaps.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It was \$145 million, so the \$140,000 was something that clearly was a pretty small amount in the overall context of everything.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, and I've wanted to expand on the need for academic diplomacy. It was never about the money. It was trying to get brilliant Chinese students exposed to Canadian ways.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Perfect, and the tax receipt for the donation was made to the company that made the donation.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Correct.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: There's been a lot of concern that it was mailed somewhere in China to somebody's home. If I'm a Canadian living abroad and I get my tax documents at the home where I'm living abroad, I still have to file my Canadian taxes with proof of donations. Do you know of any reason that anybody would use a Canadian tax donation if they don't have to pay taxes in Canada?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Again, I'm not a.... But as Mr. Rosenberg said yesterday, it's quite clearly only of use for a Canadian company for their Canadian tax declaration. That seems pretty clear to me.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: In order to pay taxes in Canada, you must have other activities in Canada. Otherwise, you wouldn't be liable for taxation in Canada, right?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, you must have income in Canada.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Then it wasn't a shell company doing nothing. They clearly had some income of some type.

Let me ask you this question also.

It's easy to throw around chronologies and to say that the Liberals were surging in the polls in September 2015, and so was Hillary Clinton at that time in the Democratic primaries in the United States against Bernie Sanders, and so was Brexit. I can throw in a lot of different things that were happening at about that time when there was a chronology of things happening.

You mentioned the ceremony and the four parts of the agreement. Was the Trudeau family one of them? You mentioned signatories. Were there four lines where you also signed on behalf of the Trudeau family?

• (1805)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, it was a three-part signature. I was signing on behalf of the foundation and of the family.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: "Of the family" because you were giving the Université de Montréal rights related to the use of the name of your dad, and you, as an executor of the will, needed to do that.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Correct, yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: The foundation couldn't do that. Mr. Rosenberg couldn't do that by himself.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I guess I would have probably had to sign a procuration. Maybe I would have if I wasn't going to be there, but there was a ceremonial element, as Mr. Rosenberg mentioned. We all felt it was very appropriate and not untoward.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's perfect.

[Translation]

I don't know how much speaking time I have left, but I'd like to ask you one last question.

You mentioned a report. Which director wrote the report?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was the three remaining directors and two of the others who left. They wrote it together.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Okay.

In order to testify today about what you feel happened, did you rely on what had been written by the directors who attended the meetings?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes. There were also the lawyers who came and testified, and who continued to say that they had never formulated an opinion to the effect that there had been a conflict of interest that required changes in governance, including the resignation of the board chairperson.

[English]

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Can I ask in my last question, Mr. Trudeau, if you feel that there is any one of those eight questions that has not been cleared up enough and that you want to elaborate on?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I must admit we've covered lots of different things. As I said, I will take up Mr. Green's offer. If the work continues and if there are further submissions that I have to make, I will.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather and Mr. Trudeau.

[Translation]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

So, Mr. Trudeau, you made representations on behalf of the foundation over the years.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Are you talking about public representations?

Mr. René Villemure: No, I'm talking about representing the foundation at meetings.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It didn't happen very often, but yes, occasionally.

Mr. René Villemure: Did you ever meet the Aga Khan in Paris on behalf of the foundation?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Mr. René Villemure: Did you ever meet him, more generally?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, I met the Aga Khan in Ottawa approximately 10 years ago when he inaugurated his centre.

Mr. René Villemure: All right.

There was no link with the foundation, right?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

Do you know David Johnston?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, I've known him since I was a child.

Mr. René Villemure: He too has an interest in China.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, he's a learned man who is interested in lots of things.

Mr. René Villemure: What is your relationship with him?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I knew him when I was very young. He was a friend of my father's. We used to go skiing together. He's also a great Canadian, and has been for a long time. I know his daughters. He is definitely a friend of the family.

Mr. René Villemure: So you are rather close to Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Not recently, but we were in the past. When I was younger, we used to go to his home, do some skiing together and often dine together.

Mr. René Villemure: It's because earlier on you mentioned an independent committee to shed light on the governance crisis, and Mr. Johnston has often told us that he is independent in his role of special rapporteur. I'll agree that this is not linked to our committee, but are we talking about the same kind of independence or even proximity?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Are you asking me to comment on Mr. Johnston's independence as a—

Mr. René Villemure: I started out by saying that you had talked about an independent committee for due diligence.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: In connection with the criteria, the committee's role was to draft a mandate of what would be required of investigators in terms of legal and accounting matters.

Mr. René Villemure: In order to be independent, there are not supposed to be any ties. Is that right?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's right. You will see in the minutes of the board meeting, that everything was up for debate.

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

If there are not supposed to be any ties in order to be independent, is Mr. Johnston then independent as a rapporteur, given that he is tied?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: You're asking me to comment on government decisions that I have not been following closely.

My view is that David Johnston is a Canadian who is above suspicion. He is a very honourable man in the true sense of the word, and not just because of his title. I believe that Canada can place its full trust in him for any task, to be perfectly frank.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Villemure and Mr. Trudeau.

[*English*]

Mr. Green, you have two and a half minutes, sir. Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you. I'm going to follow along that line of questioning.

We put this to Mr. Rosenberg. You may have watched it.

You have spoken about some of the tensions at the board about an independent audit. We're now in a time when there are allegations that the Chinese government has directly intimidated and threatened an MP. We're at a time when there are allegations of interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. We're now at a time when these allegations and leaks—unverified and honest leaks, supposedly from CSIS or who knows where—are out against the foundation, and Mr. Johnston has been appointed to be a special rapporteur.

It is our position as New Democrats, and it is my position, that there be an independent public inquiry into foreign interference.

I'm to take it, sir, that you're here today in some regard to protect the family's legacy and the foundation. Should there be a public inquiry, I'm wondering if you would be open to having the things that have transpired here being handed over to a public inquiry—much like the Rouleau commission, which provided a really good framework—to take that forensic audit into the foundation to assure the public that at no time was the foundation used as a vehicle to influence the Prime Minister.

Would you be open to that?

• (1810)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Look, I'm not a decider at the foundation currently. I'm not on the board, so—

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm asking you as someone who was there as a member of the family—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: As I've said all along, I think any efforts to...

At some point, I am here today to say we're wasting our time on the notion of interference. I have seen no trace of it, and I don't think—

Mr. Matthew Green: Unfortunately, that's not up to you to decide, sir.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's correct.

Mr. Matthew Green: Unfortunately, when it comes to things like interest, conflict of interest and pecuniary interest, it's as much about the perception as it is the reality. I am going to take you at your word and I am going to take you at your testimony here today, but you have an interest in clearing the air about it.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I want to defend the foundation, for sure.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, and in fairness to your family, I imagine you would want to defend the legacy of your father, who's now been brought in to this really murky world—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I think my father's legacy is elsewhere, out of all of this, in many ways.

As I said, I think this is a great distraction from the important mission of the foundation.

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay, then would you open to an independent—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I can only welcome, frankly, any efforts to bring clarity to it in all forms.

I'm not a decider of these things. I know the board is launching an independent inquiry, as was the goal for these last weeks, which brought about the squabble that we're talking about.

I know the chair of the board asked the Auditor General to look at our affairs, so the opportunity.... I'm not a lawyer either, but the courts may be a place to deal with this as well. The courts are truly impartial. This is a political forum, and we have to understand that everyone here has an agenda, so it's not necessarily the best place to get at the truth, but I want the truth to come out for sure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green and Mr. Trudeau.

We're still on the five-minute round.

Mr. Brock, you have the floor for five minutes, sir. Go ahead.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Trudeau, your claim that you have a fraternal relationship with your brother is not entirely accurate. You helped in your brother's nomination race in 2008 and you were extremely important in his leadership campaign in 2013. Before your brother left for China in 2016, he read your book, and five days after he returned from that trip, he showed up at a promotional event with you for your book.

Under those circumstances, would you agree with me that the two wealthy billionaire Chinese nationals with direct links to the Communist regime who were influencing you were directly influencing the Prime Minister?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. I disagree with those qualifications entirely.

I didn't play an important role in 2013. I wasn't involved in 2013. I helped my brother at the very beginning of 2012, when he had an embryonic team, and I helped in a very fraternal way—

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Mr. Trudeau.

I want to confirm a number of points. I'm doing some cleanup here.

You only signed one donation in the foundation's history, which is the now infamous \$200,000 from the Beijing regime. Is that correct?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I think we've gone over this time and time again. I've told you why I signed it.

Mr. Larry Brock: That answer is yes. Thank you, Mr. Trudeau.

You didn't question the tax receipts being sent, ultimately, to China, did you?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I explained that tax receipts being sent to China, because the donor was a Chinese citizen, raised no confusion or red flags at any level.

Mr. Larry Brock: In fact, you said—and I'll quote your words—that Millennium Golden Eagle International was a legitimate business operating in Canada.

However, if you had exercised your due diligence, which you claim that you did and the board did and your organization did, you would have realized that the corporate address for this multination-

al corporation was in the Montreal suburb of Dorval. It was a mansion of probably 4,000 to 5,000 square feet. It was a very large home with a pool and a basketball court.

Were you aware of that?

• (1815)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I would challenge your understanding of the corporate world in Canada. The corporate address of my phone company is an art deco home on Pine Avenue.

Mr. Larry Brock: Were you aware of the facts that I just presented?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I was made aware of that, and there's nothing there.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

Were you further aware that the address of this company listed in Hong Kong, where the original receipt went to, actually doesn't exist? A reporter from The Globe and Mail who went to Hong Kong went to the address, trying to make some inquiries about the operators of this company, and the person who answered the door had no idea.

Were you aware of that, sir?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, I wasn't aware. I know that corporate addresses are fairly irrelevant, frankly, for the nature of ownership and for the nature of taxes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you. Everything is irrelevant. I get it.

You didn't question the urgency of providing the donation around major political events for your brother, the Prime Minister, did you?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Sorry; could you repeat the question?

Mr. Larry Brock: You did not question the urgency of providing the donation around major political events for your brother.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No, because there was an urgency long before my brother was in politics.

Mr. Larry Brock: You never questioned the intention of the wealthy billionaires linked directly to the Communist regime who were highly interested in the scholarship of the Trudeau foundation. You did not question that.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: They were not interested in the scholarship of the Trudeau foundation. It became a condition to their work at Université de Montréal.

Mr. Larry Brock: You said you expressed some concerns about the Globe's story. You talked about it being simply intelligence.

My background is as a Crown attorney. I rely upon evidence when I present a case. The evidence we have here, from an unnamed source at Canada's spy agency, is that there's actually a taped conversation between Mr. Zhang, the philanthropist whom you claim is simply a legitimate businessman, and an unnamed commercial attaché at one of China's consulates in Canada, in which they discuss the possibility of your brother defeating Stephen Harper's Conservatives and forming the government. Furthermore, and more damaging, are instructions that Beijing would reimburse him for the entire amount of the donation to the Trudeau foundation.

You dismissed that as simply what—hearsay?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The facts are wrong. There was never any question of a million-dollar donation to the Trudeau foundation.

Mr. Larry Brock: No, it was \$200,000. Let's be more specific.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: But the report in *The Globe and Mail* says a million dollars, so when the facts are wrong.... You haven't seen the evidence, and I won't, so I will reserve judgment.

Mr. Larry Brock: Do you think the consulate that interfered with the family of a sitting Conservative member in this Parliament and threatened that member should be expelled immediately?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I am not aware of the facts of all that, so I'm not going to pronounce on that question.

Mr. Larry Brock: You don't read the papers?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brock.

Ms. Saks, you're up next for five minutes.

Just to advise the committee, if I work the time back, we should have about six minutes left after Ms. Saks' intervention. We're going to go for a final three minutes to the Conservatives and a final three minutes to the Liberals at the end.

Ms. Saks, you have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I'll thank Mr. Trudeau for joining us here today.

I want to lean into context. I think context is really important. It's something that you mentioned in relation to your deep understanding of China yourself: There's China then and China now.

I'd like to go back to China in 2013. Were you aware of whether Mr. Zhang did other very large donations to other university institutions in Canada at that time?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Yes, as I mentioned from the very start, this was a repeat performance that he wanted at Université de Montréal of the Bethune donation to the U of T for their med school.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Right, so it was a million-dollar donation to the University of Toronto.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: It was \$800,000 to the med school. I provided you with that as a single piece of evidence. That's very clear. It was clear to me from the start that this was a legitimate donation by a legitimate philanthropist.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Correct, and there were no questions at the time at the University of Toronto with Mr. Zhang's philanthropy or the source of it.

• (1820)

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: If we could just elaborate on that, because context is important, my understanding is that Mr. Zhang's intention was to donate to Université de Montréal, and the Trudeau foundation, in its excellent work in scholarship in that program, became part of it, but there was a negotiation process that had to happen. It wasn't simply that Mr. Zhang woke up and decided, "I want to donate to the Trudeau foundation in the same way that I've donated to the medical school at U of T."

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: No. He didn't have an interest in donating to the Trudeau foundation.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: There was a lot of negotiating a priori.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: There was going to be a partnership. It had to be presented.... As the president of the Université de Montréal stated, there was some reluctance on his part to complicate what he wanted, which was a simple deal of the kind he did at U of T.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I understand.

Okay, let's further the context of that timeframe.

It was 2013 and 2014. The Harper Conservatives were in power. Stephen Harper was aggressively pursuing a secret 31-year trade deal with China at that time with Xi Jinping. That was going on.

At that time, did the Harper government or officials brief you or the Trudeau foundation? Did CSIS come to the Trudeau foundation at that time and say, "You know, we're a little bit concerned here about potential foreign influence with Mr. Zhang's contributions," whether to the Trudeau foundation, the Université de Montréal or the University of Toronto? Were there any conversations like that?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: There were no conversations.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: You're saying there were no warnings by the Harper government while they were in power, making secret trade deals with the Chinese government and Xi Jinping, to the Trudeau foundation, which was really an entity of the civil service in part, in terms of setting it up and its bylaws. During the Conservative government's time, no one thought to brief you or to say, "Hey".

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's it exactly. If there had been damning evidence, I would think they would have brought it to the attention of someone.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: That was China then, right?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That was China then.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: My colleagues here are trying to connect the dots to China now and the concerns they have about allegations with respect to a member of the Conservative Party on a vote that actually.... I was on the foreign affairs committee at that time, and I was also a member banned by China because of the Uyghur study. Do you think this is a little bit of crystal ball pontification in terms of how the Trudeau foundation could possibly be connected to this kind of—

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: Do I think what is crystal ball pontification?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: They're alleging that there is some kind of direct connection with what is happening now, in terms of China today.

Let's talk context. It's China 2023, so a decade has passed.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The world has moved, but this is the state of politics in not looking back a lot and seeing the changes in the world. Our diplomatic goals and objectives and even the very nature of diplomacy changed. Stephen Harper was eager to trade with China. We're still trading with China.

Look around: The room is filled with Chinese-made objects. We're in a deep relationship with China. That continues. Diplomacy is very difficult for many reasons right now, and it's changing all the time, and it has changed significantly since the time this donation started.

The very goals of academic...which I still believe in, by the way; I just don't think the Trudeau foundation can do it as long as there's a Trudeau government.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: In the context of the China of then, the Harper government didn't see any need to raise a red flag to you on the Trudeau foundation or on any of these contributions.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's correct.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Okay.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have 12 seconds.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I will cede my time, and Mr. Turnbull will take those three minutes when they come up.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. There are six minutes left, three and three.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead for three minutes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You have made some, I would say, unfortunate characterizations about media reporting, whether about *Le Journal de Montréal* not being a credible source for news or about *The Globe and Mail*. We know the family of member of Parliament Michael Chong was targeted for intimidation at the behest of Beijing. It's a fact, whether you've had the opportunity to read about it or not.

Do you think the consular officials who orchestrated this campaign of intimidation should be expelled?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I'd have to read the facts more carefully. Frankly, I'm not a public official and I'm not even an editorialist. I will grant you that the risks of China doing malign interference in this country grow by the day and should be taken very seriously. I believe everyone in the committee does take these very seriously, and I trust, frankly, that the government—not just the political government but also the civil service—will act in accordance with all the rules. I'm not—

• (1825)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Have you ever organized any political fundraisers for your brother since he ran for nomination or was first elected in a general election or for his leadership?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: In the early days I was doing a lot, because he had a staff of two. Did I do any fundraisers? I hosted one at my house, yes, maybe when he was deputy.... I got some friends together and, yes, I did do some fundraising.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You were named an executor for your father's estate. Is that correct?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The assets include book rights and royalties through a numbered company. Is that correct?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: In some manner there are book rights, yes, in—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you have control over the numbered company?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: I do have control, yes. Well, control...

I'm the president of it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You're the president. What are the interests there? What's the breakdown between you and your brother?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: My father, because he worked at a law firm for the last 20 years of his life, was surrounded by fiscalists. There were a lot of companies, and over the years we've slowly wound them down. There's one left, which includes some real estate holdings and book rights. It's barely operational, but it does continue to exist, yes.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: This is private, probably, I guess.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I don't see how a private company is relevant to this testimony.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Well, stick around and find out, Ms. Saks. I'll keep questioning the witness, and you can try to interrupt, I suppose.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): That's condescending.

The Chair: We went through this yesterday.

Unless there's something procedurally within the Standing Orders—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Pardon me? Your interruption is not helpful, Ryan.

The Chair: Can we have some...?

Hang on, please. We're almost done here.

As I mentioned yesterday, unless it's something procedurally within the Standing Orders, members have the right to ask the questions that they want to ask. There's nothing in Ms. Saks' intervention, to me, that is against the Standing Orders. We're going to continue with Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Barrett, you have 27 seconds left, so go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Throughout the testimony that we've had today, you're very sure about some things. Then, when we talk about things that actually do speak to the foreign interference, whether it's the reporting... CSIS has a wiretap that confirms that this was an influence operation. That's something that you say you don't know anything about. The Hong Kong address of these donors that matches that of the Chinese Cultural Industry Association is something that you don't know anything about.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Barrett—

Mr. Michael Barrett: You say the redemption for these folks is that they have a bank account. Well, drug dealers have bank accounts, sir. That doesn't mean that they're running reputable businesses.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, your time is done.

I'm going to give you a second to address that if you like, Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: There's a lot of innuendo and misinterpretation. I don't think I need to address it.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, the final three minutes are yours.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Trudeau, for being here. I've listened intently to your testimony today.

I wanted to take a little bit of a different approach because I have a personal connection with the Trudeau foundation through my very best friend growing up.

He is a Métis-Cree individual who experienced intergenerational trauma, struggled with addiction, went through a cycle of homelessness and committed petty theft and crimes. He went to jail and hit rock bottom. He eventually got into a rehab program and started turning his life around. He went back to school. He earned a B.A., a master's degree and a Ph.D. He also became the bestselling author of a book called *From the Ashes*.

He was significantly helped by the Trudeau foundation. He's a Trudeau scholar. His name is Jesse Thistle, and he said, "Once I won the Trudeau scholarship, I went, 'Oh, my life is going to change now'".

I think it's important that the charitable work of this foundation continue because it does deep, meaningful and impactful work, and it always has.

What do you see as the path forward?

Mr. Alexandre Trudeau: The governance crisis, the management crisis, is over. Our inquiry is launched.

There's an inquiry into the staff turnover. We know there was some turnover, but there were serious management issues under our former president. That inquiry needs to be done. These are all distractions from things like the work Jesse Thistle has done, which I know well.

These are extraordinary people. Ask anyone who has dealt with them. As I say, they make us proud to be Canadian. I know they're focused. You don't get a Trudeau foundation scholarship if you don't have terrific dedication and discipline.

Nonetheless, the very notion that the scholarship they're so proud to receive has been impugned unfairly is why I'm here today.

I encourage them to keep their heads up and do the work. It is the work of reason, and the work of reason is the work of the just society that I think we can all get behind here, regardless of what party we're from. The intellectual work in this country is the best of our country.

• (1830)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I couldn't agree with you more on that. I think it is a gross injustice that we're dragging the Trudeau foundation through the mud for partisan gain. That's a shame.

Thank you for being here today. I hope that the foundation continues its work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

That concludes today's testimony.

Mr. Trudeau, on behalf of the committee and on behalf of Canadians, I want to thank you for coming today.

I also want to thank our clerk for putting all of this together, as well as our analysts and our technicians.

Members of the committee, have a good weekend coming up. This is the last committee meeting this week.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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