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DONATION DEMAND

CONSERVATIVES CALL ON TRUDEAU FOUNDATION TO BAN FOREIGN DONATIONS AFTER TENFOLD INCREASE IN THREE YEARS

ZANE SCHWARTZ

The federal Conservatives are calling on the Trudeau Foundation to stop accepting foreign donations after a National Post analysis showed foreign donations increased tenfold since Justin Trudeau won the Liberal leadership.

"I think if the Prime Minister had the wisdom that I hope he does have, that he would tell his family foundation to stop taking the foreign donations until Canadians can be assured that there's no dirty dealings happening," said Conservative house leader Candice Bergen.

Last week the National Post reported that about forty per cent of 108 donors, directors and members of the foundation since 2014 — or one in six when not counting academic institutions — have affiliations with organizations that currently lobby the federal government. Overall donations have increased fourfold since Trudeau won the Liberal leadership in April 2013.

The Trudeau Foundation says that the "vast majority" of the foreign donations were made by Canadian citizens living abroad. As the Post reported, the majority of foreign-donated funds came from the Switzerland-based McCall MacBain Foundation, founded by Marcy McCall MacBain and her husband John McCall MacBain, a Canadian and the Trudeau Foundation's chair and the 75th richest person in Canada according to Canadian Business magazine. The McCall MacBains have donated more than \$25,000 to the Liberal party over the past decade.

The donation that has received the most attention is from Chinese national Bin Zhang, who, along with a partner, made a \$200,000 gift to the Trudeau Foundation after he attended a cash-for-access fundraiser with Justin Trudeau in May 2016.

Interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose asked ethics commissioner Mary Dawson to look into that donation to determine whether Trudeau had broken the law. Last Tuesday, Dawson wrote a letter to Ambrose saying



JONATHAN HAYWARD / THE CANADIAN PRESS

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau won the Liberal leadership on April 14, 2013 and he withdrew from the Trudeau Foundation on Dec. 10, 2014.

she would question Trudeau about some cash-for-access events, but would not ask him about the Trudeau Foundation.

"In relation to the donation to the Trudeau Foundation, at this time I have found no evidence that Mr. Bin (Zhang) has dealings with or is seeking funding from the Government of Canada or that Mr. Trudeau had any involvement in soliciting the funds from Mr. Bin (Zhang)," wrote Dawson.

Bin Zhang is a Communist Party official who helps spread Chinese influence as president of the China Culture Industry Association, a group that is supervised by the Ministry of Culture and tasked with building international ties for Beijing. Other members of the group include senior leaders from the navy, the army, and China's ruling Communist Party.

Zhang's \$200,000 donation will fund conferences and events. "It is expected that many of these events will explore the evolving role of China in the world and Canada-China relations," according to an Aug. 17 post on the foundation's website.

Dawson said she doesn't need to look into the dona-

tion because she believes negotiations around it began after Trudeau ceased his involvement with the foundation.

"Information in the public domain indicates that the terms of the donation to the Trudeau Foundation were negotiated between September 2014 and spring 2016, after Mr. Trudeau's involvement with the Foundation had ended. I will therefore not be looking further into the matter at this time," wrote Dawson.

Trudeau Foundation executive director Elise Comtois told the National Post that while the foundation first met with Bin Zhang and his partner Niu Gensheng in September 2014, the University of Montreal first told the foundation of the potential donation in January 2014.

Zhang and Gensheng eventually decided to donate \$200,000 to the Trudeau Foundation and \$800,000 to the University of Montreal with the parties signing the donation agreement on June 1, 2016. The donation to the university is divided into two parts: \$750,000 for scholarships for law students and \$50,000 for a statue of Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

Comtois said the foundation received a letter from Trudeau formally withdrawing from the foundation in December 2014 — three months after Dawson said she believes he was no longer involved with its operations, and 11 months after the foundation was first informed of the potential donation.

"As the Prime Minister has said before, following his election as Leader of the Liberal Party, he withdrew his involvement in the affairs of the Foundation for the duration of his involvement in federal politics," said Trudeau spokesperson Cameron Ahmad.

Trudeau won the Liberal leadership on April 14, 2013. He withdrew from the foundation over a year and a half later, on Dec. 10, 2014.

Asked whether the Prime Minister would talk to the ethics commissioner about the foundation or ask the foundation to limit donations, Ahmad said: "The Prime Minister has no involvement with the Trudeau Foundation."

An email sent by Comtois on Sept. 4, 2014, soliciting a donation from Google, listed the potential benefits avail-

able to Trudeau Foundation conference sponsors, including a section labelled "Networking opportunities."

A donation of \$50,000 or more entitled a sponsor to hold a private event for as many as 25 people, including "key members of the Trudeau Foundation Society." Justin Trudeau is listed as one of the members with whom donors could potentially hold a private event.

Google eventually gave US\$25,000 to the foundation to sponsor their 2015 conference. While the meeting with Zhang and Gensheng also took place in September 2014, Comtois says they were not sent the same package.

Two months after the foundation was first contacted about Zhang's donation, on March 10, 2014, Trudeau participated by phone in a foundation meeting where members voted on transitioning from Part II of the Canada Corporations Act to the Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act, according to Comtois. Prior to that, he called in to meetings on March 21, 2013, and Nov. 18, 2010.

In a letter responding to the Post's initial report, Trudeau Foundation president

Morris Rosenberg emphasized that the majority of foreign donations came from the McCall MacBain Foundation.

The foundation does not count the \$200,000 donation from Chinese nationals Bin Zhang and Niu Gensheng as a foreign donation since it was made by a company registered in Canada. Rosenberg also pointed to Dawson's decision not to include the Trudeau Foundation in her questioning of the Prime Minister.

However, NDP ethics critic Alexandre Boulerice wants Trudeau to talk to Dawson about the foundation.

"For a Prime Minister who prides himself on high ethical standards and transparency, he should have no problem talking with the ethics commissioner about that donation," said Boulerice.

Asked why Dawson said Trudeau wasn't involved in the foundation in September 2014 when he didn't withdraw until December 2014, ethics commissioner spokesperson Jocelyne Brisebois said Dawson is "looking into the matter."

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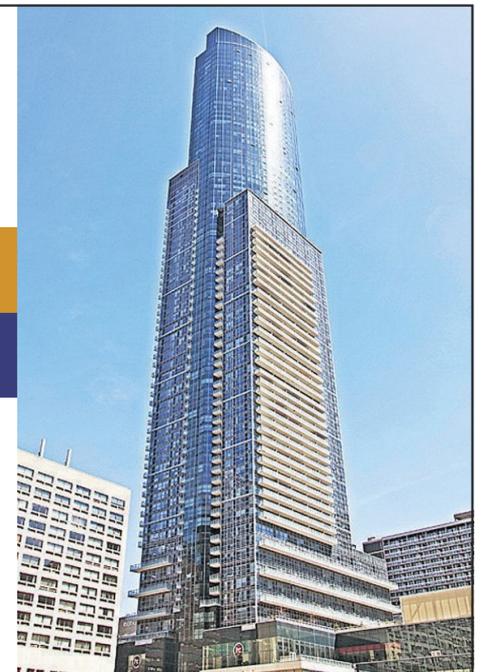
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