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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger





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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Hello everyone, and welcome to meeting number 57 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*English*]

The committee is meeting today pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) and the request by five members to discuss the committee's ongoing study on foreign election interference.

While I have the floor, I have with me two guests. We have Yasmin and Khushi, two women from the University of Toronto.

We have two others. We'll get your names shouted out too. Nila and Emily are also joining Ms. Blaney. We also have Alexa joining Ms. O'Connell, who also happens to have a birthday today. This is a very exciting day.

As a reminder, so that we can have good decorum, all comments should be addressed through the chair. The clerk and I will maintain a consolidated speaking list of members wishing to speak.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

I will move a motion at this time. We will distribute copies to members in both official languages.

I will read it into the record now.

**The Chair:** I'm just going to do the same thing. You have the floor. I will pass the floor right back to you. I'm going to ensure that it's distributed so that all members have it.

The clerk has signalled that she's received it. We will send it to everyone. It's been sent, and the minute I can get some heads nodding to demonstrate that everyone has it, I will return the floor to Mr. Cooper.

If we can have a gallery view in front of me and in front of Mr. Fergus, that would be greatly appreciated.

I understand that everyone has received the motion in both official languages.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

The motion is as follows:

That the Committee, in relation to its study of foreign election interference, invite Katie Telford, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, to appear alone for three hours, during the week of March 13, 2023, provided that she be sworn or affirmed.

Madam Chair, I'm going to make some fairly brief remarks in support of the motion.

Under this Prime Minister's watch, Beijing interfered in two elections: the 2019 election and the 2021 election. According to his national security adviser, the Prime Minister has been briefed repeatedly about Beijing's interference, and yet, notwithstanding serious interference in Canadian democracy, we have seen no action taken by this Prime Minister, and no charges have been laid, no investigations undertaken—although there are finally some that appear to be under way—and no diplomats expelled. No one has been expelled.

What is at the heart of the issue is what the Prime Minister knows, when he first knew about it and what he did or failed to do about Beijing's election interference. In order to get to the bottom of that, it's imperative that we hear from the Prime Minister's top aide, his chief of staff. It's critical to getting to the truth.

Unfortunately, at every step of the way the Prime Minister has obstructed that effort. He has refused to answer basic questions. He has deflected and tried to change the channel. He has ordered Liberal MPs on this committee to block efforts to bring forward key witnesses and to block the production of relevant documents, and yesterday we saw the Prime Minister at it again, with an announcement to do the opposite of what CSIS advised him to do.

CSIS has advised the Prime Minister that with respect to election interference, the policy of the government should be grounded in transparency and sunlight and that such interference should be made known to the public. That's why this committee is so important.

However, the Prime Minister has of course obstructed this committee, and then yesterday announced that instead of transparency and sunlight, all of this would be put before a secret committee, with secret evidence and secret conclusions all redacted by the PMO, all part of this Prime Minister's efforts to cover up what he knows and what he failed to do about Beijing's interference. It underscores why we need to hear from the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford.

With that, I hope that on the fourth time we've attempted to get Katie Telford to this committee, we will be successful today in doing so. Canadians deserve answers, and part of getting those answers is to have Katie Telford appear before this committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's good to be back in the committee. I apologize for missing some of last week, but my constituents in some of my more remote communities really appreciate the time I had with them, and I just want to thank them for always having time for me.

I do have an amendment, and I'll get that sent to the clerk, but before I talk about the amendment, I want to say that my history in this committee is that I resist heavily having staff come in when they are not the people who make the final decision.

Sadly, what we have seen in this country is a continuous leak from CSIS that tells us that there is something serious that we need to be concerned with, and after that many leaks, I am persuaded that it is imperative that we now have to take a step that I was not necessarily initially comfortable with.

People in this country trust their systems, and whenever there are questions on those systems, we need to address those questions and make sure that those systems are stronger as a result of the work we do here.

The NDP, of course, brought forward the motion that everybody mostly agreed with around the public inquiry. We feel very much that this needs to be done in a setting that is public where, as my colleague Mr. Cooper talked about earlier, there would be an element of transparency and sunlight shown on this issue. If we are going to ask Canadians to trust their elections, then we must be held to that account.

Hopefully, it is seen as a friendly amendment to the motion. Has it been sent out yet? I want to make sure—

**The Chair:** I'm just going to pause you, Ms. Blaney. You have the floor, and the floor will be returned to you.

I understand that we have received it. Have we hit "send"? We're just going to send it to all members. We have two members who are replacing regular members, so we'll make sure that they are on the list. Once it's in front of people's eyes, Ms. Blaney, I'll return the floor to you.

Just wait a couple of seconds, please.

Printed copies are on their way. Can I just confirm that people have received it electronically? That will keep the meeting moving.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

• (1115)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Chair.

My amendment is simply that we add at the end of the sentence after "a.", "and"

b. invite the following individuals to appear before the committee as part of the study, provided that they be sworn or affirmed:

i. Jeremy Broadhurst, Azam Ishmael, Hamish Marshall and Waled Solomon, national campaign directors for the Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of Canada during the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns.

ii. Jenny Byrne, Leader of the Official Opposition's senior leadership advisor, and Tausha Michaud, Chief of Staff to the former leader of the Official Opposition.

Madam Chair, I was just recently in Brussels, where we met together with the NATO Parliamentary Association, and there are a lot of concerns about foreign interference. I think it's absolutely imperative that we take this very seriously. We know that 11 campaigns from both the Liberals and Conservatives have been implicated in some of the information we've heard come out.

I think that this needs to be an open and transparent process, that we recognize that all foreign interference matters and that if we're going to have strong systems that our country can rely on, we definitely need to have this kind of transparency happening here.

I hope that it's seen as a friendly amendment and that we can move forward on this very serious issue that's impacting us here in the House, in Parliament, but also Canadians across the country.

Thank you.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, I just want to comment.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

As per usual practice, Mr. Fergus is on the list, and then I'll return back to the amendment with Mr. Fergus, but would you like to first comment on the amendment or would you like to wait?

I will come to you, Mr. Cooper.

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** I will have comments about the amendment and I certainly have comments about the main motion, Madam Chair. What would you recommend?

**The Chair:** Do you want to speak?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes. Madam Chair—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. She is asking for it as a friendly amendment and is not moving an amendment. Mr. Cooper would like to respond to it.

I'm sorry, Mr. Fergus. I will have Mr. Cooper respond.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank my colleague Ms. Blaney for bringing forward the amendment. I accept the amendment as a friendly amendment.

**The Chair:** That's perfect.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Ferguson:** Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion, as just amended by Ms. Blaney with the approval of my colleague, Mr. Cooper.

If I could backtrack for a moment, as Mr. Cooper correctly mentioned, this is the fourth time we've debated this motion. I remember when he submitted his motion and when he moved an amendment last week, during the parliamentary break that we spent in our respective constituencies.

I only have the English version of the motion in front of me, but let me read you the relevant excerpt:

[*English*]

invite Katie Telford, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, to appear alone for two hours by herself, within two weeks of the adoption of this motion, provided that she be sworn or affirmed;

● (1120)

[*Translation*]

Near the end of the same meeting, Mr. Cooper moved an amendment to his own motion, asking that Ms. Telford be invited to appear for four hours.

This morning, he tried to move the same amendment as he did last Thursday, before a meeting that seemed to drag on forever. Now, for the fourth time, he is trying to invite the Prime Minister's chief of staff to appear on her own, this time for three hours. I suppose that if today's debate is adjourned or if we don't pass the motion, Mr. Cooper will move another one. He left out one hour this time. Maybe his next motion will have the chief of staff appear for three and a half or five hours. He's going to keep playing games and ignoring the time-honoured traditions of our House of Commons.

According to the Standing Orders, when a motion has been debated and defeated, the same motion cannot be brought again. We can't do something indirectly that we can't do directly. I know that Mr. Cooper's first amendment to his motion was minimal, and he made it in a way that was acceptable or admissible.

But then he amended his motion a third time, and now a fourth. We have to wonder why Mr. Cooper is playing these political and procedural games and wasting our committee's time. We have to move on to serious issues to come up with serious solutions for Canadians.

Today, Mr. Cooper moved his motion, saying that the Prime Minister and his government took no action to address the situation. I find that pretty funny. Actually, I feel sorry for him. Yesterday, the Prime Minister gave a news conference in which he explained his response and outlined the steps the government was taking. Most importantly, he made sure that those efforts were depoliticized. After meeting for nearly 17 hours, the committee must do what it can to depoliticize the debate, because foreign interference is an issue that demands we, the members, put our best foot forward and set aside all partisanship in order to get to the bottom of this. After 17 hours, or nearly 20 if you count today's meeting, we are missing the opportunity to deal with the issue impartially, in the best interest of Canadians.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that we were here to discuss measures the government was taking to protect our democracy and institutions from foreign interference. He pointed out that Canadians had heard and read a lot in recent weeks about attempted foreign interference in our federal elections, mainly by the Chinese government. He, himself, acknowledged that a lot of people had asked questions about our democracy, our security agencies, our Parliament and even our sovereignty as a nation. I think those questions are what this is all about. They are fundamental questions that concern us all. The Prime Minister also explained that Canadians were paying attention to these questions because they understood that protecting our democracy was of the utmost importance.

I don't think anyone here disagrees with that—at least I hope not. I hope we can all agree on the importance of standing up for our principles, our sovereignty and our democratic process. I hope we can also agree that doing so is our greatest challenge as members.

● (1125)

It should never be turned into a political issue.

On Wednesday of last week, when Mr. Julian opposed Mr. Cooper's first motion, he issued a warning. He said that we should invite neither ministers' assistants nor members' assistants, nor the Prime Minister, citing a number of people of the same mind. Mr. Julian's message was straightforward and made a lot of sense. His point was that it wasn't appropriate, that it was a bad idea, to bring political staff before the committee. It is their bosses—ministers—who bear that responsibility.

This is what he said on the subject:

● (1130)

[*English*]

Around the issue of political staff, as opposed to having ministers being brought forward to testify, I support having ministers come forward to explain what they did and what they knew, and what actions they've taken to ensure that this never happens again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Julian was very clear on the matter. That responsibility falls on the people who are elected—those who were bold enough to put their names on the ballot, who went through the purifying fire that is an election and who, once elected, assume the risk and responsibility of answering to Canadians. That does not apply to their political staff; nor should it. Their job is to provide their bosses—the people who were elected—with options. The responsibility is on those elected individuals, because they have to defend the decisions they make. Ministerial responsibility and the responsibility of elected representatives is practically a sacred principle.

One of the people Mr. Julian cited was a former Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. I don't have the French version handy, so I'll read the quote in English.

[English]

There is a clear case to be made that the accountability of political staff ought to be satisfied through ministers. Ministers ran for office and accepted the role and responsibility of being a minister. Staff did not.

[Translation]

The person Mr. Julian was citing last Wednesday was Jay Hill, the former government leader in the House under Mr. Harper's government—a Conservative.

Mr. Julian quoted another Conservative member in the House of Commons, who made the following statement:

[English]

Mr. Speaker, we believe that cabinet ministers are responsible for what happens in their names and responsible to Parliament. This is called ministerial responsibility and it is one of the oldest traditions here in our country.

• (1135)

[Translation]

That Conservative member also had this to say:

[English]

The Liberal leader wants to do away with this tradition. Instead, he wants to import a foreign U.S. committee system that is used as a political weapon to bully, to intimidate, and to humiliate opponents, something that I believe should never happen.

[Translation]

The Conservative member went on to say this:

[English]

Ministerial accountability is the reason why cabinet ministers answer questions in question period and it is why they appear before committees to answer for their offices.

We hope that all opposition committee chairs will follow the rules and procedures....

[Translation]

It's not about you, Madam Chair, but it is very important that I repeat the last part of the quote:

[English]

We hope that all opposition committee chairs will follow the rules and procedures....

[Translation]

The person who said that is one of our fellow members in the House, the member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie. He is currently the deputy whip of His Majesty's official opposition. He was underscoring the importance of not making political staff appear before committees and of upholding the tradition and principle that ministers answer for their offices.

Last week, Mr. Julian continued citing individuals with similar views on the issue of inviting a cabinet member's chief of staff to appear. He quoted a statement that is very germane to this discussion, the same one the committee has had four times over the course of 20 hours of meetings.

The person he quoted had this to say:

[English]

The hon. member knows very well that for hundreds of years, the principle of ministerial accountability has been paramount here in the House and in its committees.

[Translation]

Do you know who Mr. Julian was quoting, Madam Chair? He was quoting the current member for Carleton, the now leader of the official opposition. Imagine that. The leader of the official opposition was referring to a centuries-old parliamentary tradition, a Westminster tradition—a fine tradition that, over the years and through trial and error, has helped us strike the right balance.

I know that we are all willing to make mistakes. I have always told my political staff that I am all right with making mistakes, because I am always open to trying something new, even if it doesn't work out, which happens from time to time. The only thing I ask of my team, and of myself, is to make sure that, when we make mistakes, they are new. There is no reason to keep making the same mistakes. There is no reason to have the same discussion four times. Three is enough.

• (1140)

[English]

Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.

[Translation]

This is the same thing. We are doing the same thing for the fourth time. Yes, the duration of the chief of staff's appearance has changed, from two hours to four hours, and now it's three hours. Thursday, it could be six hours or even an hour and a half.

If the honourable member for St. Albert—Edmonton insists on moving the same motion, of course, I'm going to advance the same arguments, because they are the right arguments, rooted in the best parts of our Westminster parliamentary tradition—and that tradition demands respect.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I have the utmost respect for the honourable member, but there's something I don't quite understand. I know members can take all the time they need to make their point as long as they stay on topic. We can see the member's binders on the table. I'd like to know, though, whether there is a rule preventing a member from repeating themselves when they have said the same thing three times.

Other members have things to say. Perhaps the member could cover just the table of contents, instead of the whole binder.

[English]

**The Chair:** As long as it's relevant to the matter being discussed, it would be suitable.

It would be good to not have repetition. Something I noticed in this committee and in other places is that when the same thing is said over and over again, it oftentimes doesn't become more true.

I will give the floor back to Mr. Ferguson.

The clerk is just going to check the Standing Orders to see if there is a spot, because I do think it's relevant.

Do you have a point of order, Mr. Turnbull?

• (1145)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Yes. I was just going to clarify that the deliberations and reflections that Mr. Fergus is relaying to the committee are really insightful and important to hear.

From my sense of it—and you started out by saying this, Mr. Fergus—it seems that we are replaying the same motion over and over again. Can it really be said by any member that the remarks we are making wouldn't also be just as legitimate to repeat?

Mind you, obviously there are differences in the things that Mr. Fergus is saying, but if the motion is able to be repeated over and over again with very subtle changes, are our remarks not able to be heard in the same way?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Mrs. Sahota, do you have a point of order as well?

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Well, I think Mr. Turnbull has made the point perfectly. The motions are very subtly different and the remarks are subtly different as well, so I don't see how they can be ruled as repetition or out of order in any way.

**The Chair:** I'm going to try to keep us moving to see if we can land. There have been times when, as a person who is interested, I do listen for a long time.

I have a speaking list. I think it is important to hear from members, so, Mr. Fergus, I will go back to you.

I do believe—although perhaps with the debate, I'll be able to feel otherwise—that we actually have addressed these matters, but at the same time, I want to understand where members are at. With that, I will just say let's stay relevant and let's try to get ourselves to a good spot.

I'll return the floor to Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I certainly made sure not to repeat myself during my remarks.

I started by criticizing the fact that this was the fourth time the committee was having essentially the same discussion. Mr. Cooper's motion is on the borderline of being procedurally acceptable for debate.

I highlighted certain principles.

Then, I mentioned the actions that had been taken, disproving the member's claim. I placed a proverbial asterisk there, in order to review the actions the Prime Minister and his government have taken in response to the legitimate concerns Canadians have about political interference.

After that, I went right into the substance of Mr. Cooper's motion, referring to the tradition of inviting the responsible ministers and not bringing the assistants who work for them before committees. To support my argument, I quoted political figures that Mr. Julian had cited last week. I could have cited Liberal members, people in my own party, but I opted to quote an NDP member and a Conservative member instead. I will definitely try to quote a Bloc

Québécois member, if I can, to illustrate the fact that the motion stretches the limits of reason and is out of step with the fine traditions of our Parliament.

I did all of that, but I did not repeat myself.

However, I would like to continue talking about actions. If you agree with my point about the tradition of ministerial responsibility, let's talk about the actions taken by the Prime Minister yesterday. In an effort to reassure Canadians, he announced three specific measures.

First, he said that he was going to appoint an independent special rapporteur, who would have a broad mandate to make expert recommendations aimed at combatting foreign interference and strengthening our democracy.

• (1150)

What he did was incredibly significant. In his remarks yesterday, he provided an overview of the measures the government had taken to continue protecting our democracy and institutions.

As you know, foreign interference is not new. It's been around for years—decades even—in many forms. However, it was actually Mr. Trudeau's government who really took the bull by the horns, after the 2015 election and everything we saw occur south of the border following the 2016 election there. Everyone was talking about what Russia was doing and the disinformation and misinformation campaign it was waging.

The reason it was so important to discuss what was happening and do something about it right away was that we had never in our history been faced with such a present danger to not only Canada's democracy, but also democracies around the world. Many state actors and non-state actors with ties to those states are trying to create a climate of instability and contempt, a climate where people no longer have confidence in their institutions and feel as though those institutions are no longer capable of doing what they are supposed to and governing. The idea is to incite contempt among people.

I'm going to digress momentarily, if I may. I had the honour and pleasure of working for a former Quebec member and minister, Pierre Pettigrew. Not only is he someone who gets things done, but he is also someone who is all about ideas. He wrote a book, and I forget the title in French. As a middle-aged man, I have moments of forgetfulness from time to time.

• (1155)

[*English*]

However, in English, it was *The New Politics of Confidence*.

[*Translation*]

The book's underlying message is that people need to have a very high level of confidence in one another in order for democracy to work. The sole objective of countries and actors looking to destabilize democracy is to sow doubt, to sow contempt among people—contempt for one another and for the government.

It is indeed true that democracy relies heavily on confidence. I remember telling my children once that, if less than 10% of the people in a city disregarded traffic lights and stop signs, that's all it would take to stir up trouble and ill-feeling. Our safety depends on the vast majority of people following the rules. When I am about to cross the street, I assume that drivers are going to stop when the light turns red and I will be able to cross safely.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I would like the honourable member to explain the connection between the topic in hand and road signals. That would help me understand why he isn't comfortable addressing the subamendment before the committee. That's what I need to understand.

Again, it's fine to digress every now and again, but it should be brief.

I'd like to know whether the committee can adopt a rule to ensure that every member has an opportunity to speak before the meeting is scheduled to end, at one o'clock.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I will just remind all members that it's important that we stay relevant. I do believe Mr. Fergus will be wrapping up at some point.

Madame Gaudreau has asked a question of Mr. Fergus. Mr. Fergus, I will also just share that I do have other people on the speaking list, and perhaps you can take another opportunity to speak later, if there is still debate to be had.

Mind you, the last points that you made in regard to your children and so forth actually are relevant to me. These are like some of the conversations we've also had as to what you do and not do. I think when it comes to interference infiltrating our elections and so forth, it is a heavy topic. It does involve a lot of different factors, and I do think we're having a very serious conversation.

I'm not sensing that Mr. Fergus is not being sincere, so if there are other concerns people want to raise, I welcome them, but based on what I'm hearing—and I am listening—I do feel that he is raising his concerns and I do believe that this is the time to do that.

The agenda we had today was on redistribution. We had members coming from Alberta and from Quebec who are concerned about their ridings, but they are not with us today because opposition members wanted to have a Standing Order 106(4) emergency meeting on this—Madame Gaudreau, you were part of the signatories—and I think it's important that if we change the agenda because it's such an important topic, then members should be given the time to talk on it, because it is obviously important.

With that, I thank you.

Mr. Fergus, I'm sure you've heard my reminders within my comments. I will pass the floor back to you.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Chair, allow me to explain to the honourable member the reason I brought that up.

The use of exaggeration is an old political strategy in debate. I was talking about confidence and countries whose aim is to undermine Canadians' confidence in their elections and democratic institutions. That's the connection I was trying to make.

I see the honourable member nodding, so her understanding is greatly appreciated.

That's the end of my digression on the issue of confidence.

I was referring to that because the Prime Minister said yesterday that he was aware of the situation. As confirmed last week in an independent report, the Chinese government and regimes such as Iran and Russia have attempted to interfere not only in Canada's democracy, but also in other spheres of Canadian life, from our institutions and businesses to our research labs and even the day-to-day lives of Canadians. That is why I digressed in the first place.

As I've said, this isn't a new issue. It was around before this government's election in 2015. However, no other government had put any mechanisms in place specifically to counter this threat. We created the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, which gave members, themselves, access to unredacted information in real time on matters of national security, as is the case in other countries.

In addition, during the 2019 and 2021 elections, we established a non-partisan task force made up of senior officials, responsible for examining all the foreign interference attempts and reporting to Canadians on the integrity of our elections. The task force determined that the interference attempts had not affected the election results.

Be that as it may, the important thing is that we established those bodies. The task force is part of a mechanism, a protocol we created in 2019 to bring independent experts and senior officials together to communicate with Canadians at election time, in a clear and impartial way, in the event of an incident that threatened the integrity of the election.

• (1205)

Madam Chair, I see that other members would like the floor in order to participate in the debate, as you mentioned. I'm prepared to yield the floor, but I do want to point out that I haven't said everything I was going to say. My opposition to the member for St. Albert—Edmonton's fourth attempt at this motion is for good reason, so it is highly likely that I will have more to say in the course of this debate. For the moment, though, I will yield the floor to others so they can contribute as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

You just said that you would have more to say later. Would you like me to add your name to the list now, or will you let me know later when you would like to speak?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** You can add me to the list now, Madam Chair. If I would like to respond to other members' comments, I will refrain so as not to repeat myself.

**The Chair:** All right.

Just so everyone is aware, here's who I have on the list: Ms. O'Connell, Ms. Blaney, Ms. Gaudreau, Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Fergus.

[*English*]

I will just say that I've asked the clerk to find a relevant standing order, as you requested. There are comments in regard to repetition and relevance and so forth, but you had asked for a specific standing order, so the clerk is searching for one for you, and I will then share it with you at that time.

Ms. O'Connell is next.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do have a comment on this and I want to make that very clear, but before I get to these comments, I have some technical questions about the procedure that just happened.

In regard to the original motion tabled by Mr. Cooper and then the amendments that were accepted as friendly amendments, in my experience, some will argue that friendly amendments are allowed. I have seen an amendment changing “four hours” to “two hours” in the committee, but I have never seen a friendly amendment that is this substantive accepted without a vote. There is no such thing as that.

First of all, Madam Chair, I'd like to see what we are actually debating, because you can't argue relevance to a motion if we don't know what we're actually speaking to. Are we on the main motion or the amendment? Will the amendment have a vote? You can't accept that amendment as friendly. It needs to have unanimous consent, which you do not have.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Wait. Hold on. Every person gets the floor. We don't need to provide commentary. We've demonstrated we can function.

Ms. O'Connell, I asked if the words “friendly amendment” are in that book, and the clerk quickly said no. I'm just going to have a quick conversation with the clerk and I'm going to return to all of

you, so perhaps take a moment to stretch and take a breath. I'll be right back.

I'm going to come back.

Thank you, Ms. O'Connell, for the points you've raised. I'm just going to make sure we have the attention of all members.

You've raised a lot of valid points in regard to objections. What would usually happen is there would be a motion, a friendly amendment, as there was. Once it was raised, because Mr. Cooper did accept it, members could then object, but I also know that members do recognize how I run a meeting, and so most members do tend to wait for their time on the floor.

There are multiple ways we can deal with this. First of all, we could suspend and have some of those fruitful conversations we have and see if there's a way forward. We could also ask for unanimous consent. If it's not there, Mrs. Blaney could move an amendment to the motion, and that would follow more of the rules and the book.

I'm going to go to Mrs. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I'm happy to move that amendment. I would love to see a vote on that.

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Let's go to a vote.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Madam Chair—

**The Chair:** This is good, because I actually had asked for clarification myself, and there was some conversation.

What we will do is the debate will continue. I do feel like Mr. Fergus was dealing with it as an amendment too. I know that Madame Gaudreau had mentioned a subamendment, so I think we're maybe more or less all on the same page.

We are going to continue the debate on the amendment.

Ms. O'Connell, you have the floor.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's important, because there are points of order being thrown out about what to speak to when the members opposite didn't even actually know what we were talking about procedurally. As much as I appreciate the friendliness, that's not how Parliament works and that's certainly not how committee works. Some of the others may want to open those books from time to time.

Madam Chair, now that we are clear on what we've actually speaking on, I'd like to speak about a few of the points and where we're at. It is like *Groundhog Day*. We have dealt with this, as Mr. Cooper himself has said, four times.

With that said, one of the things that is being talked about time and time again as we're trying to deal with the very serious issue of foreign interference in our democratic institutions, and what keeps getting thrown out is.... Yesterday we saw that the Prime Minister was again addressing it and taking further steps, and the Conservatives continuously referred to it as a "secret committee with secret evidence" redacted by the PMO. Once again, just like their approach to procedure in this committee, the Conservatives speak to things they know nothing about. They keep referring to NSICOP as the secret committee, yet they have their own members sitting on it. They talk about evidence in NSICOP, yet none of them served on that committee and know anything about the quality of evidence that is there.

● (1215)

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** We can't talk about that.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** None of them sat on NSICOP and understand how redactions work, yet they speak about that with certainty.

I, on the other hand, sat on NSICOP. I had my security clearance. I respect the work that committee does. I understand how redactions work. I understand the severity of national security. That's what our government understands.

While Conservatives want to make political attacks and speak about secret evidence and secret committees, they are treating Canadians as if they don't understand the significance of and the seriousness with which national security is guarded in the way that it is in this country and why creating committees of parliamentarians, through which they can actually access this information in a way that is done securely, matters. Conservatives may not care why that matters. Canadians do.

We had significant debate about the creation of NSICOP. Our Five Eyes partners have similar versions, through which parliamentarians or elected officials can access this information but in a way that is done securely.

Something I would always hear during my council days was that Conservatives don't want to be confused with the truth. And the truth is that you have to handle national security with the security that it deserves. Conservatives are playing partisan games with it time and time again, and for what? Because they want to bring some staffers in here? For what? What's the end goal? To make national security or our democratic institutions stronger? Why?

They don't seem to care about how secure documents are being handled. They don't care to know the precautions that are taken through NSICOP. They don't care to know that NSICOP is actually well regarded by international partners and that actually their reports have received accolades from around the world.

They don't care that there are recommendations tabled on a regular basis. And they certainly don't care that it was NSICOP's 2019 report tabled in the House of Commons that actually raised foreign interference and the seriousness of it years ago. It seems the Conservatives never bothered to read those reports. If they close their eyes and cover their ears, then they think it doesn't exist.

But the fact is that the members on NSICOP do an incredible amount of work. The secretariat is incredibly professional and non-partisan. You have representatives from all parties and from the Senate.

Because of my experience on NSICOP, I take very personally the suggestion that it's some secret committee controlled by the PMO. That's absolutely ridiculous, and it is insulting to the hours' and hours' worth of work that committee and that secretariat do.

They do so in a way that is so professional, to provide the information so the committee can make legitimate reports and recommendations to make our institutions better. They do so with Canadians in mind to ensure the safety and security of our national security officials, the information we have or the information and partnerships we have with our Five Eyes partners and our national security partners around the world.

So I take great offence to the Conservatives playing Spy Kids over there on things they know absolutely nothing about. They do not take the security of what this government does seriously. And I hear them chattering that this is why they need an inquiry.

I urge you to ask your leader. Sit on NSICOP. If you're so concerned about national security, do it in the right way. Madam Chair, they should do it in the right way. They should get their national security clearance, serve on this committee, see the evidence, make the recommendations and spend the hours and hours in a secure room reading documents. If they sat in those secure rooms reading documents for the number of hours that these members do, they would learn a thing or two.

● (1220)

If they had picked up that 2019 annual report that was tabled in the House of Commons, even with the redactions, they would have learned about foreign interference two years ago. They would have been able to track and see the recommendations from NSICOP. They could have seen the work that was being done. They could have talked about the SITE committee. They could have talked about the critical election task force, but they didn't. They scroll through Twitter feeds waiting for a partisan opportunity, but the opportunities for this have been here for over seven years.

I take great offence to Conservatives' all of a sudden waking up to the seriousness of national security under the guise that they are the serious stewards, and they are the ones who want to make sure that Canadians know what's happening, but Canadians see through this. Canadians see how reckless and irresponsible Conservatives continue to be. Conservatives don't care that there is a reason all of this information cannot be public. It has nothing to do with the Prime Minister. It has nothing to do with PMO.

Madam Chair, it has to do with the fact that this is Canada's most sensitive top secret information about adversaries trying to undermine our democracy. Conservatives want this information, but so does Beijing. Conservatives don't seem to care that that's a problem. Conservatives don't seem to care about the division that they're trying to sow in making Canadians think that our elections are not secure. They don't seem to think that's exactly what China would want. That's exactly what Russia would want. You don't have to believe me. That's what witness testimony concluded.

I've said it before, and I will say it again: this undermining of our elections is an import from the south. The Conservatives are trying to emulate this Trump style of politics, saying that it's not them. It's not their bad policies that Canadians rejected; it must have been somebody else's. Well, our institutions do need protecting, but what we need protecting from is foreign interference, absolutely. What we need is for Conservative members and parliamentarians to grow up and take this stuff seriously, to be mature about an issue this serious and come to the table with solutions.

I've said it before, and I will say it again. Why are we not having witnesses from New Zealand, Australia and the U.K.? Estonia had massive interference from Russia, and France.... I can go on and on. The U.S. 2016 presidential election faced these issues. Instead, we've had four times talking about trying to bring in a chief of staff instead of bringing in witnesses to say that their country is experiencing these issues. It is ever-changing. It is fast-paced. It's easier for other countries to try to sow division and fear.

How are they doing it in these other countries? What are they putting in place that Canada isn't? What have they seen that's working that we should emulate?

No. Instead, we're going to get into more of bringing in this staffer or that staffer about what happened years ago instead of how we are moving forward to strengthen our democratic institutions. Canadians are going to see through this. The Conservatives have tried this game before, and it did not work for them. They are going to repeat their same mistakes. That's on them.

If Conservatives, again, truly cared about foreign interference and protecting our democratic institutions.... Again, you don't have to believe me. I'm partisan, no question. What about their own leader who was the Minister of Democratic Institutions and did absolutely nothing on this? Maybe we should bring him in. Maybe we should have asked the Conservatives about all the things that they did for 10 years to strengthen our democratic institutions. Crickets. You will hear crickets.

● (1225)

If we want to be serious and if we want Canadians to see that we can put partisan politics aside to do right by them, to ensure that our democratic institutions are protected into the future, then let's use this opportunity in a public forum to bring in witnesses, to bring in officials, to bring in that experience to make recommendations to the government.

At the same time, allow NSICOP to do the work in a secure manner, which again I point out they already had, and brought forward these things. It seems that members of the Conservative Party never bothered to read it. Now that they're paying attention, let's have

them do that work again. I have a lot of trust in the secretariat. They're incredibly professional. They're extremely well regarded around the world. I think even our intelligence community respects the work that NSICOP does and trusts that the information can be handled securely.

What I do fear in this country is that, if national security is played with in a partisan way, the national security community will become fearful to release information, will become fearful that it is going to be played with, that lives will be at risk, that our Five Eyes partners will say that Canada is a joke on national security and that they can't share information with Canada because parties want unredacted versions and open sessions.

Then who suffers? It's Canadians. Our security gets weaker, our reputation gets weaker, our institutions don't get stronger. Russia is cheering. China is cheering. Other adversaries are cheering. Then what happens? Conservatives put out a tweet.

Are we really willing to risk the grand issues at stake here when we have the ability for NSICOP, as I said, to do their work in a way that is well respected and secure, where the information is handled with extreme caution and care, but it is provided. NSICOP is incredibly professional. They have representatives from every party, the Senate, so it is not a partisan thing. They have a very clear and separate mandate—I'm not sure if anyone's read that—about how the recommendations are handled in that process, because it is not controlled by the PM or the PMO. That was built into legislation.

You can do that work, have a special rapporteur who will also look at it. NSIRA can also be involved.

I was in the House last night when the Prime Minister was making his announcement of these new measures, and the Conservatives came running in, papers going...talking about how this is ridiculous, that they don't even know what a rapporteur is.

Well, Madam Chair, I think it's absolutely crazy, because the Conservatives didn't know what a rapporteur was. They said it was too fancy, this fancy word, and that was somehow why it was a bad idea.

The point is, you can say "special" seven more times, but it doesn't make you look smarter.

Madam Chair—

**Mr. John Nater:** No, I just want to know what it is.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Madam Chair, the point is that there are opportunities here through NSICOP to handle these documents with care and to get that report. There's a special rapporteur who will ensure that NSICOP and NSIRA have the information and can make the recommendations. At the same time—don't worry, I'm not forgetting about the importance of this committee—there is a lot of work that this committee can actually do to make our institutions stronger and inform Canadians about the seriousness of foreign interference.

We can learn a lot from allies who have been experiencing this for years. We can be hearing that testimony. We can be learning about what works, what hasn't worked, how the threat is changing and who some of these bad actors are. We could actually be putting forward recommendations to the government from this committee.

We can take the work of this committee, and the work of NSIRA, NSICOP and the special rapporteur and make a fulsome document that the government can consider. It will have all parties' ideas and viewpoints represented. It will take the care and caution with sensitive national security information that Canadians expect a mature and responsible government to take.

Or, Madam Chair, we can go down the road of silly games and a kangaroo court, playing partisan politics with one of the most serious things that any government should be worried about and thinking about and taking precautions on. Whenever the next election is, I think Canadians are going to see that it's not leadership when you're willing to throw every principle and value you can have as a country out the window because it's....

You get some giggles over on the other side because they're having some fun over there. They think this is going to be something to talk about, but they are once again providing no solutions. I think Canadians are going to see through this. I know that Canadians are smart enough to know that playing games with national security only weakens our country. Playing partisan politics with national security, with the independence of our elections—just turn on the news to the south to see the division that's causing.

I'm willing to bet that Canadians do not support the division of questioning elections without significant evidence and the idea of rationalizing a loss and trying to suggest that the elections were not held by Canadians, or that the decisions were not upheld by Canadians, when we have heard time and time again from non-partisan experts that it was Canadians who decided the outcome of elections. Time and time again, it was determined that they were free and fair.

If Conservative members want to keep playing games and create division and confusion instead of solutions and strengthening our institutions, then I don't think Canadians are going to see that there's a responsible, mature alternative. I think it's really sad for our democracy that we would actually run the risk of going down the path of democracies around the world that have fallen into this trap.

I think PROC has a very real and unique opportunity here. There are other things on the PROC agenda that I know are important to many members and should also be handled, but I do think we can walk and chew gum at the same time. I think even on this study

there is a lot of meat on this bone that this committee can deal with, but by calling in staff and trying to create a political circus instead of trying to actually contribute to the conversation on how we make our institutions stronger and how we ensure that although our elections were free and fair, they continue to be....

• (1230)

Madam Chair, I think there's a lot we can do. I think there are a lot of recommendations we can take. But if the Conservatives want to continue to play this game.... They've done it before. Before the last election, the Conservative one who was....

I always lose track of which leader they were on.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, a point of order.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. O'Connell; one second.

You have a point of order, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to make it clear that you do not have the implied consent of the official opposition to adjourn at one o'clock.

• (1235)

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, I will state that it's one thing during constituency weeks. We will know what resources are available and so forth, and we will follow the process. I do appreciate your assistance in my chair duties at all times. I thank you for that.

Go ahead, Ms. O'Connell.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

What I was saying is that I always forget which leader they were on—there were so many.

In the last attempt to play games with foreign interference, the Conservatives, under Mr. O'Toole, decided that their solution would be to take their toys and go home. Instead of having more information, they pulled their members off NSICOP. How did that work out for them? Did Canadians view them as noble, value-based members? No. They saw it for what it was: a cheap trick because they didn't get what they wanted, because they couldn't use national security as a partisan weapon in an election.

Then the next leader comes in and puts the members back on. That would be the mature thing to do. Well, now the lack of respect for and knowledge of the incredibly hard work that NSICOP does—incredibly hard—is very clear.

You should read some of the accolades, Madam Chair. I would encourage all members of this committee to actually read some of the accolades that NSICOP has received from around the world on its work and on its reports.

We've heard from officials here time and time again that it's always a tough balance between what you share with Canadians—because you do want that transparency and want people to know so they can be on the lookout for the issues and be aware of what's going on in the world—and protecting national security, whether it's our personnel in the field doing this work or whether it's protecting those relationships we have with our allies. All of that is incredibly important. That is why that balance is sometimes hard to strike, I'll be honest.

It would be wonderful if we could just share everything and know that it's not going to fall into the wrong hands. As mature parliamentarians and as any responsible government would say, we have to make decisions that are going to be right for Canadians but also ensure that those consequences don't do a greater harm. That's what is on the line when it comes to the care of national security documents.

When Conservatives put their members back on NSICOP, it was an acknowledgement that this committee does important work. Now they won't even say the name NSICOP. They don't refer to it. They refer to it as “a secret committee...with secret evidence...controlled by the Prime Minister.” How scary sounding when, in fact, it is an incredibly professional committee that works well beyond partisan lines. I'm willing to bet that if they spoke to their own members on this committee, they would say how hard the committee works and how non-partisan it is.

But, you know, again, don't be confused by the facts. That's the mantra that I'm seeing with the Conservative Party these days.

We can keep coming back, as my colleague Mr. Fergus pointed out, four times and probably more to debate the same motion, to spend committee time debating the same motion, or we could actually get to work, come together and acknowledge that we have work to do to continue to strengthen our institutions.

We have a lot of professionals within the Canadian public service. Academia would be incredibly helpful. We've had witnesses from all walks of life. Again, I think there are more opportunities for additional witnesses, and there are more opportunities for this work. We could actually come together to determine what some of the objectives are that we want to see here.

We've heard about a foreign registry. I would love to have more conversations about how that looks. The Prime Minister has indicated that it is something he is tasking ministers to look at.

• (1240)

We could provide insight. All members of this committee could provide some insight into that work. Instead, we're going to keep having 106(4)s. We're going to keep having the same debate on the same motion.

What's it for? It's because Conservatives want to bring staff in. They think it will be some winnable moment for them. Maybe there will be a partisan hit.

Madam Chair, through you, maybe the Conservatives will land a punch. I don't know. Does that help Canadians in the long run? Does it strengthen our institutions?

The Conservatives will get a tweet, a photo or a headline they like. Maybe. Does it make our democratic institutions stronger? Does it make the next election stronger? Does it ward off foreign interference? Does it keep Beijing at bay? Does it stop Russia from trying again? No, absolutely not.

You can sell your morals and values to play a game. Listen, I'm the first to get up in the House and take a partisan swipe. I have no problem.

There are certain things that I think.... If you really care about this job and our democratic institutions, there should be some red lines. I think sharing our national security information in the public realm should be a red line that we all agree to.

If you think that dragging staffers in for a day of headlines or a few good tweets at the expense of a meeting in which we could actually do work to make sure that future elections are protected.... If members think that's valuable, and that's what their constituents sent them here to do, that's between them and their constituents.

I would like to be able to look at myself in the mirror, go to my constituents and say that I want to do this work, but I'm going to do so in a way that I think is going to be optimal to make this situation better. That's how serious national security is. That's how serious it is when Canadians no longer determine elections.

Conservative members, get your tweets. Get your headlines. If they don't make our institutions stronger, what have you actually done for Canada?

Will this testimony make our institutions stronger? Will it protect the next election? Will putting unredacted national security secrets in an open forum, because some members are curious about what they say, instead of being able to read them in a very secure manner...? It's not that members don't have access. It's that it's done in a secure manner.

They're trying to make that information public. Would members opposite be comfortable if an agent in the field or someone collected that information and that was eventually used to harm someone serving our country? You got a tweet out of it. Maybe the Toronto Sun wrote a nice column about you. That would be cool.

If our national security community could no longer collect information because our allies didn't feel comfortable sharing it and, therefore, we became a little less safe...? However, some members got to giggle in this committee. Some members got to tweet in this committee.

Is that a trade-off that Conservatives are willing to make? I'm certainly not.

We have a choice. Be serious. Let's continue our meetings on foreign interference. Let's continue to bring in experts and talk about very real ways that we can deal with the next elections, such as how to make SITE better, how to make the critical election protocol better and how to learn from other jurisdictions that are going through this.

Or, we can keep debating the same amendment, the same motion, go down that road and achieve nothing of substance.

• (1245)

Then Canadians can judge who the leaders are and who is going to take their safety and security seriously. How will our Canadian Armed Forces and our intelligence community view how members act with their lives on the line? We're sitting in here in a cushy committee room while there are people out doing the very real work for which irresponsible motions have consequences.

I'm not prepared to throw the national security, Canada's reputation and the safety of those who actually serve this community and do this work out the window because Conservatives want to play games and take very anti-partisan shots at the very real work we are going to do and can do.

Madam Chair, I've said it before but I'm just going to conclude on this point. We have an opportunity to do very real work in this committee in conjunction with the very real work that NSICOP, NSIRA and a special rapporteur can do to provide recommendations and a report in such a way that the information is handled in a secure manner, is classified and takes our safety and security seriously, something that a mature and responsible government would do, something we can all work together on to provide a report. Then Canadians can determine if it's enough, if it's being taken seriously enough, and that is all fair game, or we can continue on for however many meetings as we've done now. We can continue on the road of playing partisan games with no real solutions coming forward and using committee time for headlines and for tweets and really offer no solutions.

Madam Chair, I would like to get to work on this. I would like this committee to provide very real recommendations and I would be very willing to keep that study going, to hear that witness testimony, to actually write a report, to hear all perspectives from all members of this committee and to do the work that Canadians expect us to do in a mature, responsible manner.

As long as motions keep coming forward, which I don't think build toward actually making our next election more secure, to actually hold off foreign interference, then I'm inclined not to support them. If a motion comes forward that will actually produce recommendations and results that will help us move in that forum, then I'm happy to consider it and I'm happy to advocate that we actually come forward with a very real report with recommendations that might be tough for any government to have to implement, but at least we're doing that work.

As long as we're going to play partisan games with national security, I'm going to fight really hard to make sure that mature, responsible and reasonable decisions are made instead of reckless, irresponsible, partisan games with something that is so incredibly important and has such serious consequences if handled incorrectly.

I'll leave it there, Madam Chair, and depending on the rest of the debate, I may add my name again, but I'll let you know.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that clarification.

Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Chair.

I thank everybody for this very interesting conversation.

I just have a few things that I feel are really important to say.

First of all, I will say that it has—and I talked about this earlier—been my practice and that of the NDP not to support bringing staff. I appreciate Mr. Fergus' quoting the amazing MP, Peter Julian, and the work he did in this committee and the things he said. That is largely the position the NDP takes. People are elected, they make decisions, staff implement those decisions.

However, we cannot pretend that those statements that Mr. Julian said happened, and then the next day be opening the papers with more leaks coming out of CSIS. I just feel frustrated right now.

Our leader was very clear. He said we should have a public inquiry. This place and this committee have supported the NDP motion to have a public inquiry, and it will be tabled in the House very soon, I'm sure. That is a transparent process.

Canadians are now worried. I'm not doing this because I like to tweet and get a good headline. I will take the punches. I have been in this room and I've said, "No, I will not support having documents looked at that way," because I care about national security and because I represent a base in my community, 19 Wing, where people are called on to serve this country. I take that very seriously because their lives are literally on the line when we ask them to do that. I don't want information coming out in a way that is going to jeopardize Canadians or the people who serve this country. That matters to me.

I don't want an immature process, but I also cannot take away the reality of how many leaks have been coming out that have said things directly related to a person we have named in this motion.

Until there's a transparent process through a public inquiry where there can be processes put in place to make sure that all of our security is addressed, and that we're not leaking information out that is going to be harmful to the people who serve our country, I just don't see how we can do anything but go through this process in PROC.

It's really unfortunate that we're here. We've been very clear about what we want to see, but those things are not happening. The Prime Minister had an opportunity yesterday to have that be a part of the announcement. He chose not to, so here we are today having this discussion.

The other reality for me is that Canadians care about this. Canadians are emailing my office. They are worried that our systems are not strong enough, that our institutions are not strong enough. You know what? I agree. I agree that the Conservatives often use information in a way that I would not use it. There are a lot of political points they're trying to make that are very harmful, and I will say this publicly—and I just have—that they can use it in whatever way they want. They do that.

The other part is that this government left a void. If you've got people concerned and you've got people bringing up information in a way that is not appropriate, then it's not really on the government to create a response that is meaningful, because the more fear we have in our communities, in our institutions—and I've said this throughout this whole study.... How many times in this study have I prefaced everything I said by, "How do we make sure that Canadians have faith in our institutions?" Everything that we do around this table should be around this.

This has become partisan. It's a committee. There are different parties that are represented here and we're all going to have our partisan perspective, which is exactly why our leader said to take this out of that partisan realm and put this in a public inquiry so that there will be an accountability measure for Canadians. That is why this is so important.

I appreciate and I deeply respect the work of NSICOP. I absolutely do. They do important work and I appreciate it.

The problem is, at this point, so much misinformation and so many leaks have come out that Canadians don't have security. If we have NSICOP do the work, it will not be public enough. I'm not talking about the details behind it; I'm talking about the process where the public is included in the system. This is where we're at.

I will fight every single time to make sure that we don't have documents used in a way that could be harmful to the people of this country. The fact is, when the Conservatives put forward things around the legal clerk or the law clerk, they do not have specific training in national security.

• (1250)

We cannot allow information to be out there in that way. We have to make sure that we're protecting our institutions, Canadians and our elections.

However, today the motion that we're talking about does not have anything about documents. It's about how we figure out what was happening at a time, how we address the issue that this information is being leaked repeatedly and to whom it is being leaked, these journalists with certain ethics and requirements. So we have to trust that when they're saying this is happening, there's something behind it that we have to look into.

Speculation creates fear and that's what we're seeing. We're seeing more and more fear. I'm hearing about it in my riding. People are talking to me about it as I'm out doing the things that I do to spend time with my constituents. That means that we need to have something, and that's why the NDP brought forward the idea of a public inquiry. That's why we fought so hard in this place to make

sure that we had a motion that said so, and that's why our leader called for it.

So I agree. We need to depoliticize this situation. I think my friend Mr. Fergus talked about that. I agree that in this room it is getting really politicized. So again, let's see the Prime Minister step up and not just make the announcement that he made, but actually see that investment in a public inquiry so that we have something to hold on to.

You know, every opposition party yesterday called for a public inquiry, so let's see what we can do to make that happen.

This was not easy for me. I struggled with this as I struggle with everything. As an elected official, I believe fundamentally that if you are not struggling most of the time, you're not doing your job well. When we have hard situations we have to think about them. We have to ponder them and have to consider the implications of every decision we make, not only for our careers, but most importantly for the lives of Canadians.

So I think this is quite frustrating to be here. I know that we're getting close to one o'clock. I don't know if we're going to continue. I do want to say to the committee that I'm not interested in seeing other committees shut down. So that's just some food for thought. Our work is really important here, but I don't think any committee's work is less important and we need to be mindful of that. Maybe the clerk could let us know, if we were to extend, how many other committees would be cancelled. I guess the other thing is that I see in our meeting notice for Thursday that this will be the issue that we'll be talking about again. So I would just like that confirmed, that one Thursday we will continue on this.

I also want to just speak to the fact that we do have important work to be doing in this committee. We're talking about the election boundaries for future federal elections. We have people who want to talk about the concerns they have about the ridings they represent or ridings they feel connected to. We need to be doing that work. So I hope we can get through this part to the next step.

I am not trying to make a big play. I think everybody at this table knows that I am not a person who comes here to play partisan politics, Superman-like. We definitely all have people like that. I am not that person. I want a reasonable solution to a very complex and hard question and issue and situation. I also want there to be some sort of transparency so that Canadians can be assured. They need to know that their institutions work for them. They need to know that when there are comments about the institutions not working for them, we will make sure that they do work for them. We all know that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that misinformation being used by foreign entities that want to undermine our democratic ability to govern ourselves and to break down fundamentally the well-being and connection of our communities is happening. We've heard of it many times where false groups are made up on different forms of social media. They engage people who have particular fears. They ramp up those fears and then bad things happen in the community as a result of that.

We need to take this seriously because if we have people coming into our communities and talking to folks and making them more afraid so that they don't participate in our democratic situation...which is why I will also remind this table that I brought up again and again that we want to make sure that rural and remote communities have access to good information. We know that papers, local papers, are struggling profoundly across this country and they provide good information, as opposed to just social media posts with unknown sources.

We know that ethnic communities are targeted. We know that indigenous communities are targeted. We need to make sure that those issues are dealt with. I stood in the House and asked for unanimous consent to get that happening. I didn't get that unanimous consent. I'm hoping in this committee we can be talking about that.

• (1255)

These things all matter. It is our democracy, and our democracy is reflective of how our communities are doing. If our communities are being ripped apart by false information, by foreign interference, we have an obligation as members of Parliament to take that seriously. Unfortunately, we're put in a situation where there are so many leaks that we have to do something.

I don't want to be here. I don't want to be bringing staff in. But we must take action. We cannot sit here and not take action, when Canadians are saying to us very clearly, "We don't believe these systems are strong enough. We don't believe the government is being transparent. We want action and we want answers".

I will do my job, and I hope that everyone around this table will also do their job.

Thank you.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I want to answer a couple of things.

This morning at 9:33, I received a message to say that they had received the report on the motion that was passed last week and could I be in the House at 10 a.m.? I acknowledged that message at 9:45 a.m. It's unrealistic for me to be in the House to present a re-

port with that kind of notice. I take my role very seriously, and I think you can tell by my decorum in this meeting in keeping people moving along that I do.

That report will be presented tomorrow. As I have always done, the people on the subcommittee will know when I'm presenting the reports. I have always provided that courtesy. It's happened up until now and it will continue to happen unless I provide notice otherwise. Stay tuned for the report. It will be presented in the House tomorrow if everything goes well.

On the concept of resources, I have been given a signal that we have resources until about two o'clock today. There's agreement from all members, all parties in the House, that we are adjourning the day after question period because we have a guest speaker tonight in the House of Commons. That's the agreement of the House. You can speak to them. There's an address at 6:30 p.m. tonight. You need to be in your seats by 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Cooper, I'm going to finish speaking because that's how it works here.

Because there is an appetite for this conversation, if need be, we will continue this conversation. It's important that we have the space for it. I think I've demonstrated that. On Thursday, we have a minister confirmed, but we will try to find a way that will work best with all members. I will have those conversations to figure it out.

Members have to remember that, as chair, I do have some abilities. I have not tried to abuse them. I have used them very respectfully, and I will continue to do that. At some point, there needs to be an understanding that there might be some women in this House who also know the rules. To the women in the House following me today, I'm sorry you don't get to have lunch with me, but you will get lunch. I look forward to spending some time with you later because we need.... Committees sometimes have to continue, and when we have resources, we need them to continue. It's really important work. I'm sure you're noticing that with the tone and temperament of this conversation.

Mrs. Blaney, I just wanted to answer your questions.

With that, Madame Gaudreau has been waiting very patiently. We will be going past one o'clock clearly.

The floor is yours, Madame Gaudreau.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Chair, if I may speak before Madame Gaudreau begins, we've been advised that as far as—

**The Chair:** Sorry, I'm just going to correct myself. Based on the information I received and reported, afternoon meetings are happening. Evening meetings have been cancelled.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** So we can go—

**The Chair:** We don't have the resources.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Six committees are sitting until 5, between 3:30 and 5:30.

**The Chair:** We do not have the resources without putting another committee out of a spot, and that was the concern.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** That's not the information I have.

**The Chair:** You can challenge the clerk, but we are hearing that we have resources until 2, and that's what I've said.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** That's not—

**The Chair:** Excellent. Well, have your people talk to our people.

Madame Gaudreau, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Chair, I'm going to keep my comments specific and concise, but I, too, have no choice but to respond to everything I heard. I took notes. I know these proceedings are being watched closely.

The first thing I heard was that this wasn't a game being played. I was shocked at that, I must tell you. What is more important than what we are doing right now? The game is what's been going on for the past two hours. I realize it's a right members have, and granted, that's fair.

I'd like to put some things into perspective. We heard earlier that work had been done. Yes, work was done in the past few years. Fine. Was that enough? Was it appropriate? To answer those questions, I'm going to refer to some evidence. As everyone knows, three polls came out. I'm hearing about this from my constituents in Laurentides—Labelle on a daily basis. Obviously, I have to consider the bigger picture. On a broader scale, Angus Reid did a poll that revealed 66% of people were concerned about Chinese interference. Seven out of 10 people think the government is afraid to take a stand. You might argue that the methodology is all wrong. These are polls. Another survey showed that 64% of people were in favour of an independent public inquiry. Let's start there.

We are taking all this time. We're trying to get the facts. Why? As we heard earlier, the point is to identify best practices and course correct. To do that, we need to find out what happened. What can we find out? Nothing. We are being kept in the dark, and here's the proof. I was talking to people yesterday, and they asked why the government was trying to avoid the issue. According to them, we had agreed that, in government, we were going to put partisanship aside and work together to choose a chair who could do the job and oversee an independent public inquiry.

What happened last week? I thought it was pretty clear. Then we find out that the Prime Minister wants to make the decision and that he is going to appoint a so-called special rapporteur. I just found that out. Forgive me for being naive. I'm not the only one embarrassed as people watch all this. We are trying to save our democracy. What happened earlier is exactly what's been happening for the past two hours and for the entire time we met last week. I've been through this before, with the WE Charity scandal—a whole 48 or 50 hours of it, if I were to ask my fellow members.

I can list other points. People have lost confidence. What do we have to do? What does a leader need to do to preserve the bit of confidence people have left? He must step up. He must be humble enough to admit that some ideas are good ones and that perhaps he could have done a better job, but he mustn't do what he's been do-

ing since yesterday. Again this week, we are going to spend question period talking about small steps and incremental actions. Is it normal for the opposition parties to be the ones providing answers and strategies? Come on.

• (1305)

It's tough to explain this to my constituents. With every filibuster and attempt to draw things out, I think to myself yet again that something fishy is going on.

What's it going to take? We all know the answer.

Madam Chair, I would really like to go on, but I'm not going to do like my fellow members. There's an amendment on the table, and that's what I'd like to vote on.

Initially, I heard all the frustration and arguments conveyed by the members, but what I heard in the end was that they wouldn't let this go. Indeed, we aren't going to let this go.

Can we finally move on? I'm ready to vote. That's what I want to say.

• (1310)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

I've been listening very intently to all the comments made by all of the members of this committee, whom I greatly respect. We've been debating this amendment for some time now. We've heard quite a few arguments and perspectives.

I'm wondering whether we should proceed to a vote on the amendment. I think there's one other speaker after me, if I'm not mistaken, Madam Chair, or two, so perhaps we can move to a vote.

I would like to say, though, that I would like to be added to the list to speak on the main motion after the vote, if that's possible.

**The Chair:** You're ready for the vote on the amendment. That's what you're suggesting.

I have Mr. Fergus, followed by Mr. Cooper.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'm of the same mind as Mr. Turnbull. I'd like to put my name on the list to debate the motion. I'd also like to take myself off the list for the amendment, so we can vote on it.

**The Chair:** I have good news for you, Mr. Fergus. You were already on the list to debate the motion, so you are first.

Mr. Cooper said that he didn't wish to speak now. He may want the floor later, however.

I will therefore call the vote on the amendment.

[English]

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

**The Chair:** With that, we are on to the main motion as amended.

We'll go to Mr. Ferguson, followed by Mr. Turnbull.

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Ferguson:** Madam Chair, I've spoken a lot already, and I'd prefer to hear what Mr. Turnbull has to say. Could you kindly move my name to the end of the list? Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ferguson.

[English]

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks to my colleague, Mr. Ferguson, for being so gracious and kind to me.

I've certainly been listening and preparing lots of remarks, but before I do that, I'd like to introduce an amendment to the motion.

I'll start by moving this. I move that the motion be amended by replacing the words after "in relation to its study of foreign election interference" with the following:

Invite the—

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull, I'm sorry.

I want to confirm, to maintain some order, whether you have shared that with the clerk in both official languages.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Yes, I believe we have.

**The Chair:** We've just received it. If we can wait a couple of seconds to make sure that everyone has it, it keeps us on the same page. I'll return the floor to you once I've confirmed that everyone has it. Thank you.

I understand that everyone's received it.

With that, Mr. Turnbull, I'll provide you back the floor.

• (1315)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

I'll start from the beginning. I move that the motion be amended by replacing the words after "in relation to its study of foreign election interference" with the following:

Invite the 2019 and 2021 National Campaign Directors of each recognized party in the House of Commons and the security-cleared party representatives to the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

The French translation is there as well.

I'd like to speak to that and address some of the comments that were made by Mr. Cooper at the beginning of our meeting today, which I found quite troubling. I have taken the time to listen to and review all the information we've had at our disposal, as well as the multiple reports. I pride myself on researching and reading through the various documents that are provided and also in doing my own research on these topics, because I take these matters extremely seriously, especially when there are allegations flying around and quite a lot of political rhetoric that I think could be injurious to our

democracy as a whole, in terms of undermining our democratic institutions.

In particular, one of the false claims that we keep hearing from the Conservative Party of Canada—over and over again they repeat the same thing—is that the Prime Minister and our government have done nothing when it comes to foreign election interference. This couldn't be further from the truth. Based on all of the documents I have in front of me, there is ample evidence from the very first days of this government, which I wasn't a part of in those days, to show a track record of significant work that has been done on this issue at least as far back as 2017. I think it's safe to say it goes back right to 2015, when the Liberal government that's currently running the country first got elected.

I would like to take some time refuting that claim, but I also want to talk about a couple of other assertions that have been made over and over again that are deeply troubling.

One is that the Conservatives keep saying, and some opposition parties seem to be chiming in with a chorus of support for this, that they're interested in "getting to the bottom" of this. What's interesting to me is that, when you look at all of the non-partisan and independent processes that have been set up by our government, and you look at this committee and how many witnesses have already come forward with significant expertise in national security, you see that we haven't heard anything to demonstrate that this government isn't willing to get to the bottom of this.

What strikes me as just pure political rhetoric and games, to be honest, is this claim that somehow we are not interested in getting to the bottom of these matters. Quite the contrary is true. In fact, our government has been getting to the bottom of these matters and has demonstrated a real dedication and commitment to addressing foreign election interference.

The other thing I found really troubling about Mr. Cooper's claims at the beginning of this meeting today was that somehow the PM has instructed us to do some obstructionary work. I think that is also 100% false. I know I speak for myself, and I probably can speak for all my colleagues, that we're here of our own volition. We take our work at this committee very seriously, and to imply that we're somehow being controlled by somebody else is insulting, to be frank.

I also want to say that there has been a significant shift in the messaging over recent days from the leader of the official opposition, who I would remind people was the former minister of democratic reform. If you look back on the record, you'll see, I'm sure, that not much was done on foreign election interference in the time that Pierre Poilievre was the minister of democratic reform.

• (1320)

The shift in messaging that I've seen is that the leader of the official opposition has gone from saying that, yes, there were attempts at election interference but their party stood by the results of the election, to some very recent remarks that are significantly different from that message.

Let me just read a couple of quotes here. I believe it was yesterday that the leader of the official opposition said that we've never seen an intelligence service so worried about the prime minister and "his collaboration with a foreign power". He has also said that they are "so concerned" about how Canada is working against its own interests and for a foreign dictatorship's interests.

These claims are somehow implying that the Prime Minister is working against the interests of Canadians and in a way collaborating with a foreign power to undermine our democracy. That couldn't be further from the truth. I don't have words to describe how much I think that's inappropriate language. It's untrue and it's unfounded. It's really risking our entire democracy and the faith that Canadians have in our democracy by making such baseless claims. If they were founded, of course, those claims could be made, but they're unfounded.

The other thing I want to point out is that, further to my colleagues Mr. Fergus and MP O'Connell, both of whom I have great respect for and in their remarks today made some very compelling arguments, we have set up all these different mechanisms within our government's mandate to protect against foreign election interference. We know that, on the one hand, there are non-partisan senior public servants within the caretaker period who are part of the panel for the critical election incident public protocol and panel. They take part in that during the caretaker period. We also know that outside of that caretaker period, our government has implemented what Rosenberg refers to as an "electoral ecosystem approach", which is an all-of-government approach to combat foreign election interference. This has four pillars—enhancing citizen preparedness, improving organizational readiness, combatting foreign interference and building a healthy information ecosystem.

What I want to say about this is that, on the one hand, our government has set up a process—i.e., the protocol and panel—so that even within an election period, in a writ period or where the caretaker convention applies, there is a rigorous set of non-partisan senior officials who have expertise and are informed by the SITE task force, which is composed of experts in national security from all of our agencies, which are providing them with regular briefings.

That's just within the caretaker period. Then we have an independent assessment done after every election. Let's also be honest. If we actually look at and evaluate from the James Judd report, which was an independent assessment, how many of the recommendations were implemented, we can see that the vast majority of them, if not all of them, were implemented. I think maybe one wasn't implemented. That's because the government didn't necessarily agree with that one or took a different approach.

Similarly, within the 16 or so recommendations that were made by Morris Rosenberg, which I take very seriously.... I read the report. I think there's a lot of substance there that this committee could be deliberating on. We could be really drilling down on those recommendations instead of playing political games.

• (1325)

To me, the original motion that Mr. Cooper put forward, which was to have political staffers here.... I mean, they're not national security experts. We have all the deputy ministers. We have the national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister. We've

had the director of CSIS. The list goes on and on. I actually have the list of witnesses here if you want me to read them out.

You couldn't ask for a better list of witnesses to come before this committee. I don't see what the rationale is when you have ministerial accountability outside of the caretaker period and you have the officials and experts who inform them coming to this committee. Then you have the non-partisan public servants who are doing the work within the caretaker period who are coming forward. What more information could you possibly really want?

If your motivation was truly to get to the bottom of this and to take this matter seriously, why wouldn't you be listening to the people who have the expertise?

That's not good enough for the official opposition. It's not good enough because they want to push a narrative that is counter to the interests of our democracy and our democratic institutions. It's one that tries to undermine our democracy and our institutions. That, I will not stand for.

I want to talk for a moment about the fact that our government took up recommendations from an extensive report that was done in 2018.

In 2018, the ethics committee did a study that produced a very significant report called "Democracy Under Threat: Risks and Solutions in the Era of Disinformation and Data Monopoly". The chair at the time was Bob Zimmer. I know the Conservatives will know Bob. That report is over 100 pages. It has significant recommendations, many of which have been acted on. If you trace back to the government response to that report, you can see that many of the things that unfolded after that report was published were responded to by the government and actually implemented.

Again, it points to the fact that there is no basis for this absurd claim that our government doesn't take foreign election interference seriously and the false claim that the government has done nothing on this.

Let me stack this up a little bit in terms of what the government has done.

I'll go back to that ethics report, which I assume happened over the course of a significant period because it's a pretty extensive study. As we know, these things can take months—to hear from witnesses and then deliberate. What I can see from that is that in 2018 that report was published, a government response came in shortly after—I'm not sure I have the date on the government response, but it was shortly after—and many of these things were then acted on.

First, obviously the critical election incident public protocol and panel were set up. That was first established before the 2019 election. The plan to protect Canadian democracy, which is that four-pillar plan that outlines an all-of-government approach, was implemented as well. That's listed in the Rosenberg report. He takes the time to go through the various initiatives that unfolded and were implemented out of that, so I'd like to speak to those for a moment.

• (1330)

One of the pillars of that all-of-government approach, which is sometimes referred to as the electoral ecosystem approach.... Let's be honest. Foreign election interference can't be tackled with just one intervention. It's a systematic set of strategies and interventions that cut across all of our ministries and institutions that's required. There's a lot of collaboration with many of our other systemic issues. We know that we need an all-of-government approach, and I think all of us are familiar with calls on the government to have a whole-of-government approach. This is exactly what our government has been implementing, and there's evidence of this. For committee members to claim that the government hasn't done anything just ignores the facts.

When you look at pillar one of the plan to protect Canadian democracy, enhancing citizen preparedness is the pillar. There's been a digital citizen initiative led by Canadian Heritage, which supported skills development through the use of awareness sessions, workshops and learning materials. That's one thing that's been done in that pillar.

Another is Get Cyber Safe. It is another public awareness campaign about Internet security, which added content about cyber-threats to the Canadian democratic process. Again, this is raising awareness among citizens across Canada, because what we've heard from CSIS in our testimony, and others, is that this is not just about intelligence. Everybody has a role to play in protecting our democracy. Part of it means raising the awareness of our citizens so that they understand what we're up against, what to look out for and what the signs are of foreign election interference so that they can help us identify, report and, in a way, gather intel and information that may be helpful in preventing it from happening.

Prior to 2019, the government provided journalists with training on foreign interference and convened regular press briefings. We also helped essentially to inform and to train journalists. There were also changes to Canada's election laws that expanded the CEO information and education programs aimed at the Canadian public. I will just flip to some of the legislative changes that were made.

One was An Act respecting national security matters, Bill C-59. Bill C-59 was a piece of legislation that our government brought forward that provided both CSIS and CSE with the ability to engage in threat reduction measures, subject to legal authorization of course. We heard from the director of CSIS when he was before our committee that they do intervene and have threat reduction measures that they're able to use. Obviously when there's credible intel that's been analyzed, corroborated and evaluated such that they're obviously not acting on a partial piece of intelligence, which as the director said, was the case. Most of the time they were accumulating intelligence that came with significant caveats. However, it's

good for us to know that they have threat reduction measures, and they use those where needed.

What's interesting, though, is that our government was the one that gave them those powers in Bill C-59. Again, what's interesting is that the Conservatives keep claiming that we've done nothing. CSIS has threat reduction measures that were given to them by legislation that was passed by our government. That's a direct conflict with what the Conservatives keep asserting.

Another one is Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act. Conservatives also claim over and over that the government hasn't done anything, as if they repeat this falsehood and people are going to believe it. I don't believe that Canadians are going to be fooled by the assertion of false claims over and over again. The Elections Modernization Act came into force in June 2019, and it adds a number of different interesting and important measures. One is that it prohibits foreign persons or entities from unduly influencing an elector to vote or refrain from voting, or to vote or refrain from voting for a particular candidate or registered party.

• (1335)

It also prohibits third parties from using foreign funds for partisan advertising and activities. It also prohibits foreign entities from spending on partisan advertising and activities during both the pre-election and election periods. It also requires online platforms to publish a registry of partisan advertising published during the pre-election period and all election advertising during the election period. It also has provisions that prohibit knowingly making or publishing a false statement to affect election results.

Those are five additional measures that were added in the Elections Modernization Act.

**Mr. John Nater:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I was just getting started, Mr. Nater.

**Mr. John Nater:** I know.

**The Chair:** Mr. Nater, go ahead on a point of order.

**Mr. John Nater:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just very briefly, on Bill C-76, Mr. Turnbull just mentioned knowingly making a false statement. I would just like to point out for the record that I made an amendment to that effect, but it was declined by the committee. The courts had to throw out that piece of the legislation. It had to come back in what's called the John Nater vindication act, in which we fixed that piece of legislation after the fact. I just wanted that for the record.

**The Chair:** Mr. Nater, I think you know very well that's not a point of order, but just to demonstrate to all colleagues the leniency I show when people want to put something on the record—and I have done that time and time again—I think I've just offered that courtesy to you. I just want it to be noted, because I think sometimes people don't recognize the courtesies I offer.

I'm going to go back to Mr. Turnbull—

**Mr. John Nater:** As a courtesy, I will be brief.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Nater.

**Mr. John Nater:** On that matter, Madam Chair, we do appreciate that courtesy.

I would point out that one of our former colleagues on that side, Mr. Scott Simms, created what was called the Simms protocol—and I see Mr. Simms' former staffer back there—to allow that type of intervention. I think it is cordial and collegial to allow a member to make an intervention without yielding the floor, so I do appreciate that opportunity to make that comment.

**The Chair:** I thank you, Mr. Nater. I'll take that in writing. I appreciate it.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** On that point of order, Madam Chair, just before I have the floor back, I'd like to speak to that. My understanding is that the Simms protocol can only be evoked when the member who has the floor gives permission to have it evoked, and I did not give permission for that intervention, which was not a point of order.

**The Chair:** I feel like we're doing well. Our resources are going to be limited. With that, let's keep doing what we've been doing. I'm going to remind us to take a breath, and I'm going to return the floor to you, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Kudos to Mr. Nater for getting that in. I'm sure he won some points with somebody somewhere.

Anyway, I'll go back to what I was saying, which was that we have this four-pillar plan and I've only spoken to one of the pillars so far, but there are three other pillars to speak to.

I was just speaking to two pieces of legislation that enhanced both CSIS's and CSE's abilities to combat foreign election interference, but also how Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act, also enhanced our government's ability to tackle this very important issue.

The second pillar of the plan was improving organizational readiness. It says, "Government departments and agencies were briefed on how to identify threats, emerging tactics and systems vulnerabilities in order to strengthen security practices and behaviours." That's important. Again, that all-of-government approach means actually educating and training people across government departments, which was done. Those briefs, that training and that capacity and awareness development did happen, and I'm sure it continues.

It continues, "Political parties and election administrators were provided with technical advice". This one I find particularly interesting: "Political party representatives were also provided with classified briefings on threats." This is interesting because Rosenberg refers to this in his report, which clearly demonstrates again a willingness and ability to work on these issues across party lines and to make sure that all parties have adequate information, that they're briefed, that they understand the threats and that they can weigh in on those discussions.

I'd also like to refer to the fact that, in terms of organizational readiness in 2018, our government established the Canadian centre

for cybersecurity with a budget of \$155 million over five years. CCCS is responsible for monitoring threats, protecting national critical infrastructure against cyber-incidents and coordinating the national response to any incidents related to cybersecurity. That organization didn't exist prior to 2018 and was established by our government. Again, it's another example of a body, an entity, that works across government and is tasked with one piece of the overall ecosystem approach or whole-of-government approach.

I think we can all agree that cybersecurity in the age of disinformation and data monopoly, referring back to the ethics report that was done in 2018, highlights how vulnerable the Canadian public is to disinformation. The use of online platforms for the dissemination of that information certainly has a real impact and changes the threat environment for anyone looking at national security and the seriousness of foreign election interference.

The other pillar that I'd like to refer to is combatting foreign interference. Our government established the security and intelligence threats to election task force. This is the SITE task force. It's the coordinating body and is comprised of the Communications Security Establishment, CSE; the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS; the RCMP; and the rapid response mechanism housed in Global Affairs.

SITE builds awareness to threats to Canada's federal election processes and prepares government to assess and respond to those threats. Each agency brings its unique information and expertise to the table to support the panel by providing up-to-date intelligence and information. The SITE task force has met regularly since 2019 and now meets on a monthly basis. It met daily during the 2021 election.

• (1340)

I think it is really important that the security agencies that are tasked with monitoring and collecting intelligence and identifying threats to Canadian democracy have been doing their work since 2019, meet regularly, meet on a monthly basis and then, during the elections, have daily meetings.

The information they are collecting is being relayed to government officials outside of the caretaker period, and then within the caretaker period, it feeds right into the panel. I don't know how anyone can claim that our government hasn't taken foreign election interference seriously.

That is not to say, Madam Chair, that we shouldn't be constantly improving and evolving our systematic approach and our comprehensive approach over time. That is what our national security advisers and experts have been saying to us, which is that we need to continue this work in a non-partisan way, in a serious way, in a way that respects Canadian democracy, and in a way that really tries to protect information that's highly sensitive and classified and to make sure that we don't put at risk our reputation with Five Eyes partners or other institutions.

I also want to speak to the fact that our government set up the rapid response mechanism with G7 countries at the 2018 G7 summit in Quebec. Its purpose is to strengthen the coordination across the G7 countries in identifying, preventing and responding to threats to G7 democracies. The rapid response mechanism supports the SITE task force in providing regular briefings to the panel of deputy ministers. You can see how, if you actually draw a picture of the flow of information, the rapid response mechanism basically shares information and coordinates efforts across the G7 countries such that we should find out about foreign threats to Canadian democracy in advance.

It's an early warning system, to my understanding, that feeds right into the SITE task force. That SITE task force then relays that information and briefs deputy ministers on the panel during an election, so this works as a comprehensive set of mechanisms that can identify threats to Canadian democracy.

I'd also like to say that, within the plan our government launched in 2019, which was the plan to protect Canadian democracy, again we acknowledged the need to work with external partners. Those include academia, industry and civil society to support information integrity in elections. These partners often have a unique role to play, it is safe to say, but it's an important role because they provide a unique perspective on the evolving threat environment. They help educate the public, and they alert the public to attempts at interference both before and during the campaign.

It is important that within a whole-of-government approach we also consider the fact that there are external partners that also play a very important role.

The other pillar, the fourth pillar, is building a healthy information ecosystem. One of the things that are obviously important is the degree to which Canadians get information online today. Our government launched the "Canada Declaration on Election Integrity Online" in 2019, and it was updated in 2021 prior to the election. Again, these are actions our government is taking. These are relevant to our work and our study and are exactly the reason why, if we actually look at the facts and information and if members opposite are actually concerned about what's being done, we have to acknowledge and affirm that lots has been done.

- (1345)

The commitment by online platforms and the Government of Canada to "safeguard elections from malicious interference and create a healthier online ecosystem" was endorsed by Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube. Again, that was updated before the 2021 election.

I'm not claiming that's the be-all and end-all of election integrity online. I think there's a lot more work to be done. However, I would say that going right back to the 2018 report, when there were many recommendations made about how to protect Canadians from consuming disinformation online, it's great to know that our social media platforms were in agreement and endorsed that declaration, and that they were willing to do it again before the 2021 election.

There's also something that was implemented called the Canadian election misinformation project. This is on page 20 of Rosenberg's report. They did an analysis of the role that social media platforms play in spreading false information. They found that "notwithstanding more assertive moderation and election integrity policies, large social media platforms continued to be home to widespread misinformation."

This is an area where we could do a lot more, deeper work, calling witnesses and looking within a writ period—but also outside of a writ period—at how we ensure that Canadians aren't consuming vast amounts of misinformation online. Our online platforms are saying that they're committed to that, but the independent research is saying, no, those online platforms, although they're committed to that, still continue to be home to widespread misinformation.

There's a whole area of our work that we need to take seriously that doesn't involve calling political staffers. It involves calling more witnesses who are relevant to the study, and some of the experts who have written these fantastic reports that I have here.

I have one really good one on misinformation and disinformation during the 2021 Canadian federal election from March 2022. It's relatively recent. It's from the media ecosystem observatory, made up of McGill, the University of Toronto, the Max Bell school of public policy and the Munk school. All of them are collaborating on writing these insightful reports that demonstrate that we need to do more work in that area.

I think there is an opportunity there, so why are opposition parties not focusing on that, when these are clear indications coming from experts? It's clear work that needs to continue to happen in order to protect Canadians, yet members on the opposite side don't seem concerned at all with that. Maybe that would be something that we could focus on in our work to come.

The thing that is really not sitting well with me is the fact that we keep hearing these very false assertions made over and over again. I think we have to be really honest with ourselves. We have to be honest and say, if you really want to step outside of the partisan antics, get down to the truth and take foreign election interference seriously, let's stop playing games and trying to win political points by calling political staffers who don't have expertise in national security. Let's start listening to the experts who have come before this committee. Instead of repeating three or four times the same motion with slightly tweaked language, so that we're here debating it over and over, ad infinitum.

I can do it forever. I'm happy to talk about this topic, because I'm reading and consuming information and I care about it. I'm happy to continue talking about this if that's what opposition members really want. However, I don't see why we would waste our precious time. The public has elected us to do important work, and we want to protect Canadian democracy. It's clear from everything I've said so far that our government has a track record. I could paint you a picture of it. It's so clear to me.

● (1350)

I could lay it out in a diagram for any of the opposition members. I just don't see why they would continue to deny the real facts and information that are clearly laid out in multiple reports. There's lots of information to substantiate what I'm saying.

I'm not making this up. I think the Conservatives have a duty, if they are going to make false claims, to back them up with evidence, because they are not doing that, in my view. They are just spouting off things that they think will win them some political points or a little uptick in the polls or something.

I really believe there is a need to continue to adapt our approach to foreign election interference. I think we have heard that loud and clear. If there's a silver lining in all of the partisan antics, it's to say, okay, well let's do deeper, more meaningful work in this area. I think the Prime Minister has made that clear in his announcement and press conference, at which he gave us some substantive actions—some more substantive actions, I should say—that our government is now taking.

I think just before I get to that I would like to point out a few other things. I want to sum up.

An independent review was conducted after the 2019 general election, and changes were made. Removal of a reference to the specific election in order to make the protocol continue in perpetuity, hopefully.... I think the protocol, its panel and that work are all essential. I think we can all agree. I'm sure it could be strengthened, but it should continue, so that change was made.

The change was made to align the protocol with the caretaker convention.

Explicit provision for the panel to consult with the CEO of Elections Canada as appropriate...that change was made after 2019.

Provision for the ability of political parties to alert security agencies of incidents: Listen to that. The Conservatives keep saying that their concerns weren't taken seriously. Well, our government set up the panel and the protocol and then amended them based on James

Judd's independent report that was done and the assessment that was done to add a provision so political parties could alert security agencies regarding incidents. That was added by our government.

They are not even listening, Madam Chair. The Conservatives have tuned out because they don't like what I'm saying. They don't like hearing facts and information that substantiate very real truths and claims about what our government has done on this issue.

Another one is recognition of the panel's ability to examine domestically driven interference. That change was also made. The original protocol and panel focused exclusively on foreign election interference. We know that domestic interference is also important, and the panel was expanded to include domestic-driven interference.

Recognition of the panel's ability to receive information from other sources at its discretion was also added. An independent review of the protocol no longer includes an assessment as to whether to establish the protocol on a permanent basis because, of course, our government made it permanent.

I also want to mention budget 2022. Again, this all goes to the false claim that we have heard over and over again by the Leader of the Opposition and the members of the Conservative Party who are making false claims every day they are out there in the House and saying—

● (1355)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The leader of the official opposition has not sat on this committee, so I don't know what claims the member is referring to.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Nater:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, just while we're on points of order, very briefly, I see that we're at two minutes to two.

**The Chair:** I'm hoping Mr. Turnbull finishes.

**Mr. John Nater:** I would just say on that matter that I would hope that when two o'clock hits we suspend until 3:30. I believe there's agreement that we would have resources from 3:30 to 5:30.

**The Chair:** Mr. Nater, I know you have always wanted to be the chair and I appreciate that. I have had a lot of feedback. I'm sitting here very patiently. I'm going—

**Mr. John Nater:** I'm just saying that would be the option we would support, to suspend until 3:30 p.m.

**The Chair:** There are many options. That's excellent to hear. I thank you for your options.

Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As I was saying, in budget 2022, our government also added several new measures. One was resources and a renewed commitment to expand the rapid response mechanism was made. One was enhancing our ability to look at “ongoing cyber-activities to protect...against disinformation”. There was a commitment to support research at public institutions on foreign election interference and resources provided to the Privy Council Office to “coordinate, develop and implement government-wide measures designed to combat disinformation and protect [Canadian] democracy.” Those are four more measures that were added in the last budget.

I don't know, again, how there's any factual accuracy to the points that the Conservative Party has been making over and over again, but it frustrates me, to be honest, Madam Chair. I'm very frustrated by the fact that they seem to want to misinform people. I don't know why they would want to claim things that are false about our government over and over again, when they know that the truth is we have a track record of developing all the systems, mechanisms and independent review processes, and improving them and adding more measures as they make sense, to continue to evolve our approach with the evolving threat environment.

Just as security professionals in this country have told us it is necessary, our government has done that. The former minister for democratic reform, now the leader of the official opposition, didn't do anything—literally nothing. I would challenge the members of the official opposition to point to something that their leader did when he was the minister for democratic reform.

Lastly, I want to talk about the Prime Minister's remarks quickly.

I think the significant actions that the Prime Minister laid out are very conducive to us continuing to evolve our comprehensive and whole-of-government approach to tackle foreign election interference. The first thing I noted in his remarks was that he basically asked Minister Leblanc to work on an implementation plan as quickly as possible.

He also talked about the importance of what was set up in 2017—I know MP O'Connell also spoke to it—which is NSICOP and how that's an appropriate mechanism for reviewing highly classified information related to national security.

Madam Chair, do you want me to continue until the meeting runs out? I'd like to start whenever we continue again. I'd like to have my name on the speakers list so I can continue speaking to this. I know members probably want to adjourn to go to question period soon.

● (1400)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I am suspending this meeting. Stay tuned.

*[The meeting was suspended at 2:02 p.m., Tuesday, March 7]*

*[The meeting resumed at 9:04 a.m., Thursday, March 9]*

● (5700)

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order. We are resuming meeting number 57 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and we are picking up where

we left off on Tuesday. The committee will continue debating the amendment of MP Ryan Turnbull.

As always, comments should go through the chair. The clerk and I will maintain a consolidated speaking list of members wishing to speak.

When we left off on Tuesday, Mr. Turnbull, you had the floor. I received the floor back, allowing us to continue with the day, so I will provide you the floor back briefly, and then we'll continue with the speaking list we have already.

On the speaking list I had, following Mr. Turnbull was Monsieur Fergus, followed by Madam Romanado.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I beat him.

● (5705)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** You did. I wasn't paying attention. You were.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** There's a bit of friendly competition here. That's always good.

I'm really glad to be back discussing this important motion and the amendment that I proposed. When I left off, I had spent considerable time going through the many different mechanisms, independent mechanisms and non-partisan mechanisms, that have been set up by our government to combat foreign election interference. I spent considerable time on that mainly because I was debunking the thing the Conservatives keep saying over and over again, which is the false claim that our government hasn't done anything on foreign election interference. I feel, as person who is doing the work, reading all the material and reading Rosenberg's report and others, that it's a claim that keeps being made, but it's not factual. It's not based on the evidence I see.

When I left off, I was just getting into, in addition to all of the things that our government has done since 2017—it's really since 2015, but obviously some of that work took a while to implement—the new commitments within budget 2022 that have now been added to with the Prime Minister's recent announcement. I think there are some significant steps forward that we should all be taking note of.

I know that most of us probably were there or listening and/or have reviewed his remarks, but I have them here, and there are a few things that I'm sure we all need reminders about. One is that the Prime Minister obviously announced there would be the appointment of an independent special rapporteur, and although the Conservatives struggle with the word, it certainly is a mechanism that should be able to determine how we move forward. To me, it's a smart step. It's a smart move. It should give us the confidence that there will be a non-partisan approach to this important topic. A special rapporteur can make recommendations on how to move forward.

That's not the only thing the Prime Minister announced, of course. In his remarks, he announced that Minister Mendicino would be looking at and engaging in a consultation to guide the set-up—hopefully set-up—of a new foreign influence transparency registry in Canada. This has been a topic of conversation within our committee. We've heard multiple witnesses on that topic, and it's good to hear that Minister Mendicino is going to be moving forward with a consultation.

We also had another commitment: that Minister Mendicino will immediately establish a national counter foreign interference coordinator position in his ministry, Public Safety Canada. That, again, speaks to our commitment as a government to taking a whole-of-government approach. That coordinator will coordinate efforts across many ministries that are involved in the work, which I outlined in my previous remarks as core to the plan the government announced in January 2019. It's a plan to protect Canadian democracy, which really focuses on an ecosystem approach, and it means there are multiple strategies being implemented through various departments.

This is what our security and intelligence professionals want to see. I would just say that having a coordinator to coordinate all of that through Public Safety is a very smart additional step.

I have a couple of other quick points, and then I'll probably cede the floor to my colleagues, who I know want to get in on this important extended debate.

• (5710)

Minister LeBlanc and the Clerk of the Privy Council will review and bring forward a plan to implement any outstanding recommendations from NSICOP, the Rosenberg report and any other reviews on these matters in the next 30 days. That is, first of all, a pretty compressed timeline. Taking 30 days to come up with that suggests there's a seriousness being applied to this. The Rosenberg report just came out last week, I believe, so I think that's really good. Of course, any other recommendations from NSICOP will be integrated into that list of recommendations.

I think that plan is another important step. Again, these are all steps being taken.

One thing that stuck out in the remarks by our Prime Minister was that our institutions need to, will and must outlast every one of us. I thought that point was really good. We have opposition party leaders, in particular from the Conservatives—I won't say that anybody else has made these claims—making claims and suggesting that somehow our Prime Minister is working against the best inter-

ests of Canadians. This political rhetoric is highly dangerous. It's charged, and it detracts from Canadians' faith in our democratic institutions. I think we as members of Parliament need to take this work very seriously and work to identify real, meaningful solutions so that our approach to protecting our democracy evolves along with what intelligence and security professionals say is needed.

The threat environment is evolving—we all know that. I think we need to evolve with it, but we need to stay true to our core focus, which really should be a principled approach to this. That is to say this is not about us and our politics, but about our institutions. We need to protect those at all costs.

With that, Madam Chair, I will cede the floor to my colleagues. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Go ahead, Monsieur Fergus.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning to my fellow members.

I will endeavour to frame my thoughts and remarks on Mr. Turnbull's amendment similar to him.

I commend him on showing such restraint and moderation in his comments. I have to tell you how deeply frustrating and disappointing I have found the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition day in and day out.

Yesterday, during question period, when I heard the leader of the official opposition say in the House of Commons that he thought the Prime Minister was working for a foreign government, I was disgusted. There's no other way to put it.

Last week, during the committee's 16 hours of meetings, I provided a brief history of the Bloc Québécois and its place in the House of Commons. I was very respectful. I recognized the Bloc Québécois members, and even though I fundamentally disagree with them on a core issue, I would never have had the gall to say such disdainful things about them. The Bloc Québécois is a legitimate political party, and I assume that it is genuinely pursuing its policy objective. Never would I accuse its members of working for a foreign government, even though they would prefer to legitimately form another country.

Nor would I dare think such a thing about the Prime Minister. To say such a thing falls far short of what is reasonable or acceptable. Here's what I think when I hear remarks like that: we've come to a point where it's clear to the average Canadian that certain people are incapable of putting the responsibility we all have as members ahead of their partisan interests. That responsibility is to get to the truth.

• (5715)

[English]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** On a point of order, I see Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, I would like the honourable member to retract his comments regarding the so-called statements made by the leader of the official opposition yesterday during question period.

Nothing that the member is insinuating comes from the comments made yesterday by the leader of the official opposition. I have the transcript. Never did he use the language the Liberal member mentioned to refer to the Prime Minister.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I have a point of order.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** This is what the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, Madam Chair:

[English]

“the Prime Minister is not interested in protecting the safety of the people serving this country. He is interested in protecting the Liberal Party of Canada.”

[Translation]

None of the rest of the member's claims are true, so I would ask that he withdraw his remarks.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Berthold. I consider that a point of debate, not a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Gerretsen, do you have a point of order or can we move on?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'm good.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Go ahead, Monsieur Fergus.

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Chair, the Prime Minister of Canada's first responsibility is the safety of all Canadians. The Leader of the Opposition questioned the Prime Minister's loyalty to Canada and Canadians in the House of Commons. For that reason, I will not retract my remarks.

Across all news outlets, columnists described Mr. Poilievre's comments as inappropriate at best. It's obvious that he is completely out of control. Given his important role in Canada's parliamentary system, it's necessary to find a non-partisan solution, a politically neutral person to examine what happened during the 2019 and 2021 elections—as well as during the 2011 and 2015 elections—and to make recommendations to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister publicly committed to implementing the recommendations issued by that important person, the special rapporteur. From there, we can get to the bottom of things. Unfortunately, when a key player in our parliamentary system makes such idiotic

statements, the whole system stops working. Until the leader of the official opposition withdraws his remarks and apologizes to Canadians, he is proving that he cannot play his key role in getting to the truth. That's one of the reasons I appreciate Mr. Turnbull's amendment so much.

Everyone here knows that I'm not known for being overly partisan. I think I'm a good sport, even though I can certainly dish it out from time to time. Maybe I'm being idealistic or a dreamer, but I would say I'm like 99% of members of Parliament: I want to work hard with the genuine goal of making life easier and more enjoyable for our constituents, and helping them succeed. As a good Quebecker, I want Quebeckers to be successful. As a good Canadian, I want all Canadians to be successful as well.

• (5720)

This doesn't happen often, but I thought the Leader of the Opposition went too far in his remarks. He plays such an important role in our system. He is a member of the official opposition in Parliament. I feel for my fellow members in the official opposition, whom I've had the pleasure of knowing since 2015. Although we don't agree on everything, they are good people, and I can't imagine that they are proud of their leader's comments. I don't expect them to speak out against their leader. That would probably be asking too much. I imagine, though, they are probably a little embarrassed.

I will get back to the issue in hand. I have much to say about Mr. Turnbull's amendment, but I don't want to take up too much time. I do want to hear what my fellow members think.

What I love about the motion is that it is an honourable attempt to get to the truth. The people involved, the people who heard the advice and the people who had an opportunity to voice their concerns are listed in the amendment. Further to the amendment, the committee would invite the 2019 and 2021 national campaign directors of each recognized party in the House of Commons and the security-cleared party representatives to the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

The benefit of the amendment is that we could bring those individuals before the committee to help us better understand what they heard and what they shared, without the risk of their breaching their national security commitments. The committee will have the chance to find out what happened while they were on the job. I think that's the responsible thing to do. We will learn more about what went on, and once we've had those discussions, we'll be able to dig even deeper. However, we must proceed in a way that honours our commitments to our allies and the people working for Canadian security intelligence agencies.

• (5725)

What's more, that approach would be in keeping with the traditions of the House. According to parliamentary tradition, the people accountable are the ones who should appear before the committee to explain what they knew. What isn't acceptable is turning our backs on the fine traditions of Parliament and inviting political staffers to appear. That is why Mr. Turnbull's motion deserves the committee's support.

I will say again how disappointing it is to see that the Leader of the Opposition will take every opportunity to speak out of both sides of his mouth. Back when he had the privilege of being a minister in the Harper government, he made the same case that I am making today: assistants should not be made to appear before committees. My fellow member Mr. Julian, the House leader of the New Democratic Party, made the same point eight days ago. Very seldom have members gone against that tradition in the history of the House of Commons.

I have been on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics for a number of years, and there are always members who want to bring staffers before the committee instead of the people who are actually responsible. I don't understand this obsession of wanting to bring assistants before committees. It's almost as though members are afraid of having a real discussion with their peers, preferring to question people who, by definition, aren't really equipped to defend themselves to elected representatives. That's the issue, so I'd like to know where this constant desire of members to go after those who are, by definition, weaker comes from. It's a form of intimidation.

• (5730)

I will have more to say, but as per my initial promise, I wanted to provide a brief overview and voice my great disappointment at what happened yesterday. I'd also like to ask everyone to take a step back and consider the situation from other perspectives, so that cooler heads can prevail and we can figure out the best way to deal with the situation before us.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ferguson.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Madame Romanado.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning to everyone.

I will be brief. I'd like to hear a bit more about what my colleagues have to say as well, so I might put myself on the list again.

I just want to highlight one point in this amendment. I think we need to be mindful of the reference to "security-cleared" or people who have authorization. I think the importance of that is getting lost to us.

I know the NSICOP yesterday issued a press release. I was looking at the members who sit on NSICOP. I just want to highlight a few of the members who sit on it.

• (5735)

[*Translation*]

I have tremendous respect for Mr. Bergeron, the member for Montarville and my riding neighbour.

[*English*]

Then there is MP Don Davies, whom I had a chance to work with on my private member's bill and whom I know has incredible integrity and takes this to heart.

Mr. Alex Ruff, who is a retired colonel with the Canadian Armed Forces with 25 years of service, also sits on NSICOP. If we don't trust someone with 25 years of service in the Canadian Armed Forces, who has a very clear understanding of national security and the importance of that....

I'm not quite sure why members here or members in the House would doubt the integrity of their colleagues who sit on this really important committee that is going to look at the issue of foreign interference and have access to those top secret clearance documents. I just want to highlight that, because I too have a lot of questions but do not have the necessary clearance to view top secret documents. I want us to be mindful of that. I have the utmost respect for the members of Parliament who sit on NSICOP. I trust that they take this work very seriously. I want us to remember that they are our colleagues and are representing all parties that sit in this committee.

I will cede the rest of my time because I want to hear from my colleagues. I just want us to be mindful of that. We're also talking about our colleagues, whom we all respect enormously.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

[*English*]

Just to keep everyone informed, it will be Ms. Blaney, followed by Mr. Gerretsen, Ms. Sahota, Mr. Cooper, Madame Gaudreau and Mr. Ferguson.

Go ahead, Madame Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's good to be here at PROC bright and early. I want to thank and acknowledge the chair for providing more times to meet. I was very concerned when I came here on Tuesday after question period and saw that we were not resuming. I think it's important to get back to this work. I appreciate that we've seen this happen after some conversations.

I am interested in this. Today we were supposed to meet with the ministers. I want to question them, and I think that's an important part of the work we do here. I am concerned about the fact that we'll have a couple of ministers, when there was pretty much clarity that we wanted one minister at a time to focus on. That does concern me. I'm hoping that if there are two, the ministers will come back to see us again.

I have some process questions that, at the end of my intervention, I would really appreciate the clerk to provide us some information and guidance on.

I know that today we are returning to a suspended meeting from Tuesday. I also noticed from the PROC notice of meeting that the ministers are coming, apparently, from 12 to one today, with a meeting prior to that hour, from 11 to 12, that says “to be determined”. I’m just wondering if the process can be explained. If the ministers are coming, would we have to adjourn this particular meeting to start another meeting? I would like some clarity on that. I think that will have an influence on some of the decisions I have to make today.

For me, the goal I’m hoping we get to before the ministers come to see us is that we vote on Mr. Turnbull’s amendment and then on the initial motion brought forward by Mr. Cooper and amended by me. I want to know from the chair if there will be time after question period to resume this meeting if we do not get that work done. I also want to know, from the clerk, if that will impact other committees and what that would look like.

I also want to put on the record for my friends around this table that at 3:30 p.m. today, I have a very important meeting with a community in my riding that has come all the way out to Ottawa because they are calling for a state of emergency because of the number of deaths they’ve had in their community. They’re feeling very concerned about overdoses and suicides, largely among young people. I cannot miss that meeting.

I am asking for everybody to just consider—we obviously have time to consider this—that if we do come back to this meeting, perhaps we can wait till 4:30 p.m. so that I can be at that very urgent meeting with my constituents. They came here from across this country. It is imperative that I be there.

I also want to recognize that sometimes it’s hard to find subs on a Thursday afternoon.

Madam Chair, this is so serious. We are sitting around this table discussing things that are so important. There are so many leaks, and they are, in fact, detracting Canadians from having faith in our institutions. I think it’s unfair to simply say to this committee in this work.... We know those leaks are coming out. More came out yesterday. That is why I’m here in this very difficult position.

I hear again that Mr. Fergus is courting my very good friend—I’m the whip and he is the House leader—Mr. Julian, whom I work with. I have a lot of pride in the incredible work and dignity he brings to this position. It was not an easy decision for the NDP to pull forward staff, and it’s not a comfortable place, but we also have to understand that the day after Mr. Julian made his very important remarks—which I think we should all listen to very carefully and consider—we again saw more information come out. When that keeps happening, you have to find a way forward.

We have asked the Prime Minister very clearly to make sure there is a public inquiry. Jagmeet Singh has been very clear. My leader has said repeatedly that there needs to be a transparent, public and independent process here.

I deeply respect the work of NSICOP and the members from every party who are on that committee. I think the work they do is incredibly important. I very much honour the fact that national security is something we should be careful about. This is why, historically, I have voted against motions the Conservatives have brought

forward. I felt they did not address the issue of national security sufficiently, and that concerned me.

● (5740)

I’m also concerned that national security and our institutions are being threatened by how many leaks are coming out in the press. I just want to remind everyone that these journalists are people who take their work very seriously. There are other people who call themselves “journalists” who do not take their work very seriously, and if the sources were coming from them, I would be very hesitant to take this step. That is not who this is coming from. These are journalists who have very high standards, and I think we need to listen to them. I feel very uncomfortable to be put in the position that I have to make the decisions I’m having to make.

I am not very content, Mr. Turnbull, with the amendment you brought forward. It doesn’t meet the criteria I have. I understand that a special rapporteur is going to be appointed, but we’re still waiting to see who that will be.

I want to be very clear: With everything the Prime Minister has proposed, it is all secretive. It doesn’t allow for what we are calling for, which is a transparent, public and independent process. I also want to be clear that within these processes, honouring our national security and making sure that information isn’t broadcasted can be done in that process. We need somebody who’s independent leading this so that Canadians can have faith in their institutions. This is undermining the fundamental belief of so many Canadians in these institutions, and that matters to me greatly.

I will wait here and have this conversation, and I’m hoping I can have some answers. If I can’t have them right away, it would be good to have them fairly soon. I just want to know what the process is so that I can better understand it.

I also want to say I agree that, through this system, through what we’ve seen happen over the last few months.... I am concerned about the rhetoric I’m hearing from the Conservatives in their positions. I think it’s frightening. It’s divisive. It is such a system that says, “Let’s be afraid of everything, and everything is broken.” I don’t believe everything is broken. I don’t believe so because we have strong, amazing Canadians across this country who represent every single party in how they vote. They are strong and they have faith. We know that if we come together, we can find good solutions, and that is what I’m focused on.

I don’t want this to be about drama and intrigue. I want this to be about getting down to answers. The minute that we see a public inquiry that is transparent, independent and public, we’re going to have lots of different conversations. That is when the doors are opened for Canadians. At the end of the day, that’s whom I’m here fighting for.

I want Canadians to have absolute faith in their institutions. I believe in our institutions, and I have a lot of pride in our institutions. I want to make sure we strengthen them with everything we do. I have tried to do that in this committee, but unfortunately this is where we're at. I've had to make some very uncomfortable decisions, and I will make them because Canadians require that and they deserve the truth, so let's get to it.

• (5745)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

I'll just take a couple of seconds to say thank you for sharing parts of your agenda with us today. The reality is that we are all doing work here on the Hill as well as dealing with our communities. For me—and this is not to the same extent—it's important that people get to see what we do as members of Parliament, so on Tuesday I had people shadowing me, as did others. It would be one thing to have committed a long time ago that I would have lunch with them and then not have lunch, but at the same time, I had a class visiting and the list went on. It was never the intention to not find resources, but we have to work with people to find resources.

Every time members ask for more time, rest assured that we've had a Standing Order 106(4) request and we've come back to make sure we do meet. I will always do whatever I can.

As for resources today, we were informed that we have a maximum of four hours, so that's from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. At first we did not have that. The clerk and the team have worked really hard, so thank you for acknowledging my work, but I've been pushing them and they've been doing really well. They're here, hearing it, and we have four hours.

I understand that we can probably push it to about 1:30 p.m. I'm going to try. Basically, that is where we're at. It would be good to have ministers come, but to be honest, whenever we ask them, often we get responses back that they cannot attend. I do push back, and that's how we were able to get one minister, now two. We will always push for them to be here because it's important that the government come to respond. I believe in that as well. Rest assured I'm there with you.

As for the meeting notice, it will be corrected. There are little systems in place. That's why sometimes the clerk is not able to change it from home or wherever she is, but it will be corrected.

The panel we were going to have will not happen because we're in this meeting. The ministers are part of the agenda, so we will remain with that, and hopefully we can have them come. Then, with committee consent—and I think nobody here is undermining the importance of this topic and where we want to get to, and I'm hearing the nuances of people's points—we can always do whatever we want at committee by having agreement. If we agree that we need to continue this work, we need to get there.

It's good that we were able to vote on the original amendment. It's good to hear where you stand on this amendment to see if there's time to have conversations to get to a better spot so the committee can advance work that I agree Canadians expect us to do. There are a lot of concerns out there.

I take this matter very seriously. There are a few things I have unconditional faith in, and our democratic institutions and judicial system are two of them. I need to know that they are insulated and protected. Rest assured that you have my full agreement to make sure the committee gets to where it needs to get to. Hopefully, all members can recognize the nuances in the work different people do and how we protect the security of Canadians. We have that responsibility. It really does stop with the Prime Minister, and that is a massive responsibility. I would say that of any prime minister. I would never question a prime minister's allegiance to the country and the importance of security. That's of the utmost importance.

Thank you for that. I hope that addresses all of your questions. If not, let me know.

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll start by addressing the point of order that Mr. Berthold referenced a little while ago. He was very quick to defend the words of the Leader of the Opposition. What I'm more interested in, quite frankly, is listening to the Conservatives defend the words of one of their own members sitting on this committee who, surprisingly, hasn't been here since we brought up his words a couple of weeks ago. That's Mr. Calkins.

It's interesting. I know he's on the Hill.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Yes, I saw him this morning.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Yes, you saw him this morning. I saw him in the House yesterday, sitting there. I know he's here. I know he's a member of this committee. I also know that I raised, in a meeting I was participating in via Zoom a week or so ago, some comments that he made. In particular, he referred to a Liberal MP as an agent of Beijing. As soon as I did that, my understanding is the whip representative for the Conservatives dragged him out of the room, and he has not been back here since.

• (5750)

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen, I'm just going to pause for a second—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Sure.

**The Chair:** —to maintain my original point about the importance of this.

We know that it's unparliamentary to talk about the presence and absence of—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** On a point of order, that's only in the House of Commons. That's not in committee.

**The Chair:** The rules of the House of Commons echo in committees. I'm just being mindful of that.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Okay.

**The Chair:** I'm sure you can always find great ways to say whatever you're going to say. Just be mindful of that.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Sure. I appreciate the intervention. I think I made my point.

I would really like to hear the Conservatives—maybe one of the people filling in for Mr. Calkins today—at least inform us of whether or not he regrets making the comment that the Prime Minister openly had a candidate who is an agent of Beijing and whether or not they think that's appropriate. Quite frankly, I don't.

For Mr. Calkins to say that and then to not address the issue in committee, in the House or anywhere for that matter, is extremely troubling. I would like to ask him questions about that. What does he base that information on? Why does he think that claim is accurate? I think there's a lot of explaining to do. I just note the conspicuous absence of Mr. Calkins in this committee and that he is not addressing the issue. That would be my first thing.

I do know that Mr. Berthold is interested in ensuring that Conservative MPs' reputations are upheld. Perhaps he wants to weigh in, through a point of order at any time, on Mr. Calkins's comments. I would be more than anxious to hear what he has to say about that. Nobody from the Conservative bench has brought up or addressed that. They're even very skeptical of calling me out on a point of order in regard to my discussion about it. Nobody wants to touch that one with a 10-foot pole. Quite frankly, I don't blame them.

Let's get back to Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I think the amendment is very germane. I think it is the proper amendment because it's asking people who were on the ground during the election to weigh in. The reason you can have an open, frank and honest discussion about this with those particular individuals—the campaign directors—is they would not have been privy to any information other than what they obtained publicly. You can have an open and public conversation with them.

I heard what Ms. Blaney had to say a few moments ago. I respect her position on this, and I will address some of her concerns in a few moments, specifically those about how to go about dealing with classified information and where the proper venue is. I'll express why I don't think the public forum, through a public inquiry, is the best venue. Although I totally empathize here and totally agree and understand that Canadians are charged with wanting to understand this—and they have the right to—I just don't think the vehicle or venue being proposed by the NDP and the opposition is the right one.

I'll go back to the individuals Mr. Turnbull is asking to come forward through his amendment. These are people who know specifi-

cally about what they witnessed on the ground during the election. It shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody that the Conservative MPs here would not be interested in listening to what any of them have to say, including Mr. Fred DeLorey, who ran their campaign in the last election. He said, “I can confirm, without a shadow of a doubt, that the outcome of the election, which resulted in the Liberals forming government, was not influenced by any external meddling.”

There are a number of Conservatives who would also say they believe that, although the rhetoric they use in other conversations certainly doesn't support the fact that they agree with that position. I think this is where the rest of the Conservative MPs on this committee depart from Mr. DeLorey. He says, “public inquiries can be highly politicized and become more focused on scoring points and blaming...parties, rather than finding solutions.”

That's what Mr. Fred DeLorey, the Conservative campaign manager in the 2021 election, had to say about where this particular issue should be dealt with. It should come as no surprise to anybody that the Conservatives would be against listening to their own campaign manager from the election less than two years ago and having him sit at the end of this table to basically repeat those words to their faces.

• (5755)

He also went on to say—because that's not where it ended—in a CBC *Power & Politics* interview that it feels like opposition parties are only interested in “political theatre”. This is Mr. Fred DeLorey. This is the Conservative campaign manager who said this on *Power & Politics*. He said the opposition parties are only interested in political theatre.

I mean, I can understand why it's tough to swallow that when it's coming from one of your own, from literally the individual who led the Conservatives through the last election. That's a hard pill to swallow. You certainly wouldn't want him sitting at the end of this table repeating that to your face.

He also said that he has concerns with security issues being treated like this. He rightly should. But Mr. DeLorey wasn't only critical of his own MPs in his statements in both his op-ed and his discussions in the various interviews he's had. He was also very constructive. I'll give you a constructive quote from him. Again, this is Mr. Fred DeLorey, the Conservative campaign manager for the 2021 election. He said that “one committee that is well-suited to fulfill this role is Canada's National Security and Intelligence Committee”.

Once again, the Conservative campaign manager would have been responsible for funnelling any information regarding what was going on in foreign interference that their team, the Conservatives, witnessed during the last election back to the panel of experts who were monitoring the election. He has first-hand knowledge. He should have the complete picture of what any Conservative candidate witnessed in the last election. This individual, who has access to that, who would have been able to see the public part of it and who would have been able to compile and report that back to the expert panel, is the one saying the best place for this is in NSICOP.

Just for the record, the Conservative campaign manager, who would have seen all that and relayed all public foreign interference actions the Conservative Party recorded back to the panel monitoring this during the election, is saying the Conservatives are playing politics, they shouldn't be doing that and this issue should be dealt with at NSICOP. It should come as absolutely no surprise to anybody sitting around this table right now that the Conservatives would be against Mr. Turnbull's amendment. Why on earth would they want to have such damning testimony come from one of their own at this table, sitting right here?

Having said that, the Conservative Party continues to go down a road further and further to the right. It's a little more extreme every day. They appear to be even too extreme for Mr. DeLorey, who ran their last campaign. It should tell Canadians something about the Conservative movement in Canada, and how it's really taken on the role of getting further and further into the extremes, that an individual who ran their campaign less than two years ago is already really concerned with how those who were elected are acting.

I want to read something else to you that I found very, very interesting, Madam Chair. This came out of question period on Monday. There was an exchange, and I don't know if people really caught this. I do know there's some video circulating right now about it. I think it's very telling of the Leader of the Opposition's position and how he treats his role now, and indeed how he would have treated his role when he was minister. I think it also provides a bit of insight into how he would treat his role if he were to become the Prime Minister.

• (5800)

There was an exchange between Minister LeBlanc and Mr. Poilievre. Can I say his name?

**The Chair:** Yes, you can.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I can say his name, but I can't reference his absence, so some parliamentary rules extend here but not all. Is that right?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Okay, so I can say his name—"Mr. Poilievre" is okay—but I just can't reference.... I just want to make sure I understand where I am here.

In response to a question, Minister LeBlanc said:

Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise to you that I disagree with the opposition leader's false claims that the government did nothing. As soon as we came to power, we took action against foreign interference in our elections. Ours is the only government ever to have done so.

When my friend, the opposition leader, was the minister responsible for democratic institutions, he did nothing when intelligence agencies raised the issue over 10 years ago.

That's what Mr. LeBlanc said. What is so telling—and I almost fell out of my seat when I heard him say this—is the way the Leader of the Opposition replied. He's under no obligation to answer questions. One would think he would have just jumped into another question. Instead, because he's too tempted to reply, he said, "Mr. Speaker, we did not have to, because the Communist dictatorship in Beijing was not helping the Conservative Party to get elected.

Mr. Poilievre, the Leader of the Opposition, said that when he was in government, he didn't have to bother trying to deal with interference because others weren't trying to help them. Is that what the Leader of the Opposition thinks his job is? His job is only to be there. His job is only to protect from foreign interference when it's related to the Conservative Party. Who says that?

It provides such great insight into the Conservative Party of Canada and its leadership, and obviously what trickles down to the MPs, when the leader fully discloses that he didn't think—and he said this in question period, on the record eternally in Hansard—they had to worry about foreign interference because it wasn't affecting the Conservative Party. That was what he was saying.

To think that any representative doesn't realize that when they form government, their responsibility is to Canadians and the whole entire system, not just Conservatives, is absolutely mind-boggling. It's a great tell, because it provides great insight into Mr. Poilievre and how he sees the role of government.

I don't think that will fade away lightly. I don't think that's something people will quite easily forget. I think it really is a tell into his character and his personality and what he views the role of government to be.

With this whole issue, I find that I can't help but think back to what I quoted Mr. DeLorey as saying, which is that Conservatives are just playing politics and this is about "political theatre". Quite frankly, I can't think of an issue that requires more attention to being as non-partisan as possible and as collaborative as possible than protecting the fundamental institution that provides for everything else that we value so deeply in our country, and that's democracy.

The Prime Minister said something in his press conference. I believe it was on Tuesday night, but maybe it was Wednesday. Was it Monday?

**Voices:** It was Monday.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Okay, it was Monday, and he was 45 minutes late. Now I remember. We have to do something about that.

On Monday, at one point in his press conference, the Prime Minister said that the institution needs to outlast every single member of Parliament. That needs to be the focus of everything we do when it comes to analyzing, assessing and making recommendations about how to protect our democracy.

• (5805)

We have to remember that the institution absolutely must outlast every single one of us, so when we play politics—as Mr. DeLorey, the campaign manager for the Conservatives, is suggesting the opposition party is doing—and when we spend so much time going down that road, quite frankly, in my opinion, we're not doing that service. We're not doing everything we can to ensure that our democracy will outlast every member of Parliament.

I like to think that everybody here agrees with that. I would never cast aspersions otherwise and suggest they don't. I don't think it's in our best interest to be having these heated exchanges to try to score political points. It's much more incumbent upon us to find solutions and to work together.

This brings me to why I support Mr. Turnbull's amendment, as opposed to the motion. We're respecting the domain in which the conversation can be had. We can have a conversation in this room about public information and what was known to the public.

Mr. Cooper and others from the Conservatives are hell-bent on trying to drag staff before this committee, but even if those staffers, whomever they are, have various levels of clearance and are able to discuss information, they will not be able to say anything more than what we heard from Jody Thomas, which was it's important that we respect the fact that different pieces of information have to be treated differently, and we can't have open conversations in a forum like this about classified information. Her main concern when she came before this committee was about having similar open conversations in a public inquiry.

When we talk about ensuring there is an opportunity to have these conversations, I think what we should be having in this room are conversations that have more to do with the public aspect of this. What did those campaign managers experience? Those conversations are the ones we need to have in this room.

I would like to hear from Mr. DeLorey. I'd like to hear from the campaign managers of all political parties about what they experienced. That's public information. To Ms. Blaney's point, if we want to try to strengthen our institutions, we can get real recommendations from these individuals, which we can then relay back through a report to the House and to the government on how they can make changes. I think that is what we can do in this venue. We can't drag staff before this venue, even if they are in a position to answer the questions, and ask them to answer questions that Ms. Thomas has said are outside the scope of what can be discussed in a committee like this and in a public forum like this.

I want to find ways that we can further strengthen the institution. I want to hear from Mr. DeLorey. I want to hear from the campaign managers of all the political parties so they can make recommendations to us.

I also think this was very interesting. Ms. Thomas made a point, and this is what I wanted to address after what I heard Ms. Blaney speak about a few moments ago. These were Ms. Thomas's words; I wrote them down. She said that intel often doesn't convert into evidence. I think that's very important.

We heard from Mr. Morrison, the deputy minister of foreign affairs, a couple of weeks ago as well. I'll get into what he said about this. He specifically went on about it. He was trying, in any way he could, to caution the committee about going down this road and being careful about information that is received. He made very clear the difference between intel and evidence. More importantly, all of them made very clear how you get from intel to evidence and how you get from intel to arresting somebody for doing something.

• (5810)

I want to read to you what Mr. Morrison said in committee. I think this is very important and that it has been glossed over by the committee. He said:

...I will not be commenting on any individual media reports, but I wish to acknowledge—as members of the committee are well aware—that there is an active debate going on right now about how reputable media organizations could be reporting that highly classified intelligence documents describe how a foreign power did this or that to influence the most recent Canadian elections, including by engaging in patently illegal activity, such as funnelling money to candidates. How could that be going on while, at the same time, others, including me, maintain there was no foreign interference detected in 2019 or 2021 that threatened Canada's ability to have a free and fair election nationally or at the level of individual ridings? How can these two sides of this ongoing debate be reconciled?

I believe much of the answer lies in the questions recently addressed on social media by professor Stephanie Carvin of Carleton University. These same questions form the crux of a recent interview given by former clerk of the Privy Council Ian Shugart, who, as you know, was a member of this panel in 2019.

This is where it really gets interesting. He said:

The key questions are these: What is intelligence, and how is it used? Without repeating all the points made by Dr. Carvin and Mr. Shugart, let me simply say that intelligence rarely paints a full, concrete or actionable picture. Intelligence almost always comes heavily caveated and qualified in ways designed to caution consumers such as me from jumping to conclusions, while at the same time helping us at least to gain a little more awareness.

An example would be a report based on “an uncorroborated source of unknown reliability”. In layman's terms, I would call this a report based on rumour.

Those were Mr. Morrison's words, and I found them really interesting because, during my opportunity to question him at that meeting, I specifically asked him about his thoughts on that. I remember painting an example. I said that he might have various reports based on “intel”—for what that's worth—come across his desk. Then he assesses that intel and makes the decision on what to move forward, what not to move forward, what to act on and what the proper course of action on each piece of intel is. He said to us that some pieces of intel end right there.

To Ms. Blaney's point earlier in the debate when she was talking about intel, I think it's really important to remember that, first of all, not all intel is real, not all intel is true, not all intel converts into evidence and not all intel even goes anywhere beyond a report about intel. As he said, there are many caveats. You have to look at the source. You have to look at the context in which it's being said. You have to look at the reliability of the information, and then they make decisions and move them on.

One thing we also heard them say repeatedly.... The RCMP said this when they were here at the same meeting: It has no active investigations going on right now. I mean, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to read between the lines that intel comes in, decisions are made with respect to that intel and then action is taken. We heard that no action was being taken. To me that says that any intel that may have been picked up through a leak by Global or somewhere else was not actionable. I'm making those assumptions because they can't even confirm or deny any of that, but I'm at least able to read between the lines.

• (5815)

From my position, this doesn't in any way suggest that Canadians shouldn't be concerned. That's not the case at all. I think Canadians should be concerned. A certain part of me is glad to see that we are having these conversations—although not necessarily that we're running around in circles—and, more importantly, that Canadians are having these conversations on this very important issue. That says to me that Canadians are aware of this, they're paying attention to it and they care about it. I think that's very important.

What I'm looking to get out of this is how we ensure that Canadians are getting what they want and what they need. How do we ensure that they get information in a public forum, that they get feedback and that they get the confidence they need while still respecting the classification and highly sensitive nature of the work that CSIS and the other agencies do? That's where the line gets drawn. All members are concerned about foreign interference. I think the line is between those who want to actually do something about it and those who want to use it for political opportunity.

I genuinely feel as though the NDP and the Bloc want to use this opportunity to do what's best, so I'm not against the idea of having the public weigh in and making sure the public is aware of what's going on. I just don't think a public inquiry into a Global News article is the right way to do it. I think the right way to do this is by putting the information in the hands of those who are tasked to do it.

To that end, I'll go back to Minister LeBlanc's comment, which I referenced earlier. He said that we've done a number of things, and indeed we have. I think it's important to reflect upon them in the context of this discussion.

The first is that we established the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, or NSICOP. This is a committee of parliamentarians—Liberals, Conservatives, Bloc and NDP—and some senators who have the opportunity to review information that has come forward, review all intelligence and work hand in hand with CSIS and NSIRA to get to the bottom of this and get questions answered. They do have to do this in a manner that respects the confidentiality of the information.

The unfortunate part about it is that it has to be done in a way that respects the classification of the information, but NSICOP does report to Parliament. I'm sure my colleagues sitting around the table have taken the opportunity to read all of the NSICOP reports that have come forward from the committee and made sure that they're fully aware of everything that's contained within them, because there's a lot of good information. Just because NSICOP has to evaluate information behind closed doors does not mean that it cannot

make recommendations. It does not mean that it cannot report to Parliament and provide insight into what it has come to conclusions on. NSICOP does do that.

To suggest that NSICOP is not the right venue because the information just goes into a black hole that nobody ever gets to see isn't true. What happens is NSICOP and its members—in particular the parliamentarians and senators who sit on that committee—will review the information. They get to ask questions of those who gathered the information. They get to dive deep into it. Mrs. Romanado mentioned that Mr. Ruff is one of the members on that committee. I believe Mr. Motz, a Conservative, is too—or at least he was previously.

• (5820)

These are individuals who had the opportunity to put their eyes on this information and then, working with the committee, make recommendations back to Parliament. They've done that and have reported to Parliament already based on what they have been able to gather through that intelligence-gathering exercise.

That's a perfect venue for this information to be analyzed. That's why Mr. Fred DeLorey, the Conservative campaign manager from 2021, agrees with that assessment. He agrees with the fact that that's the best place to assess the information. I'm inclined to support him on that. I never thought that I would have such a close alignment on what we should do with the Conservative campaign manager, but I do. That's the one thing we established.

I will remind members of this committee that NSICOP, which was created by the government and which Stephen Harper, the former prime minister, was not interested in, is unfortunately a committee that the Conservatives have a history of playing politics with. Look back to the previous leader, the member for Durham, who by all accounts looks like a centrist now. What did he do? He pulled his members from that committee out of defiance, in order to somehow suggest that they were not going to keep their membership on that committee because it doesn't serve Canadians.

Conservatives have a history of playing politics with NSICOP, and unfortunately we're seeing that again. As I indicated in a previous intervention, maybe a week ago, it's unfortunate, but Conservatives seem most interested through this exercise in just ensuring that they have sound bites and opportunities to continually bring up this issue through a public inquiry. In my opinion, they're more interested in the politics of it than in genuinely coming to any kind of solution. That's why I find it very troubling that they would treat this committee in such a partisan way.

The other thing this government did, which I think is really important to point out, and this was in time for the 2019 election, was to establish a group of independent experts who would review in real time and have the authority to respond in real time to foreign interference that was occurring during a writ period. I think this is very important, despite the fact that Mr. Cooper, when the witnesses of the panel were before this committee, was berating them at length and treating them as though they had done something that in my opinion they hadn't. I think we're very lucky to have a group of experts in the field of foreign interference who include bureaucrats, top civil servants, who by nature of their employment are non-partisan and whose interest is in ensuring that our democracy remains free, fair and transparent during election periods. It always makes me worried about foreign interference specifically in an election period, because the policy-makers, the members of Parliament, are busy in the election campaign, working on connecting with constituents in their ridings, running around doing the incredibly time-consuming work and, by default, they don't have the ability to also be monitoring this stuff very closely.

Knowing that we have this panel monitoring this in the background, a panel that Mr. DeLorey and other campaign managers could funnel what they're seeing on the ground back to and reply if necessary, knowing that this is going on, I think, is something that all members of Parliament should take great pride in, namely, that we have individuals who are trying to safeguard our elections while the elections are ongoing. Having that panel in place, something that this government brought in, is extremely important.

• (5825)

What's more important is that after the election is over, a third party works with the panel and provides a report. That won't stop Mr. Poilievre from making comments, as he recently did, that the only thing we did was hire somebody to write a report and, at the same time, making disparaging comments with regard to these dedicated public servants who have worked for decades, suggesting they're somehow corrupt or politically motivated. It doesn't stop him from attacking them, but the reality is that we do have individuals who care deeply about our democracy and through their work and through the work that's being reported back, we were able to learn that no interference occurred that jeopardized our election and that our election and its results were free and open and occurred properly.

It's incumbent upon us to reflect on the fact that they do incredible work and that we're obligated to ensure that we give them the supports they need moving forward. Rather than dragging in and trying to dig up dirt and making more unsubstantiated claims, why aren't we focusing on that? Why aren't we focusing on talking to the panel and asking what we can recommend to the government to allow them to do a better job? That, in my opinion, is what our job as policy-makers is.

I talked about NSICOP and about the special panel that was set up for the writ period, but we even did something before that, and that was Bill C-76. Even before any of that, we brought in Bill C-76. One of the things that Bill C-76 did right off the bat was to make it easier for individuals to vote. This was in response to the minister at the time, who happens to be the Leader of the Opposition now, who, when he was the minister of democratic institutions,

brought in legislation that made it more difficult for Canadian citizens to vote. When you try to limit the ability of people to participate in democracy, I think Canadians should be taking great notice of that as well. I think many of them did, and perhaps that contributed to why the Conservative Party lost the trust of Canadians and Mr. Harper wasn't re-elected.

However, the reality is that Bill C-76 did more than just undo some of what Mr. Poilievre did through his legislation when he was democratic institutions minister. Bill C-76 also tightened up rules around financing and, in particular, foreign interference and foreign financing, to make sure that we could limit that to the best of our ability, because we don't want individuals funding our elections who are not from within this country. What I find really interesting about Bill C-76 is that the Conservatives voted against it in 2018, despite the fact that they sit at the table, throw their arms up in the air and raise all hell about foreign funding in elections. We had a bill, parts of which made it more difficult for foreign actors to participate in the funding of our elections, and the Conservatives voted against it, yet they sit here today from a place of all high and mighty suggesting that they are the authority when it comes to looking out for democracy.

It really goes back to my point, and Mr. DeLorey's point too, about how Conservatives are just using this as political theatre. They're using the opportunity here just to try to ensure that, at all costs, they can do whatever they can to try to smear the government. They don't appear to care about what the genuine impact is on our democracy—at least not from my perspective.

• (5830)

Madam Chair, I talked about the three main things that we have done since we came to power: Bill C-76 with respect to foreign funding, NSICOP, and the expert panel we established for the writ period. These are three major things this government has done when it comes to combatting foreign interference.

I find it very rich, as I think I read from Mr. Poilievre's intervention a couple of days ago, that he says we haven't done anything. That's simply not the case. We've done more than what I've just indicated, and we're proposing to do even more, because there is a legitimate concern out there right now, whether it's fuelled by Conservative rhetoric or by unsubstantiated reports or by Global News articles based on what could be just rumours. As a witness before this committee said, there is genuine concern out there. As Canadians, if there's anything to be concerned about, we should obviously take concern.

I'm actually really happy in some regards about the Conservatives, who have finally come on board and said, "Hey, maybe we want to have something to say about foreign interference too, because we voted against Bill C-76, we stripped our committee members from NSICOP and haven't really shown an interest in this"—and now they do. That's great. They're here. They're here at the table, better late than never, and it's great to see Conservatives interested in foreign interference.

The question is, how do we make it better? How do we change the processes we have in place, because we always have to be changing, as the threats are always going to change? Is a public inquiry the best way to do it? Are we going to get out of the public inquiry anything of substance, according to Mr. DeLorey? No. According to all the experts who came before this committee, we won't. But what we can do is work with NSICOP and with the legislation that's already in place. We can identify where we can improve it.

One thing I forgot to mention about the public inquiry, and I think Mr. DeLorey said this himself.... Gosh, I never imagined that I would say the name of a Conservative campaign manager so many times in this speech, but here we are. He hit all the points and hit the nail right on the head. The other issue that I heard him bring up, and I've heard others bring it up, is with respect to the time a public inquiry would take. If there were to be a public inquiry—which Ms. Blaney seems to be in favour of—the average public inquiry takes two to four years. What are we going to get in terms of recommendations? Will it even report before the next election, if the NDP stays true to its word on working with this government? I guess if we're on the short end of those two years, we would get that just before the election, but if we are on the long end of that, it would be after the next election.

Notwithstanding that fact, Madam Chair, so much can happen between now and then. New threats come along and suddenly this public inquiry is almost out of date because it's not even addressing the threats of the day. There's the issue of time, which I think is something we need to be very concerned about.

These aren't my words; I didn't come up with that. I didn't go and research how long the average public inquiry takes and what the pros and cons are. I'm genuinely listening to the experts. As a matter of fact, if I'm being totally honest with you, Madam Chair, because I do like to do that, I'm going to come clean with you. It's time to do that. When the idea of a public inquiry first started floating around, there was a part of me that said, "Hey, why wouldn't we do this?" It kind of made sense. I really had an open mind about it. I thought it might be something that would put a lot of.... Why wouldn't you do that, if it's so easy and if it would provide Canadians the comfort they're looking for?

● (5835)

Then I started listening to the experts, and expert after expert—and top security advisers, NSICOP, the people who had been on the panel, the people who are tasked with holding this information and gathering this information—started to say, "No, no, you can't do this in a public forum because we can't give the information to the public as it would jeopardize our sources." I started to think to myself that maybe that does make sense. It's never an easy position to take, because you want to be as open and transparent as possible, but the reality is that, according to what they were saying, you have to be careful with that information. Quite frankly, they even said.... I think Ms. Thomas said at this committee that she couldn't share any information with a public inquiry that she couldn't share with this committee, because this is an open forum. That makes sense. Then I started to change my mind. I thought that makes sense—it's obviously not going to be the most comforting thing for people to hear, but it does make sense.

Then I started to hear people like Mr. Fred DeLorey, the former campaign manager for the Conservatives, say exactly the same thing. I thought it kind of makes sense and I understand. I know it doesn't put Canadians' minds at ease with respect to what's going on with the entire situation, but it certainly does make a lot of sense. It made a lot of sense to me when I heard them talk about that. I very quickly came to agree with what the experts were saying.

I find it interesting that expert after expert will come before the committee and tell us that, yet there are members of the committee who are just so blatantly willing to disregard it, with all due respect to my NDP and Bloc colleagues, and just toss aside the information. You have people coming before you saying, "This is vitally critical information." This is me reading between the lines. "If we share the information with the public, we can burn our sources; we can reveal our sources; we can jeopardize the integrity of being able to work with our allies." Can you imagine if our allies knew that we would hold a public inquiry and just share all of the information? Our allies would say they are not sharing anything else with us ever again, and that kind of makes sense.

Ms. Blaney brought up the point when she was speaking earlier—and I heard her colleague Mr. Boulerice say this as well when we were on a panel together—that you can put some information in closed session, and some information in public, and you can operate it like that. The problem is that the vast majority of the information you need to hear, notwithstanding the fact that people don't have the proper security clearance to hear the information, would have to be held in such a manner. So what's the point of having a public inquiry if the majority of the information that's being shared and talked about in that inquiry is not accessible to the public? This is where it goes back to the comments from Mr. DeLorey and from the experts and from all of those before about why it's so important that the information be treated and used in the right venue.

I think it's very important for us to reflect on that, and I think it's also important for us to reflect on this concept of interference not being new. Perhaps the manner in which interference occurs now is changing; it's evolving. It has probably changed a lot in the last 20 or 30 years with the Internet and the ability to influence situations and influence public opinion. It's something that has certainly been talked about a lot more and in different venues, but it is not something that is brand new. Foreign interference is something that has been going on in one form or another for a long time, and governments have been seized with this for a long time, both Liberal and Conservative governments throughout our history.

The part of this that becomes very alarming is more specifically with respect to how we can allow it to happen in a way that perhaps is much more covert and therefore so much easier to hide. That's why we have put in place the mechanisms we have, the mechanisms of allowing the members of NSICOP to look at all of the intel so they can see it themselves in an unclassified manner and, for the first time ever, a panel that monitors in real time.

• (5840)

This is the point I was trying to make. With the advent of technology, we see the ability to interfere more quickly and in a much more covert manner. That's why we need rapid response mechanisms that are able to deal with this in real time. That's where the panel comes in, but the panel has to review the information. Quite often it's in a classified manner. Then the panel has to report back to the public after the election. That's what we see them do when they bring that information forward later on, and they can provide it to us in a manner that does not jeopardize the classification of the information that went into making it. It is important to reflect on the fact that foreign interference in some capacity or another is not something that is brand new.

I will now turn, Madam Speaker, to the last meeting we had, at which we did have the individuals who came forward to the committee—we had Foreign Affairs, and before that we had CSIS, and it started off with Elections Canada. I think it is important to reflect on the number of times Elections Canada has come to this committee. They are interested in working with us in an open and transparent way. That's a vehicle for us to give recommendations as to how we can make changes and how we should suggest changes. We need to be doing more of that.

To Mr. Turnbull's amendment here, what he's basically trying to do, in my opinion, is to say let's strip the politics out of this. Let's put aside the political rhetoric, let's have the individuals who were receiving the information, any who were on the ground in the last election and who would have been subject to receiving information from their candidates in terms of foreign interference, and let's hear what they have to say. It's actually a really good group to listen to, not to hear their partisan spins on everything but just to hear about what they were experiencing at the time. That's what Mr. Turnbull's motion is attempting to do, Madam Chair.

We know the Conservatives want to bring forward every staffer they think they can get a sound bite out of. They want to drag them before the end of this table and subject them to the same aggressive attack style that Mr. Cooper had with government officials. If he is willing to do that to non-partisan public servants, we can only imagine how he would treat an individual who came before the committee who actually worked in the office of a minister or of the Prime Minister.

We're not going to gather much intel and much information from them in order to make recommendations. We would be better off if we were to have information about what was going on in the last election on the ground. His amendment specifically says to invite the 2019 and 2021 national campaign directors of each recognized party in the House of Commons and the security-cleared party representatives to the security and national intelligence threats election task force during the 2019-21 federal elections. That would provide more insight for this committee if the objective of the committee really is to get down to understanding what was going on and how we can provide meaningful input into ensuring that there are substantial recommendations that we can make through a report back to Parliament and to the government on what they can do.

When we reflect on how we've gotten to this point, Madam Chair, I know I talked about NSICOP and the special panel and Bill

C-76. We've also heard from a number of experts at this committee. We've heard from Global Affairs and CSIS, who came before the committee and provided us with as much information as they could. They confirmed that there were no active investigations going on, or at least the RCMP in the same panel did.

• (5845)

We also heard from the RCMP and CSIS in their panel, specifically that their job is to collect secrets and keep secrets. They are very interested in protecting their sources. I think it is very easy for us to point fingers and try to suggest that there's some kind of nefarious activity going on. I know that the opposition wants to try to suggest that the Prime Minister is covering something up. But the reality is that any information that has been relayed back to us, at this end of the table, by the experts who have come before has been that they have no information that suggests there was any foreign interference. That's what we heard Ms. Thomas and others say at this end of the table.

Madam Chair, I think I have made the majority of the points that I wanted to contribute to Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I think that he brings forward a good amendment in terms of trying to gather information that we can genuinely use and that can be useful to us in order to provide our recommendations.

I will perhaps end my discussion today where I began, and that is with respect to the manner in which I've been witnessing members of Parliament treat other members of Parliament and disparaging their character. Specifically, I reference Mr. Calkins' attack on Mr. Dong and the manner in which he treated him, the manner in which he attempted to stir political division—or to fundraise or to do whatever he was doing—by suggesting that a sitting member of Parliament is an agent of Beijing. I think it's extremely unfortunate.

I think Mr. Berthold can defend Mr. Poilievre's claims and what Mr. Poilievre said of the Prime Minister. I think he can do that. I think he can skate around and try to explain away what Mr. Poilievre said—which he already did in this committee—but I don't think he can explain away what Mr. Calkins said. I think it's extremely unfortunate when we go down that road of accusing other members of Parliament, basically, of treason, of working on behalf of another entity by calling them an agent of Beijing. They're saying that their loyalty is not to Canada, their loyalty is not to their constituents, but rather their loyalty is to a foreign country. And that's exactly what Mr. Calkins did.

I think it's extremely unfortunate that we would tolerate this. I think it's unfortunate that Mr. Calkins has not come forward and explained that, apologized for it, retracted it and deleted the video that he posted regarding that. I think it's extremely unfortunate that his colleagues who sit at this table don't try to, at the very least, say that it was wrong for him to have said that. I think that if they're genuinely in this, not for the political gain of this, they would do that, unless of course they felt the same way and therefore felt as though they didn't need to say that.

I really hope that when my Conservative colleagues contribute to the conversation today they could address that point. They could address why, according to the minutes of the agenda, Mr. Calkins' name doesn't appear to be on any of them since a number of meetings ago. Is that in order, Madam Chair? It's a printed document. His name wasn't on the document from the minutes, so I think that's in order.

• (5850)

I think it's very telling. I think the Conservatives are nervous about the fact that he said that. I don't think it's appropriate. They need to own up to it. It would be great if one Conservative colleague on that side of the table could actually do that. I think it's important for us to respect the fact that we are all honourable members. To suggest that somebody is working for another country, I think, is extremely unfortunate.

With that, Madam Chair, I've said my bit for now. I do have more to add, but I think for now that may be all I have to say. Were members expecting a little bit more? Is everybody good? Okay.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Ms. Sahota, go ahead.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It was really nice to hear what I think was my colleague's preamble to the full speech that we'll hear later on when we reconvene this meeting or continue this meeting. I know he's just getting started. That's like the famous words of David Christopherson at PROC back in the day. I always used to admire his ability to bring passion and a lot of insight to any debate. He would also say, "I'm just getting started" after we had heard from him for countless hours at times. That was very interesting.

I'm going to focus some of my initial comments around some of the things my colleague said and some of the things I've been hearing from various sources, whether the Conservatives or the media, as the debate grows about having a public inquiry versus what the Prime Minister has announced and the misinterpretation as to what a public inquiry might result in and what a special rapporteur is and the jokes and all the stuff we've been hearing lately.

First, we've been hearing the demands for a public inquiry. I've stated here before, and I'll state it here again, that I'm not fully convinced but I'm not fully against the idea either. I think we have been given a great opportunity at this committee to continue to hear from our experts on public safety and security in this country—the agencies and ministers who might come forward today and in various other meetings—as to what the best course forward might be. We

will also be hearing about a special rapporteur; that will be decided on and announced in the coming days as well. He or she will have free rein to decide whether a public inquiry is the right route to go or not. I'm not fully convinced, but I'm still open to the idea.

One of the arguments I've been hearing coming from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Poilievre, is about the many mechanisms that Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Gerretsen have highlighted—and I'll highlight in the second portion of my talk the misinterpretation that's been happening as to all the steps, or the misinformation that's been put out there. The criticism has been, "Oh, well, NSICOP is not a parliamentary committee. How dare some people call it an actual committee?" I've been hearing those remarks in question period quite a bit. Well, it is a committee of parliamentarians. It may not be a standing committee of the House of Commons. However, it is a committee of all parties. Members from all parties are on this committee—the Conservatives, the Bloc, the NDP and the Liberals—and they have top secret clearance so they're able to take a look at these documents.

I was looking on the Government of Canada's website to really understand better how a public inquiry would be created. What I've heard is that NSICOP is created by cabinet, appointed by the Prime Minister through an order in council, and therefore maybe what they are alluding to, and outright saying at times as well, is that this committee is not independent. For some reason, we are seeing the Conservatives especially question the integrity of the chair, who has a lot of integrity. I think most people across party lines would say that Mr. McGuinty, who has served here for many years, has a lot of credibility as a parliamentarian. David McGuinty, who is the chair of NSICOP, and the other members take their work very seriously.

• (5855)

What's very interesting is that, in order to set up a public inquiry, a commission would be established by the Governor in Council, which is cabinet. Cabinet would be establishing this public inquiry. Of course, they would be giving this public inquiry a mandate to fully and impartially investigate issues of national importance, in this case one that is of extreme importance to me and I'm sure to all members of this committee, and especially the Prime Minister: foreign interference. It has had a great deal of importance to us since we formed government in 2015, immediately, having learned from even that election and from previous elections that it was already out in the public that interference is a real thing, not just in Canada. We saw shortly after, in the 2016 elections in France and the U.S., that this was a growing problem in the world.

That's the first point: that this inquiry would be created in the same way, through an order in council, as was NSICOP, that committee. Does that now make this public inquiry that we may have impartial? Or does it make it partial? I don't know. The Conservatives have been implying that somehow NSICOP is partial and not fully independent because it's created in a similar fashion. We would hope, of course, that this inquiry would be led by an expert judge who, just like the special rapporteur, would have the ability to bring forward witnesses and bring forward testimony and all those things that a special rapporteur is also given the ability to do in his or her investigation.

I'll get a little bit into the definition of a special rapporteur, because I know the Conservatives find it very humorous and have been laughing quite a bit because of the lack of understanding as to what it means. I think it's only fair to educate all parliamentarians and the public as to what the difference might be—what a special rapporteur is and what a public inquiry is—and actually how similar those two things could be, especially given this context.

I know that in some contexts we've had people come before us and give public testimony on a lot of issues, but when you're dealing with an issue that is of a sensitive nature like this, I don't think the public inquiry would end up being the great revelation that most people would expect of a public inquiry. That's my one concern: that perhaps we are over-promising Canadians in some way that this public inquiry will be the answer to all the questions they have. They have good questions and they have a right to have those questions. Many of us have those questions as well.

However, I think many responsible parliamentarians do understand the different committees and the protocol that has been set and put in place in order to evaluate these sensitive issues. We have respect for those who have served as public servants for a long time and we know they would be impartial in deliberating and giving us advice, just like our analysts and our clerk. We have great respect for them as well—to be able to guide us through our committee reports and to give us good procedural advice and make it impartial—and I don't think any of us, as long as I've been here, have ever questioned that. That's the first thing.

I also came across a study as to what the public perception is of public inquiries and what the expectations are of public inquiries. The study is really interesting. It took a broad sample size of about a thousand people or so and really delved into what the public's expectations are of a public inquiry. This study was done in 2022. We have seen a growing number of public inquiries being done in the U.K. and the U.S. Here, we've had many public inquiries. We just had one not too long ago, which was legislated that we must have, after the protests and the convoy that took place here on Parliament Hill. That was a must. We had to have a public inquiry after the use of the Emergencies Act.

● (5900)

We've seen in other inquiries before—and the survey makes it quite clear as well—that many people have expectations that a public inquiry is somehow a trial of some sort, where the judge or the person presiding over the public inquiry would have great powers to subpoena and also to maybe criminalize and punish those who are wrongdoers or actors through this public inquiry. At times, we have seen that public inquiries, although they can vindicate some people, can also be disappointing to others who thought that once the information was out in the public they were going to get some kind of criminal justice out of the public inquiry. That's not always the case. We've also heard, as my colleagues have mentioned in some of the testimony that has come before our committee, that oftentimes—and actually always, until it gets to a certain point—it's not evidence and it would not necessarily lead to investigations or charges.

We've also seen times when charges are laid based on intel received through CSIS and through American intelligence agencies

as well. We had an example here before of weapons of mass destruction. All the intelligence was pointing towards weapons of mass destruction. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, after all of the intelligence that was being fed in by Five Eyes partners. I think many of us have a lot of respect for the amount of resources and tools that the U.S. has at its disposal and especially that its federal agencies have. Even they got it wrong. Even they got it wrong with the amount of resources and the sources they have to be able to get something right. They got it wrong, and they advised the government in the wrong way at the time.

When people have looked at stuff like this, it doesn't surprise me that the results of the survey are such that there are a lot of questions around what a public inquiry would end up resulting in. It says that over 45% of the public doesn't know if a public inquiry would actually explain the issues to them as the inquiry unfolds, so there are always questions left.

I think you heard what the Prime Minister said, and some comments about what the Prime Minister said yesterday, some critiques, fair or unfair, about some of the words he said around the issue of how there may still be questions, no matter what he may or may not say about this issue. There may always be questions surrounding foreign interference and the security of our democracy. I have to agree with him. No matter who the Prime Minister is, whether it's a Conservative prime minister, perhaps an NDP prime minister or a Liberal prime minister, these issues will continue to exist, and there will always be questions around the top secret work that these agencies do.

I think it's always been intriguing. I think that's why so many movies are made about these types of issues: because the public wants to know. The Conservatives have done no favours in the area of sensationalizing this issue. They've made it into a movie of some sort so that the public can digest and feed its curiosity and intrigue, but that's a dangerous game to play. This is not for entertainment. This is a serious matter, the risk to our democracy.

● (5905)

The survey did result in a large sample of the public saying that they weren't sure what public inquiries necessarily result in. Another thing that was very interesting in the survey was whether they believed or didn't believe certain elements of a public inquiry. They were asked whether a public inquiry has a jury: 35% didn't know whether a public inquiry had a jury and 25% thought it was true. Those are high numbers of people who don't even know, people who think it's actually true that this is some type of trial or jury that is going to take place. Forty per cent knew that wasn't true. The majority either didn't know or thought it was true that a public inquiry has a jury.

Some other questions were asked as true-or-false questions: “Does a public inquiry have the power to award people compensation?” Did you know that 45% of the respondents in the survey answered “yes”, that a public inquiry had the power to award compensation, and 32% didn't know? Only 23% said that was false. I think that's really interesting, because the expectation and what's being built up to be consumed by the public right now, I would contend, is a false narrative that is being built up.

There are some good things that can come out of a public inquiry, but I think there are some good things that could come out of NSICOP and some great things that have come out of Mr. Rosenberg's report, which, by the way, was informed by our top intelligence officers. The committee that took a look at the issue of the 2021 election and whether it was free and fair had the clearance to go through all of that information, and those people are top public officials, non-partisan public officials. They obviously received that information in private or in secret. As the Conservatives keep saying, so many of these things are being done in secret. Well, they're being done in secret because they are looking at top secret documents, so it's no surprise that those things are being done in secret.

What the public may not be aware of, however—as some of our witnesses have informed us here, and as I think, on many panels, experts have come forward and also said—is that in a public inquiry the person who would be presiding over that inquiry would also see these things in secret. NSICOP sees things in secret. The protocol committee saw things in secret. The rapporteur will probably have to see some things. He will see them all himself—sorry, I should say “he or she”. We just had International Women's Day. I feel like I've been programmed since I was a young child myself to constantly say “he”. I have to un-program myself. I really hope that it would be a prominent female to lead this investigation.

On the inquiry as well, that stuff would be in secret. We're hearing the words “in camera” being used. Our committee goes in camera at times as well. When we go in camera, that stuff is a secret. That's a parliamentary committee, a standing committee of the House of Commons that has members of all parties and that, at times, due to sensitive reasons, has to go in secret. That doesn't mean you're up to something dubious or nefarious or whatnot, as the opposition parties have tried to imply and even outright state in many of the press conferences I've been seeing. They are letting Canadians know that somehow, because there's sensitive material that's being viewed and it gets viewed behind closed doors or in secret, that's a bad thing. Well, that's not a bad thing. That is done in order to protect all of us and to protect our country.

• (5910)

The very fact that the opposition parties sometimes want to.... I have to give them the benefit of the doubt, but sometimes I think that maybe they just want to see this place burn; maybe they don't. Maybe they're not interested in the truth. Maybe they just really want to see the world burn, and I'm not interested in that. I honestly want to figure out how we can get the best result.

We'll hear from ministers today and other witnesses at this committee. If somebody convinces me that a public inquiry is the way to go because somehow we will have a better result or outcome, or Canadians won't be left with any questions after a public inquiry and all their questions will be solved, even though a lot of the stuff that is going to be presented at a public inquiry will be done in secret—at a public inquiry, in secret—then I'm for it.

I've heard some things about the special rapporteur: that this could take years, until the next election, that it could take all the time in the world to have a special rapporteur look into this matter. Well, I was looking at the UN. The UN is most popularly known for appointing special rapporteurs for many different things, and I'll

get into having that discussion and making sure that everybody is aware of all the different human rights categories that they appoint special rapporteurs for. I think I counted 60 or 70 different areas and 13 different countries that currently have special rapporteurs appointed for extremely heavy investigations surrounding human rights concerns, war crimes and many things.

They're generally appointed for a year in a term. There are public inquiries that have gone on for much longer than that. I think my colleague also mentioned in a previous meeting that the average public inquiry could go on for four years or so. Is the public ready for an inquiry of four years? That's a possibility. It's not necessary, but I'm going to put it out there because I think the public deserves to know the other side of this. We deserve to know all the pros and cons to this issue, because the Conservatives are definitely getting out there and talking about all the cons to having a special rapporteur. Therefore, I think we should weigh it and make sure that we give all the pros and cons to both. There are cons to both, and there are pros to both as well.

The average amount of time could be four years or more for a public inquiry. That's the type of stuff they've been implying. I've even heard the media mention that the special rapporteur could go on forever and we may not have a result. Well, it's the same thing for a public inquiry, so let's just make it clear so the public understands that they may be in the same position.

I was also looking at costs, Madam Chair, the costs of what a public inquiry can be. I'm not against—especially when it comes to the security of our institutions in this country—putting our money where our mouth is to make sure that we have robust, safe measures in place and that we have a good system that would alert us and indicate to us when there is a foreign threat—or an internal threat. I think I've mentioned before misrepresentation and disinformation campaigns. I'm going to get to an issue that happened to me in the 2015 election, which was quite concerning, regarding some things that were very parallel to what happened to Kenny Chiu. Stay tuned for that. That's an interesting story that I'll share with all of you today.

I was talking about the cost of a public inquiry. The cost for just the public inquiry that's being done regarding the Ottawa LRT.... The LRT for Ottawa is a small issue in comparison to foreign interference. Some Ottawa members of Parliament might disagree. They might think that's the end-all and be-all issue of importance, but the LRT doesn't even run, from my knowledge of it, in all that large of a geography.

• (5915)

However, the last time I could find a calculation—last November, in November of 2022—the public inquiry that is being done for the Ottawa LRT has cost \$14.5 million. That's \$14.5 million. I think that's going to make it hard for the Conservatives to sleep tonight. I really do. That's because I know they are fiscally responsible, or they at least claim to be fiscally responsible. They claim to be fiscally responsible, but they're saying that there is no option that could be a viable or good option other than a public inquiry. That could be costly, could be done in secret and could result in Canadians still being dissatisfied at the end of the day, because there are so many secrets in a public inquiry.

A really extremely tragic event that shook our nation was the 2020 mass shooting. That public inquiry cost \$25.6 million. It was \$25.6 million. I can only believe the numbers for the LRT inquiry and the mass shooting inquiry. A lot of the issues were not the top secret intelligence type of information, so they were able to share a lot of information in the public inquiry for the mass shooting. That cost \$25.6 million, so I can only imagine what this public inquiry is going to cost the taxpayer. This public inquiry will definitely cost the taxpayer a lot more than that, because it's going to take a lot of work to start from scratch again.

Why start from scratch? That's the other thing that I've mentioned before, and as I get into talking a bit about the proposal the Prime Minister outlined a few days ago, I think the proposal is complementary to a lot of the work that's being done. Also, it's a step further, and it gives the special rapporteur power to make the final decision on how this should be dealt with and the best avenue and course of action.

I think this committee is going to do something similar as well. This has become such a big issue that we are having to replicate a lot of processes, and the public inquiry also will be another replication of a lot of processes, in part, because NSICOP is doing the work they're doing and we have the critical protocol for the work that's done during election time. We've heard testimony regarding the limitations of that work. We've also had the critical election incident public protocol report recommend that the scope be widened so that we're not just looking at the writ period but beyond the writ period. I think that's important, and it's important for us to also give Elections Canada more powers so that they can look at things beyond the writ period.

Those are some things that I think are very important to highlight: the cost, the fact that a lot of things might still be in secret, the duplication of so many processes and the dissatisfaction that the public may still be left with.

You also know, according to this study that was done about public inquiries, that when people were asked whether they can send people to prison—whether a public inquiry, themselves, as a result of the public inquiry, can actually send people to prison—28% of those answering thought that this was true and 32% didn't know. Only 40% of the people thought that was false.

Once again, with the majority, a lot of disillusionment and a lot of questions still surround what a public inquiry would or would not do. It sounds good. A lot of things often sound good, but that's why we've been elected and put here in Parliament. When I talk to my constituents about a lot of issues, sometimes I get really great feedback and other times I get comments that we need to delve into those issues because “that's why we elected you and put you in Parliament”.

● (5920)

Yes, overall, we have a duty, I guess I would say. We have a role and responsibility in our democratic system for things to go both ways. We do have a huge role to play at election time, but I would also say throughout as well, especially in an open democratic system of the kind we have, to consult and to talk to our constituents. Oftentimes I've heard them say, “Ruby, this is a very serious matter, and we expect that parliamentarians are going to study it and come

out with the right conclusion. They're going to determine, and government will make the right decision.” A mandate is given to a government to really investigate, and they put trust in parliamentarians to look out for Canadians' best interests and make those decisions on behalf of Canadians.

What was really disturbing, as my colleague Mr. Gerretsen was talking about just a little while ago, were the outright assertions made that the Prime Minister somehow does not have Canadians' best interests at heart, and I would say any prime minister. I'm not just saying that because this prime minister is a Liberal prime minister, but I do think that most people come here for the right reasons, I really do.

Every time I'm asked this question.... I was just at CIVIX the other day, doing a video. I think that about 70 parliamentarians went to CIVIX to talk about the things that people don't know about politics that we'd like to share with Canadians. Well, I will share that again today here. One of the things that a lot of people don't know, I feel, is that we generally work really well around the committee table. What you see in question period is not necessarily always what happens in committee. Here there is a lot of collaboration, and we do deliver really good insights and reports into very heavy topics at times, and always in treating topics.

For most people.... Before getting into politics—although I've always loved politics since I was young and I was fascinated by government and how it makes decisions for Canadians—I was also definitely a bit of a political activist for many of my young years. Most of my time was spent protesting things, but eventually I wanted to be on the People want to be at that decision-making table.

What I was surprised about was that politics wasn't necessarily like a lot of the movies I had seen. You come in with your guard up, thinking, “Oh, my God; everyone here is going to....” You think you have to really watch out for yourself because everyone is going to be evil, as depicted in the movies and all of that stuff.

We do get carried away at times, and I think the Leader of the Opposition has definitely gotten carried away lately, especially when he has made comments that are so dangerous about the trust people would have as to whether their Prime Minister and their government are working in collaboration with foreign actors or whether members here are foreign agents. All these types of assertions that are being made are really disgusting. It is extremely disgusting and disappointing, but still, on average, we go through these times. Those who have been here for a while see that there are ups and downs in government, even in Parliament and even in this PROC committee.

I've been here since 2015 in this committee, and I'm so lucky, but I've seen a lot of ups and downs about issues that sometimes we really have to talk through to work out. We do usually get to a good place at the end of the day. There are issues that come very quickly and naturally to us, and we can agree on. I have seen those.

I would still conclude, having seen all these things and being disappointed right now in the Leader of the Opposition, that most people come here to do the right thing. They come here to do the right thing, and I've met a lot of really wonderful people in politics. I think they are some of the best people I've ever met. I thought I met a lot of cool people in law as well, but more questionable people there too. Some of the best people I have met have been here.

● (5925)

For the most part, I think the public trusts us to make the right decisions for them, because people can't understand a lot of these words. They wonder what they are going to get out of a public inquiry, what they're going to get from a special rapporteur. That is important for us to really delve into and to take a look at.

I'm going to finish up with one more thing, but I do want to be put on the list again for this, because I didn't get into the second part of my talk. My second part of my talk is really on what the Prime Minister has proposed, what a special rapporteur does and what special rapporteurs in the UN have done. I really want to delve into a lot of that, but my colleagues are eager to also get their thoughts in. Because they're eager to get their thoughts in, I think I should give them that, and I'll return to my comments later.

What I will leave you with is that—and I think my other colleague shed some light on this—many Canadians, as we know, do believe that Chinese interference had a role to play in our institutions. No one is denying that. We are all saying yes, that's absolutely true. The only thing that we also all agree on is that it didn't have the impact that we think and that our last elections in 2021 and 2019 were free and fair.

What's really interesting is that even the national campaign manager for the Conservative Party has said, "If people lose faith in the fairness of our elections, they will lose faith in the legitimacy of our government as well." He stated:

...it's important to clarify one critical issue. I can confirm, without a shadow of a doubt, that the outcome of the election, which resulted in the Liberals forming government, was not influenced by any external meddling.

I think that's really important. He too believes that it could be extremely dangerous for our institutions to be going down this line. He also said that he has "watched with interest the growing calls for a public inquiry", and while he understands "the concerns behind these calls", he said:

...I must say that I have serious reservations about the effectiveness of such an inquiry.

Election interference is a complex issue, involving national security and intelligence, and a public inquiry would likely result in much of the information being redacted, rendering it useless to the public and the likely outcome will be everyone wondering why we wasted so much time and money on an inquiry in the first place.

Secondly, a public inquiry will be slow and bureaucratic, and by the time the inquiry is over, the situation may have changed and the solutions found may no longer be relevant.

Additionally, public inquiries can be highly politicized and become more focused on scoring points and blaming individuals or political parties, rather than finding solutions.

That really sums up a lot of what I was trying to get to.

My first point that I wanted to get out and on the record is that we may be selling a false narrative to Canadians that they are going

to get what they are looking for out of a public inquiry. It's going to be costly. There's still going to be dissatisfaction. I think we should just do the right thing at the right time, and that is something I will delve into the next time I make my comments: what the right thing is and what that timing is.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (5930)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sahota.

Are you asking to be added to the list again?

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper is next.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will be very brief.

First of all, I want to correct the record of what you said, respectfully, Madam Chair, about what happened on Tuesday after question period, when this committee did not reconvene.

You said, at 9:46 today, "It was never the intention to not find resources, but we have to work with people to find resources." That's a direct quote from you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to clarify for the record that all opposition whips agreed to make resources available. All opposition MPs returned to committee. Resources were available. There were interpreters in the booths, waiting for Liberal members to show up. The only reason that the committee did not return on Tuesday is that after Liberal members filibustered for three hours, they then changed tactics to simply not show up, so that there would not be a quorum and therefore the meeting would be suspended until today.

It's an illustration of the Liberals using every tactic in the book to block the Prime Minister's chief of staff from having to testify before committee.

With respect to Ms. Telford appearing before the committee, in listening to my Liberal colleagues speak about this matter, you would think that this was completely unprecedented. First of all, they refer to her as "just some staff member". For heaven's sake, she's the chief of staff to the Prime Minister. She's the top adviser to the Prime Minister. She's one of the most powerful people in this government.

Further to that, it's hardly without precedent. Ms. Telford has appeared before a committee before. She appeared at the finance committee—I was a member of the finance committee at that time—on July 30, 2020, with regard to the Liberal government's WE Charity scandal. She also appeared before the national defence committee on May 7, 2021, with respect to sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. Ms. Telford has appeared twice at committee. There's absolutely no reason that she can't appear before this committee.

Really, the motion before us is quite clear. The amendment put forward by Mr. Turnbull to gut my motion to have Ms. Telford appear is straightforward. All the arguments have been made. There is no reason for this debate to continue. All opposition parties are united in wanting to see Ms. Telford appear before our committee, of course with Ms. Blaney's amendment to my motion, which all opposition MPs are united in support of. The Liberals oppose my motion amended by Ms. Blaney.

Let's get on with it. Let's get to a vote on Mr. Turnbull's amendment and then let's vote on my motion and get back to business and hear from the ministers and from Ms. Telford next week.

• (5935)

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair. It's not.... With respect for my colleague, I wanted to mention that the screen here is blinking like crazy. I don't know if we should turn it off or something, because it's blinking on this side.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

We'll get on that.

Mr. Cooper, was that your point?

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Let's get to a vote and stop the filibustering.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Before I go to Madame Gaudreau, Ms. Blaney, Mr. Fergus and Mr. Turnbull, I would just say, Mr. Cooper, that you're welcome to do.... What you're doing is taking my one sentence out of context. I did also go further on to explain.

I understand that you believe that when you want me to be here, whether it's in my constituency week or whatever else, I have to be here. I get it. I do my best, but I have obligations to my constituents. I also take my responsibilities to Canadians seriously, and I have to fulfill all of them.

I have often agreed to disagree with you. Sometimes we can find a way forward. On this, I would say that your interpretation versus what I said are not the same. I'll leave that with you, because you're not the first person who has put words in my mouth. I guess it's just part of the job, which is unfortunate.

Go ahead, Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

You know me by now. I always preface my remarks to explain what's happening.

I know that people in Laurentides—Labelle are following these proceedings, including some of my friends and family. Many of them are wondering what's going on. A lot of language keeps coming up: “obstruction”, “need to understand”, “confidence”, “we have to do something”, “people are worried”, “people want to know” and so on.

This is a fine example of a filibuster. I should even applaud because I'm learning so much. I think I know the right people to call now if I ever want to do any filibustering. Some members are accusing us of filibustering, but I would tell them to look in the mirror before they make such a claim. It's too bad, actually, that they're not here.

People asked what constituted a filibuster. It's almost noon and we started at nine o'clock. When someone takes more than 10 minutes to argue their position before returning to the subject in hand and going off on long tangents about the past but isn't even able to put forward an argument on the current situation or make useful suggestions for the future, that's what you call a filibuster.

I can say that, because those who saw how I handled myself during the WE Organization study know this is true: there is one person here who can actually say that they are truly acting in the best interests of the people they represent. Allow me to explain. Two things are still true. We all have good intentions. We want to get to the bottom of certain things, find solutions and protect our democracy. We all agree on that. How to go about it is another story.

The people I think about are the people following these proceedings and my children. Why is this taking so long, they wonder. The reason is that we have a rule permitting members to waste time, and over the course of the next few minutes, perhaps they will surprise us and pull a rabbit out of their hat. Will we get to hear from the ministers and officials between noon and one o'clock? Will the committee take a break and come back in better form? There's question period. We have commitments. Members have been beating around the bush for three hours. I find that hard to swallow, and I would even say I've lost respect for the people who are doing it. I realize it's posturing, which I consider to be a game. What's happening here, though, is no game.

That was an aside. It only took two minutes, when it could've taken 40.

My views regarding the motions on the table are based on many things.

First of all, why are we so adamant that an independent public inquiry be held? To my mind, “independent” is synonymous with “100% impartial”. That means the person leading the inquiry would be mutually agreed upon. We've spent days demonstrating—and this was even a recommendation—that, together, we can all choose a person to lead the inquiry, an impartial person who can conduct a thorough investigation in order to reassure the public. People are really worried.

• (5940)

In the public space, much has been said about the Rouleau commission and the impact of its findings. Some have questioned whether there is really a desire to crack down on the issue. I think the question we should be asking is this: Ultimately, what are the benefits of a public commission when part of the proceedings take place in camera? That was the case, after all.

What happens in that situation? It creates legislative pressure, and that's what we need. Right now, we have to present our argument to the fullest. I realize it can be quite a lot, but how do we get something that's currently stalled moving again?

The government has shown that measures were taken. I made that point yesterday during question period. That's good, but at this point, today, are those measures enough? Are they appropriate? No. Once you've done everything you can with what you have, it's time to change strategies. You have to go further.

In softball, you get a few tries before you strike out. One strike, two strikes or three strikes. I won't go into everything that's happened since the government has been in power, but it's not as though this is the first time this has happened and the government has been open and transparent thus far. Now the government is saying that it's time to move forward and that it's appointing a rapporteur. We're past that point now. The trust is broken. The government had every means at its disposal but opted for the power to choose.

The government needs to show real leadership. It needs to follow the recommendations. That means coming at the issue with the right attitude. As I've often heard said, it's time for the government to step up to the plate. Yes, it can apologize, as it does every time, but it has to show that it is making things right.

Right now, on this committee, government members are making arguments I don't always understand. I'll explain. We keep hearing—and the previous member just said this—that we shouldn't involve political staffers, that they should be protected. I won't repeat everything that was said because these are very honourable people.

On the table, we currently have an amendment to bring staff before the committee. National campaign directors are not elected representatives, so I'm at somewhat of a loss. You could say that it's due to the interpretation, but I'm really trying to wrap my head around this. Then again, this is normal. I tell people back home this is normal.

The government needs to protect our democracy because the situation is critical. We need to get to the truth, and we will. I am telling you, we will.

We have asked Katie Telford to appear before the committee four times. I was there when she appeared in 2020. I heard her statement and the answers she gave. I wasn't aware that she had also appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence, but it happened. The members keep bringing up tradition. The idea is to drag this out, and that would be in line with our customs.

• (5945)

In this case, however, this isn't about tradition. It's about something very serious. In the next few minutes, I'm eager to see

whether all of the members here today will stand up and show some humility.

I may be going too fast for the interpreter, but half the members aren't even listening.

You are listening, Madam Chair, and what's more, you're looking at me, so thank you.

Unfortunately, this is what we are having to deal with: members talking, dragging things out and filibustering. Then they say there are important matters we should be dealing with. They're right, so what are we waiting for?

It's going to take some strong arguments to convince me why I should agree to bringing national campaign directors before the committee, instead of Katie Telford, the Prime Minister's chief of staff. If my fellow members really want to waste time like this, we will meet with all of those people, but I'm going to need a strong case. This is a little discouraging, to put it mildly. Obviously, "little" is an understatement.

We have 11 minutes left. I'm going to do as I said. Earlier, I said that, when a member goes on for more than 10 minutes, they are beating around the bush. I've been speaking for about 10 minutes.

Hopefully, members will give serious thought to the important points I made and my comments will be good for something. By something, I mean our democracy and confidence in our institutions.

I'm eager to see what happens next.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

If I understood correctly, Ms. Gaudreau, we need to hear from ministers and we also need to make a decision on the matter in hand. We can do all that.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think what would probably be helpful to you and to this committee is for me to outline what I'm hoping to see today. First of all, I hope that today we will actually get to a vote. I would be very excited to do that, and if at any point the other side is prepared for that, I am here for it.

I would like to hear from the ministers, but I have a bit of a concern. I want to make sure we continue because I want to get to a vote, so we may need to continue to discuss this. I hope we get to hear from the ministers. I hope we continue to stand in this committee until question period. I have heard a lot of kind words from members around this table about the fact that I have a very important meeting with constituents from North Island—Powell River. As you can imagine, that is a big trip, and it's a community facing significant challenges.

What I would like to see is that we return at 4:30 to continue this work. I do have another committee at 6:30 that I would like to go to. I am very hopeful that we'll get to a place where we can have the vote done and be wrapped up so that I can get to the veterans affairs committee.

I also recognize that if the vote does not happen, we'll be continuing this next week more than likely. I think that's very concerning. I really appreciate what the chair has said about paying attention to constituents and having time with constituents. I live a far way from my constituents. I have a rather large riding, so I can't always get to a computer to do this work, as much as I would like to, because I'm with the people I serve.

I hope that around this table, all of us remember our accountability to Canadians. I am a little disheartened to hear some of the comments I've heard on the Liberal side today. One of the things I heard Mr. Gerretsen talk about—I don't know if I'm allowed to talk about it if he's not here, but hopefully he will hear what I'm saying—was recommendations. He kept talking about how we should be working hard on recommendations so we can give them to the government. I've been on a lot of committees in this House for a lot of years. I've done a lot of really important work and I respect the people I sit at the table with, but very often we do not see recommendations go anywhere meaningful.

I believe in this work and think it's really important, and I will always encourage government to look at hard work with multiple parties coming together, but I want to be really clear. Mr. Gerretsen is implying that us doing our work here is going to somehow fundamentally change what the government is doing and how they're accountable, but I don't think it will. If that were the case, then in veterans affairs we'd have things like the marriage-after-60 clause revoked. We would have the disability benefits being delivered and the backlogs would be dealt with. Those things have not been done in my other committees, so I'm not in any way persuaded that the important work of this committee is going to fundamentally change what the government does.

I was also really disappointed to hear on the other side this intention to undermine the importance of a public inquiry. The reality is—and I will keep saying this—the information coming out in the media is really what is guiding Canadians to lose faith in our institutions. As parliamentarians, we have the job to try to build that faith, because those institutions really do matter. If we want a strong democracy, having faith in those institutions is absolutely fundamental and key.

I heard from Mr. Gerretsen that it might take too long, that we might not get anything done and that everything is changing so rapidly. Of course it's changing so rapidly. I spent time yesterday, on International Women's Day, talking about how women leaders are targeted in social media and how to respond to that. One of the challenges, of course, is that things keep changing so quickly in technology that it makes it hard to do that work. I respect that. I respect that things change quickly, but it doesn't mean we do nothing as a result, and that's what it feels like. It feels as though there's been an implication. Ms. Sahota talked about it being too expensive and things taking too long.

• (5950)

We just recently had the public inquiry on the Emergencies Act. That was a very important piece of that legislation. It allowed Canadians to feel and see there was a process happening that addressed their concerns. They knew that was happening, and they could observe part of it and get some sort of response back. The Mass Casualty Commission is happening too. Those things matter. People just need to know that the work is being done.

We keep coming back to this assumption that there's a carelessness around national security. I'll say, from the NDP's perspective, that I don't feel that at all. We care very much. We respect the role of NSICOP. We know there is key work that needs to be done. We understand their processes and how they communicate with Parliament, but the public has been concerned with this issue. The media would not be reporting on it if people weren't asking for more information. We know that as leaks continue, they build a lack of faith in our systems.

We need to make sure that this is addressed, and I believe the public inquiry will do it. It's important to remind everyone around this table of what the Prime Minister said: If the special rapporteur says we need a public inquiry, he will fully support that. Why don't we just get to that? Why don't we get to a system that Canadians understand?

I understand there are always misconceptions. We could talk about misconceptions here in the committee if you want. As politicians, we always understand that there are a lot of misconceptions and confusion, but here we are.

We should be having this discussion. I see some excitement in the room, so maybe ministers are coming, but what I need to hear from the chair, if these ministers are coming, is that we'll be able to return to our work. That is because if this side of the table does not want to get to a vote, we need more time to converse about this.

• (5955)

**The Chair:** I would say, Ms. Blaney, based on everything I've heard from everyone, that we need to continue this work. As the person at the front of this room, I am committed to saying that we can get to this business and then return to this conversation.

When it comes to the resources for this afternoon, it's no secret that whips have the ability to cancel a meeting or return a meeting. We've also been meeting during constituency weeks, so I would put it out there that if we want to meet next week and the motion signals we want to meet next week, we can ask for resources and have a meeting next week if it passes. I am open to any opportunity or any ability to make this committee function. It is a very important topic, and I don't know how many more times I can say that. I actually think we can do it all.

As I said to Madame Gaudreau, we can find a way forward and go with the ministers who are appearing now, and then return to it. I'm also pushing for a vote, because we're currently on an amendment and we still need to get to the motion as amended already. I will continue doing whatever I can do, but I don't hear anybody opposing continuing this conversation or this discussion, whatever you call it.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Chair, can you explain to us when we're going to hear about that? I am the whip for the NDP. I've been very clear and my team has been clear that we are open to having this committee continue. When will we know that?

I am feeling a lot of pressure to somehow magically allow the ministers to do the thing we're here to do, but we're also asking in good faith for a process to make sure that we get to continue this committee and continue this work. How are we to say that we're comfortable having the ministers here if right after that, this meeting will be adjourned, we'll all go to the House and next week we'll be back at this again? I'm hoping that before the ministers come to this table, we have some answers.

**The Chair:** What I would say, to reply back, is that the ministers are here for an hour. I said earlier that I think we can keep this room functioning until 1:30. It makes the clerk very anxious in that half hour. I think we can then determine a way forward.

As to resources we can receive or ask for from the House of Commons, we received them this morning. Anything else, as you've also mentioned.... Choosing between committees is for whips to do. The clerk does not have that ability, and I don't have that ability. If we want to change around the committee schedule this afternoon, that's what I'm saying about the whips. We have already received the resources we could get without having an impact. Next week, the House is not sitting. If there is agreement that we want to meet next week, the clerk and I are more than willing to ask when it would be suitable to have all the resources we need. We can work with schedules and make that happen.

I'm putting that out there to say I can find a way forward. What's in my hands right now as of this moment is setting up a meeting next week, because next week we're not competing with other committees, unless there's something going on that I don't know about. This afternoon is out of our hands right now.

• (6000)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Can we get any idea of when we would have an update on that? Maybe the ministers could come for half an hour. Then we need to move on, because we haven't had this assurance. I don't want to disrupt the ministers. I want answers. I think we've been very clear at this part of the table that I'm here to find solutions. I'm not here to grandstand or to make some sort of political drama. Canadians need answers.

I'm worried, Madam Chair, and I think I've been very clear about this since the very beginning this morning when I spoke. We need an assurance that if we allow the ministers this space, we are not losing our space to do the work we are here and tasked to do. Will you be able to give us an update during the middle...? I need some sort of assurance that we can continue this work after question period.

**The Chair:** As soon as I know, I will tell you. That's what I'm hearing from the clerk.

Is there anybody at the table who is concerned about us coming back to this? I think we have agreement that we have to come back to this.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, I'm not prepared to say we're going to trust you to have the committee return. We saw the tricks that were played on Tuesday when resources of the House were available. Opposition MPs returned to debate a very straightforward motion, and Liberal MPs didn't show up.

We want to hear from the ministers. The only reason we're in this position is the filibuster that has been going on for six hours over two days. I'm not prepared to move on to hear from the ministers until we have the assurance that this is going to be taken up this afternoon, period.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cooper—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I want a time when this committee will be returning this afternoon, and then we can hear from the ministers, but we will be dealing with this motion in no uncertain terms.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, I'm not sure if you heard the words that came out of my mouth, but I was clear to say that I agree with that. I think we can have ministers appear, and then we can return to this motion. I asked if anybody has any concerns with it, and I did not see a single one. I will finish my point. I do have Ms. O'Connell and Mr. Turnbull next, and I'll return to you.

The reality is that we can do it. In our hands right now are resources until one o'clock. I am willing to push them until 1:30. The ministers are here from 12 to one. I would have them leave right at one o'clock. As long as we keep our question-and-answer rounds tight, we can have them out then, return to this from one o'clock until 1:30 and then find our way forward. As to this afternoon's resources, at the current time, unless there is a cancellation.... Whips can come together to determine what meeting is being cancelled and if we can return.

What I have also said is that if we cannot find the time this afternoon, I am more than willing to ask for resources next week, because the House is not sitting and we're not competing against it. However, right now, as to the clerk and me getting to use resources from the House of Commons, I have provided you an upfront update of where we are. This afternoon it's not in our hands, but if something happens organically, like something is cancelled, we would for sure ask for the resources. The first time it was said here, whether everyone wanted it or not, right away I signalled to the clerk to please ask to see if there are any resources available, and she maintained trying to see what was available. The minute we know, we will share it.

Ms. O'Connell is next.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think you have been more than clear on what resources are available and what is outside of your control. Despite Mr. Cooper's temper tantrum, at the end of the day, it was this committee that asked ministers to appear. They have appeared, so why would we not hear them out? If the Conservatives are actually interested in answers, they should be all for asking their questions and getting that on the record instead of playing these games once again and taking their toys and going home.

I think Canadians want to hear from the ministers again. This is what was asked. We're prepared to do so and to then get back to the debate on the motions at hand. If the Conservatives want to play games once again and want to throw temper tantrums, then we'll continue to do that and the ministers can go on with their day, but this is what the committee asked them to appear to do. They are here, and I think it behooves us to actually get on with the work of this committee instead of more and more things to complain about—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I have a point of order. Can we have a unanimous consent motion? I propose a unanimous consent motion that we continue after the ministers and return at 4:30 after question period.

• (6005)

**The Chair:** I can take that, but it would not be genuine because right now we don't have resources at 4:30.

What I'm saying is that with the way this place functions, whips on each of our teams are welcome to come together and choose what they want to cancel, and then the committee can meet. Between the clerk and me, I can't commit to coming back at 4:30 until I have resources.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I recommend that we do that and have faith that you're going to figure it out and that the whips will do their job. I'm—

**The Chair:** It's fascinating, because you keep questioning whether you can have faith in me and then you're asking me to have faith in the conversation I won't be part of. I'm in public telling you I think it's an important conversation. I think we can find a way forward. The longer this takes and the longer it takes for the ministers to come here, the harder it is for us to get back at one o'clock and push the resources we're already pushing.

Do we have agreement—let me know—to have ministers appear, and then we can go back into this conversation right after to find a way forward? If, by then, the whips have figured out a way to cancel another meeting and meet at 4:30, that's perfect. If not, what I'm committing is that I'll find you a time next week, whenever you want to meet, and we can continue this conversation during the constituency week, because then it will not be the whips who decide that.

The clerk and I can try to push to get some resources, as we have for the other Standing Order 106(4) meetings that have happened. Rather than it being a Standing Order 106(4) meeting—for anybody watching, an emergency meeting—we can actually plan when we're doing it and then work around our schedules. I think that's reasonable.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, just to be crystal clear, if the majority of whips ensure that there are resources available at 4:30 this afternoon, are you going to be here and are Liberal MPs going to show up?

**The Chair:** It's interesting enough that you would say that, Mr. Cooper. I made that same comment to the clerk, and the clerk said she's not sure how that stuff functions. What she does know is that we don't have resources right now, and what the House has told us is that whips can determine the way forward. Therefore, I am, as a chair does, taking procedural advice from the clerk and doing my job as the chair of this committee.

I am on the record telling you what my intentions are. There are just certain things I can't control. If I could, I would have a lot of wishes, I can tell you, and one of them would be to ensure that Canadians have full confidence in our system.

With that, go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Really quickly, because of this, I think we're wasting the precious time we dedicated to hearing from a panel of ministers. We will come back when we can, when the resources are available, so let's get on with questioning the ministers.

If members are truly serious about getting to the bottom of this and getting answers, why are we wasting the ministers' time? Let's move on.

**The Chair:** I'm going to make a proposal. It is currently 12:08. I can offer that ministers stay for one hour or we ask ministers to leave at one o'clock. Would you like ministers to stay for one hour, or would you like ministers to leave at one o'clock?

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, I just want to put on the record that opposition whips have agreed to coming back at 4:30 and freeing up necessary resources. I want to put that on the record. I want your assurance that you're going to be here at 4:30 along with Liberal MPs.

**The Chair:** When my clerk tells me that and I know it, I will go from there.

Can we get this moving—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I'd like the ministers here for the full hour, so I certainly hope we'll be back here at 4:30. If we aren't, I guess we'll deal with that then.

**The Chair:** We will get it dealt with for sure.

Is anybody opposed to having the ministers here for one hour?

We're adjourning this part of the meeting, starting the next meeting and coming back to—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** We're going to suspend.

**The Chair:** We'll suspend. We'll get the panel switched over.

Welcome, Ministers. Please come in and join us.

We will continue our meeting. Everybody should be in their seats in two minutes because I will continue the meeting. Thank you.

• (1205) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order. Welcome back to the procedure and House affairs committee.

We're resuming our meeting. I would like to welcome Minister Joly and Minister LeBlanc.

Thank you for coming.

Accompanying the ministers today we have, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Tara Denham, director general of the office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion, and Jennie Chen, executive director of greater China political and coordination. From the Privy Council Office, we have Allen Sutherland, assistant secretary to the Cabinet, machinery of government and democratic institutions.

As reminder, all comments are to go through the chair. The better you keep this meeting going, the more quickly it goes. A lot of it is in your hands.

With that, Ministers, if you can signal to me who would like to go first and if we can, as always, keep our comments tight....

Minister Joly, it's a pleasure to have you back. Thank you for taking the time. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, members of the committee, I'm very pleased to see you all here today. Thank you for inviting me to discuss this important issue.

The Government of Canada takes allegations of interference and coercive diplomacy by foreign agents, no matter where they are from, very seriously. Keeping Canadians safe and protecting our democratic institutions is a top priority of our government. We have zero tolerance for any type of interference in our democracy.

Canadians should never feel unsafe or threatened. That is especially true when they belong to at-risk communities. Every Canadian should feel they have the ability to participate in our civil society and democracy. They should be able to do so with confidence and without fear of reprisal.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, the work this committee is doing is critical.

Democracy is a choice. It is often a fight, and it takes work every day to defend and promote it.

Canada's democracy is among the strongest and the most stable in the world. This stability is the basis for the safety, prosperity and growth that our citizens enjoy. It is worth protecting, and it should never be a partisan issue.

• (6015)

[*Translation*]

Reports of Chinese interference in the 2021 general election are deeply disturbing.

We have been clear with China about the fact that Canada will never tolerate any form of foreign interference in its democracy or domestic affairs, not here, in Canada, nor through international fora. I have made that clear to China repeatedly, including last week when I spoke to my Chinese counterpart.

We will never tolerate an attack on our sovereignty or a violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations by Chinese diplomats on Canadian soil.

[*English*]

To be clear, I will repeat this in English: Canada will never tolerate any form of foreign interference in our democracy, nor in our internal affairs. We will never accept any breach of our territorial integrity and sovereignty. We will never accept any breach by Chinese diplomats of the Vienna convention on Canada's soil.

I have conveyed this to my Chinese counterparts on numerous occasions, including just days ago at the G20. Senior officials in my department have also repeatedly delivered this message in recent weeks and months. We have told them directly and unequivocally that we will not tolerate any form of interference.

We will continue to do what is necessary to defend our national security and national interests.

The question of foreign interference is not one that is unique to Canada. This is something that our partners and allies around the world are grappling with. As foreign ministers, my counterparts and I work together to share best practices in countering foreign threats to democracy.

China's rise as a global actor is reshaping the strategic outlook of every state in the region, including Canada. I've said it before and I will say it again: China is an increasingly disruptive global power.

We have been very clear about our approach to China in our Indo-Pacific strategy. We will challenge China when we ought to. We will co-operate when we must. We will never hold back from sharing our concerns and principles. We will never apologize for defending our national interests.

As we forge ahead with a strong, multi-dimensional approach to China, we will always differentiate between the Chinese government and the Chinese people.

[Translation]

Thanks to Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy, through Global Affairs Canada, we are broadening our understanding of how China thinks, operates and plans, and how it exerts influence in the region and around the world.

Key embassies across our network will have dedicated experts to deepen our understanding of the challenges that China poses, and the opportunities that it pursues. That will be a focus of our diplomatic efforts, and the work has already begun.

We are also doing more to protect Canada's infrastructure and democracy as well as Canadians from foreign interference.

That means modernizing the Investment Canada Act, safeguarding our critical mineral supply chains, and protecting intellectual property and research in Canada. We are enhancing the capacity of our security infrastructure in order to protect Canadians from foreign states' attempts to covertly and coercively exert influence. We are also strengthening Canada's capacity to effectively and efficiently gather, develop and share intelligence, analysis and assessments, so we can better understand foreign interference threats, hostile activities by state actors and economic coercion.

[English]

Finally, Madam Chair, we will continue to take this issue very seriously and work at multiple levels to shield our democratic institutions from foreign interference.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to have a discussion with you and to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Now, Minister LeBlanc, you get four and a half minutes.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities):** Madam Chair, I'll endeavour to finish in less than that.

[Translation]

Thank you for this opportunity, Madam Chair.

You already introduced my colleague Allen Sutherland.

[English]

Let me reiterate what my colleague, the foreign affairs minister, said.

Protecting our democracy and democratic institutions against threats of foreign interference is critical. It's critical to our government and to all Canadians. We obviously don't tolerate, in any form, foreign interference or attempts to undermine democratic processes in Canada. That's why the Prime Minister announced, on Monday evening, the appointment of an independent special rapporteur who will have a wide mandate to formulate specific recommendations on the protection of our democracy.

In the coming weeks, he or she will be asked to inform the work of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency, as well as other processes under way to identify gaps in our system and further advice, obviously, on how to close those gaps.

● (6020)

[Translation]

Last week, the committee heard from a range of witnesses who provided clarity on the type of intelligence and the significance of the context in building a complete picture.

I want to reiterate that a robust process is in place when national security agencies become aware of information that could impact national security and public safety.

It is also important for Canadians to know all the measures we are taking to ensure that they and our democracy are always protected.

[English]

It starts with speaking frankly with Canadians on the threats facing the country and by continuing to adapt our measures to those evolving threats. This issue is not new and it's not unique to Canada either. Public threats have been reported by the Communications Security Establishment and by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service for over a decade, and they have identified concerns of foreign interference and threats to democratic institutions.

All our allies around the world, including our Five Eyes partners, are concerned about the threats of foreign states working to advance their interests and to undermine ours—threats that are designed to continue to undermine Canada's security, democracy and social fabric.

Equally, Madam Chair, Canada is recognized as having stepped up as a global leader in responding to election interference. We've taken a number of steps since the election in 2015, and we continue to build on these actions because threats to our democracy continue to evolve and so, therefore, must our responses.

We've talked about the critical election incident public protocol, which is a senior committee of public servants, many of whom testified before this committee last week. This protocol established a panel that is designed to provide Canadians with a non-partisan, transparent process whereby these public servants can communicate clearly and impartially with Canadians during an election in the event of an incident or series of incidents that threaten the integrity of a federal election.

[*Translation*]

Madam Chair, although there has been a significant focus on the panel's training, the protocol provides for many other measures. The cabinet directive on the protocol states very clearly that, as soon as a national security agency becomes aware of interference during a general election, all options must be examined to combat the problem effectively and immediately.

[*English*]

As members know, the independent evaluation of the protocol was recently completed, and a public version was released last week. We are actively considering the recommendations made by Mr. Rosenberg, with a view to continually improving our measures to protect institutions, as I said, from foreign interference. The Prime Minister announced on Monday that we will release a plan for the implementation of the recommendations from Mr. Rosenberg, as well as others, within the next three weeks.

These are but a few examples, Madam Chair, of actions our government has taken and will continue to take to protect Canadian democracy.

Now, obviously, Mélanie and I are very enthusiastic to answer all your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will have six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the ministers and all the officials joining them today.

Ms. Joly, you said earlier that you would never tolerate foreign interference in the country. You are very good at making big statements that come across as quite strong. Can you tell us how many diplomats from China's Communist regime your department or the federal government expelled in 2018?

• (6025)

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I would be pleased to answer the honourable member's question. Not only are my strong statements rooted in feeling, but they are also rooted in the measures our government is taking. Why—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** How many diplomats were expelled in 2018?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I'm going to answer, but you have to give me the chance.

First, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have many tools at my disposal when it comes to dealing with China. To your question specifically, I will say this: I will never hesitate to send home any diplomats who violate the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations or Canadian laws. Now—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Minister, I'm going to try to keep this simple.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Madam Chair—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I have a simple question.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Madam Chair, I would just like to answer the question.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I have a simple question.

**The Chair:** We're going to take a break, Mr. Berthold.

[*English*]

I have Mr. Turnbull on a point of order.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Madam Chair, I'm just going to bring up what we all know, which is that Mr. Berthold is talking over the minister. If he wants to get responses to his questions, I think we should be able to hear the minister's responses.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** At the beginning of my comments, I was very clear that we cannot have a good conversation unless all comments—from colleagues, ministers, everyone alike—go through the chair.

[*Translation*]

All comments have to be addressed through the chair, and only one person can speak at a time.

[*English*]

Interpreters can only do the work they do when one person at a time is speaking. I recognize that the time belongs to members, but to pretend that this is a courtroom and go back and forth also doesn't help. On one side, we're saying that this is a very important conversation and we all want to get there, and then on the other, we're kind of trying to make a show out of it.

We should be mindful about how we answer questions. As I asked earlier of both of you, let's just try to keep it tight. The whole concept of thanking for a question or whatever else today is not needed. We said it once at the beginning, we'll say it at the end, and we'll go on our way. We'll ask questions and answer questions as factually as possible. We can make this work.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll repeat my question. How many Chinese regime diplomats did the Government of Canada expel in 2018?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** As I was telling you, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have a number of tools in my tool box to manage relations with other countries, including China. What we've done—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair—

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** What we've done, and I think this is what you really want to know, is—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, can I have the floor back, please?

Minister, I asked you about the number of expelled diplomats in 2018. I gather that none were. How many diplomats were expelled in 2019?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** The important thing for the honourable member to understand about diplomatic relations is that diplomats have to adhere to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. If they violate the convention, we expel them, to be sure. What is also important to understand is that we have to be there—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Minister—

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** —from the beginning to ensure that, if we see already—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I gather that I won't get an answer to my question about 2019.

In 2021, how many diplomats were expelled?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We can take action to prevent a problem, instead of fixing it. As was in the news this morning, we denied prospective Chinese diplomats visas.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, I'm going to continue with my questions.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** In 2021, 2022 and 2023—

[*English*]

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, I'm doing my best to keep my questions short.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I know, but listen, friends. The more time we take like this, the less time we actually have.

I really want to find a way forward. Please, let's maximize our time—all of us.

I see Mr. Turnbull on a point of order.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I want the minister to be given the space and time to respond to the questions that Mr. Berthold is posing. It is important. He has important questions, but he should be equally interested in the answers he is getting.

**The Chair:** Some of us want that. Unfortunately, the way this place functions is not functional. These members believe they own the time and, therefore, there are some processes that would give equal time for the question and the answer, because.... I won't get into a commentary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, witnesses need a bit more time to answer questions.

[*English*]

We should be mindful with each other and find the way forward.

Your time is limited. If this is going to keep being interrupted, I'm going to have to let the clock run, rather than keep pausing it.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead.

• (6030)

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, I can use my time how I like, and I will continue to do so.

All I asked for was a number, and what I'm getting from the minister is equivalent to zero. The cover-up continues. It's well and good to say that the government is going to do X and Y and will try to be tough on China, but facts are facts: despite being briefed numerous times over the years, the government did not expel any diplomats.

Here's my second question. When did the minister find out that there were Chinese police stations in Quebec?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Dear colleague, I'll go back to your previous question.

Whenever we make decisions about another country, such as China, we consider the services we may also provide in that country. Indeed, there's a very important rule in diplomacy: reciprocity. Every time we make a decision about Chinese diplomats in Canada, it has an impact in China. It is very important for us to have Canadian diplomats in China, because we need eyes and ears there, especially to protect Canadians who are there.

So, we know that reciprocity is important, we've seen it...

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, I think I've given the minister enough time...

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** ... during the two Michaels episode.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Minister, I understand the principle.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Every time we are preparing to make decisions...

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Minister, I understand the principle.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** ... about Chinese diplomats in Canada, we take into account the repercussions for us in China.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I understand the principle.

Madam Chair...

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** It's important that my colleague and, of course, the public understand. Furthermore...

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** ... the minister is trying to use up all the time...

[*English*]

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Chair, I understand that the minister wants to use up all the time to avoid answering my questions. Unfortunately, I still haven't received an answer. How many diplomats were expelled?

**The Chair:** Just a moment. There is no interpretation.

[English]

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, I don't know if you have your earpiece in, but the interpreters have been so frustrated by this interaction that they have said they are refusing interpretation. Therefore, I don't think it's fair to continue questions in this way, if we can't properly understand what's happening in the committee. It's a matter of privilege for me to be able to understand the interactions.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I am told that the interpretation is now working.

[English]

The first round is always the toughest. I just want to get to the next person.

Mr. Berthold has been clear with his intentions. I think you have been here long enough that you know how this works. There are certain things I can't do.

If it is what he wants to do, that speaks to what he wants to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, I don't like your comments about the way I'm asking my questions, and even less so that you would presume to know my intentions.

Minister, for the last time, how many diplomats have been expelled from Canada by the federal government since 2015?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Here is my answer, Mr. Berthold: Should any Chinese diplomats violate the Vienna Convention, we will act accordingly.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Have there been any?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** In the meantime, we have refused to grant visas, we have summoned the Chinese ambassador several times, we have applied direct pressure on Beijing and we have moved to protect Canadian personnel in China.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, there's a principle we are trying to respect according to which the minister is granted as much time for her answer as it took to ask the question. Unfortunately, the minister is taking up far too much time, to avoid answering questions.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Dear colleague, the question is too important...

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** That's precisely what I mean, Madam Chair.

Minister, since you were appointed, what concrete measures have you taken towards any diplomat whatsoever who is on Canadian soil and responsible for foreign interference in our elections?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** That's a good question, Mr. Berthold. In fact, we did several things.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have several tools available to me...

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** So you've often said.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** ... and we began by raising the issue of foreign interference directly with my Chinese counterpart. I did so again last week, at the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I take it that no diplomats were expelled.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The timer has gone off, which means it's the next member's turn.

[English]

Ms. Sahota, it's over to you.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hopefully, I can get some answers to some of the great questions that Mr. Berthold asked. We couldn't hear the interaction properly, so I think I will give the floor back to Minister Joly, because I think it is really important to understand the mindset or the calculation that GAC has to take when making decisions. What types of decisions does Global Affairs—you and your department—take when you are made aware of these types of troublesome interferences in our relations?

• (6035)

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, dear colleague Sahota.

First and foremost, obviously this is an issue we've been dealing with for some time. I've been the foreign minister since 2021. One of the things that were really important was to have a clear stance on China, so what we did in our Indo-Pacific strategy was to make sure that we would draw our red lines on how we would be engaging with China.

Now, since it's extremely clear, we now have our rules of engagement, but before then, as we were dealing with diplomats... We obviously expect that they stay in their lane. If there are any issues with any form of the Vienna convention or Canadian law, first and foremost we engage directly with China, because that's what G7 countries do. It is in our national interest to do so. It is in our allies' interest to do so, as the geopolitical situation is extremely complicated and getting more complicated.

The other thing we did is that, since Canadians had concerns, I clearly instructed my department to call in the ambassador and make sure also that our ambassador in Beijing, Jennifer May, would be in direct contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China. That has happened many times in the past year. The other thing, also, was that, when China wanted to send a political operative last fall, we decided to deny a visa, which obviously is the right thing to do.

These are the different actions that we've put into place and, let me tell you, if we have any form of clear evidence of any wrongdoing, we will send diplomats packing very quickly.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Do you feel that, at this point, it would be in the best interests of Canadians and our institutions to expel all Chinese diplomats?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I know that, on the side of the Conservatives, this is something that is an easy fix, a quick fix, but the reality is that, when we take that decision, it has an impact on us also, in China. For any expulsion, there is an expulsion afterwards of us from China, and right now our biggest challenge is to understand how China operates—how they plan, how they work.

I believe profoundly in the importance of diplomacy and our diplomats. More than ever, we need capacity. We need eyes and ears on the ground, as I said before. We need to be able to address and defend national interests that we have in our bilateral relationship and, also, I'm extremely concerned about the protection of Canadians abroad. We know that we have consular cases with China. We need to engage to protect these people. This is something that keeps me up at night.

That is why it is important that we have capacity in Beijing and across our network in China.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** How important was it in the case of the two Michaels to have diplomats present on the ground in China?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I would say it was fundamental. It was extremely important.

In front of this committee, I would like to thank our Beijing team, which was instrumental in making sure the two Michaels came back to Canada.

You guys all have consular cases in your office. I have had the chance to talk to many of you about them. You know how difficult it is when a citizen, one of your constituents, comes to you and says, “I have an issue with my family” or “A family member of mine is in a difficult situation elsewhere in the world.”

Of course, we want to make sure that we offer that service, and it is particularly true in China.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I have another quick question. You mentioned in your introductory remarks the G20 foreign ministers' meeting that you just had. You said you delivered a message to China.

What was the delivery of that message, what did you say and how was that message received?

• (6040)

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I wanted to make sure that I was able to meet with my counterpart. Why? Because he's the new foreign minister.

I had a conversation and a relationship—a tough one—with Wang Yi, the former foreign minister, who is now at the politburo.

I wanted to create this relationship, which is a difficult one but a necessary one, with the new foreign minister. I was not the only one who wanted to talk to him, because, obviously, all my G7 counterparts and even, I would say, G19 counterparts wanted to engage.

I was extremely clear. I looked him in the eye and said to him that, first, we will never tolerate any form of foreign interference in our democracy and internal affairs and, second, we will never tolerate any form of breach of our sovereignty.

That is why I think it's important to have these types of discussions. They're not something that we like doing, but I think they're necessary for Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I've been waiting for this moment. We discussed it this week. Now we are amongst ourselves and we can have a conversation. I have six minutes.

There's something our citizens would like to know, and we would too, for that matter. What was the reasoning behind the government's decision to appoint a special rapporteur? We could have done it together, in a non-partisan and fully informed manner. We could have made the choice together and demonstrated our good faith. That would have increased the trust of our fellow citizens, rather than undermining it. What was the rationale? I'm really quite curious.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Madame Gaudreau.

Over the past 40 minutes here, we've seen that it's not easy to address these issues in a non-partisan way. That was also evident during question period.

I fully concur with the desire you and your colleagues expressed in the House. Canada will be well served by a non-partisan, transparent review that is open to Canadians, to understand the nature of this interference and what we have done as a government. We believe we have a positive record, but we need to strengthen it. We have already strengthened it and we'll be pleased to continue to do so.

The notion of a special rapporteur is to very quickly define what steps need to be taken. It's a process. If we had immediately set up a board of inquiry, we would have been asked why we chose this mandate over another, these witnesses over others, and whether there would be access to this or that information.

We will move quickly to appoint someone and that person will be judged on their integrity, their experience and their non-partisan character. If that person can, very quickly and in a public way, advise us on the next steps, we believe it will help depoliticize this issue. I hope it will give everyone an opportunity to see that we are all working toward the same goal.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I understand all these good intentions. However, people are questioning us and plenty of polls show that trust is eroding year after year. This was a splendid opportunity to choose an individual together. Perhaps that same individual will be chosen, but I'm thinking about the optics and the next election. We could have agreed on a solution and found someone by mutual agreement, but no.

Also, we could have made this process public. That would have given the public a chance to demystify the situation and be keen to participate in the next election. I'm not used to this kind of situation. I'm not a lawyer, I'm a psychosociologist by trade, but what I saw with the Rouleau Commission was that meetings were held behind closed doors only when necessary. Right now, people think that everything is predetermined and that their vote won't change anything. That's the basis right now.

Can we go back and put things right so there is consultation? We spent significant time on this issue during question period, didn't we? We would like to move on and show that we can work together. What do you think, Minister?

• (6045)

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** We're here to work together. I share several of your views, but perhaps not your pessimism about people's willingness to participate in elections. In Canada, we pride ourselves on having one of the highest general election turnouts in the world, but we can certainly always do better. I agree with you.

The Prime Minister promised to consult opposition parties before appointing the special rapporteur. As I said, we believe that choice will have to be judged based on the person chosen. I am convinced that we'll find someone capable of assessing the current measures, identifying shortcomings and suggesting appropriate measures. If we can entrust someone credible and independent with the mandate to proceed expeditiously, the Prime Minister has promised to release their recommendations...

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Did I understand correctly...

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** ... obviously, and so I hope we can achieve the same laudable goal that you and I are both seeking.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Yes, absolutely. I just want to make sure I understood what you said.

You're retaining the option of appointing a rapporteur, but I heard that all the opposition parties would be consulted on the choice of that person. Did I get that right?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** The Prime Minister said during Monday evening's press conference that he would consult with opposition parties before selecting the special rapporteur. Perhaps it won't be unanimous, but when we see the proposed names, I hope we can turn down the volume, focus on the challenge that I'm certain we all share, and discuss specific current measures that could be improved and strengthened. I hope this will set us on a somewhat more promising track.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Gaudreau. That was a very good exchange. I think that's the right way to go about it.

[*English*]

Kudos to you.

Ms. Blaney is next.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Chair.

I thank the ministers for being here. I'm grateful that you waited for a few extra minutes to sit at the table with us today.

I also want to put it on the record that when we have that kind of intense back-and-forth, it's also very hard for interpreters. They do

hard work for us, and I hope that all of us respect the work of those folks when we're having conversations.

My questions are going to be through the chair for Minister Joly.

This is a really serious issue. I am very concerned, and I take this very seriously. I appreciate the fact that you talked about the difference between the Chinese government and the Chinese people. That's something I hope every Canadian hears very clearly—that we cannot mix up the two.

I'm also very curious about the fact that, as I read in *The Globe and Mail*, which cited a CSIS report from December 2021, a Chinese diplomat, Tong Xiaoling, boasted about interfering with the elections. I'm trying to understand this. I want to understand.

Were you aware of the intelligence reports? Were you aware of those or any similar accusations of Ms. Tong? We know that she did not leave her post until August of 2022, even though the CSIS report of her claims of interference was provided eight months earlier.

I'm trying to figure out if you were aware of this. Were there any actions taken on the part of you and the department to pressure the Chinese government to withdraw her as a diplomat? Could you give us some clarity on that? I think this is part of the problem and why Canadians are questioning so many of our institutions.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you, Madam Blaney. This is a very important question.

First and foremost, I get many briefings. Many of them have sensitive information, and obviously the right committee for me to be able to address these issues is NSICOP. Of course, if they ask me to go, I will definitely be going.

That being said, everything that is linked to foreign actions in Canada is under the purview of my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety. I don't have a specific answer for this case.

That being said, if I were presented with clear evidence about any form of wrongdoing that goes against the Vienna convention—and when I say that, Rachel, I mean anything that would be wrongdoing in accordance with our Canadian law—I would send them packing.

• (6050)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that, Minister. I hear very clearly that you cannot answer that.

What I'm trying to understand is how this person, in this particular position, was allowed to stay for eight months despite the fact that concerns were raised.

I guess the other component of this question, and you referred to it earlier in your conversation, was that the department did refuse to grant a visa to a person who was coming from China in a new diplomatic position at their embassy in the fall of 2022.

I know you can't go into nuances, but could you at least provide the public with some sort of understanding of how it is that one individual was allowed to stay in this country for eight months after explicitly boasting about interfering in our election process, and later on you were able to refuse a visa? I'm trying to get some clarity. Was there a specific change within the process? I want to understand the process so that Canadians have some sort of transparency.

If you can't speak to this in specifics, has something changed? Is there a new rule that you're implementing that is preventing this? Is it because they were already in the country? Do we have weaknesses in removing people who should be removed from our country? Is it easier when they are at the door to prevent that from happening?

If you could provide some sort of process answers, I think that would help clarify to Canadians their serious and important concerns.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I agree. They are serious concerns.

There are a couple of things on that.

First and foremost, as I said, I can't go into the specific issue but what I can tell you is that, when it comes to our own accreditation process for granting visas to diplomats, I think there has been a higher level of awareness in the last months. I think also that we've been following and making sure that the norms are in place. I have instructed my department to never shy away from denying a visa if it's for a political operative and therefore linked to the Communist Party of China. That's my first point.

My second point is that, when it comes to Chinese diplomats in general, we've summoned the Chinese ambassadors many times. I've instructed my department to do so. I think it is important for us to be able to send strong messages and to make sure that any form of action is stopped through this engagement. Now, should that not be the case, afterwards, as I said, we would never hesitate to expel somebody.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I apologize, but I have 10 seconds left.

It's clear to me, and what I understand you are saying, is that it's easier to prevent people from coming into the country than it is to get them out of the country when they're here.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** If I can just answer that, I believe it's easier to prevent. On the question about afterwards, when it comes to diplomats in our country, I think it's about how you make sure you have the evidence to deal with an expulsion and what the impacts of an expulsion might be.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I appreciated that, Ms. Blaney.

There's a little bit of a nuance going on with our timer and my timer, so we want to make sure that everyone knows I am timing it all.

We are going to get to have just one round—so one more Conservative and Liberal, and then two and a half and two and a half—and then we will have the ministers go on their way.

Mr. Cooper, you have up to five minutes.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ministers, for being here.

Through you, Madam Chair, to Minister Joly, you've talked tough. You've talked tough with your Beijing counterparts, so you say. You even stared into his eyes—I'm sure he was very intimidated—and now we learned yesterday in *The Globe and Mail*, very conveniently, that a visa was denied for a diplomat who wanted to work at the Canadian Beijing embassy.

It was one visa. Is that it? Was it just one visa? How many visas have been denied—just one?

• (6055)

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I won't comment on your question, particularly at the beginning, because I think it's actually.... The tone—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, I have a right—

**The Chair:** I'm going to pause time.

I'm pausing time. Our approach here is very important, so I would just say, be mindful.

Mr. Cooper, earlier, one of your colleagues said that we want to make sure about how much time we speak and the response is given. You spoke for 43 seconds. The minister will be given close to the same time. You are at 10 seconds already done.

Minister, go ahead.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, you would know China because you went to China as a parliamentarian in the past. Therefore, I think you would understand that when we fall into too much partisanship we're falling into China's trap, which is trying to sow division in many democracies.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Minister, through you, Madam Chair, how many visas of Beijing diplomats have been denied? Is it just one? How many?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I can give you under my watch. What I can tell you is that there was a visa that was not granted back this fall.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** So, it's one. Okay. Thank you for answering that: one visa denied under your watch.

Minutes ago—

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I just wanted to—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** No, it's my time.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** No, but I wanted—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, my time is limited, and I'm going to ask for you to—

**The Chair:** Minister, pause.

Minister Joly—

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I just want to make sure that we all understand that it's a diplomatic visa. It is a diplomatic visa. Obviously, we have visas for the Chinese community—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** My question was prefaced on how many diplomatic visas: one. You've answered that question. You said moments ago that Beijing's Ambassador Cong has been summoned on many occasions.

It's true that the ambassador has been summoned with respect to the balloon incident and with respect to illegal police stations, but not on election interference. Why?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We've summoned the ambassador on many, many subjects, including foreign interference of all sorts, including within our democracy.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** On election interference...yes or no?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Like I said, yes.

Maybe, Jennie, you can add to that, because the department would know, of course.

**Ms. Jennie Chen (Executive Director, Greater China Political and Coordination, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would just like to add that diplomatic representations were made to Ambassador Cong by senior officials at GAC on February 24.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** With respect to interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections...?

**Ms. Jennie Chen:** Based on the.... Yes, that is correct.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you for that.

Madam Minister, it's been more than six months since we learned of illegal police stations operated in Canada by Beijing. We just learned in the last 24 hours that there are two operating in Montreal, one in Brossard and one in Montreal within 30 minutes of your riding, yet, six months later, election interference, illegal police stations, tough talk...but not a single diplomat expelled. Why not?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** When it comes to police stations, the RCMP has confirmed that they have been closed. My colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, has also given a lot of information on that aspect before. Of course, we will not tolerate any form of foreign interference, including police stations.

I've been having many conversations with my colleagues around the world on this issue, particularly with Antony Blinken again last week, and we will work within the Five Eyes to identify any form of foreign interference, including—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** One visa denied and not a single diplomat expelled, these are hardly the actions of a government that takes Beijing's interference seriously.

Minister, when you last appeared before this committee on December 13, you said repeatedly, unequivocally, that you had no information about Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. How is it that The Globe and Mail and Global News have information based on their review of CSIS documents about significant interference by Beijing in the 2019 and 2021 elections, but you, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, know nothing. How is that possible?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** When it comes to activities of foreign actors in the country, the foreign affairs minister was not made aware. Since then, I've made sure that changed and that would not be the case, because obviously, as everybody around this table would be aware, it is important—

• (6100)

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** You've asked to be briefed. You didn't know anything in December, but—

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Can I just finish my sentence, please, Michael?

Obviously, in the context, as colleagues around this table would agree, as Minister of Foreign Affairs I need to make sure that I have access to that information in order to conduct our diplomatic relationships in a good way in the Canadian interest.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Let me just offer the ministers my apologies for what they've had to witness today in this committee in terms of the condescending tone. I will apologize on behalf of my colleagues, because I don't think they will.

I'll start off with a question for you, Minister LeBlanc.

Have you read the recent Morris Rosenberg report?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I have, and I've also had an opportunity to discuss with Mr. Rosenberg his recommendations and the nature of the work he did late last fall as well.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

I noticed in the Rosenberg report that there was a specific reference in a footnote, on page 26, that three of the political parties participated in the briefings during the last election and all continued to support a panel composed of senior public servants. What I found interesting about it was that it was noted that the Bloc Québécois didn't participate in those briefings.

Do you find that surprising?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Turnbull, I think I saw the leader of the Bloc explaining at some point why they chose not to participate.

We think it's important that all political parties designate senior campaign officials who can receive the appropriate security clearances and be briefed directly by non-partisan, senior officials responsible for monitoring and enforcing Canadian law, including, obviously, countering foreign interference.

We thought this was an important part of our protecting-democracy initiative. We certainly intend to continue making available to political parties and their representatives a chance to participate in this process. We think it strengthens, as some previous questions have identified, the overall public confidence in the measures the Government of Canada is taking to protect institutions.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that response.

I agree with you that it does add to the transparency and the overall confidence that Canadians have in our electoral process, and I think that's a good thing. I hope that all political parties would participate in those briefings, especially when they later are claiming that somehow our government is not serious about foreign election interference.

Mr. LeBlanc, do you intend to implement the recommendations from the Rosenberg report?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Of course we do. The answer is yes.

We did that following the report done by Jim Judd, a former director of CSIS, as well after the 2019 election.

The Prime Minister committed publicly on Monday evening...and I even had a chance to talk with the clerk yesterday and again this morning. He assigned her and me a little bit of homework: to look at, obviously, the 16 recommendations that Mr. Rosenberg made, as well as the Judd report again to look at how we evolved for the 2021 election, and also reports from the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians—some members here have sat or sit on that group—and to come back with a public report to the Prime Minister within 30 days.

On Monday we had a discussion as to whether it was 30 working days, sitting days or calendar days. We're just going to err on the side of doing it as quickly as possible, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that.

That's great to hear, because I've read the report and there are quite a few really good recommendations in there that we can benefit from.

In terms of foreign interference, I think foreign interference has been reported for over a decade. Why do you think we've only really seen action starting in 2015?

Minister LeBlanc.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Madam Chair, through you to Mr. Turnbull, I've said a number of times in the House of Commons that we have taken this issue seriously since we formed government.

You're right to note that previous public reports by CSIS go back over a decade, to 2013. Mr. Harper's former national security adviser was talking publicly on national television networks even a few years before, so this is not new in the last few years. It's certainly not unique to Canada, as I said.

We wanted to take a strong, robust approach, which we have continued to evolve. The Leader of the Opposition, I thought—you were in the House earlier this week—offered an interesting take when he was the minister responsible for democratic institutions. These reports were public. He had taken no action himself, as minister responsible for democratic institutions, and in sort of a smart little quip to his second question he said to me that was okay because it wasn't benefiting the Conservative Party. I thought that was a rather perverse way to look at one's public responsibilities.

• (6105)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have two and half minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Chair.

I'll come back to my question.

Minister, we are amongst ourselves, as I said earlier. I would like to know how information is exchanged between the Prime Minister and the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force. I'd like to know how you operate to make sure I'm up to speed on what's going on. I think things have changed and I'd like you to tell us about that.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Ms. Gaudreau, I'd like to make sure I understand what you're saying. Are you asking how I go about my conversations with the Prime Minister?

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Actually, I'd like to know what rules are in place so that you are well aware of what is going on. Do you interact with the task force and with the Prime Minister on a daily basis? How often do those interactions take place?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I take part in a lot of briefings when I'm in Ottawa, which are secret in nature. There are also briefings on the road—I'm often required to travel—or sometimes when I'm travelling with the Prime Minister. On those occasions also, there is someone who can provide information.

These briefings can be on any topic related to international affairs, what's going on elsewhere in the world. My goal as foreign minister is to know what's going on in the world to be able to conduct our diplomacy to defend our interests and protect our values. I don't need to explain that to you, of course.

In Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, we recognize that we need to increase our understanding of China, which is clearly lacking. That's why we're investing \$2.3 billion to increase our presence in the region and expand our capabilities.

We did recognize that we needed to do more with respect to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to manage foreign interference issues. That's why we invested \$88 million to hire more staff.

I want to tell you that this is a challenge that the United States, the Europeans, and many countries around the world are finding out more about. I've had conversations recently with my colleague, the Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, to understand more about this, because Australia has had to deal with these issues in the past.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Chair.

My question is going to be for Minister LeBlanc, but before I ask that question, I want to say, as a woman politician, that I remember at the very beginning of my career being asked if I was tough enough to do the job, and I think that it's absolutely devastating that this frame of reference would be used in this way.

I believe a minister has a position of power, regardless of gender identity, and that should be respected. I'm sure that internationally it is, and I think it is shameful that it was even said in this place.

I want to put that on the record.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you, Rachel, for this.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Through you, Chair, for Minister LeBlanc, when I look at where we are at right now, we know that Canadians are rightly concerned. Our political system and our electoral system are being discussed around kitchen tables, because people are not sure if they can trust our institutions anymore.

We know that many people with a lot of experience—Richard Fadden, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Gerald Butts, Artur Wilczynski and even my leader, Jagmeet Singh—have all asked for a public inquiry.

I fundamentally believe that the process needs to be transparent, public and independent. Right now, what is happening is we're seeing all of this debated and fought out in a very public political realm, and it's extremely partisan. That concerns me, because if we're going to have Canadians trust our systems, we need to have processes that engender faith and belief. Right now, we have a feeling that the government is hiding something. We have the Conservative Party creating a lot of fear, telling people that they have to stop trusting what we should all trust, and we're not focusing on how to strengthen our systems in an ever-changing reality of foreign interference from many, many countries.

I wonder if you can explain to me why the Prime Minister says that if the special rapporteur says we need a public inquiry, we're going to do that. Why are we waiting? Why are the systems and everything that is being proposed by your government not allowing for that transparent, public and independent frame?

● (6110)

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Madam Chair, through you to Ms. Blaney, thank you for the question, but also thank you for your comments about the inappropriate comments Mr. Cooper made earlier.

I would agree with you that Canadians need to have a robust and pervasive trust in their democratic institutions. That's precisely why we have taken a series of incremental measures in every election, including the non-partisan professional public service. Nobody around this table would imagine that the Clerk of the Privy Council, the head of Canada's public service, is a partisan figure. When he or she, for example, has chaired the protocol or testified before this committee or made public comments along with other senior officials, they have been precisely designed to restore that confidence.

Ms. Blaney, we believe—and I know, Madam Chair, that I'm out of time—that the special rapporteur is another step in depoliticizing this conversation and pointing to a path forward that will hopefully take us to the place that I think you and I want to get to and that other colleagues have referred to, where we can have a thoughtful conversation around further strengthening our institutions.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much for that.

With that, I would like to thank all of you for coming. Sometimes we don't always have enough time to answer the questions

because we've run out of time so quickly. We welcome you to send any answers or extensions of answers in writing to the clerk, and we'll share those around.

We don't have a lot of time left here, so we'll continue our meeting quickly. We thank you for making time to come and we will see you soon. Have a great day. We appreciate you and your teams.

Just because we have limited time—and I know, interpreters, that I'm already pushing it, so I apologize—we have resources confirmed from 4:30 to 6:30. We will be returning to this room, room 025-B, and I will be here shortly before 4:30. We will be here from 4:30 to 6:30 unless we can get out faster. Those resources have been confirmed. I would remind all members that we're coming back for that.

Ms. O'Connell, go ahead.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate Ms. Blaney's pointing it out, but I have a point of order with regard to the conduct of Mr. Cooper and his comments.

I think any woman sitting around this room can understand—and I'm sure men can appreciate and understand too—the constant demeaning nature of the comments towards the only female minister who appeared today. Yesterday another member of our team asked a question in QP, and a Conservative member said she deserved a participation medal. Today it was a question about whether this minister was tough enough.

Every single day that we women sit in this House, we hear what are called microaggressions, but they don't feel very micro as we are continuously undermined. I think he owes this committee, and the minister in particular, an apology. I am really sick and tired of sitting in here having to listen to it. I am sick and tired of Canadians having to see it and I am really sick and tired of the Conservatives just not getting it.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mrs. Romanado.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I too am really disappointed. I want to know, when then prime minister Stephen Harper confronted Vladimir Putin and said, "Get out of Ukraine", did that member opposite say, "Was he tough enough?" That was completely unacceptable. It is unacceptable behaviour towards every woman who has ever taken her place in this House, and I demand an apology under Standing Order 18.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus...I would just ask speakers to be mindful of the volume.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I didn't realize I was on the list, Madam Chair. I think it was Mr. Fergus.

• (6115)

**The Chair:** It's Mr. Fergus. My apologies.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** As someone who is very sensitive to these issues of discrimination, I too demand an apology from the member.

My colleague, Ms. O'Connell, mentioned these microaggressions that, from the victim's perspective, are anything but "micro", but rather "macro".

I hope the member will have the decency to apologize, especially since today is the day after International Women's Day.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I thank you for that.

I will remind all members, especially when we're having.... It shouldn't be cool if it's not in public. We should be mindful of the work that we're doing. There are a lot of things around this place that make me puke in my mouth often. It's really unfortunate. We can be better than this. I will leave it at that, and if anybody wants to act on the comments, we can figure that out later.

In a quick second, since we are coming back at 4:30, this committee is also tasked with redistribution. Among our ways of finding a way forward, I tried to have one day for redistribution and one day for this study. Obviously, that's not the approach the committee wants to take. I know there are questions being asked by our colleagues. They want to know when they're going to be able to come. I don't have answers for them. I would like us all to find a way forward.

With regard to the reports that are ready for me to present when we return to the House after the constituency week, I will present them in the House. As I've been asked to do, and as I usually do, I'll give the vice-chairs a heads-up that I'm presenting them.

With that, I really encourage us to be mindful of the topic of the day, of what's important and why we're here. I will see you at 4:30 in this room.

Take care. I am suspending.

• (1315)

(Pause)

• (1630)

• (6430)

**The Chair:** We're going to resume meeting number 57, as was agreed to earlier.

Just to continue on from where we left off, Ms. Blaney, you had the floor. You had passed it back to me, but I just want to make sure you were done. Do you want the floor back?

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Chair, thank you for that. I think I'm done, but I would love to hear the list of names just so I have a better understanding of who will be speaking, and then I'll decide if I want to put myself back on the list.

Thank you.

• (6435)

**The Chair:** That's excellent. For right now, after you I have Mr. Fergus and then Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to begin our discussions this afternoon.

I must express my deep disappointment with the way we ended our last meeting three hours and twenty minutes ago. Mr. Cooper's comments were not befitting a parliamentary statement or the man I know. I offer him the opportunity to interrupt me at any time on a point of order to apologize to Minister Joly for his intemperate comments. I think it is important to do that. It's been over three hours since he made those comments, and I still haven't seen an apology on social media.

Let's get back to this amendment proposed by my colleague Mr. Turnbull. One of the reasons why it is important to focus on the individuals on the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force and invite the participants that my colleague is proposing is that this is a very important institution that was set up to combat foreign interference. In addition, members of all recognized political parties in the House of Commons can become members. All parties except the Bloc Québécois have taken advantage of this.

Not only did these parties have access to secret information related to foreign interference, but they also had the opportunity to speak with experts and the other members of this task force to ask questions, to bring forward their concerns, to pass on information that they or their candidates heard, and then to compare that with the information provided to the task force by the national security experts. That is very important and very helpful.

This is part of a long record of actions taken by our government after the 2015 election. We took these steps because it was clear long before that that state and non-state actors were trying to interfere with our elections and our democratic institutions. It is unfortunate that the former Conservative government did not take steps to reassure and protect Canadians from this.

• (6440)

The Harper government's former minister of democratic institutions offered an explanation this week. He said he didn't take action because the supposed government of China wasn't taking a stand for his party and therefore it wasn't in his party's interest to take action. This is ridiculous.

Not only did we create the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, but we also created the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. This is important because unlike all of our allies with whom we share security intelligence, especially those who are in the Five Eyes alliance with us, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, we were the only country that did not have a group of parliamentarians to review, question and receive information on the activities of our intelligence and security services.

Early in its tenure, our government created this very useful committee. I did not have the privilege of being a member of it, but I know that several people around the table had that privilege in previous Parliaments. From what I could gather without people divulging information, it was an interesting experience, to say the least. I imagine there were a number of issues that were discussed. Canada is facing real risks. We need to take action and our government has done that.

In 2018, we also introduced the critical election incident public protocol and launched the G7 rapid response mechanism.

In addition, two very important bills to counter the effects of foreign interference were introduced and passed. These were Bill C-59, which became the National Security Act, 2017, and Bill C-76, which became the Elections Modernization Act. And to complete all that, we created and supported the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security.

● (6445)

All of these institutions and tools are designed to protect Canadians and their freedom from foreign interference. That is so important. That is why my colleague Mr. Turnbull's amendment is so important. It would give us a chance to bring forward the people who know what happened in the 2019 and 2021 elections.

When people come here, they won't be able to disclose secret information. That makes sense. However, they will give us as much information as they can, as will the people who came before the committee last Wednesday and Thursday. We had a chance to ask questions of excellent officials from the Communications Security Establishment and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, deputy ministers from Global Affairs Canada, people responsible for public safety, and the national security and intelligence advisor to the Prime Minister, Ms. Thomas.

These are dedicated experts whose sole purpose is to ensure our protection, and they find every way to do so. What was their conclusion? They acknowledged that information had been leaked in the newspapers, but they said that this information was not intelligence and did not paint a complete picture of the situation. They were careful to explain to us that while incidents may be reported, an incident does not necessarily represent the truth.

They said we need to put this in context first. Last week, I reminded people that text without context is just pretext. That means you have to look at the big picture. The so-called findings that are published by some journalists do not present the big picture that would allow us to determine whether the findings are legitimate or not.

● (6450)

I can imagine my colleagues asking me why I don't want the chance to look at this information to get the full picture. This suggestion raises a couple of weaknesses or problems.

First, to get the full picture, you have to rely on national security information, which by its nature cannot be discussed in public. Second, I don't have that security clearance and I don't think most people around the table do either. However, the good news is that there is a committee whose members have that security clearance, and that is the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. These parliamentarians, our peers, our counterparts, have the security clearance to access this information. So why not entrust them with this study so they can have all the information?

Some will ask how Canadians can trust this work since it is not public. This is assuming that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians does not publish reports. That is not true, because it does so regularly. I had the opportunity to read one of its reports. I have not read them all, but I have read at least one report in its entirety. I learned some things. That report painted a pretty important, comprehensive enough picture of the situation to allow me to draw conclusions.

We, as members of Parliament, need to have confidence in our sisters and brothers who serve on this committee. These people deserve our trust. They have undergone a very serious background review to ensure that they deserve the highest possible security clearance. I have confidence in them. That committee is the right place to have those kinds of discussions.

I said that my colleagues might ask me why we would not investigate ourselves here in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The first answer is that we don't have the security clearance.

● (6455)

Secondly, and I say this with great sadness, I don't think Canadians who watch our deliberations in committee or in oral question period see the best of us. They see that we are too partisan, that we ask questions that we don't want answered, that we ask questions without giving others time to answer, and that when we get an answer, we don't accept it and we talk about something else. That's a shame. We are capable of doing better, but at this point I am not convinced.

I'm going to digress for a moment, if I may. Last night my goddaughter visited me with her brother and her parents. I took them to the House of Commons after the parliamentary session, and we chatted. They are 14 years old. They talked about oral question period yesterday. They were not impressed with the attitude of some members of Parliament, who were not up to the task. It's sad.

My goddaughter, whom I love dearly, knows the difference between the various political parties, but the vast majority of Canadians do not distinguish between Conservatives, Liberals, Bloc, NDP and Green Party members. To them, we are just politicians, and they see politicians that are not up to the job. So how can they trust us when we can't even ask a question and let people answer without braying like donkeys? That is what I had to say.

The third reason is that we have allies who share information with us. This is a very serious matter and it is important that there be a parliamentary committee to oversee these issues. However, none of the other parliaments, whether in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand or the U.S., conduct public inquiries using top secret documents; they leave that to specialized committees. That's the main reason I think this committee is not the right place to get to the bottom of this, which I assume is the goal of everyone around the table.

• (6500)

For these three reasons, I think this is the wrong place. Everyone says they are taking into account these leaks, which are not confirmed or corroborated by the experts and officials who have appeared here. This information, if it is legitimate, is by definition partial, incomplete. Witnesses have even denied some of the things revealed by these so-called leaks.

I remember the first day of our debate, during which my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton said that one could not question the credibility of the journalists who published this information. I agree with him. I'm going to assume that these people are acting in good faith. They are professionals, journalists. They are going to reveal information that was presented to them.

However, I started reading the report issued by the distinguished Justice Dennis O'Connor on the events surrounding the Maher Arar case. What is the conclusion of this report? The so-called information leaks were not information leaks.

The judge was very tough on some people, some of them bad apples at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Communications Security Establishment, and on journalists who didn't take the time to verify their information, young journalists at the time, like Bob Fife.

I think it is important to remember this, because a great injustice was perpetrated against Mr. Arar. Not only did it destroy him physically, because he was tortured for a year, but we were complicit in it. Maher Arar claimed to be innocent and Judge O'Connor concluded that he was.

• (6505)

Not only do I have the great privilege of serving on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, but I also have the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. We will be talking about foreign interference there tomorrow, but we will approach it from a different perspective: We will look at its effect on diasporas in Canada.

I am not an admirer of everything the government of the day in Beijing does, but we have to be very careful about pointing fingers at China. Reputations are being destroyed with information that of-

ficials in our institutions responsible for the safety of Canadians say is not true. These officials have seen the big picture and have received information from both our allies and their employees, agents, Canadians who, in some cases, put their lives on the line to provide us with this information. All have come to the conclusion that what we are reading is not true.

Sometimes you have to trust the experts. If we only want to play partisan games, there are advantages to talking about these things as if they were the Good News, the kind found in sacred texts.

These claims are not entirely true according to the experts. I find it very frustrating that every time this is discussed, these claims are talked about as solid, truthful information, when they are far from it. The experts have told us that this is not the case, but the temptation to play political games is too great. The temptation to manipulate news and rumours to try to find political advantage is great.

We have to rely on what we have the capacity to do at this committee, and we have to do it while respecting the rights and privileges of others. One does not want to unnecessarily damage the reputation of others without justification.

• (6510)

I have colleagues of Chinese descent, who were either born in China and came to Canada when they were very young, or who have parents, grandparents or great-grandparents who were born in China. It's very hurtful for them when, on social media, people lose it and say anything.

Some of them have already received often hateful, sometimes threatening messages. This does not only affect the Chinese Canadian community, but almost all Canadians of Asian origin or with Asian ancestry. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to confuse people. I hope my colleagues do not do this, but some Canadians do not hesitate to do it. That's when we realize that there are consequences to what we are doing.

We have to be very careful and use words very carefully. We should not assume that everything leaked to the media is true, especially not when we ask questions of those responsible for national security and those people tell us that the information is not true. With the big picture, these officials were able to see that this information didn't hold up and that it didn't paint an accurate picture of the situation.

I remember the early days. In the newspapers, it was claimed that Canadian Security Intelligence Service officials had told the Prime Minister that electoral candidates had to be withdrawn because they were under foreign influence. However, experts said that this did not make sense and that the service did not do such things. Two days later, the reporters changed the story and said that part of their report was not true. Yet the damage was done and everyone believed the worst, when it wasn't true in the first place.

This really does sound like what Justice O'Connor had called a real injustice. You have to be extremely careful before you come to these hasty conclusions, and that's why we have intelligence agencies that cross-check all the information.

• (6515)

I recall Mr. David Vigneault, Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, saying that news reports were not intelligence sources. The Service has to put this in a broader context. They often receive information, but they have to be patient and put it all together before they draw conclusions, because they can't present the Prime Minister with partial or incomplete information. As much as possible, they must give him justifiable information. It is because of the vast experience of the service's staff that it has this ability.

It is really important to remember the wrongs done in the past. Justice O'Connor's report is lengthy, but it is important to read it. I don't want to say that it makes you feel uncomfortable, because it's more about wisdom, the wisdom of asking yourself if the information you have in front of you is complete enough to draw conclusions. That's very important. My mother always told me that you have two ears and one mouth, so you should listen more than you should talk.

I think it's the same with the information we're reading. We need to try to get a more complete picture. If we're not able to access that information, we have to trust those who are charged with doing that work. We had all the best sources in front of us. We had access to these people to ask them questions, and I think they answered them very frankly. Without giving away any secret details, they gave us a bigger picture of how they came to their conclusions. They determined that the information that was reported in the newspapers was very incomplete, and that the conclusions that many of them had reached were not correct, but wrong. That's one of the reasons I don't want this committee to get it wrong.

I am proud of our record on intelligence and national security issues. As I said, several important new tools have been made available to the government to combat foreign interference. They are not necessarily complete, but they are always being reassessed to see if there are new ones that could be put in place to protect Canadians, which is very important.

• (6520)

Before I conclude, I would like to say this: It is 5:23 p.m., and it has now been four hours since my colleague made disparaging remarks about the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He did not take advantage of my offer: He could interrupt me at any time on a point of order to apologize. It is disappointing that he has not done so to date.

I hope my colleagues will at least acknowledge that they have all these important and appropriate tools to get to the bottom of this and access all the information. It would be much more appropriate for them to use these tools to educate themselves. When they investigate foreign interference, they will come to the same conclusion as our experts, the men and women charged with protecting us.

I will stop here and hope that people will be convinced of the wisdom of my words. I also hope that my colleague will use this break to burnish his image, do the right thing, and apologize.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (6525)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm sorry that I had to be away from the committee for a few minutes, but I'm glad to be back. I'm glad to still get my turn to speak to the amendment I put forward.

Again, it is quite reasonable to ask the campaign directors to come before the committee as additional witnesses. We've had a whole host of credible witnesses. In terms of our study, we've heard from the majority of witnesses, some of them more than once, and they've given us some very compelling testimony. I don't think it gives the Conservatives what they're looking for and I think that's why they continue to push us to have to debate this topic.

This is really clear-cut. Our government has been acting on foreign election interference since 2015. We know that the past government, prior to that, did absolutely nothing on foreign election interference. That's a fact. I've never heard a Conservative say otherwise. In fact, in the House, we heard an exchange between Minister LeBlanc and the leader of the official opposition. Minister LeBlanc said:

When my friend, the opposition leader, was the minister responsible for democratic institutions, he did nothing when intelligence agencies raised the issue over 10 years ago.

Mr. Poilievre's response was:

Mr. Speaker, we did not have to, because the Communist dictatorship in Beijing was not helping the Conservative Party to get elected.

I don't know how anyone can hear remarks like that and not fully understand that the Conservative motivations here are clearly partisan.

When we heard Minister LeBlanc at the committee today, he made reference to this statement, calling it a "perverse" sense of how a minister would take their responsibility. For the leader of the official opposition, who was formerly responsible for democratic institutions, to say such a thing really speaks to the true motivations of what the Conservatives are trying to do. They are well known for this as a party, because they have done this over and over again.

We've seen this. It's not that surprising. Many Canadians know that this is the new Conservative Party of Canada, a party that is constantly becoming more extreme, trying to stoke more division and trying to question our democratic institutions, and they won't let any of the facts get in the way of their partisan games.

We also know what Mr. Poilievre said this week in English, and this will be a direct quote, contrary to what Mr. Cooper said in our previous meeting today. Pierre Poilievre said, “They are so concerned about how the Prime Minister is acting against Canada’s interest and in favour of a foreign dictatorship’s interests”. He then said in French—I’m quoting the English—“we’ve never had an intelligence service so worried about a Prime Minister and his collaboration with a foreign power”.

For me, this is morally reprehensible. It’s disgusting. It reeks of partisanship. It is really calling into question the motivations of our Prime Minister, who, like all of us, stood for office and is doing this for the benefit of the country and is giving so much to this country.

It is utterly disgusting. I don’t even have words to describe how I feel about it. It actually makes me sad to think that this is the kind of politics we have in this country today.

● (6530)

When you add in the comments that Mr. Cooper made earlier to Minister Joly, which I found very offensive.... I really wish Mr. Cooper would realize just how gender-biased his remarks were and how disempowering that would feel. I can’t put myself in the minister’s shoes, but I can say we totally expect tough questions, of course, to ministers when they come before this committee. Holding the government to account is the responsibility of all of us, and it’s something we all take very seriously, but when you are a complete and total jerk about it, and are offensive and are basically putting on display for everybody that you’re gender-biased and discriminatory in your perspectives, you’re just embarrassing yourself. It would be nice for him to actually “man up” and apologize for those comments.

Anyway, I’m sure we’ll keep waiting for that to happen. I’m hopeful that he will find in his better judgment, at some point in the near future, a way to come back to us and hopefully apologize for those remarks.

Look, I’ve spent a lot of time talking about how much our government has done on foreign election interference and I’ve been very careful to also say that we should never allow ourselves to think that we’ve done enough. We need to evolve and do more. With respect to the threats from our adversaries, we’ve heard the same thing from multiple witnesses. I think every member of the government who’s come before this committee, whether public servants or ministers or deputy ministers, has said the same thing: Canada needs to take these threats seriously. We are doing that, but we also need to constantly reflect and consider how we can strengthen the many different strategies we have currently.

I think it’s important to give an overview, a more condensed summary. It would be really nice to hear some acknowledgement of that. It would really go a long way in our debates and conversations on a study that’s so important, if parties....

I don’t have a lot of hope, obviously, for the Conservative Party, because I’ve just given you quotes about how hyperpartisan they’re being about an issue, on the one hand claiming they want to get to the truth and then, when they hear from the security experts and intelligence experts who are the most prominent figures in their fields—who are coming and telling us the things that we should be

doing—not being willing to listen to that. They’re not taking those things into consideration, and then they’re even ignoring what they’re being told and what the reports are saying. They’re ignoring the facts.

I think my job is to continue to confront their partisanship with facts and information, which we have plenty of. I don’t think that’s being unreasonable. I think that just extends our debate, of course, and I think we need an acknowledgement that our government has been doing a lot on foreign election interference. Just because the Conservative Party woke up to this recently doesn’t mean that our government has been inactive.

Going right back to 2017, we passed the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians Act and then formed NSICOP, with members from all parties. We all know this. We all have members of our parties who sit on that committee of parliamentarians. That’s just one thing. I realize if that were all we had done, fine, you could perhaps criticize, but....

I’m not saying that we can’t be critical. We should be critical, and that’s fine, but when you’re ignoring the facts, that’s not being informed based on the information we’ve been given.

● (6535)

I think to respect the process, we really need to review those facts until, in my view, people acknowledge that those things are all real, positive, sizable steps forward in protecting our democracy.

I mentioned the 2018 ethics committee report on threats to democracy and the substantive government response to that, which came shortly afterward. We established the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security with a budget of \$155 million and we announced the rapid response mechanism at the 2018 G7 summit. Those are three sizable things. The ethics committee wrote a report of more than 100 pages, and the government responded. Then the government did some things that relate to foreign election interference, one of them being setting up the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, giving it a budget to do its job and setting up the rapid response mechanism with other G7 partners. I think those things have to be acknowledged. They are significant.

Then in 2019, there were many more steps taken. There was a major report that a committee did in 2018, and then some things were immediately done that year. Then in 2019, a whole host of other things were done. Before the 2019 election, there were six or seven major steps taken. One was the announcement of the plan to protect Canadian democracy. I mentioned this before, but I am referring back to it to say that four-pillar plan really represents an all-of-government approach.

If we look at the details of that plan, we could actually check off the things that have been done as a result of that plan. Conservatives always seem to say that the Liberals just talk about things and they don't do anything. No, these things got done. You can't deny that. I can give you very specific examples, and I'd be happy to do that. Mrs. Block, I see you shaking your head, but these things got done. Again, I'm not saying that they're perfect, but I'm saying none of these things were in place before our government came to power.

This isn't a rose-coloured glasses moment for me. These are real, tangible steps that have been taken. We set up the SITE task force, which includes CSIS, the RCMP, the rapid response mechanism and the Communications Security Establishment, CSE. We passed Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act, which added protections for third parties to funnel funds into partisan advertising, in addition to a bunch of other things.

It's important to keep in mind, of course, that Bill C-76 was tabled in the House in 2018, and it took until almost the end of 2019, I believe, to actually get passed through the House. That Elections Modernization Act added a whole bunch of things that I think are really significant. I went through some of those in my previous comments, but just to summarize, a whole bunch of things were added to strengthen our process.

We also passed Bill C-59, which was tabled in the House in 2017. That's an act respecting national security matters. That act gave CSIS and the CSE new threat reduction measures. Again, when we had CSIS come before us, the director said they do intervene and use threat reduction measures. Obviously those powers were given to them through an act that our government tabled in the House of Commons. It took two years to get through the House and came into force in 2019, but it shows significant progress. Between 2017 and 2019, there were multiple legislative things that took place. There were numerous bodies that were set up, including the SITE task force. Again, the critical election incident public protocol and the panel were also established before the election.

• (6540)

We also have examples like the Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online, which was a commitment that all of the major social media platforms and online platforms made. That's another sizable undertaking. It's not as though we just threw that up and people just agreed to it. A lot of work went into it. Again, for the opposition parties to keep claiming that we've done nothing just shows ignorance of the facts.

The other thing I was really happy to read about earlier this morning, which I just happened to dive deeper into, was the digital citizen initiative through Canadian Heritage. Again I would like to take time tonight to demonstrate to you this all-of-government approach that involves multiple departments all working together on foreign election interference—both primary prevention and early intervention, which involves educating the public. It involves people being more aware through things like the digital citizen initiative, which really is trying to educate people on digital literacy. That was composed of 23 projects over nine months, and it reached 12 million Canadians. That's 12 million Canadians who learned about digital literacy—in other words, how to question the content that they consume online, which we know is the most common way

in which people consume information today. Those 23 projects over nine months reached 12 million Canadians. That's a significant undertaking. It didn't just happen overnight. Lots of work went into that. Canadian Heritage led that work, and it had an impact.

We can ask ourselves how much of an impact it had and we could ask what else we need to do on that front. I would suggest that we need to do more. What's interesting is that if I look at budget 2022, I see more resources for initiatives like that as well. Again, I'm being critical of my own government and reflecting and asking what we haven't done yet, but when you're not operating in the realm of reality or fact, then how are you making a judgment? I'm looking at the information we've been given and informing myself based on that. It seems that at least the Conservative members don't seem willing to do that, which I think again reeks of partisanship, because it's just wilful ignorance of the facts. We have to look at the information we've been given and the testimony of the security experts and intelligence experts whom we've heard from.

Another initiative was the Get Cyber Safe program, which is a national public awareness campaign to inform Canadians about cybersecurity. Not only did we do digital literacy training; we also did a major public awareness campaign. That was led by the Communications Security Establishment, and it's an important part of an overall strategy that links it to another major strategy of the government called the national cyber security strategy. This, I feel, demonstrates very clearly how there's kind of a whole-of-government approach.

I've described so far how we've launched a four-pillar plan called a plan to protect Canadian democracy. We set up the SITE task force, which includes CSIS, the RCMP, the rapid response mechanism and the CSE. We passed two bills. We set up the public protocol and panel for the writ period, within the election period, and we did a declaration on election integrity online, the digital citizen initiative and the cyber-safe initiative. That was all in 2019, before the election.

Again, for anyone to claim that we didn't do anything or that we weren't taking foreign interference into account or taking it seriously, that just shows ignorance of the facts. In 2020 there was an independent assessment done. We all know that was done. An independent person named James Judd was appointed and produced a report. I have it here. There are some really good analyses and suggestions, most of which have been followed through on. The vast majority of them seem to have been implemented, and obviously the government has to assess what the best way forward is.

● (6545)

There's evidence that the report was taken seriously, that the independent advice of Mr. Judd was taken into consideration and that there were measures, mechanisms and initiatives implemented based on those recommendations. Again it shows responsible leadership from a government that took the independent advice into consideration. It demonstrates how the government is taking this threat seriously, so I just don't understand how anyone can claim....

Maybe we could find consensus in some way if the Conservative Party of Canada would just live in reality and come to terms with some of the facts about the things that our government has done. Maybe a member of that party could pipe up today on a point of order and say they recognize that the government has done a lot on foreign election interference and they all now want to reflect on how we move forward and what else we can do. Then we could have a constructive, non-partisan, committed conversation, because I really believe that when it comes down to it, we all really do care about our democracy. We want to protect the health of our democracy. I know I do. I really care about our democracy, so for anyone to claim that our party, our leader, I or anybody else does not take this seriously is just deeply offensive. It is deeply offensive, and I won't stand for it, because it's not true, so cut it out. Let's work together. Let's work together on the things that we know we need to do.

We have 16 recommendations from the newest independent report from Morris Rosenberg. Morris Rosenberg wrote a really substantive report. I would say it's even better than the first report after 2019, the Judd report. I feel as though the Rosenberg report has even more substance in it, more things we can do or consider doing. I know the Prime Minister has already made an announcement asking Minister LeBlanc and the Privy Council to, within 30 days, look at all of the reports that have been done, say they are going to implement them and come up with an implementation plan. To me, that shows a responsiveness. It shows that there was an independent assessment done. It shows that we care and that we're considering that independent advice.

I don't know how parties like the Bloc Québécois can criticize, because they didn't even show up for the briefings during the last election. I mentioned this earlier, because I'm dumbfounded by this little fact that was in a footnote. I came across this and thought, first of all, that it's difficult to understand how the Conservatives, the NDP and others can claim that they didn't know about things and almost claim ignorance when they were part of these briefings, but then, on the other hand, the Bloc never came to the briefings. It just seems very rich for them to then accuse the government of not being transparent enough. They didn't even come to the briefings on foreign election interference in the 2021 election. It's clearly said in the report that Rosenberg wrote.

Again I feel frustrated by the fact that our opposition parties don't really want to work on this issue, in my view, but just seem to want to push some political agenda they have. I hope we can get through that logjam and come to terms with the fact that there are facts in the matter and that we should be taking those into consideration.

I mentioned 2020 and 2021. I am establishing a timeline and a pattern of responsible leadership. I know nobody wants to listen to that, it seems, but that's the truth. Responsible leadership involves having all of these different initiatives to tackle foreign election interference, and as the threats to Canadian democracy are evolving, our government is responding to each step along the way. You can see it, year over year.

● (6550)

That's not to say it's perfect. I'm not claiming that, and we have to seriously look at it, but that's exactly what we've been doing. With every step, every year, there is a track record of progress. If you're denying that there has been progress, I don't know how we come to terms with moving forward on a study when you won't look at the information and facts we have been given.

That is our job, as a committee. Our job is to come to these studies and do this work in good faith for the benefit of Canadians. We're not benefiting Canadians when we deny the facts and the information that we've been given. To me, we're avoiding our responsibilities, in a sense. We're not taking this work seriously if we're not willing to look at the facts. It's unfortunate, but that's what we're seeing today.

In 2021, our government worked on updating the Canada declaration on election integrity online, and that got updated. It was done again for the commitment for the online platforms. I think Rosenberg quite rightly says it's great to have that declaration, but social media companies.... I could quote the quote if you would like, but I remember it off the top of my head. I will paraphrase it, so I apologize to the folks in the committee if they remember verbatim what Rosenberg wrote. He basically said that online platforms, even though they have signed this declaration, are still the major source of misinformation and disinformation, and those platforms are where Canadians are consuming a lot of that information.

Could we criticize and say that maybe the declaration doesn't go far enough? Maybe we need to do deeper work with online platforms around foreign election interference and the dissemination of disinformation on their platforms. We've talked a lot in different committees about this issue of disinformation being so widespread and how much of an impact it has on Canadians.

Yes, we can see that there were instances of disinformation in the last election, both foreign and domestic. There was quite a lot of it, I'm sure. If we were to have our experts in this area come before us, they would showcase many examples of online campaigns that featured information that was not quite accurate or that put a spin on things that could potentially influence voter behaviour and voter intentions.

It is very difficult for us to establish a direct link. We've heard that. One of the challenges that we all have to come to terms with is that we don't know the extent that disinformation out there is impacting Canadians' sense of disenfranchisement and perhaps their level of anger and frustration with Canadian democracy and their feelings toward different parties and their policies. We don't know the direct causal links, because people consume so much information and get so many different impressions upon which they then base their decisions.

A lot of that is not even conscious for many Canadians. You see something, you react to it, you relate to it in a certain way, you associate it with something else and you internalize it. Some people are able to block it out. Other people are not. How does that resonate with you over time? Everybody is slightly different. Ms. Block may not react to things the same way that Ms. Gray does or Mr. Barrett does, or anybody else on this side does. We're all quite different in how we internalize the information that we're consuming, whether it's online or not.

The point I'm trying to make here is that even though a declaration on election integrity online has been a positive step and has been updated and social media platforms at least have expressed a commitment to protecting our elections, perhaps we can go a lot further and a lot deeper on that work. I'd be happy to get into a constructive debate on how we move forward in relation to foreign election interference by tackling the challenges that come naturally with online platforms having so much power in our democracy today.

● (6555)

This goes right back to the 2018 report, which was done by the ethics committee. I note that Mr. Fergus served for quite some time on the ethics committee, and I know it's done great work. I notice that Mr. Fergus participated in some way in that report, even though I don't think he was on the ethics committee at the time.

I've looked at the report. I haven't had the time to read all 100-and-whatever pages, but I look forward to reading it. I read the government response. The government response is very substantive. The recommendations coming out of that report really dig into online disinformation. Even the title of the report is all about looking at how our whole democracy is shifting, with online platforms disseminating so much information that people consume and having more power over the Canadian public because of where people are getting their information.

To me, it highlights the importance of this area. We could be digging into that, and I would invite that. Out of this study, we could have some very serious conversations about how to move forward, and I would be really happy to deliberate on that with my opposition colleagues and talk that through with the very substantive reports that we have. We can use them as background information to make some determinations as to what we can do.

In budget 2022 in particular, our government made additional commitments. Again, this showcases a track record of progress. Our government, after 2021, didn't just rest on its laurels and say it couldn't do more or become passive in this regard in any way. We made additional commitments and rolled out new supports and measures to tackle foreign election interference. I have mentioned

some of these before, but I'll quickly condense them into a very short summary here.

We committed to expanding the rapid response mechanism and offering more resources to it. When I think about G7 countries all tackling the very same issues in terms of threats to their democracy, I really think that they're going through the same things. The more we share information and collaborate and the more we strengthen our early warning systems for foreign election interference by working with our G7 partners, the better. I am sure everyone here agrees that this is a positive step. First of all, our government setting up the rapid response mechanism in 2018 was a good thing. I am sure everyone agrees that collaborating with G7 partners on identifying foreign actors and their strategies to intervene in or interrupt our elections in any way is a good thing. I'm sure everyone agrees that adding more resources and expanding that initiative is also positive. I'm sure everyone would agree with that.

I would also note that we enhanced cybersecurity activities to protect against disinformation. That's also a positive step moving forward.

We funded more research to support public institutions to continue to look at foreign election interference and understand how they can protect themselves.

We also added resources to the Privy Council Office to coordinate, develop and implement government-wide measures. That, to me, is really positive. The Privy Council plays a key role in all of this. We heard today from Minister LeBlanc, and we've noted it before in terms of the public protocol and how important the Privy Council Office is in coordinating, developing and implementing government-wide measures.

● (6600)

I also mentioned the 2023 independent assessment. Again, the Rosenberg report has 16 recommendations. I'm sure all the members of this committee have read those recommendations and are considering them. When I asked Minister LeBlanc today when he was here, he was very clear about saying yes, we will be implementing what is recommended in the Rosenberg report. Obviously there's a process there to look at what's been recommended. Perhaps the government will say, "Well, on one or two we may take a slightly different path", but the point is that many...and it is the same with the Judd report. Many of the recommendations were implemented.

Again, it shows a very clearly laid out track record of concern for Canadian democracy, for progress, for taking tangible, important steps forward in ensuring that we're protecting and doing our utmost to protect Canadian democracy.

Lastly, for this timeline overview that I'm giving, we have the Prime Minister's announcement, which we've all heard about by now. I'm sure many of the members took note of the more important and sizable next steps that the Prime Minister outlined.

He had a conversation with NSICOP's chair, our good colleague, David McGuinty, who I think is a fantastic chair and a really great parliamentarian. I've benefited from many conversations with him since I got here in 2019, and I really think he's doing a great job. I know he takes his role on that committee very seriously. I trust that he's doing his utmost to recommend and implement strategies and measures that will help protect Canadian democracy from foreign interference.

I note that the Prime Minister, in his remarks, asked the chair of NSICOP and the head of NSIRA to start work on foreign election interference, and I think that's a really good thing. I think that work is starting very soon.

We also note that there's an appointment that will come soon, in the coming weeks. I think it was pretty clear in the remarks that the Prime Minister made that an independent special rapporteur will be appointed to assess the situation and make recommendations on protecting and enhancing Canadians' faith in our democracy. That special rapporteur will independently look at what we need to do, assess all of the allegations that have been made and the information that's out there that Canadians are concerned about right now, and identify gaps in our systems and our mechanisms that have been set up by our government. I trust that will be a non-partisan, impartial process that will give us that outside perspective that's not coloured by any partisan politics and will offer really good, thoughtful, fact-based suggestions on how to move forward. Whether a public inquiry is a recommendation or not, we'll have to see. I think, again, based on the testimony that we heard, that there are a lot of people who don't agree that a public inquiry is the best way forward, and I take them very seriously.

I know that my colleague Mr. Gerretsen, when he was here earlier today, spoke to the fact that the previous campaign director for the Conservative Party in the last election, Mr. DeLorey, said that he didn't think that a public inquiry was the best way forward, and I have his remarks here.

He said, "A public inquiry is not the best way to address the issue of election interference. No meaningful solutions will come from it."

• (6605)

I feel like I should read that again. I'm not sure anyone's listening. He said, "A public inquiry is not the best way to address the issue of election interference. No meaningful solutions will come from it." He then said, "A multi-partisan committee, working with security officials, is a better way to identify and address the problems and find lasting solutions to protect our elections for the future."

For me, this corroborates what we heard from security and intelligence professionals like Jody Thomas and David Morrison, who pointed to the fact that these highly sensitive documents and information that would need to be reviewed need expertise to be interpreted, because they come with so many caveats, are only part of a

picture and are sometimes misleading. We require trained professionals.

Also, there are some significant risks to Canada's national security and the individuals who make up that community. Let's not forget that the national security community is made up of real people who are doing work on behalf of Canadians as well. We can't hang them out to dry because the Conservatives think we should be exposing all of the intelligence that the national security community has.

If Fred DeLorey agrees with security and intelligence professionals, perhaps the Conservatives could consider that even one of their own—not just anybody, but their previous national campaign manager—is agreeing with the national security and intelligence professionals, all of whom seem to be saying the same thing, which is that you're not going to get what you want out of a public inquiry.

We all agree, and I think everyone agrees, that this issue is important to the public. They need to be aware that it's an issue. They need to be aware of what the government is doing. They need to be more aware on an everyday basis to know what to watch out for. That's why there is that initiative around raising online awareness—the public campaign that I talked about—for Canadians who are reading and consuming information online. How many of us are consuming information online every day?

My daughter did something the other week. She said, "Daddy, you spend a lot of time on social media." I said, "No, I don't". I was in denial about it. She's a smart kid. She's 11 years old. She pulled out my phone and went into the screen time portion of it. I had spent 11 hours of screen time in one day on my phone. It wasn't all on social media, but can you imagine?

How much information are we consuming online on a daily basis? I've seen evidence to suggest that Canadians, on average, are spending over an hour on social media alone. It really is important to consider how online information consumption is impacting the public and how important it is to make people aware of what they're looking at, to improve digital literacy and raise awareness around what foreign election interference looks like for the Canadian public when it's done online.

What the Rosenberg report shows is that the main examples of things that qualified as attempts at interference coming from foreign state actors were disinformation campaigns online. It highlights the importance of how this is shifting Canada's democracy and shifting that overall threat environment that we need to take seriously, and we are. Nobody can doubt that we are. You can, if you want to ignore all the facts, but I would suggest that if you do some reading and look at the lived reality, you would be able to have a good, thorough debate and discussion based on the information that we have at our fingertips.

● (6610)

The Prime Minister's remarks also included a number of other tangible next steps. One was that the Minister of Public Safety will launch the consultation on a new foreign influence transparency registry in Canada. This is something that every party has said might be a really good thing to do. Australia and some other countries have done it, and the United States has too, if I'm not mistaken.

If our government is starting to move forward on a consultation process, this is another substantive step that shows we are taking this seriously and that we really want to keep up with the threats to our democracy and ensure that we are protecting Canadians and our democratic institutions as well as we can.

Also, the Minister of Public Safety was tasked with immediately establishing a national coordinator position for countering foreign interference. This is another important step. I already mentioned the importance of the Privy Council Office in terms of coordination across government, but having a foreign interference coordinator in Public Safety is also an extremely positive next step, because we know that every government institution, every ministry, every part of government needs to be protected from foreign interference. It's not just our elections. What we've heard from the Rosenberg report is that a lot of the public protocol focuses just on the writ period and that we should be extending our focus outside of the writ period into the pre-writ period. In a minority Parliament, what is pre-writ? It's all the time. It's the whole time. An election looms at every moment.

Taking the report and the independent assessment that Rosenberg has done seriously, in my opinion, the Prime Minister has quite rightly tasked the Minister of Public Safety with establishing a coordinator position on foreign interference as another positive next step forward.

Last, in terms of this timeline, the other really big tangible step forward that the Prime Minister made was to task Minister LeBlanc and the Clerk of the Privy Council with reviewing all of the reports that have been done on this topic. NSICOP is one. The Rosenberg report is another, but any other reports that have been done should be reviewed. The way it was phrased in the Prime Minister's remarks was that there should really be a comprehensive review of recommendations and within 30 days an implementation plan should be in place.

That is responsible. It's a very compressed timeline for the number of recommendations that are in those reports. It starts to move from basic recommendations to how we are going to actually implement these things. That is important.

I did strategic planning for a living for quite a number of years, and that's how I would approach it. I would identify recommendations and a strategic plan and then quickly develop implementation plans and then divide those up into implementation plans or action plans for each of the ministries and then have ministers who are accountable for those take them on, with timelines attached to them.

To me, that's how you get things done. You don't just wave a wand and say, "Oh, we're going to make this happen." You actually have to do a comprehensive review of all of the recommendations

that are in those reports, pull them all together, and then decide and deliberate on which ones make sense and which ones may not, because there's always an opportunity to decide what the best way forward is.

A good role for our committee to play that would be really constructive would be to look at all of the reports and recommendations ourselves and then be recommend things out of our study and our work that Minister LeBlanc and the Clerk of the Privy Council could consider. That would be a great contribution to the next steps that Minister LeBlanc has been tasked with developing in the next 30 days. That would be a really positive next step.

● (6615)

I would wrap up here by saying that I've established a timeline of progress and tangible steps that have been taken on foreign election interference. It's clearly laid out in the Rosenberg report, so no one can say they don't have this information. We all have the information that I've gathered. I've taken the time to do that. I would invite other members to look at the facts, the timelines and the information.

If members would like, I'd be happy to send them an overview of what I've worked on here, to make sure that they feel they have the information at their fingertips. We can make sure that in the future, we all start our conversation from the point of view of facts, evidence, living in reality and looking at the information and the progress that's been made, which has been substantive. I don't think there's any questioning of that.

That's it for me, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the time and the attention of my colleagues.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

The resources that we requested for this committee were from 4:30 to 6:30, and we are approaching 6:30. What I would like to share with all members is that we have been able to secure resources for Tuesday at 10:30 a.m. to resume this meeting. You should have an email in your inbox that confirms that we will resume this meeting on Tuesday at 10:30 a.m. in this room.

With that, I am going to suspend the meeting. I will see you on Tuesday.

Thank you.

*[The meeting was suspended at 6:18 p.m., Thursday, March 9]*

*[The meeting resumed at 10:33 a.m., Tuesday, March 14]*

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting to order.

We are resuming meeting number 57 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and we are picking up where we left off last Thursday. The committee is continuing debate on the amendment of MP Ryan Turnbull.

As always, I'll remind members that all comments should be addressed through the chair. The clerk and I will continue to maintain a consolidated list of members wishing to speak. The current speaking list that I have with people who are present would be Ms. Blaney, followed by Ms. Vandenberg and Ms. Romanado. I'll leave it there and ask members to give me a signal if they wish to jump in.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** That's excellent, Madam Chair. I'm a little surprised. I thought I had a bit of time, but that's wonderful. I'm happy to start today's conversation. I won't take a lot of time—

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney, just so you know, we had Ms. Sahota on the list prior to you, but she is not here today, so that's why I'm coming to you. You are correct in your understanding, but out of the people who are here today, you would be first.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** That's excellent.

I have a few comments to make. I just want to say that I am concerned. I'm concerned by some of the comments I'm hearing from the Liberals that make me feel a bit like they're undermining the work of the journalists in this country who have brought some of these leaks to our awareness.

It's really important. We saw this in the convoy, and it was very concerning to me, this idea of minimizing the work of the media and talking about it as fake news. That's stuff from the other side of the border with our neighbour, and I don't think it has a place here in Canada. I just want to caution the Liberals about how they talk about those things. It concerns me greatly. I think we have to respect the role of the independent media and the work they do bringing forward issues.

The other thing I am concerned about is some of what Ms. Sahota brought forward. I'm sorry that she's not here at the moment to respond, but she talked a lot about the cost of the inquiry and how expensive it would be. I just feel that Canadians collectively are really concerned about the state of our institutions and that, as elected officials, our job is to really bring forward those concerns and make sure we address them in a meaningful way. A public inquiry also really provides that opportunity for Canadians to have faith in a system that will allow for those conversations in an independent, public and transparent process. I think that's what Canadians are asking for right now. Hopefully we can see a bit of a change in the tone and dialogue around this.

I also want to add that, from my perspective, we have some important work to do in the committee, important work about the boundaries for future elections and what that's going to look like. We have important work in this committee, so I hope we can get to a place where we can vote today. We have the amendment first, of course, and then we can get on to the next part of this.

Madam Chair, I think I'm just going to let some of the new members around the table share their thoughts. I'm really interested, but I certainly hope we get to a vote quickly. I think that will be important for us in terms of next steps.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Next is Ms. Vandenberg.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

It's a pleasure to be back on PROC. As some of you will remember, I was on this committee in the 42nd Parliament. This is a committee that, certainly in the time I was on it, did some really good work. Part of the reason for that is that this committee has always been full of members who really put the institution first. I think there's a bit of a lack of that right now. We as legislators are the front line of democracy. We are the ones who have to look at safeguarding the institution and the processes.

Many of you know that before I got into politics I was working internationally on democratic development and parliamentary strengthening. I worked with UNDP's global program on parliamentary strengthening. I worked with OSCE in very difficult places, where legislative oversight of the security sector was very difficult, such as Bosnia and Kosovo. We developed some best practices.

What I'm concerned about today is the way in which and the venues through which this kind of oversight is happening, where it should happen and where it shouldn't. We anticipated things like this election interference or, might I even say, interference in our democratic processes writ large. As many of you know, I'm a member of SDIR, of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. I was chair of that committee when we studied the Uighurs, and, as many of you know, China has sanctioned not only the members of that subcommittee, because of the report saying that what was happening to the Uighurs was a genocide, but also the entire committee.

Yes, I want the committee to know where I'm coming from. This is a very serious issue, and I don't think there's anybody here who doesn't take this issue very seriously, whether we're talking about interference by China, by Russia, by Iran or by anybody else, or interference in our entire democratic process, including our own committees and our own committee processes. That's just to tell you where I'm coming from as someone who has been sanctioned by China.

Having said that, I think we need to look at where the best place is to have these conversations. Obviously the Canadian public, everybody, would love to know what our intelligence institutions, our executive branch of government and our cabinet knew, when they knew it, how they knew it and what they did about it. Do you know who else would like to know that? China. China would love to know what we knew, what we didn't know, how we found that out and, more importantly, what we did about it. These are not things that can be talked about in a public and open forum.

However, this is a dilemma that legislatures all around the world have. You can go online and find numerous reports of the United Nations development program of OSCE, or of DCAF, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, that talk about best practices with respect to where the best place is for legislative branches, for people like you and me, for members of Parliament to oversee these kinds of things. If in a public committee like this one, or in a public inquiry, we call, let's say, Katie Telford or any other government official and ask them about classified materials, we know ahead of time that they won't be able to answer about anything that's classified.

Then the answer has to be, "I can't discuss that. I'm not at liberty to say. That is classified." We know ahead of time that we're putting them in that position. I can't imagine why as parliamentarians we would want to put officials into a position where they have to either break the law or be in contempt of Parliament or look like they're obfuscating.

The only reason to do that is if you want it to look as though they're obfuscating, if you want it to look as though they're covering up something. Even if those people who testify have all the answers that could explain everything and would actually make them look very good, they can't talk about it, so why, if it were about the institution, as I know this committee has always been—if it were really about protecting our democratic processes—would we put officials in that kind of position, unless it was to try to make them look bad and to try to make it look as though there is something to hide?

In that case, trying to make it look as though there's something to hide and casting doubt on people's faith in the processes, in the integrity of our democratic system—I'll be very honest—is something that would probably make China very happy. Then the question becomes what we do about it. If not here, if not in public, how is it that we as legislators...? It is very legitimate for legislators to have the right to oversee everything the government does.

Even more importantly, I've worked in very fragile states. I've worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the president has his own republican guard that has absolutely no oversight by any civilian or other body, and I know how important it is that legislative branches are able to do this. There are entire reports of DCAF and UNDP that cite NSICOP as a global best practice as to how legislators can oversee the security sector. That's why I feel as though, yes, we anticipated this, and, yes, we know.... I don't think there's anybody who doesn't believe that other countries make attempts to undermine democratic processes. We are in a world today where the split is not east-west as it was in the Cold War, or right-left. The split is not north-south. The real divide in the world today is democracy and authoritarianism. Authoritarian states are learning from one another. They are working together. I see colleagues here who are on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. We know that full well, because we hear testimony day in and day out.

Right now, we're hearing from women in Iran and we're hearing about what authoritarian states do to their citizens. That divide is something about which we have to be very, very careful. Canada has always been a bit protected in history because of our geographic boundaries. We have a democratic country to the south and essentially oceans around the rest, so in a world where the dangers

are geographic, where wars happen through physical contact across borders, Canada has always been a bit protected. The problem today is that while warfare is happening, obviously, physically, the real danger right now is hybrid warfare. The real danger is cyber-warfare.

The problem with that—I heard just last week that China has an entire military wing on cognitive domain operations—is that it is something and it's not new. Russia has always had propaganda. If you talk to people in places like Estonia and Lithuania, they say they've always known; they've had that critical thinking because they've always known that was there.

Our problem, because we have been somewhat innocent throughout our history and because Canada hasn't been subject to having nefarious actors on its borders, is that we don't live along a geopolitical fault line like the Balkans, which is a place, as I said, I've spent several years working in. Therefore, we haven't necessarily anticipated it enough over the last number of decades, but the fact is that they can get right into our living room. They can get right into our child's device or our phones. This is a real threat, and I want the public who might be listening today to know that absolutely, we take that threat very, very seriously.

Having sat now for seven and a half years on the government side, I have seen how seriously we have taken that threat. As someone who has been sanctioned by both China and Russia, I know personally that this is something we should not take lightly, but I'm not seeing this being taken seriously as a threat in the discourse that has been happening over the last few weeks. What I'm seeing is—and you've seen it—even today, former senator Hugh Segal talking about "gotcha" politics. There seems to be an interest in trying to make it look as though one party over another is not taking it seriously.

Frankly, I found it really difficult to sit in the House the last few weeks and hear suggestions that as legislators, as Canadians, we're not acting in the best interests of our country, because I believe fully—and I've always been an MP who has worked very closely across party lines—that if we sit and work together, we can have the processes that allow for legislative oversight.

NSICOP, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, was created for exactly this kind of situation—so that it can be depoliticized, so that opposition members can have secret clearances that will allow them to get access to things that, in almost every other country, only the executive branch would have access to. You have members from both houses, from the House of Commons and the Senate. You have members of all the recognized opposition parties and government members present who work in the way that, I think, Parliament should always work, where you are looking at the national interest first and where you put aside your party hat and actually work to make sure that, where there are changes that need to be made, you can make those changes.

Are the processes perfect? No. In fact, NSICOP itself has put together a number of recommendations over the years about how these processes can be improved. The fact is that you have a place where you can ask those questions, where you can get the secret information, where somebody who comes to testify can actually offer what they know and can offer that secret information in an environment where even the opposition is present.

That committee can then make reports that are ultimately made public. That committee can make reports that will not say, “This is what the government knew and this is how they knew it and this is the person who told them,” because this could put a lot of people in danger. Instead, it makes reports that say, “We’ve had access to the materials. The government gave us full access—or didn’t give us full access. The government acted—or didn’t act—on the materials that it was given,” and then it makes that available to the public.

In fact, what that does is make it so that you have incentives for the government to ensure that it is providing those materials. This is a committee that is actually almost unique in the world. A number of reports have used Canada and our NSICOP as a case study, because, as you can imagine, there are a lot of governments out there that don’t want to give secret information to opposition members. This is something that we probably would have put in place if we could have seen ahead exactly what’s happening right now with these allegations of election interference. If we had actually looked ahead and said, “We need to create something that will involve a process whereby we can actually respond to this,” NSICOP would be precisely the committee we would have created.

The U.K. has intelligence and security agencies. The U.K. Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament can scrutinize other bodies that form part of the management and structure of the U.K. intelligence community, including things like the Joint Intelligence Organisation, the National Security Secretariat, the Cabinet Office, the office for security and counterintelligence and the Home Office. It’s not quite structured in the same way ours is. In fact, it’s more like our Liaison Committee. It has the chairs of other parliamentary committees on it.

If you look, for instance, at Spain, they have a commission on the Congress of Deputies. I won’t go into details about all of that, but I can just give some examples of what other countries have. In France, for instance, they have the Parliamentary Delegation for Intelligence, which also is a bicameral parliamentary committee. It has eight members. It’s responsible for monitoring the performance of the French intelligence agencies, and it can take testimony from

the Prime Minister, ministers and heads of agencies, and call for papers.

In the U.S., they have the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

In fact, in Australia, in 2017, they did an entire report on the Five Eyes, and they actually said what the Five Eyes, including Canada, do when it comes to legislative oversight of the security sector. That was right after NSICOP was first formed, and they listed what Canada was doing in a very positive light and had some recommendations for going forward.

We talked already about the U.S. and the U.K., but it also talks about New Zealand and Australia.

In Australia, the six agencies that comprise the intelligence community are overseen by a parliamentary committee that examines their administration and expenditure. That’s a bit of a different role, because of course we have different mechanisms in committees that oversee expenditures of the intelligence, security and defence sectors.

I’ll probably come back to this a bit later, but as you can see, there are a number of different examples around the world of this kind of thing. New Zealand, in 2017, created something whereby the security agencies are overseen by a parliamentary committee that can look at policy, administration and expenditure. If you look at some of these international examples, every one of them talks about Canada and says why Canada has one of the best practices.

Looking at the permanent members of this committee, I just don’t understand why, when we have one of the best mechanisms to do exactly what needs to be done right now, which is legislative oversight in a space that does not put at risk any of our security agencies or any of our intelligence operatives—that does not reveal to adversaries in the world exactly what we know, how we know it and what we don’t know—we are having this almost deck-chairs-on-the-*Titanic* kind of debate about whether it should be a public inquiry or whether it should be here at PROC. The fact is that we have the mechanism.

That’s one of the reasons I wanted to come today. Many of you know that I did work internationally. There are numerous reports that I could talk about, but what many people don’t know is that, in between, I also worked in the House leader’s office under the Paul Martin government. In 2004, one of the things many of you might know is that Paul Martin gave a speech at Osgoode Hall, when he was running for leadership.

At that time, one of the key platforms in his leadership campaign was democratic reform, strengthening the legislative branch vis-à-vis the executive branch. As we have all seen and as is now well documented, over decades the executive branch and the Prime Minister’s Office in Canada have gained more power vis-à-vis the legislative branch. One of the things Paul Martin wanted to do was to create a democratic reform action plan that would rebalance and give more power to the legislative branch.

At that time, I was in the Liberal research bureau, and I happened to be the researcher for the Liberal democracy caucus. A lot of the ideas in that Osgoode Hall speech actually came from the democracy caucus.

One of those ideas was to create a national security oversight committee of parliamentarians. That's something we were talking about already in 2002, and then, in 2003 and 2004, when Paul Martin first became prime minister, he established the first-ever minister of democratic reform. It happened at that time that it was also the House leader. We've had some phenomenal ministers of democratic reform and House leaders since then.

I was then brought in. I was director of parliamentary affairs in that office of the House leader and minister of democratic reform. Specifically, my role was to work with the Senate, with the House of Commons, with PROC at the time, with parliamentarians and with civil society experts to help to turn those ideas that he had put forward during his leadership campaign into an actual action plan. We worked with PCO and actually did get through cabinet and table in the House of Commons a democratic reform action plan. This was in February 2004. It included the national security committee.

I will read you the bullet of what the recommendation was. It stated, "The government will seek the support of Parliament to create a National Security Committee of Parliamentarians. Members would be sworn-in as Privy Councillors so they could be briefed on national security issues." The one thing we haven't done is swear in members as privy councillors, which is something we can all maybe have a conversation about, because there is always room for improvement. The fact is, though, that was in February 2004. I have been working on this file for 20 years.

We started working on this when I was in LRB in 2002, and then in 2004 we created this democratic reform action plan. Unfortunately, there was an election shortly after, and when we went into a minority government, a lot of these things didn't actually happen, but what is the first thing we did in 2015 when we formed government? We created NSICOP. We created the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, and in the interim I was working overseas, working specifically on parliamentary oversight, on strengthening legislative branches.

This is precisely the kind of work that I have literally been doing for 20 years, and so I guess I'm a little disappointed, because I was very proud when we created NSICOP. I was actually very proud that Canada created something like that, because this issue of interference is not going away.

I know that for a lot of Canadians it's something they're only reading about in the newspapers right now, but for those of us who have been working in this sector—and also when I was parliamentary secretary for defence, which includes oversight of CSE—for 20 years or more, this is not something that is new. It's not something that is not anticipated, and it's something that we—certainly I, both in Canada and in countries around the world—have been working very hard for decades to find processes whereby we can resolve that dilemma of how to have oversight of things that are secret.

How do you have the legislative branch of elected parliamentarians—who are responsible for overseeing the government and representing citizens—have that at the same time as knowing that certain things have to be classified and certain processes cannot be made public?

I have more to say, Madam Chair, and I might get on the list for later, because what I'd like to do is actually talk about some of the recommendations from some of these reports over the years that, in fact, have exactly what Canada has done. We have the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, which says it must have the authority to conduct inquiries and interrogate members and senior officials of the security sector, to be able to deal with a specialized committee, preferably a permanent or standing committee that is resourced, that has members who demonstrate strong commitment and expertise—which I actually think our NSICOP does—which has sufficient resources, which has adequate time and personnel, logistical support, technical support, expertise among the members and membership that is balanced so that their responsibilities are not overextended and they can dedicate sufficient time.

Maybe some of my colleagues will elaborate on this, but I can go through a number of these recommendations over the years and, in fact, that's exactly what Canada is doing. We are recognized globally as being a leader in this.

I guess what I would leave with is that I don't know why—and I haven't been on the committee to follow the debates that led up to this, but when I look at the motion and the amendments, I don't really understand why we are not using NSICOP. In fact, we've gone beyond that, because the Prime Minister has even said, beyond what is the international best practice, that we're going to have a special rapporteur.

People make fun of the word "rapporteur", which is a little juvenile, to be honest, because it is used everywhere internationally. When the Secretary General of the United Nations wants to send somebody who is going to be independent and who is going to look at all the facts and have access to everything and report back to the Secretary General, they are called a rapporteur. That is the name.

A special rapporteur will then look at all of the reports, including the work being done on NSICOP—the security committee of parliamentarians—and look at NSIRA, which is a different kind of review—an expert review by independent experts who are able to look at the security sector, which is another thing that has been put into place—and then say, “Okay, I’ve looked at it all and I don’t believe that NSICOP is able to do this. I don’t believe that NSIRA is able to do this. I think there’s more here. I think we do need a public inquiry, because the government isn’t doing what it’s meant to do. The processes that are in place aren’t working.”

The Prime Minister has said that in that case, he would be open to a public inquiry, but the fact is I don’t think it’s going to come to that. Maybe I have a little more faith in some of these processes, and certainly I have faith in the members of NSICOP. We get elected to this place, and one of the things.... I’m a process person, and when I did democratic development overseas, when I worked in Parliament, I was a senior adviser to the Parliament of Kosovo when it became a Parliament. When Kosovo became independent it had a small rubber-stamp assembly that was essentially under the authority of the United Nations mission in Kosovo, so it didn’t have any real authority. It was an advisory body that could recommend what to do to the UN mission, which had executive and legislative authority at the time.

When they declared independence, overnight that small rubber-stamp assembly had to become a national Parliament. I was the senior adviser with OSCE to the Parliament of Kosovo when it became a Parliament. When I look at those sorts of things and I look at what we put in place in terms of best practices, I would say that the Kosovo assembly probably still has a ways to go. In fact, it could use Canada’s model, but the fact is these are the kinds of things that Canadians are going around the world and working on.

I will go through some of the international best practices, because I think it is important that Canadians understand that nothing is perfect.

We can always learn and improve on the processes we have in place. When I look at NSICOP, I truly think the result of the rapporteur is going to be that we have processes in place, that NSICOP does it. We as MPs want to make the country better. Certainly, when I got elected, I believed very firmly in Canadian democracy. I believe it is resilient. Yes, of course there are many others; there are authoritarians out there who don’t want Canada to be strong and resilient in its democratic institutions, and it is our institutions that make us resilient.

When I got elected, I came here with the idea of making this place more democratic, making it function better. One of the first things I did, partly because of the work that I did overseas, but also having been a staff member in the House leader’s office, having been a staff member who did all the research for MPs and gave them materials that they could then use and make decisions from—and, by the way, let me tell you the staff of our committees are phenomenal. I don’t think any of us would be here and able to do what we do if it weren’t for our staff. Having been in that position, after getting elected I wanted to use the voice and incredible privilege of being a parliamentarian to make this place better, and that is something that I still feel very strongly. I see members even on the other

side who actually became members of the all-party democracy caucus in the 42nd Parliament.

The reason I reached out across the aisle to create a democracy caucus was specifically that I know there are members, some of whom are process-oriented like me, who really see the institutions and the limitations of the institutions and oversight of the executive and see the threat over decades that has been widely documented, where executive power has grown in comparison to legislative power. I reached out and we created this all-party democracy caucus which still exists—Elizabeth May is the chair this time, but at that time I was the chair—so we could talk about how to make this place better, so that we could work across party lines and put our parties and hats aside, and the incentives in this place.

If I were coming in as OSCE or UNDP and looking at the way our Parliament functions, our Parliament is actually very top-down compared to some of the ones like Kosovo, where we were able to learn from all over the world and benefit from what works well and doesn’t work well. The people of Kosovo created their Parliament, but when we as advisers were able to bring to them some of these practices from around the world, they were able to put some of those in right at the outset.

The fact is that the Canadian Parliament has been here for over 150 years, and some of the things we do are still the way they were 150 years ago, when you had a number of, usually, older white men who would take the train, come here to Ottawa—I’m talking about in the 19th century—and decide amongst themselves what was best for the plebeians across the country. There was very little discussion with constituents. There was very little dialogue. Most of it was people who came here, and they wouldn’t be able to go back and forth, given the nature of travel at that time. It was a very centralized Parliament. It was in fact a very masculine and adversarial Parliament, which over the years we’ve been able to change somewhat, but the fact remains that our Parliament needs to work on that.

The incentives here are more about a “gotcha”. They’re more about making the other guy look bad than reaching across the aisle and talking to each other.

Even the physical space in this place.... When I want to talk to a member of the opposition, there's almost nowhere we can go. It used to be that the lobbies where we ate were combined. Peter Milliken will tell you about this. We had our own lobbies, but when we went for our meals, we had to talk to each other. Peter Milliken has said...and I firmly believe we should go back to that, because I can tell you, if I'm going....

Certainly, when I was chair of SDIR, I always tried to fight for consensus. This space right now is not a place where we're fighting for consensus. NSICOP is a place where that can happen. Sadly, in part, it's because the cameras are off. I think a lot of us would say that we're able to talk to each other much better and come to common solutions sometimes, when those cameras are off.

It's not because we're not transparent, but it's because there's such an incentive.... If I'm saying something today, there's a sense of, "We're going to get her, we're going to quote that and we're going to make sure that particular thing she said goes on Facebook or YouTube and makes her look bad." That's the problem with this place. It is about making the other guy look bad.

I've seen that. The motion that's here today.... A lot of this is about making the other party look bad, but the fact is that's not why we got elected. I don't think that's why any of us got elected in the first place. I think we want to work together.

By the way, if you want to look at models of committees that work well together, look at the status of women committee. I'm not an essentialist. I don't think women are by nature somehow better, but the fact is that the status of women committee has had almost entirely consensus reports. It's a committee in which sometimes, when we're talking and asking questions, you wouldn't know who is in what party.

The other one is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. I think it's because the members of that subcommittee, when we're looking at these kinds of global threats, are looking at them from one place, which is that we are all Canadian. We're looking at them as Canadians and where our place is vis-à-vis other countries that want to do harm to our democratic processes and, frankly, to human rights defenders who find sanctuary here in Canada.

I believe that this particular discussion is better off happening in a place where you're not always talking to the camera and you're not always trying to do "gotchas". If a good idea comes forward, but it comes from another party, you have to shoot it down just because it's coming from another party.

Sadly, the incentive structure in this place.... There are things we can do, and I could go on about what we can do to make that a bit better, but I think looking at something like NSICOP is precisely the way we can do that.

I'll give you an example. When I was parliamentary secretary for national defence, and covering the CSE as well, I naively saw an NSICOP report that was rather critical.

By the way, look at the NSICOP reports, because a lot of them are actually very critical of the government.

I was getting briefs. I looked at this report, and my first instinct was to go to one of our Liberal members who was on the NSICOP committee and say, "What are you doing? Why didn't you come and talk to us?" She got very defensive and said, "That's not what NSICOP is about. We don't take our direction from the minister's office, or from the parliamentary secretary for that matter. We are an independent committee. We do our work very much according to the evidence and across party lines, but we don't have a parliamentary secretary sitting on the committee, asking us questions about why we're doing it." She was very resentful that I even did that. I learned my lesson at that time, because I realized that this is something they guard very well.

It's the reason NSICOP is powerful and that it works. It's because the members of the committee take it very seriously that they are independent and that they do not work on behalf of the government or their party. Frankly, I think it would be better if more committees were like that in this place.

I am going to go through some of the things in some of these international recommendations, because I actually think Canadians need to know. Canadians need to know that we have put in place—and it took us a long time, as I said. We put it forward in 2004, and we didn't put it in place until...I think it was 2016, when NSICOP was first created, but the fact is we put in place a mechanism for this kind of discussion, to hear these kinds of witnesses.

I'll say, for instance, in 2021, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, which is colloquially referred to as DCAF—I know many people who think DCAF is funny—

**An hon. member:** Like decaf coffee?

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Decaf coffee—right. I can assure members that this is not decaf. I don't think I could talk this long if I had decaf.

I know many people who have worked for DCAF. When I was in Kosovo, they relied very significantly on the Balkans in that period of time, when there was a transition, not only post-conflict, after the war in Yugoslavia, but also post-communist, because these were countries that were going through a transition from communism. It wasn't a matter of restoring a democracy; the democracy had never existed. When I was in Kosovo and trying to ensure that the parliament of Kosovo became a national parliament, it wasn't to recreate something that had existed before the war, but to build it from scratch.

DCAF is known around the world, with some of the best security experts, intelligence experts and parliamentary experts. Many of the people I worked with when I was in Kosovo had either worked at DCAF or went to work with DCAF afterward, and a lot of the best practices that we had were taken from this institute. I would encourage members to go on its website and look at some of the reports from over the years, because I'm not here just trying to say NSICOP is perfect and it's the only mechanism we need. The fact is there are ways we could improve NSICOP significantly, and we need to look at some of these comparative reports, look at what's worked in other countries, look at what hasn't worked in other countries and look at unintended consequences of creating certain processes and institutions, especially among the Five Eyes, because we have very similar security interests.

Might I say that we're in a position, in Canada, where we are asking for classified information in public settings. It's going to be harmful, not only in terms of some of the people out there who work in the security sector, who risk their lives for Canada, but also in terms of danger to other members of the Five Eyes. We need to think about what it is that we want to air publicly when we are a member of the Five Eyes. We have an alliance. When we're sworn in, when somebody is sworn to secrecy... There is a list of people who are allowed to get information from the Five Eyes, and there are parliamentarians on that list, and I worry about the impact that might have.

Again, going to international best practices, I'm not saying that we can't oversee it. I would be the first to say that, because I've seen countries in which the security sector, behind the veil of secrecy, does tremendous overreach, and I've seen places where people can disappear.

I have a very, very good friend now, someone who at the time was a constituent, who was picked up in the Democratic Republic of Congo by the Republican Guard. He was at the airport. This was before I was elected. I was working at that time with the National Democratic Institute, which is another organization that does incredible work on parliaments and parliamentary strengthening. When I was in the Democratic Republic of Congo, this person from my riding, whom I knew well, who had been working with the opposition at the time, was on his way back to Canada. He was a Canadian citizen.

He went through security at the airport, and he was on the phone with his family. All of a sudden they heard something that sounded like he was being physically grabbed or taken, and then his phone went off. They checked on the flight, and he wasn't on the flight. That was, it turns out, the Republican Guard, which responds only to the president, at that time President Kabila. My friend had been picked up, and there was absolutely no oversight in this case. Because I knew him when I ran in 2011 and I had also been the head of NDI, I got a call from his family in my riding. At that time—and I have to give him credit—I called John Baird, because he was the MP. I had run against him in 2011, and he had won.

Again, here's an example. When it comes to things that matter in terms of the security and safety of Canadians, you can work across party lines. To his credit, John Baird immediately contacted our embassy, which put in a query to find out what had happened to this young man.

The first 24 hours are always absolutely critical. When I was working in Congo, we all knew that if people disappeared, after the first 24 hours you wouldn't see them again. Because the government at the time, which was the Conservative government, acted so quickly and John Baird acted so quickly, they did produce him. They put him in a prison. There's a book about this, by the way, *Noël en prison*, if you want to read it. They put him in prison and they charged him with insulting a general or something like that. Fortunately, because of the Canadian government's pushing, several weeks later, after a horrible experience, he was able to come back home to Canada.

The reason I'm talking about this is that I have seen first-hand what happens in countries where the security sector doesn't have oversight, where you don't have mechanisms and where, for those that represent the public, members of Parliament and security oversight agencies, there is a secret veil. I am the last person on earth, having seen this first-hand, having been sanctioned by China and Russia, who would ever say that we want to bury these things or that we don't want processes that are going to protect against the overreach of the security sector.

Look at everything I've done, not just as a parliamentarian but in my career, right from when I was a student. I was in the civil liberties association of Alberta when I was a grad student at the University of Calgary. I have been talking about the potential for overreach under the veil of secrecy and national security throughout my career. I feel comfortable, as somebody who is coming from that position, that NSICOP right now is the best place. It has the tools and the mechanisms to get access to secret materials. It has opposition members on it. That is the best place.

I would also say that we probably could improve it. I'm not here wearing a partisan hat. I'm here wearing the hat of what is best for our country. Back in 2002 and 2004, we suggested—in fact it was approved by cabinet at the time—that members of NSICOP be sworn in to the Privy Council and that they have access to cabinet materials. I would probably be the first to say that's something we may want to look at in order to strengthen the process. I'm not here because I'm parroting the government line or because I'm a Liberal member. There's a lot of cynicism out there. I hope my constituents at least know, and I think opposition members know, at least those whom I've worked with on committees, that if something's good for Canada, I don't care who gets credit.

I'm willing to push the envelope a bit on what our government is doing, put forward good ideas and fight for those good ideas in order to make the processes better, because at the end of the day I'm a process person. I firmly believe if the processes and the institutions function well, then you will end up with good results. I still firmly believe that our processes and our institutions function well. I have no doubt about the resilience and the strength of Canadian democracy. I think that we can maybe improve it. Like I said, if NSICOP were able to be sworn in and get access to those kinds of cabinet materials, to be sworn in as privy councillors, again, that would be unprecedented in the world.

First of all, we have a committee through which we allow top secret information to get to committee members and to members of the opposition unfettered. I can tell you, having worked in many places in the world, that if I had suggested as an international expert that they create a committee and allow members from the opposition access, I probably would have been kicked out of the country *persona non grata*, because they would have said there was absolutely no way they could ever do this, let alone swear them in and give them access to cabinet materials.

It comes down to trust a bit, and our government has trusted the opposition members who are on that committee. You saw some of the former members of the committee. Vern White was in the newspaper this week. I have exactly what he said. He said it is "BS"—that was the term in the newspaper—to say this isn't a committee that works well. He told CBC's *The House*, "Our work was done unfettered, totally unfettered."

Here you have a senator from the opposition who is saying exactly the same thing that my colleague said to me when I was the parliamentary secretary. I tried to talk to her, as a parliamentary secretary, and she pushed back.

I would venture that all of the members of that committee want to make sure they are using the committee responsibly. We are trusting opposition members with top secret information, and I think we could use a bit of trust back.

We, as members of the government side, are fighting every day for Canada. We are putting in everything we have to do what is in the best interests of Canada. The fact that we've created that committee, which allows the opposition to have that kind of information, to be able to ask those kinds of questions and get those answers, suggests that we also believe that the opposition members are fighting in the interests of Canada as well.

Like I said, I meant to go through some of these international best practices. I care so much about this issue that I haven't even gotten to that, but let me go through one of the reports. It's called "The Contribution of Parliaments to Sustainable Development Goal 16 Through Security Sector Governance and Reform", linking good security sector governance to SDG16.

For those of you who don't know what SDG16 is.... As many of you know, I'm the parliamentary secretary for international development now, so the SDGs are fundamental. However, I was also working at the UN when they called them millennium development goals, because we hoped we would achieve some of these by the millennium, or by 2015. The SDGs are the sustainable development

goals, and these are things that, hopefully, we'll be able to achieve by 2030, although with COVID.... I call them the three Cs: conflict, COVID and climate.

There's a crisis happening in the world that is making it much harder to achieve those sustainable development goals, but the one that's relevant to the discussion today is SDG16, which says that we "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels".

This is the one that specifically addresses what I've been talking about today, which is those institutional processes. This report from 2021 talks about a number of recommendations. It's a long report, so I'm going to talk only briefly about the key recommendations, but some of my colleagues can elaborate on that a bit later.

The first recommendation is to:

Ensure that committees possess sufficient authority to fulfil their SSG/R—

That is the security sector governance and reform, but I'll say "SSG/R" because it's easier.

—oversight functions, to contribute to SDG 16. This includes the authority to conduct inquiries, interrogate members of the executive and senior officials in the security sector, and conduct site inspections; and implies broad access to information, with any exceptions based on national security concerns limited as much as possible.

That last bit about the exceptions that are based on national security being limited as much as possible, I think, is really the crux of the division that we have today. Are those exceptions limited too much, or are those exceptions reasonable? I would say that in an environment like this, those exceptions have to be in place.

We cannot have discussions about classified materials in an open setting like this. To a certain extent we can, but as it says here, those exceptions have to be based on national security concerns and have to be limited, whereas having a committee like NSICOP does allow for those.

In fact I don't know if there are exceptions as to which materials NSICOP can access. I think they're able to summon papers and all of the things it says here. They're able to conduct inquiries. They're able to interrogate members of the executive and senior officials in the security sector. I'm not sure if they've ever done site inspections. That's something I would have to ask the members, or maybe they wouldn't tell me because they really guard the process.

I would imagine if they wanted to do a site inspection, I know for a fact that as members of Parliament we can go to any military base in Canada and we're allowed access, something that actually, during the Harper years, was denied to members of Parliament. When we came to power, we actually said that as members of Parliament we should be allowed to go to a military base and, within reason, visit it and see it. Again I think our government has actually opened things up significantly from what was the case under the previous Harper government. I might go into some of those details later, but I really want to stick to the crux of the motion here today. Maybe on another day I can elaborate on some of those things. Conducting site inspections is something MPs have a right to do, and I would imagine NSICOP does too—although I don't know of any examples of where they have done that—and that implies broad access to information.

That is precisely NSICOP. That is precisely what that National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians is there to do. I would say that for the most part, recommendation number one is something that we have here in Canada. One of the things, as I said before, is that they don't have access to cabinet documents. Again I think there are pros and cons to that, but certainly if this committee, by the way, were to take on an issue that would actually have tremendous impact.... If I were still on the committee, I might suggest that we talk about how we can make committees like NSICOP stronger. It might be by hearing from other countries around the world about their processes. Also, maybe there's room to hear from experts on what might be the intended and unintended consequences of swearing in the members of NSICOP to the Privy Council and giving them access to cabinet materials. That's something I would say would be a good role for this committee, whereas what's being discussed in this committee now would be better done in NSICOP, which might even be strengthened based on the recommendations from this committee. As I said, when I was on this committee, we did tremendous work.

We did the entire family-friendly Parliament study. Once again, we weren't trying to make the other side look bad. When a good idea came from others—and I remember it was David Christopher who was on the committee for the NDP and there were times when we clashed a bit, but the fact is he had a good idea—we weren't going to turn it down just because it came from the opposition. Frankly he had a lot of good ideas. He had been here a long time and he had a lot of good ideas as to how to make this place work better. If you look at the history of what our Prime Minister has done and what our government has done since 2015, we have consistently tried to open up and consistently tried to make the processes better, but I think that if PROC were to study anything right now, it might be whether or not there are models out there in the world that would be better or improve what we have in NSICOP. The fact is the rest of the world is looking to our model.

We might be a bit hard pressed to find models that are better, but as I said, the members of the U.K. Parliament are all committee chairs. I think that would be more difficult, because one of the recommendations is that members have the time and are able to dedicate themselves to that kind of work. As any of you who know some of our colleagues who are on NSICOP know, it takes so much of their time. It is all-consuming. In fact, sometimes, given the number of hours they sit and the materials and the briefs they have

to read through, the members have to have the capacity and the time and not be pulled by being on other committees and certainly not by chairing other committees. I think that would be a little more difficult. In fact in that respect I think we're better than the U.K.

That's recommendation number one.

Then we have the second recommendation here, which is this:

Establish standing committees to oversee the implementation of the [sustainable development goals]. In order to prevent a siloed approach to implementation of the SDGs, parliaments should create specialized committees, preferably permanent or standing committees....

That's exactly what NSICOP is. In fact, we went one further. It's not even a standing committee. It is a specialized committee of parliamentarians, and it's not just the House; it's also the Senate. Because there are senators there, they aren't always looking at how to score a point for the next election. Yes, absolutely, having accountability is vitally important, and we are thinking about how things are going to reflect on us in our constituencies—at least I hope we're all thinking about that—but senators have a bit more of an ability to take a much longer-term approach.

Rather than looking to the next election, senators can look 10, 20 or 30 years ahead. In fact, if we look 10, 20 or 30 years ahead, I think what we're talking about today is going to be the greatest threat. It's not just the hybrid warfare, the interference, the cyber-interference, the influence mechanisms, the cognitive domain and the attempts to undermine democratic processes and pluralism and, I would say, to undermine the very openness of democratic countries that means there is inclusion and that means we have pluralism.

We heard in the SDIR committee just this week that there is a global anti-feminist, anti-human rights, anti-gender narrative that is happening right now, which is being put out there by countries like China, Russia, Iran and many other authoritarian countries. I think that if we look at the long-term view, as the senators on this committee do.... Hopefully we do too. I wouldn't say that none of us are looking 20 or 30 years down the road. I think most of us want to create a better place for our children and grandchildren. If we look at that, I'm very concerned, because I think the hybrid warfare and the threats we face right now aren't just to the elections and aren't just to committees—like I said, our committee was sanctioned by China, so talk about interference in a democratic process. The threats are also to our infrastructure, to our grid, to our communications, to our banking systems, to....

I have the old Nortel campus in my riding. It's now DND, but before DND could move in—and I'm citing media sources; I don't know this first-hand—it was reported that they found all kinds of listening and spyware devices on that campus, because someone was stealing intellectual property.

What we need right now is not this really partisan attack, saying, "That party tried to work with China to manipulate elections." What we need is a very serious, non-partisan view of what the threats are.

It's not to overstate them, either, because one thing I know, having been the parliamentary secretary for defence, under which the CSE falls, is that I have tremendous respect for the work of our intelligence institutions. Our intelligence agencies, certainly the signals intelligence, are incredibly capable—some of the best in the world.

Yes, we need oversight. Yes, we need to make sure we guard against overreach, but not just overreach. Sometimes it isn't overreach. Sometimes it's that you're so focused on a task that you want to see that task accomplished, so you're not thinking about the transparency.

The fact is that's not the job of our intelligence agents. That's our job as parliamentarians. It's our job as people who obviously care deeply about our democracy, because we ran for office in this democracy. It's our job to make sure we set those limits and the criteria, that we create the balance between transparency and secrecy, so that, to the extent possible, we can ensure there is not overreach on rights.

Unfortunately, I'm going to have to bring my mom to the hospital shortly for a minor procedure. She's okay. It's a minor procedure, but it's been almost a year that she's been waiting to get this procedure, so I have to take her to the hospital.

I have to leave in a few minutes, but I want to leave with one last piece. Hopefully, I'll be able to come back and maybe elaborate more, or some of my colleagues can talk more about some of these other recommendations.

I am really concerned about the tone and the nature of what's happening. I think, frankly, that if China was trying to cause people in Canada to lose faith in democracy and in our processes, to turn on each other and to become polarized.... This is what we're doing. I came here today because I really wanted to put on the record that I think we can do better. I think we can work together as parliamentarians, put aside this pointing of fingers and saying.... God, none of us are working with China. Please.

I think that when you take intelligence, which.... By its nature, intelligence is partial. That's why you have to keep on gathering more. With intelligence, if it's partial, it's overheard and it's bits and pieces, you can come to the wrong conclusion, which is why people who work in intelligence rarely come to conclusions. They present it and then it's something that we can look into, try to find evidence and try to find.... When intelligence in its partiality and in its raw form is made public, it can utterly destroy lives.

Just look at Maher Arar. I've worked closely with Monia Mazigh, his wife, over the years. Look at what happens when assumptions

are made about an individual person based on intelligence that was not gathered to make that assumption. It was gathered to show...and it continues to be gathered.

When those things happen, as soon as you say that someone is disloyal to this country and as soon as you say that someone is working with foreign agents for a foreign interest—not just that individual, but their families and their communities—their life is ruined, because once you say that about someone, how do you prove a negative? How do you prove that you're not?

I am fortunate. I can go back to my constituency and tell people, first of all, that I am white; I'm of Dutch descent and I am sanctioned by China. I can go back and I can say that, obviously, I'm not working for China, as I've been out there on the Uighurs. However, what if I was Chinese? What if my parents were Chinese? I think people should look at what Minister Ng said in the press conference this week, because the impact on communities in our ridings, when you start taking intelligence and treating it as if it's fact, can be extremely dangerous.

I have spent my life on human rights. This is one of the ways that human rights defenders are discredited. When I worked in other countries, sometimes if I went to the office of a member of Parliament or an elected member there, because I am Canadian they would be accused of operating with Canadians or with foreigners. One time I was accused, when I was with NDI, of being a member of the CIA.

There's distrust. They would say, "Please, let's meet in your office," because they didn't want the perception that they were meeting with foreigners. This is what is used by authoritarian states to discredit civil society, feminists and LGBTQ activists. They discredit them by saying, "You are a foreign agent and you're working in the interests of the other." I don't want Canada to get into a situation in which we're saying those sorts of things.

Again, my mom's appointment is in half an hour.

Frankly, if this committee were to go down that road and start asking questions in public, or if there's an inquiry where these questions.... Sometimes a person might say something, not realizing. It seems like an innocent, small fact, but it might be the little piece that a foreign government was waiting to get that puts everything else together and allows them to clue in to what the whole picture is.

We don't know what is useful to another government. That's why I am exceptionally concerned about the tone and about the nature of the way this debate has been playing out in the House of Commons, in this committee and in the motions before this committee right now.

I think we all need to take a step back. I'm looking at my opposition friends now. Let's remember why we ran. Let's remember what it was that made us want to be members of Parliament. If we do that, we will get to a place where we can work together and get to a place where perhaps this committee can look at how we strengthen the processes that we have, but we'll still use the processes that we have. That's exactly why the NSICOP committee was put in place.

I think this discussion would be much better if it were to happen in a place like NSICOP. That's why we have a rapporteur who will come back to the public to say whether that process is working well or not. He'll come back to the Prime Minister. At that point, if he says it isn't, then we have to look at that again very carefully, but I don't think he will say that.

I think Canadians should have comfort and faith that all of us, as elected members, are working very hard to make sure that our democracy is protected. I can tell you that it's my life's work. It's almost my religion. It is what I'm here for.

Again, I'm getting messages that my mom is waiting for me to take her to the hospital, so I have to go, but I hope that I'll be able to come back. I'm going to also make sure that some of my colleagues have a chance to elaborate on some of these international best practices, because I think it is important that Canadians know that our institutions are strong.

Thank you, Madam Chair. Reluctantly, I have to go.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Vandenberg, I thank you for your comments, and I wish your mom a good appointment.

Go ahead, Mrs. Romanado.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Good morning to my colleagues.

I have to say how impressive it was to have my colleague, MP Vandenberg, here to share her experience in this regard and bring forward such good information on where PROC could look with respect to foreign interference.

I want to touch on something that I've talked a bit about, because, as I mentioned, it's very near and dear to me. I'm looking at the amendment to the motion as amended—the reference to “security-cleared party representatives”—and the importance of security-cleared party representatives. There's been reference that there is no willingness to share information, versus the capacity to share information, and there is a difference. When information is classified, it's not a question of whether we are willing to share it; it's a question of whether it can be shared. There is a very big distinction.

As MP Vandenberg said, a committee of all parliamentarians was set up a few years back. It has representatives from all parties, as well as senators. As I said previously, I'm incredibly impressed with the calibre of expertise that the members who sit on NSICOP hold. MP Alex Ruff, for instance, served as a colonel in the Canadian Armed Forces for over 25 years and understands intimately the importance of national security and the importance of working with our allies. He is a member of NSICOP. I have no doubts whatsoever that a study of foreign interference held at NSICOP would be taken very seriously and with the utmost of care.

[*Translation*]

My colleague Mr. Bergeron, from the Montarville riding, which is next to mine, has worked in international affairs. He has my respect and I have great confidence in his abilities.

[*English*]

When we asked the director of CSIS, when he was here, what the impact of classified information being made public would be, he testified that to do so would not only put our relationship with the Five Eyes at risk but put the safety of our intelligence assets around the world at risk.

MP Vandenberg spoke of that. She referenced a report done by Australia. It's a Five Eyes report. I think it would be helpful if it could be provided to the members of this committee, because I think there's a lot of referenced material that could be beneficial for us in there.

No member of this committee has the necessary clearance to look at classified documents, that I'm aware of. I'm looking around the table, and I don't think any of us has that necessary clearance but that could be one of the questions. Could members of PROC be given the necessary clearance? If the members of this committee were adamant that they wanted to see classified briefings, could members of PROC receive them?

Of course, what would happen is that any briefings that were provided would be in a secure location. Obviously the staff who support us would not be eligible to be in the room, and of course any information provided to us could never be made public. We already have a group of parliamentarians who have the necessary clearance looking into this. I think that is beneficial. I understand that, in the Prime Minister's announcement, he asked NSICOP to look into it, and a press release was issued last week by the chair of NSICOP stating that they will look into it.

There's another area to note when we talk about top secret clearance and the concerns that members of Parliament on this committee have talked about. It is briefings on best practices with respect to cybersecurity and mitigation measures for foreign interference. Could that be something all members of Parliament, including their staff, receive? For instance, obviously all of our devices, which we have a habit of carrying with us everywhere, could be hacked. There could be tracking on them or access to the microphones and cameras. Some people in this room might have a compromised phone with them right now. Have people who work in MPs' offices or senators' offices, or the MPs themselves, received the necessary training on mitigating such interference? Is that something PROC should look into?

When we go in camera to discuss conversations here or even reports, we all have our devices with us. We are putting that information at risk because anyone of us could be a target of foreign interference. I don't know if other parties or other MPs have had training or briefings on cyber safety and what tools are at their disposal, but I received a special bag—I don't know if other MPs did—in which to put my devices when I'm in a meeting. It's a special bag that will prevent communication of my device. I know that when we go into caucus meetings, we put our devices in a little locked box and do not bring them into the room.

This is an opportunity for members of Parliament and their staff, who are probably more likely to be the target than the MPs themselves...and the reason is that often they are the gatekeepers to MPs. When someone wants to meet with an MP or speak to an MP, they go through the office. They want to speak to the staff member who is handling the agenda of the MP. My staff probably know a bit more about my agenda and where I'm supposed to be than I do. Do our staff members have the necessary training to be mindful of and be prepared and on the lookout for possible attempts?

Talking about training and briefings, I have questions about official party leaders. Do they receive briefings on potential threats and attempts? In the case of the 2019 and 2021 elections, were party leaders provided briefings during the election on what to do and how to flag anything they were seeing or hearing on the ground? Those are things PROC could be looking at.

I know that this committee put forth a report in the House with respect to a public inquiry, and I think it's important that people understand what a public inquiry is.

[Translation]

We have heard repeated calls that there needs to be an independent inquiry, not an investigation by parliamentarians, to verify what happened. However—

[English]

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Good morning, Madam Chair. I have a point of order.

My interpretation wasn't working. Is it working right now?

**The Chair:** Mr. Long, let's confirm that the interpretation is working.

[Translation]

Can you hear me now?

[English]

Is it working?

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Yes. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Long. It's good to have you here.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I'm happy to be here.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Romanado, we'll go back to you.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Madam Chair, should I start over?

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** I'm just kidding.

[Translation]

With respect to public inquiries, as I mentioned, the government's webpage that discusses commissions of inquiry clearly states: "Commissions of Inquiry are established by the Governor in Council (Cabinet) to fully and impartially investigate issues of national importance."

Some say that the person who will act as special rapporteur will not be impartial because he or she will be appointed by the Prime Minister. However, it will be the same in the case of a public inquiry.

[English]

If cabinet were to establish a public inquiry, it would be through an order in council. It is cabinet that decides this. The difference in the case of a public inquiry is that it would not be parliamentarians looking at the evidence. It would be someone named by cabinet who is not a sitting MP. Also, a public inquiry would not have access to secret or top secret documents. It would have the exact same access to information that PROC has, and that has been confirmed by CSIS, the RCMP, the CSE and the national security adviser. The only instrument in the tool box that would be able to see those documents would be NSICOP.

We heard a bit about a timeline for a public inquiry. If the special rapporteur decides to suggest that, the Prime Minister has said he will abide by it. However, a realistic timeline could be two to four years. We might be in another election or past another election by then.

I want to quote former senator Vern White, whom I have a lot of respect for and who spent his career in policing. He said:

But I think NSICOP will be quicker than a public inquiry—

Pardon me for the unparliamentary language, as I'm quoting the senator.

—[and] a hell of a lot cheaper than a public inquiry.... I think this team, both the secretariat and committee, are ready to run. It's too bad politics is becoming the player here in discussion around whether or not NSICOP should manage it. But you can go back and ask any member of NSICOP. Regardless of whether they were with the Conservative Party, the NDP party or the Liberal Party, they will all talk about the strength of that committee.

When I hear someone like Senator White, who has years of experience in the police domain, stating this, and when I look at the membership of NSICOP with someone of the calibre of Colonel Ruff, I have full confidence in NSICOP.

When I look back on PROC and the conversations we've had—and we've had a lot of members on PROC change over the last two years—we've been talking about foreign interference and looking into foreign interference for a while now. I ask myself what we want to achieve as a committee. If the goal of PROC is to determine whether there were attempts by the People's Republic of China to interfere in the 2019 and 2021 elections, whether the current processes in place were able to detect, deter and counter foreign interference, and whether there was an impact on the outcome of the general election or on the outcome of specific ridings, I think a lot of work can be done here in collaboration. I think everyone here would like to answer those questions. I would hope so.

However, is the goal of this committee or of members of this committee to fabricate some scandal that isn't here, to find a gotcha moment, as MP Vandenbeld kept saying?

When I listen to the language used by some members, it is clear—and former senator White said it himself—that this committee, this study, is becoming incredibly partisan. I really, truly hope that we can move back to where we were when we were working on other reports and other studies, because I truly think there are some issues that need to be addressed in terms of foreign interference. I would hope that we can get back to a place where we're not looking for gotcha moments but are actually working as a collective.

It makes me think a bit about a team Canada approach. I remember that, when we were negotiating NAFTA 2.0, we all came together to protect Canadian interests in that negotiation, and this should be the same. We have a foreign entity that is attempting to interfere in our democratic institutions, and we're fighting among ourselves versus having a united front to not only get to the bottom of it but also improve it.

I truly want to hear from colleagues around this table what recommendations they would have to strengthen it. There are a lot of questions, and my colleagues have asked in previous meetings why one of their candidates in the election, Mr. Chiu, was not advised during the campaign that there were attempts to interfere. If that were in fact correct, why was the candidate not informed? Whose responsibility was it to inform the candidate? Was it the responsibility of the party not only to flag it to SITE or the panel but also to flag it to the candidate? Are candidates briefed by Elections Canada when they run to be on the lookout and how to report such concerns? There are a lot of questions we need answers to.

Canadians watching probably have a lot of the same questions. What is the workflow in terms of necessary stakeholders? For instance, if a citizen in a specific riding were privy to information of concern, would they know who to flag that to and what information

to flag? These are things we need to look at. Do we need to streamline those things? Those are things we need to look at. Is there room for improvement? Absolutely, there is always room for improvement. That's why we review things. That is why NSICOP is going to look at what happened here.

Since 2016 tools have been put in place to deal with foreign interference. There has been the establishment of SITE, the establishment of the panel, the caretaker period and briefings provided to political parties. Also, as I said earlier, perhaps some training is required for all parliamentarians and their staff.

Have methods of interference changed? I assume they have. Before I was elected I didn't know very much about cybersecurity. We know that, compared to other jurisdictions, Canada has not had a very robust cybersecurity infrastructure in place. What are we seeing now in terms of cybersecurity, in terms of disinformation campaigns? Do we need to increase our capacity in that regard?

MP Vandenbeld spoke a little bit about our Five Eyes partners. Again, she referenced a document, a report done in Australia. It would be very interesting to hear what other Five Eyes partners are doing to detect, to deter and to counter foreign interference. Could we perhaps have parliamentarians from those jurisdictions provide us with their feedback as well?

I'd like to hear from other members of this committee, so I'll probably ask to be put back on the list a little later, once we've heard from others, but I just wanted to put some of those items out there.

One area of concern—and I know Ms. Blaney brought this up, I believe, at the last meeting and again at the top of this meeting—is news reports and validating media reports. As we've heard, information that is provided to journalists or news that can't be independently verified or that is taken in little tranches—little bits of intelligence versus understanding the bigger picture—is of concern. The question of leaks, the sources of which cannot be validated because it might be a matter of national security, is of concern.

I think there are a lot of questions that PROC could be focusing on that we're not. I doubt that any member of Parliament would want to put our intelligence assets at risk. I do not believe that for a moment. When members of Parliament are asking that classified information be made public, I would gently remind them that we cannot do that. We cannot put the relationships with our Five Eyes partners at risk, nor can we put the assets we have around the world at risk.

I want to reiterate what MP Vandenbeld mentioned. Words matter. When the tone and the choice of the language we use to refer to others are demeaning, it is important that we recognize that we are hurting not only that person but also those around them. We are all honourable members. We all put our names forward to represent the communities we come from, and I think we need to take the partisanship out of this. We've proven in the past that we can work together. We have.

Some folks here on PROC have worked with me on other committees, and they know that I have some of the same questions and the same concerns. I think we can work together in a non-partisan way.

Madam Chair, you have been incredibly patient with us in trying to bring us together to find a way forward. I do want to thank you for that.

I truly think we can come to a path forward. I know that, in the game of politics, when a camera is on it's all about the clips. It's all about the fundraising emails and things that go along with those. It's unfortunate because I'm pretty confident that if we shut the door, turned off the camera and got the members of PROC not to sit across from each other in this very adversarial way but to sit around the table together, we could probably actually come up with some really good ideas and some really good recommendations. It's not about trying to do things in private or secret or anything like that. When we take the partisanship away from this place, we can actually get stuff done. I'm a firm believer in that.

Again I ask this committee: What is it we want to achieve? Do we want to detect, deter and counter foreign interference, or do we want the clip for Facebook or Twitter? I ask my colleagues that because I know I would prefer to get stuff done versus playing games with national security and people's reputations.

With that, Madam Chair, I'll turn it over to the next colleague.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Chair, I would like you to remove my name from the list of those wishing to speak, at this time, and add it at the end.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Madam Chair, I'll pass for now, and you can add me to the bottom of the list, if that's okay.

Wait. I think Mr. Barrett wants to hear from me.

Do you want to hear from me? You always do.

Madam Chair, you can put my name on the list. I'm still formulating my thoughts. I have a lot to talk about.

**The Chair:** I think you were overwhelmed by Mrs. Romanado's comments about the chair trying to get us all together, so I understand that's on division.

Mr. Long, I think you have already spoken. Because you had the technical issue, I would like to do a sound check with you before you speak. Tell me either how your day is going or what the weather is like wherever you are.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Chair. It's great to be here in PROC.

My day is going great, and the weather is a little overcast. We're very clearly out of winter here in beautiful Saint John—Rothesay, but we have 25 centimetres of snow coming tonight.

**The Chair:** That's excellent. We always appreciate the snow.

I got some thumbs up. I'm not sure if that's in reference to your weather or your sound, but I'm hoping it's for the sound.

Mr. Long, welcome to PROC. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Chair.

Just let me start by saying I'm happy to be here, on the one side. On the other side, I'm disappointed that we're actually here doing what we're doing today.

Let me start with this. I'm going to read this out. A solution in search of a problem is "A proposal that does not solve any problem or provide any value; or one that is intended to fill a need which does not really exist."

I appreciate what PROC has debated over the last week or so. I've listened in with great interest. We're certainly in a different world. We know that. We see what's happening in Europe, Ukraine and China. We have challenging times in front of us. We all know that. I'll be honest. It's difficult to see us, as parliamentarians, doing what we're doing right now.

There's no question that we have foreign entities that want to interfere, that want to interfere in democracies all over the world, as we all know, and certainly not just in Canada. The objective of these foreign entities is to sow chaos, to sow fear and to interfere. That's what they want to do. Obviously, social media reigns supreme. All of us, as MPs, are very active on social media. We see the posts. We see the comments. We see the algorithms. We recognize absolutely that it's much easier to try to get in and interfere or influence through social media. It's sad, what we do see. Does any of us around the table or on this Zoom think that there are entities that are trying to do this to us? Absolutely. I think we all agree on that. They've tried. They've tried in the past and they'll try again. That's their objective. Their objective is to sow doubt.

I live in a riding, Saint John—Rothesay, in which, I will say, when I entered politics, back in late 2014 as a candidate—and I ran in 2015, 2019 and 2021—there was a lot of skepticism about politics, politicians and government. It wasn't just on the Conservative and Stephen Harper side. There was, I think, skepticism about politics in general. People were tired of what they were seeing at the federal-provincial level and there was skepticism.

One thing I wanted to do as a member of Parliament...and I can remember it like it was yesterday. Actually last week I posted a picture on my Facebook page of me in November of 2015, so obviously it was shortly after the election.

I believe, Madam Chair, we came up for some training or maybe we came up to get sworn in or what have you.

I remember those days and I'm starting to fully realize how big a responsibility we all had. My objective with respect to Parliament was certainly to bring a breath of fresh air to politics to show people that we don't all have agendas. We want to do good. We want to represent our constituencies. We want to represent our provinces. We want to be good representatives. We want to work together and we want to show Canadians—I was certainly determined to show the constituents of Saint John—Rothesay that I could do politics differently—we could do politics differently. We started to replace the apathy, distrust and what have you that so many Canadians had for politicians in general, and you can see that in voter turnout at times.

There have been bright spots where I think there have been bipartisan or team Canada approaches to things. I think, when we need to, we've shown we can work together. We can advance the interests of our constituents. We can do good things.

One of the main reasons I ran.... My background before that was hockey, and I know you're all probably going to cringe saying, "Oh no, he's not going to mention the Saint John Sea Dogs again." Well, I just did.

We want to work together and do good things. I know I'm proud of what we've done, obviously, very quickly—things that make a difference in the lives of Canadians. That's why we're there. We're not there to play partisan games and do things for the clip on the news or the gotcha moment. We're there to enhance and better the lives of Canadians, to come up with transformational programming, such as with the Canada child benefit, the child care program, the

dental program or the support for Canadians, and to help Canadians.

That's why they send us to Ottawa. Don't ever forget that. They send us there to work together, to get things done and to better their lives. What they're seeing now is, in my opinion, a Leader of the Opposition who loves to join in on this chaos, who loves to sow fear and who loves to rile people up. You'll say, "That's his job." Sure it's the job of the loyal opposition to challenge government, and as my colleague MP Romanado just said, we need to be challenged. We don't always get it right. We don't. We're learning. Good government is understanding that, when you make a mistake, you move forward, address it and work with other parliamentarians to do the best for our country.

From what I've been hearing over the last while, you would think that NSICOP is a group of Liberal parliamentarians, period. The last time I checked, it was all parties. Why is there skepticism? Why are there objections to letting NSICOP do its job? Its members receive top security clearances. They're bound to secrecy under the Security of Information Act. Let them review it.

Actually, Madam Chair, it took me about an hour to say that correctly, but the rapporteur.... Hopefully I did say it right.

I think those who know me know that I'm not afraid to speak up and speak my mind. I'll be blunt: Do I wish we had come forward and said we were going to appoint a rapporteur a little sooner? Sure, but guess what—we didn't. That rapporteur is going to be an independent person who's going to have the ability to recommend an inquiry. What am I missing here? Why is it, again, as I said, a solution in search of a problem? Let's let the rapporteur do their job.

Let's see who's appointed. Maybe we're going to be surprised. Maybe members of the other party will say, "Oh, geez, okay", but let that happen. We've watched inquiries on TV for years. Obviously we've just gotten through watching an inquiry with respect to the "freedom convoy" in Ottawa. We know how much time, organization and planning it's going to take. It could take a year easily. We don't need that. We don't need that right now.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but the leaders of every party have said that they recognize that there was nothing that changed the election result. Why is there the continued "we need an inquiry"? Obviously we're debating the amendment, but I see the main motion here that the committee, in relation to its study of foreign election interference, "invite Katie Telford, Chief of Staff". If you want to replace that with "invite the 2019 and 2021 National Campaign Directors of each recognized party of the House of Commons and the security-cleared party representatives to the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections", what's wrong with that? Why are we debating this?

My constituents understand about the rapporteur and understand that's the way forward. Maybe my office is in some kind of a bubble, but my phone isn't ringing off the hook here. They see what's happening now. They see what the Prime Minister has done. They see what the Prime Minister is recommending. I'm not being overwhelmed with people saying, "We need more. We want an inquiry." I'm not getting that at all. I dare say that none of you is getting that either, if you'd be honest about it.

I have obviously sat in my seat and watched question period and watched the dynamic back and forth. Again, I respect fully that the opposition, the Leader of the Opposition, has a job to do, but the way he is going about it, the way it's happening, is not fair. It's not proper. It's not parliamentary. Think about it: He has all but accused the Prime Minister of Canada of treason. It's shameful.

If anybody thinks that there's a foreign entity that's controlling the Prime Minister, that is really disheartening to me. It's sad to think that, as parliamentarians, we have digressed to that level. It's just disappointing to me. Again, I ran and I wanted to be a parliamentarian my constituents could be proud of. I have great relationships with MPs from all parties, and I enjoy working with them. The first committee I was on was actually HUMA. I'm still on HUMA. We got to travel the country. We were very instrumental in the poverty reduction strategy and the housing strategy. I worked alongside great MPs, and we got some good stuff done.

Madam Chair, that's always where I'm most proud, when I sit side by side with people with different ideologies, different ways to approach things or different thoughts on this or that, and in the end, we can work together to get things done for Canadians.

That's why we're here. I had a constituent come into the office the last time I was in my riding, a week and a half ago, and ask me straight up, "Is it really like we see in question period? Is that what it's like every day?" I said, "Yes and no." Yes, question period is intense. I always think about the Bugs Bunny cartoon in which the sheepdog and the wolf go in and they punch their cards and they say hi to each other, and then they go through their routine; they leave and they chat, and it's all good. That's what I explained a little to this constituent. I said you see the show; you see the parties trying to get on the five o'clock news, or *The National* or what have you; you see the clips, but what you don't see is the camaraderie, the great work that happens on behalf of all Canadians when we work together.

I want the constituents of Saint John—Rothesay—and I know every MP would say this—to be proud of the work I'm doing. I'm saddened by what I've seen over the last several weeks, to think

that's where we are. I know politics has changed. I know all of us would say there's a very different tone. I am part of the "Class of 2015", and I think a lot of you around the table are too. It's hard to believe we're in our eighth year, but, man, what a change we've seen in the discourse from 2015 until now. It's like night and day, but we have work to do. We have a job to do.

To continue to want this person called and that person called....

Look, I'd be the first to say, well, let's shine more light, but we're appointing a rapporteur. Let that process work. Let NSICOP work. Has there been interference? Have there been countries that want to interfere in our democracy? Absolutely. Let's not forget that Canada is one of the greatest democracies in the world. It's one of the most stable democracies in the world. We show that time and time again around the world and on the world stage. This is exactly what foreign entities want. It's exactly what they want, Madam Chair. They want to sow the seeds of doubt, sow the idea that maybe the election was "stolen". Let's be careful with what we know is not true. Let's be careful on that.

We see first-hand what happened and what's happening to the south of us with respect to disinformation, with respect to doubt being sown in America and in democracy. We cannot allow that to happen here, Madam Chair. We cannot. We are better than this. We are much better than this.

Madam Chair, I know we're debating the amendment to the main motion. I'm obviously coming in halfway through this. I haven't heard everybody's speech, so I'm not sure if there's support for the amendment, but let me appeal to other parties on this amendment: Support it. Let's move forward. The rapporteur has the power to appoint...or to recommend a full public inquiry. Call a spade a spade. In every public inquiry I have ever seen, one side will say, "Oh, look, here's the result of the public inquiry." The other side will be like, "Well, the brother's uncle's mother's cousin's son of the chair of that public inquiry, the guy who was appointed, drove by Joe Biden's house once three years ago, so there has to be bias there." Where are we going here? Where are we going with this? Let the rapporteur do their job. Let's see what happens.

If you're not happy—if people aren't happy when the rapporteur is appointed—somebody may scream, "Oh my gosh—there's unbelievable bias here!" We know that's not going to be the case here. Anyone would be crazy to appoint somebody who is going to be in conflict here. Of course not. I think we should let this process unfold and do the right thing.

I want to contribute to this debate. I want to speak more. I want to express my feelings, but I do sincerely hope that at the very least, people around the horseshoe, the table, or on Zoom want to do the right thing and want to work together and move this forward. Let's see what the rapporteur says. It's somebody whom everybody respects. Can you imagine? Let them do their job. Let them check it out. Why are we so hard and fast with, "Well, no, just because the Prime Minister suggested this, it can't be a good idea. No, we can't do that"?"

Again, I get that this side wants this and that side wants that. I get that, and I understand the questioning, but the suggestion that there's manipulation or that somebody is under the control of a foreign entity is just not right. It's not right, and that's why we need to move forward, in my opinion.

Madam Chair, let me say this: Does it surprise me that a foreign entity has an agenda to try to sow chaos in western democracies? Absolutely not. I'm not surprised at all. They've always talked about China potentially. China can play the long game. Western democracy has changed. Every so many years, am I surprised to think that China or Russia would love to see democracies fall in the west, in Europe? Absolutely not.

Can they try to manipulate and influence voter intentions through disinformation and Facebook posts and false names and so on? Yes, I can see that. Am I surprised? No. Let's be clear: This certainly isn't something that's new to 2015, 2019 and 2021—come on. No, we all know that. We all know that existed in 2015 and whenever the election was before that, in 2011 or what have you. We know that.

Before politics, I was in aquaculture, which I love to talk about at length, but not on this committee, and I was in hockey. Did I really pay a lot of attention to what was going on in Ottawa? No. To be transparent, no, I didn't. To think, though, that the Leader of the Opposition was the minister of democratic institutions—I think I said that right—and clearly he was the minister of, probably, families and children, because I still remember him handing out cheques with his Conservative golf shirt on. I remember that much. At that time, though, when he was the minister of democratic institutions, what did he do? Where was all the proactive movement at that point? Well, of course there wasn't any. He was briefed. We know he was briefed. What did he do?

Now, all of a sudden, it's a massive scandal. My colleague before me asked if we have done everything right. No. Are we perfect? Do we make mistakes? Yes, but do I for one second or do my constituents for one second think that there's some gross behind-the-scenes manipulative agenda? Come on. No, my constituents don't think that. They don't.

Can I just caution all of us, and on our side too, to cut down on the rhetoric? Let's not turn more Canadians off. Let's show Canadians. This should be a team Canada thing. This should be all parliamentarians standing side by side saying, "You're trying to interfere in our country? We're going to show you we're united. We're going to show you we're going to do the right thing and put the right checks and balances and procedures and policies in place to make sure we have control of the situation," because they're going to try again and again and again. I will guarantee you, Madam Chair, that

there is some entity in some backroom somewhere just laughing at this and saying, "Look at what we did. Look—this is perfect. We've got everybody disagreeing. We've got parliamentarians tied up. We've got question period in the House of Commons 90% consumed with the idea that there's some foreign plot, when they should be talking about the challenges Canadians face." That's what our constituents, what Canadians, want to see out of every one of us. They want to see us debating.

They want to see us talking about, as the Conservatives like to say, the price on pollution. They call it "scrap the tax". Just as a funny aside, really quickly, Chair, I'm going to talk about the price on pollution here really quickly. I had a constituent who came in and was like, "On this price on pollution you guys are doing nothing for Canadians." I sat down with them and we went through their gas bill and stuff. I said, "How many litres of gas do you use a week?" He said, "About 40." I said, "Okay, that's \$4.75 a week for the so-called crippling carbon tax—\$4.75 a week and \$230 or \$250 a year." I said to the constituent, "Do you realize you are going to get a rebate that's basically going to cover that, if not more?" He said, "We are?" I said, "Yes, in New Brunswick."

Mr. Williamson at one point wanted us to get back to the federal backstop. We got back. He's my colleague here, and we have a good back and forth all the time. That's what Mr. Williamson wanted. Straight up, he said, "Too bad New Brunswick didn't have the federal backstop, so constituents could get their money back." I was actually sitting in the House of Commons at that point, and I said, "Yes, he's right that that's probably not going to happen." Premier Higgs was keeping the rebate for the province to do things with. The premier himself came out here about a month ago and said, "No, the best way to get Canadians back money is to go back to the federal backstop." I said, "Oh, wow—that's great." Anyway, I'll go back to the story.

This constituent was basically going to be in for \$20 or \$30. I said, "Do you understand this?" He said, "Oh, I understand it better now," and I said, "By the way, Mr. Constituent, you said we're not doing anything for Canadians and that the Conservative Party would fix all of that." I said, "Do you realize that we just came through with a child care program that's going to save the average family about \$1,000, \$1,500 or \$2,000 a month? Do you realize we just came through with dental care that's going to save thousands of dollars, in particular for kids and those in need? You know, the Conservatives voted against those."

Yes, I know they're trying to save you \$230, but you're going to get \$250 back, and they voted against the thing that's going to save the average family \$20,000 or \$15,000 a year. How does that square?

That was just a sidebar. That's what constituents want to talk about. They want to see us being challenged by the Conservatives and the NDP and the Bloc and my new seat colleague, Elizabeth May. I was on one side of the House. Now I'm on the other side of the House. I have a different view, Madam Chair. I think actually I'm behind you a bit now. I think you're down my side too, but I'm down that side. That's what Canadians want to see. They want to see us as government being held to the fire, as we should be. Absolutely—I like holding us to the fire at times too. It makes for good government.

Madam Chair, what they don't want to see is this. I watched last week when you had some words for what occurred there, and I won't repeat those, but I saw a sitting minister basically challenged. That's not what Canadians want to see. They want to see us working together.

I will be honest: I've learned a lot through this process too. Now I know what NSICOP is. Now I know how it works. Again, sometimes you hear this talk that NSICOP is some kind of influenced partisan group. Geez—it wasn't the last time I saw it or the last time I read about it. I will quote:

The committee was set up in 2017.

No—it was set up under us. Okay, it was because we saw a problem. Clearly the leader of the opposition didn't when he was in charge of democratic institutions.

The committee was set up in 2017 to provide parliamentary oversight of Ottawa's intelligence operations. It completed a report on foreign interference back in 2019, which called on the government to “do better”.

Why all of a sudden is this not adequate? Why? I don't get it. I don't understand. Maybe somebody who speaks in the future can clarify that for me. Why isn't it good enough now? Why isn't the rapporteur good enough, especially when they can recommend a full inquiry, Madam Chair?

That's what bothers me. I just don't like to see what I'm seeing. I don't like trying to create a scandal where a scandal doesn't exist. I'm not naive enough to say there's nothing, that this never happened or not to worry. I know there are foreign entities. I get it. I get that there's foreign interference. If as parliamentarians we open that Pandora's box, if we start to show Canadians that even we can't stand together on this and we start to sow seeds of doubt, that will not be a good thing. It's not a good thing. Here in Saint John—Rothesay, I hold these things regularly called AMAs, and I think you all do too. They're not wrestling events or boxing events. They're called AMA—“ask me anything”.

I have actually gone back and done my first live one. I hadn't done them live in a few years, but I did them live, obviously, on Facebook. When I do them, I always get the skeptics who do not really understand Ottawa or understand the role of the MPs or trust. What we're doing now, Madam Chair, sadly, is confirming a lot of the doubts and distrust of Ottawa, of the Ottawa machine, of the Ottawa bubble.

I know some people bristle when I say “the Ottawa bubble”. Obviously you can't answer this, Chair, but around the table and on this screen, are any of us, if we're honest with ourselves, totally

seized in our constituency offices with this foreign entity controlling our...? Are we really there? No, we're not. No, we are not, and if people think we are, I would challenge them. I'm in my constituency office. I've gotten the odd email. I get hundreds of emails on other issues. I receive thousands of emails. Let's not create a problem, or let's not create a scandal where a scandal doesn't exist. It doesn't exist.

Let the rapporteur do their work. Truthfully I can't wait to see who is appointed, because I'll bet you it's going to be somebody, hopefully—I'm knocking on wood here—about whom all parties are going to be able to say, “Oh, okay, we respect them.” We've just wasted a week and a half of PROC here. Let's try to move forward and let the rapporteur do their work.

Chair, I have a lot to say. I have a lot of thoughts in my mind about this, but to be fair to my colleagues and to everyone around the table, I can start to close up with some closing thoughts.

We take our democracy for granted. I need to remind myself every day how fortunate we are to live in a free country, a wonderful democracy, a country that's regarded around the world as a beacon of democracy. We're fortunate, but it's fragile. I wouldn't have used the word “fragile”, to be perfectly honest, until I saw over the last year what's happened or what almost happened and what continues to happen in the United States.

Let's not take it for granted. Let's not sow those seeds of doubt where no doubt exists. Yes, again, we can be challenged. The opposition party should be saying, “What have you guys done? What are you doing? We're not comfortable with what we've seen.” I get it, but whether it's NSICOP or the rapporteur, let's work together and let them do their jobs.

If a rapporteur calls for an inquiry, well, guess what, we're going to have an inquiry. To be perfectly honest, I don't know enough to say whether there should be or shouldn't be. How do we know? The rapporteur is going to have the ability to investigate. They're going to have the credentials to make the right decision. Let that person do their work.

Again, just let me say this to be clear: I trust our Prime Minister. I trust our ministers. I trust CSIS and officials. I trust NSICOP to do the right thing, and I trust that the rapporteur, once appointed, will come to the right conclusion and make the right decision.

Beyond that, what I'm saying and what other MPs are saying is conjecture and what they think and innuendo and this and that. We're just making noise. That's what we're doing. Let the process unfold. Let it work, because I believe passionately that's what Canadians want. They want to see us work together. They don't want to see us continue this way.

Really quickly, as I said before, I get the back and forth. I get the question period. I understand it. I wasn't in opposition. I came in 2015, but I understand that the opposition has a job to do. I get that. We would do the same if we were in opposition—and obviously we haven't been since 2015—so I get it. I get the back and forth. I get the challenging, but this is a whole different level, Madam Chair. This is a whole different level. This isn't what will solve this. This isn't what, Madam Chair, will give Canadians the answers they've wanted or they want or they need. Our going on in PROC, going around in circles like this, isn't what they want to see. No, they want to see us move forward.

The Prime Minister has come out, and maybe he should have done it a bit earlier or whatever. He has come out and said this is what we're going to do. This is how we're going to give confidence back to Canadians. We're going to appoint somebody who is going to be respected and who is going to investigate. Then, if they deem it necessary, they will appoint or call for a public inquiry.

In closing, Madam Chair, I appeal. I do, sincerely. I know there are good MPs right around the table there. I can't see everybody, but I know there are. I know them, and they're good MPs, good constituency MPs. Let's do the right thing here. Let's do the right thing and let the process unfold. That's what we want to do, Madam Chair. That's what Canadians want. That's certainly what my constituents want. They don't want to see a logjam. They don't want to see back and forth. They tune it out. We tune it out. Come on—call a spade a spade. They want to see us work together as team Canada on this. This isn't us against the Conservative Party or the NDP or the Bloc or the Greens or the independents. No, it's not. This is us as Canadians. This is us as parliamentarians standing against foreign interference, foreign entities that want to sow chaos. They hate our democracy. They want to end our democracy. That's their agenda.

Madam Chair, through you, I implore you—and, again, I'm just a visitor here—who do great work on PROC. That's the committee. I get it. That's the big one. All of you are on there for a reason. You're on PROC for a reason: because you have the depth, the experience, the oversight. That's what PROC is for, so use that depth and use that experience to say, okay, enough is enough. Let's move on. Let's move forward.

Let's move on. Let's move forward.

Listen, the Conservatives have every right to say after a week or two, “Whoa, time out here. Hold on. We gave you confidence. We're not seeing this.” Let's let the process unfold. Let's not get into a logjam here. It's not productive. It's not productive for me or you or anyone around the horseshoe.

Madam Chair, I thank you for letting me come in and state how I feel. I am passionate about this. I just hate to see it happen. I've seen it in other countries, I've seen it in other committees, I've seen it in the States and I've seen it back and forth.

If any one person on PROC thinks this is what their constituents want them to be doing, what Canadians want them to be doing, it's not and you know it. You may not admit it, but you know it. Let's do the right thing.

Madam Chair, I thank you, and I wish everybody a wonderful afternoon.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Long.

I note something you've been pondering for quite a while and that you've just announced today is that you won't be re-offering. I want to say thank you for coming to spend some time with PROC and for the work you do.

With that, I will pass the floor over to Mr. Cooper.

Just so everyone knows, the speaking list is Mr. Cooper, followed by Mr. Gerretsen and then Monsieur Fergus.

If there is an appetite to pause for five or 10 minutes for a health break, I would encourage that. If there's interest right now, I can offer that or not offer that.

I see that some people would like a health break. Is there appetite for a health break?

Let's just do that really quickly right now.

[*Translation*]

Does this suit you or not?

**A voice:** We can take a break afterwards, too. It's not a problem.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. Let's do that. Let's go with Mr. Cooper now, and then right after Mr. Cooper we'll do a 10-minute health break. Is that fair? Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I just want to observe, it being 1:05, that it has been more than 14 hours now, over four days, that the Liberal MPs on this committee have been filibustering and droning on for hours on a very simple motion to have the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford, testify before this committee on Beijing's interference.

It really begs the question: What does this Prime Minister have to hide? How much longer are you guys across the way going to continue this? Let's get it to a vote.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I've been patiently listening to the wonderful speeches and all of the thoughtful input from colleagues. I just want to ask for clarification as to the relevance of the last comment made by Mr. Cooper. I believe we're actually debating the amendment, not the original motion. He didn't refer to the amendment at all, which doesn't include Ms. Telford or anybody else he referenced. I just want to ask for clarification on relevance.

**The Chair:** I see Mr. Barrett, and I will also go to Mr. Gerretsen.

We have leniency here. We've just listened to Mr. Long and we've heard from others, and there is some leniency. As long as we're coming back to the purpose of it, I think it's important that we provide leniency.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** For more than two and a half hours, Madam Chair, Liberal members have talked about everything from their time in college to their time overseas, and about all kinds of nonsense unrelated to this very simple motion, without a single interruption from members of the opposition. I appreciate that Mr. Turnbull might be just rolling out of bed, but Mr. Cooper spoke for 30 seconds. Now that Mr. Turnbull has had his intervention, he can go back to sleep, but we've been here listening to this for two and a half hours.

Let's be judicious in when we want to chime in with those points of order, because we could call the question, end the cover-up, have the vote and find out what the Liberals are trying to hide, or we can listen for another two and a half hours to more filibustering.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'd like to speak to that point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen, as I mentioned, I will come to you.

It's challenging for me, Mr. Barrett. I would have agreed with you entirely, but I think sometimes when it comes to the extra commentary, it's not necessary. I say that to everyone equally.

When it comes to relevance, I think we've all demonstrated leniency. I agree that we should be judicious with points of order, and that it's important that members get to speak.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** On this point of order, Madam Chair, only about a year or a year and a half ago, I witnessed Mr. Barrett speak about train robbers and store clerks from the 1800s for 45 minutes in the House of Commons, and the Speaker agreed that what he was contributing was indeed relevant. I hope you take into consideration leniency and the fact that the rules we have within this committee are very much supposed to follow those in the House. I hope that will be a consideration.

**The Chair:** I think what's clear is that sometimes, as the chair, rather than trying to seek consensus, perhaps I should just go with my feeling and recognize that a health break is needed.

With that, I am going to suspend the meeting for 10 minutes and encourage you to take a health break, stretch and do whatever you need to do, so that we can continue with the functional meeting, because it is a very important topic we're discussing.

We'll see you back in 10 minutes. Thank you.

• (1310) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1325)

**The Chair:** With that, I'd like to welcome everyone back to our committee.

On our current speaking list, I have Mr. Gerretsen, followed by Mr. Fergus, who will be followed by Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank everybody who has had the opportunity to speak prior to me. I've certainly learned a lot. I think there was a lot offered, in particular in the comments made by Ms. Vandenberg and Mr. Long. We really heard some interesting perspectives.

Ms. Romanado, you speak all the time and I'm always moved by your comments, but we had two special guests today, and I felt as though they were able to bring a perspective to this that was very interesting, a perspective that is perhaps outside of what we're used to talking about in this committee.

I know we are talking to the amendment to the motion, so, Madam Chair, in the interest of making sure that I stay relevant, I want to talk about and read out where we are with this motion and then the amendment.

The original amendment says:

That the Committee, in relation to its study of foreign election interference, invite Katie Telford, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, to appear alone for three hours during the week of March 13, 2023—

I think there will have to be an amendment to this at some point, given the date prescribed.

—provided that she be sworn or affirmed.

An amendment that was added and since passed says to “invite the following individuals to appear before the committee as part of the study provided that they be sworn”. It lists the national campaign directors of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party for the 2019 and 2021 campaigns. Then it lists the leader of the official opposition's senior leadership adviser and the former chief of staff of the former leader of the opposition.

That amendment was passed, and we are now dealing with Mr. Turnbull's amendment. The amendment asks that the motion be amended by replacing the words after “in relation to its study of foreign election interference” with the following:

Invite the 2019 and 2021 national campaign directors of each recognized party in the House of Commons and the security-cleared party representatives to the Security and Intelligence Threats to Election Task Force during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

That's where we are right now on this.

I have some comments that I would like to offer in relation to this, but before I do that, I think something bears repeating, because every time I have had the opportunity to speak at this committee since it occurred.... I brought up the fact that a sitting member of this committee, Mr. Calkins, who hasn't spoken a word in quite a while, made a rather offensive comment when he referred to one of our colleagues, the member for Don Valley North, as "an agent of Beijing". He did that in a video he took of himself when he was walking through the airport on his way to a committee meeting here.

I have yet to hear the member who made the comment, a member of this committee, apologize for it or provide some insight into how he has come to that conclusion. I also have yet to hear any of my colleagues, on the Conservative side in particular, try to either defend or denounce those comments. It is extremely unfortunate, because I think that as members of this committee and as honourable members, it's extremely problematic when MPs start to refer to other MPs as agents of Beijing. I'm still waiting for that patiently. I have yet to see it. I note that Mr. Calkins hasn't contributed to the meeting pretty much since the day he shot that video or the day after. I hope he will soon be here to address it.

It's true—and I don't think it's going to come as a surprise to anybody—that the Liberal members on this committee are filibustering because we don't believe in the appropriateness of this motion. That's why we're doing this. We don't call political staff to question period, do we? Are political staff asked to answer questions in question period? No, they are not.

The accountability lies with the minister. For accountability, the ministers are willing to appear before committee. We've already had a couple come before this committee. It's their job to speak on behalf of the committee.

When I say we are intentionally delaying this, it's because we're trying to ensure that ministers remain accountable. I would say I'm just trying to be consistent. I'm trying to be consistent, but not with our side of the table; I'm trying to be consistent with the Conservative side of the table.

Let me read you something, Madam Chair. These are the words of Pierre Poilievre. Listen to what he had to say:

The reality is that Mr. Soudas—

He was the director of communications for the Prime Minister's Office at the time.

—is not going to be testifying anyway because of a tiny, little inconvenient problem that the coalition parties have, which is this 300-year-old concept of ministerial accountability, meaning that ministers answer questions on behalf of the government and not staff.

We're not going to be changing 300 years of history all of a sudden, at the behest of the coalition parties. We're not going to have staff members appearing in question period to answer on behalf of the government. We're going to do it the old-fashioned way, the way it's always been done right up until the last several months, and we're going to keep ministers, the guys in charge, responsible for their duties.

Those were the words of Pierre Poilievre—when he was a minister—on CBC on June 4, 2010. He was explaining to Canadians why it is inappropriate to be calling staff before committee. As I said, I'm just trying to be consistent with the Conservatives and consistent with the Leader of the Opposition, Pierre Poilievre.

Those were his words. He's the one who said this is a 300-year-old tradition. How can we break from this tradition?

If anybody out there watching this is wondering why the Liberals are filibustering this.... If you're filibustering something, it must mean you're up to something nefarious and you're hiding something. However, the reality is that I'm participating in this because I want to be just like Pierre Poilievre. Can you believe that? That's my objective here. I want to live by the words of Pierre Poilievre.

That's why I'm participating in this process. That's why I think it is incredibly problematic to bring staff before this committee. It's not because I think staff can't answer the questions or that they don't have the capacity or the ability to do it. It's because I agree with Pierre Poilievre when he says that the buck stops with the minister. The minister is responsible for answering questions. That's my position on this, and I'll take the great advice given to us by Pierre Poilievre, as minister at that time, when he suggested that it would be completely inappropriate.

If anybody wants to see that video—this won't surprise many people here—I tweeted it. If you want to go to my Twitter feed, Madam Chair, you can see in the flesh a young Pierre Poilievre from 13 years ago saying that. It's available for people to witness and view.

It begs the question: Why the double standard? Why was it completely inappropriate 13 years ago, when Poilievre was in the other position, to be saying that staff should appear before committee, but now, when we're effectively doing the same thing, Mr. Cooper says there's something to hide? Why is that? Explain it to me. I will talk as long as necessary to get an answer from the Conservatives that satisfies my concern over why it is okay for Pierre Poilievre to make that comment in 2010 and to take that position in 2010, but suddenly now, it's not okay for us to take that position.

I can ask questions. I can encourage my colleagues to respond to that. I have a feeling they won't, because it doesn't fit the political narrative that Mr. Cooper in particular is trying to spin out of this whole process.

I think he's underperforming, by the way. I don't think he's convincing Canadians with his approach on this, and I think the vast majority of people would agree. The buck stops with the minister. I would agree with Mr. Poilievre that the buck stops with the minister. It's up to the minister to come testify and appear before committee and answer the committee's questions. We've already had a number of ministers do that.

This goes back to why the Conservatives are doing this. I talked about this last time. They're not doing this because they genuinely care about the outcome. They don't care. What they care about is the sound bites and the clips they can make along the way. It's not just my saying that. Fred DeLorey, the Conservative campaign manager from 2021, recently said in an interview that it seems like the opposition is just trying to create issues and to use this as a political tool. Nobody stands to gain more from it, by the way, than those who would want to interfere with our elections.

I won't stop at Mr. DeLorey. How about former senator Vern White, a Conservative-appointed senator? I know Ms. Romanado earlier spoke a bit about what former Senator White said.

All of my colleagues are bringing me various forms of lozenges, so thank you very much.

This is what Vern White said to CBC on March 11, just a few days ago: "Everybody who wrote about the reports of the committee"—and he's referring to NSICOP—"wrote in glowing terms that we were doing our job. That's all you can do. And my circle of influence never extended into PMO or PCO. That could have caused people to react. I think we did our job."

Later on, former senator White said:

One is you'll get the transparency that you're allowed to receive. I don't think you'd get more through a public inquiry process either. You're not going to get what you can't get, right? I mean, ultimately, you're not going to get the techniques, all of those kinds of things you heard from the CSIS director last week, who is a spectacular guy. I think he was very clear on what he can and can't tell.

I realize, Madam Chair, that this relates back to the public inquiry, and I'm going to tell you in a second how it comes back to the issue we're dealing with in this motion specifically. Senator White is basically confirming everything we've been saying all along, which is that it's not appropriate to be discussing this information in public and that it should be done somewhere like NSICOP.

If we try to haul before this committee Katie Telford, or other staff who might have the proper security clearances to have seen this, they're not going to be able to provide us any information, even if we thought it would be appropriate to invite them here. This is where Mr. Poilievre and I don't agree. We don't think it would be appropriate to bring staff here.

We can recognize that. Why do you want someone here for three hours to comment on this information when you know they can't do it? It brings me back to my point that the Conservatives must be playing games to create sound bites. They want three hours' worth of video in order to clip something out of it afterwards. That's what they want. That's all that they want. I think everybody knows that. I think the partisan hacks know that. I think anybody in the Ottawa bubble or anybody who's paying attention to this knows that. That's all they're really after.

Senator White goes on to say:

I think NSICOP would be quicker than a public inquiry [and] a hell of a lot cheaper than a public inquiry... I think this team, both the secretariat and committee, are ready to run. It's too bad politics—

This is coming from the Conservatives.

—is becoming the player here in discussion around whether or not NSICOP should manage it. But you can go back and ask any member of NSICOP. Regardless of whether they were with the Conservative party, the NDP party or the Liberal party, they will all talk about the strength of that committee.

This is the part of his interview Ms. Romanado referenced as well. I think it's very important, because it underlines and solidifies, in my opinion, my argument about taking politics over the genuine interests of this country. The interviewer Catherine Cullen says, "Pierre Poilievre has talked about this as being both a secret committee and suggested that they're under the control of the Prime Minister. You used to be a Conservative. I know you left caucus, but what do you think about hearing that from the leader?"

Of course, I should have referenced that Senator White was appointed by a Conservative, which is what I said. He was a Conservative senator, but then I think the Conservative Party veered way too far into extremes, even for a Conservative senator, and he decided to join another caucus in the Senate.

Here's his response to Catherine Cullen's question. He said, "Obviously it's BS. They're not under control. Look, our work was done unfettered—unfettered—until the report goes forward, and then there are strict rules on things that need to be redacted. Read the legislation. It's very clear." That's what Senator Vern White says.

This is what Senator White says about Pierre Poilievre:

He's allowing the politics to take over, the same as Erin O'Toole did, to be fair, when he refused to put members on that committee... I won't be surprised that maybe Pierre will pull his folks off it, like Erin did. I'm not sure, but it's too bad because I think this committee does great work. Nobody has questioned this committee's independence. We had former ministers, a number of ministers under Stephen Harper's time, sitting on that committee. Not one of them ever questioned the credibility of that committee, and it's disappointing to hear people question it.

This is Senator Vern White, a retired senator. He just retired recently. He was appointed by a Conservative and was a Conservative sitting senator until he decided to join another caucus that wasn't so extreme. These are his comments about Pierre Poilievre and the approach he's taking as it relates to "allowing the politics to take over", in his words.

Madam Chair, here we are, and you can't help but wonder. I started off by telling you about what Pierre Poilievre did in 2010 and the strong position he took on protecting staff and not allowing them to appear before committee. He was so matter-of-fact about it. He said, "The reality is that Mr. Soudas is not going to be testifying". That was the Conservative approach to this back then. I would suggest to you, Madam Chair, that we're just being consistent with Pierre Poilievre. We said staff will not be testifying, and it's the right thing to do.

I've told you about Mr. Poilievre's position on this 10 years ago. I've told you about Senator White's interpretation of what is going on, the impact it has and what he thinks is really happening. You can't help but wonder: Why would Pierre Poilievre be so invested in this if it wasn't for anything other than partisan and political gain and trying to score cheap points?

I'll tell you what's going to happen. This committee will adjourn today at some point. Mr. Cooper is going to send out an email blast—he's nodding his head, great—or it will be Mr. Poilievre. It will be Mr. Cooper saying, "The Liberals filibustered for 17 more hours. They're hiding something. Help us find the truth", and there will be a big "donate now" button underneath.

That's why we've been dragged to Ottawa during a constituency week. It's so that the Conservatives can continue to fundraise. I doubt there is any other reason or any other motivation on their side of the table than exactly that. It's partisan cheap shots and political fundraising. That is it, in my opinion.

I think it would be very useful to talk about what another Conservative senator has said. He was a Conservative senator who represented my area, Mr. Barrett's area and Mr. Reid's area before he retired. That's Senator Hugh Segal. Senator Segal had a lot to say about this as well. He was a Conservative senator who, I would note to you, Madam Chair, was appointed by a Liberal Prime Minister, Paul Martin. That was back in the day before Stephen Harper got a hold of the Senate and before the mess and debacles that came about as a result of his appointments. That was back when a Liberal Prime Minister could say, "Hey, I don't care what political party you are. I think you would be a good fit for the Senate and, therefore, you're being appointed." That's how Hugh Segal, a Conservative, got appointed by a Liberal Prime Minister.

Let's listen to a bit of what Hugh Segal had to say. He contributes to the Toronto Star, and this is specifically about this particular issue and where it all started. After I talk about this, I'd really like to hit on a point that Ms. Blaney made at the beginning of today's discussion when she was talking about the motivation and trying to be careful when it comes to journalistic integrity. Mr. Segal wrote this:

It is possible that Canadian Security Intelligence Service is unofficially correct and that the People's Republic of China (PRC) embassies, consulates and United Front networks and agents have been, and are, involved in specific efforts to unlawfully impact the outcome of Canadian federal elections.

After all, Australia's Security Services has openly discussed evidence relating to their election. And European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pointed out that European countries must keep up their guard against these interferences.

But one wonders what the summary is about the perceived incoherence of Canada's security establishment reported?

"Leaks" from national security organizations are against the law and are currently being investigated by the RCMP.

Further, the Chicken Little nature of the Official Opposition is apparently resistant to demonstrating any balance or regard for a measured or broad national interest beyond its own narrow coyote approach to public discourse. Yes, there are questions to be answered. But rather than co-operating in an effort to get those answers, the "gotcha" moments appear to be far more important.

He's talking about you, Mr. Cooper.

He goes on to say:

Unfortunately, political gamesmanship can put people in harms' way as has been shown by the 300 per cent rise in anti-Asian hate crimes.

Inflaming segments of the public, who might use the information as rationale for taking matters into their own hands, is dangerous and racist.

As for the media, some seem to favour "the instant over the substantial." Any suggestion that China, or Russia or Iran interfered in our elections must be investigated. However, any suggestion that classified information must be made public or shared is not acceptable. I would hope the media understands the difference.

A conjured-up crisis about how our Canadian national security was organized (or not) would generate more dislocation, misunderstanding, disunity and apparent national and political incoherence than any alleged gaggle of Chinese spies or agents hovering around or elected to Parliament.

Again, for those who are just joining us, these are the words of Senator Hugh Segal, a Conservative senator, from prior to retirement.

He goes on:

In other words, the purveyors from within Canada's political establishment with no Chinese connection could and would do more harm to Canada's competitive interests with the PRC, than some potential Chinese agents.

It's as if some of the actors in our political media system have drunk from the same fountain of odd fluids that generate a loss of measured judgment and a tendency to overstate what could threaten national security and dilute any actual facts that protect our democracy.

Public inquiries can be helpful. They can also lead down dark roads—especially when sources, for various reasons, are secret sources that need to stay secret. Should these sources be forced to discuss their intelligence on the record, in public, they would weaken the mission of protecting Canada and Canadians from foreign assaults on our human rights, economy and armed forces. Further, they could imperil Canadian diplomatic and immigration personnel worldwide.

Only governments in power need to worry about this. Coyote-style opposition parties and their media fans do not.

The PRC could very well use the current sowing of discord as a tool equally as helpful as actual espionage or political interference. Just as the Russians had a major impact on U.S. politics by floating the Donald Trump conspiracy—partially true or utterly false—so too would the Chinese see benefit in the apparent overwrought Canadian establishments' both media and political, quixotic overreaction to a leaked CSIS document whose accuracy is less than clear.

Canada has gone through real crises, two world wars, the depression, the War Measures Act, the 2008 recession and Trump, to name a few. The powers-that-be in Parliament, government and the media did not lose their heads.

There is no reason to do so now.

Those are the words of Senator Hugh Segal, the senator who represented my area, Mr. Barrett's area and Mr. Reid's area, a Conservative senator.

I also read to you the words of another Conservative appointed senator, Vern White. They're both retired now. Those are their words about what the official opposition is doing right now: playing political games, dragging parliamentarians to Ottawa on a constituency week when we could be working on behalf of our constituents and dragging us here so they can drum up video and sound bites for fundraising.

Before I started reading that I said I would address Ms. Blaney's point. I think Ms. Blaney has a very good point. We need an independent media in our country that is able to properly do its investigations and properly report. I think that's very important, but I would refer her—notwithstanding the incredible comments by Mr. Segal, who pretty much just addressed this point—to the fact that we had experts here who were sitting on the panel activated during an election. I said to them very specifically that they are getting reports across their desks on intelligence, and they assess those reports and then decide what to do with them. They concurred. The point is that the RCMP also said they're not currently investigating anything.

It doesn't take a lot to conclude that an intelligence report—which as we know does not mean evidence and can feed into the system to determine the validity of it and what to do with it—is something that is not necessarily always true. That's what he said. He said intelligence reports quite often are based on rumours. Those were his words, not mine, when he appeared before committee.

If The Globe and Mail, or any reporter for that matter, intercepted an intelligence report without understanding how it was dealt with or what validity was associated with that intelligence report, if that occurred.... We have been told nothing is being investigated, so it leads me to believe that the intelligence report, or those intelligence reports, didn't contain enough to pursue an investigation. Therefore, they were not given or were not treated as extremely.... I don't want to say how they were treated, because I don't know. That's how the system works. The point is that there are currently no ongoing investigations.

I appreciate what Ms. Blaney is saying, when she says we have to be very careful, and we have to allow the journalists to do their work. I'm sure this journalist was able to verify, by multiple sources, the intelligence report, but we heard very clearly that intelligence reports are not evidence because they are only one part of gathering information in order to determine how to act on information, if it's necessary.

I agree with Ms. Blaney that we have to be very careful, but I also think it's important for people to understand exactly what we're talking about. We're talking about reports that are out there that are based on information and that went to the leadership charged with dealing with that information. I don't know if it was accurate or not. I don't, but it's important to point out that it is possible, especially based on the questions and answers from the witness, that it isn't accurate. It is possible, but I, obviously, don't know because it's not my position to weigh in on that stuff.

One thing I forgot to mention is that not only was Senator Segal—I read out his entire statement in the Toronto Star—a senator, but he was also the chief of staff to former prime minister Brian Mulroney. I can only imagine that former Senator Segal never came before the committee as a chief of staff back in Brian Mulroney's days. It's important to reflect on the fact that you have an individual here that has been on both sides of this. He has been an actual chief of staff to the prime minister and also a senator, and he's basically blasting the approach of the Conservatives.

I must be honest. I didn't expect so many Conservatives were going to line up on this side of the table. So far I've referenced three: Fred DeLorey, the former campaign manager for the Conservatives in 2021; the former Conservative senator Vern White; and former Conservative senator Hugh Segal. All have blasted the Conservatives for their position on this.

Notwithstanding the fact that Pierre Poilievre also blasted his own position on this, although he did it 13 years in advance of taking the position. I guess I should hand it to Mr. Poilievre. He's completely entitled to changing his position on it.

However, I think he owes it to Canadians, to this committee and to parliamentarians to at least explain why the rules should have been different for Mr. Soudas compared to Ms. Telford. Why are the rules suddenly different? He may have very well changed his mind, but he has yet to explain why he changed his mind.

There's more from Mr. Poilievre, and I think this speaks very well to exactly what he's up to. I don't know if he meant to answer this question like this last week, but in doing so, I think he revealed a lot about what his intentions are.

Mr. Poilievre, last week on March 7, was trying to clarify a position he had taken the day before with a reporter with regard to his having access to this information. I believe the exchange centred around the idea of whether Mr. Poilievre would be content if he had access to the information that CSIS and NSICOP have.

Mr. Poilievre responded by saying:

The question yesterday was whether I would go in and personally get briefed about secrets of the state, and the answer—if I could answer your question—I gave was “of course not”, because then they would use that to silence me from speaking out any further. It would then become illegal for me to speak out.

Isn't that fascinating? If you read between the lines there, Madam Chair, you know what Mr. Poilievre is up to. He's more interested in the politics of this, and it's clear from that. He's basically saying, “If I get briefed on this, I'm never going to be able to speak about it again, and I raise a lot of money speaking about this, so I'm not going to stop speaking about it.” That's what I read from Mr. Poilievre's approach on this.

He's basically saying that he doesn't want the information. He doesn't want to know the truth, because if he knew the truth, he couldn't keep up the rhetoric that he's currently throwing at Canadians and that continually flows out of his mouth on a day-to-day basis. He would suddenly, in his words, be silenced, and he could no longer get in front of the microphone, cry foul and suggest that the Prime Minister, in Mr. Cooper's words, is trying to cover something up. He wouldn't be able to do that, because suddenly he would have all the information, and he would have been sworn to secrecy in order to receive that information.

Now what do we have? I have Mr. Poilievre conflicting with himself in his comments from 2012. I have Senator Vern White saying they're just playing politics. I have Fred DeLorey, the Conservative campaign manager from 2021, saying they're just playing politics. I have Hugh Segal, a well-respected senator across the aisle, saying the same thing, that they're just playing politics. They are all Conservatives.

I have Mr. Poilievre's own words, saying that if they briefed him on this, he might know the truth, but then he couldn't talk about it and he couldn't keep scaring Canadians. That is so telling of what the intentions of the Conservatives are here today.

We heard Mr. Long speak at length about NSICOP and the membership on NSICOP. I heard a lot of that and I know others have spoken about it too. I thought it would be important to refresh people, because the Conservatives, through their motion here, which Mr. Turnbull is trying to amend, are basically saying that they want to bring staff here to answer questions, which they know they can't answer for security reasons. I thought it would be beneficial to review who has the ability to look at this information as it currently stands.

As we know, the chair of the NSICOP committee is the Honourable David McGuinty. He has been chairing this committee pretty much since its inception.

Who are the members on this committee? In particular, who are the Conservative members? Mr. Rob Morrison is currently on it, as well as Mr. Alex Ruff. Both are Conservative MPs. Rob Morrison is a retired senior executive chief superintendent with the RCMP, and Mr. Ruff is a retired colonel in the Canadian Armed Forces, with 25 years of service.

I don't even have to know what political party these two individuals belong to, Madam Chair, to know that I have faith in them to look at this information and do what they think is necessary to protect Canada.

I take the words of Mr. White very seriously and to heart when he says that the committee was able to work collaboratively, regardless of partisanship or political party, for the best interests of Canadians. I have great faith in Mr. Morrison and Mr. Ruff, who have that wealth of knowledge and expertise from their lives prior to being elected as members of Parliament, knowing that they contribute along with, currently, Mr. Davies, Mr. Bergeron and Senator Lankin.

These individuals sit on that committee with three Liberal members to review classified information, to formulate and to ask questions where they think necessary, and to formulate responses that

go back to Parliament and are tabled for Parliament to review. That is just who is currently on the committee, Madam Chair.

Prior to that, in the last Parliament—the 43rd Parliament—we had Leona Alleslev, who was a Conservative member, and Mr. Falk. They were both on that committee. We had Mr. Morrison and Mr. Motz on that committee.

Again, Ms. Alleslev is a retired captain in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Mr. Morrison is a retired senior executive chief superintendent with the RCMP, as I previously mentioned. Mr. Motz retired from the Medicine Hat Police Service in 2015.

Again, these are extremely qualified Conservative members of Parliament who sit on the committee along with Bloc and NDP MPs and a few senators. Once again, they are charged with reviewing the information that comes before them, asking the questions, getting answers, formulating opinions together and submitting reports to Parliament.

I have great faith in all of these Conservative MPs, regardless of the fact that I might not be of the same political party. First and foremost, I think the nature of these meetings—having to be kept in secret and the information revealed in secret—just by default is going to create a more collaborative environment.

I heard Ms. Vandenberg tell the story of what Peter Milliken used to do. As Peter was one of my predecessors, I've had a lot of opportunity to chat with him. I can remember him saying that it was always the behind.... Parliament used to break for lunch back in the day. I think it was between one o'clock and two o'clock or something like that. When it would break for lunch, everybody would go for lunch together. It would force members of different political parties to sit together, to chat and to understand each other without having a camera in front of their faces. I think Ms. Vandenberg made some excellent points about the benefits of that. I've heard Peter Milliken speak about that at length in the past too.

The reasons that those behind-the-scenes, off-camera interactions can contribute to collaborativeness and working together are the exact same reasons that I believe this committee does the same thing. When you are sworn to secrecy, you have to leave all communication devices in a locked cabinet. You have to descend, probably, into the basement of somewhere around here—I don't even know where it is—where special protocols are taken to ensure secrecy and to ensure that the material is handled the right way.

Madam Chair, I think that is when you're going to get people to just be themselves, to ask questions candidly and to not be worried about how the opposition will spin what they just said to benefit themselves? This is where, quite frankly, we need to be sharing these very important conversations and these secrets that are out there.

A lot of people ask, “Why does the information have to be kept secret and why is this stuff classified?” It's not just about the impact that sharing this would have at home. It's not just about the impact that it would have on our adversaries, who are enjoying watching this circus going on right now. It's not just for that, although they do enjoy watching that and seeing this. It's also about the fact that we work with allied partners throughout the world. We work with other countries. We share information. We give them secrets. We rely on them to give us secrets so that we can all stay safe. If Canada suddenly starts showing that it doesn't know how to keep its information safe, why on earth would our allied partners trust us and want to continue working with us and have confidence in our ability to maintain that degree of secrecy where necessary?

When NSICOP was first formed in the 42nd Parliament, Madam Chair, a number of different Conservative MPs served on it: the Honourable Diane Finley, a former Stephen Harper minister; the Honourable Rob Nicholson, a former Harper national defence minister, foreign affairs minister and attorney general; and Tony Clement, another Conservative MP and a former Harper health minister, industry minister and president of the Treasury Board. Gord Brown, Mr. Barrett's predecessor, was on that committee, as was the Honourable Vernon White, senator, who was then a member of the Conservative Party and whose comments on this I previously talked about at length. All of these people were participating on that committee in that collaborative manner with NDP, Bloc and Liberal members of Parliament, as well as the Senate representation that was there.

I think it's extremely important when we reflect on this that we genuinely look at whether or not the objective here is what's in the best interests of Canadians. It's important for us to make sure that we use the information and the tools that we have. I would suggest to this committee that calling staff before it is not appropriate for the reasons that.... Ignore the reasons that I've put on the table. It's for the reasons that Pierre Poilievre has put on the table. Those are reasons enough in themselves. That's why it would be inappropriate to bring staff here. More importantly, it's just inappropriate to be having these conversations. They won't have these conversations with us at this table about highly classified information.

I can't help but wonder what the real motivation is here. It's pretty clear to me that this is more about politics than anything else. When you look back at what this government has actually done as it relates to foreign interference, we've actually done a lot.... We've taken this extremely seriously since day one of being elected. We've brought in a number of various different measures, which we've used to help combat foreign interference. I think it's worth considering that stuff and talking about that stuff.

The special panel that was created to deal with election interference in real time, as it's happening, consists of independent, top civil servants who have access to what they need to have access to in order to monitor what's going on and provide a conduit for political organizations to feed information into as it relates to foreign interference. That panel was established to deal with that, to be the conduit for that, and to assess and to take action where necessary. It was something that was put in place very strategically, I think.

When members of Parliament are busy running an election campaign and are not focused on what's going on in Ottawa, this would

be the best time for any actor who is looking to interfere in our democratic process to attempt to do so, in particular as it relates to elections. We have this panel that can receive information from the Conservative Party, Liberal Party, NDP and basically the parties out there running in the elections. It can receive that information, act on it, decide what to do and report back where necessary.

The reports generated from the work done by those panels in both 2019 and 2021 demonstrated, when they reported back, that elections were conducted in a free and open manner. No interference contributed to the outcomes of the elections. The irony is that I know that Mr. Poilievre has even mentioned that. He's even said that he believes the results of the last election were legitimate, but it doesn't stop Conservative members of Parliament on this committee from sowing doubt in people's minds that perhaps it isn't the case. It won't stop them from trying to generate fundraising off this particular issue.

That's one thing we did since we came to power in 2015 to try to assist with what was going on in terms of interference in our elections. Another thing we did, of course, was to pass Bill C-76 in 2018. First of all, Bill C-76 undid a lot of what Mr. Poilievre did when he was minister that was making it more difficult for people to vote. We believe it's important that we have fair elections that encourage as many people as possible to vote. Our democracy, the concept of democracy, depends on people casting their ballots. Why on earth would a government of the day try to limit people's ability? It would appear to me that the only reason they would do that is if they saw gain in doing it, and I'm sure they did. However, we made it easier for people to vote through Bill C-76.

One other thing that happened through Bill C-76 was that it specifically closed some of the avenues by which foreign donations could be made into Canada's election process. I think that was extremely important as a first step in trying to combat any kind of influence, through monetary sources that would come and put money into our election process.

Now, with Bill C-76, regardless of the reason for it.... Perhaps Conservatives just thought at the time, “The Liberals have a majority, so it's going to pass anyway. We'll look better if we vote against this.” I don't know if that was the rationale or if they genuinely had an issue with those things that I just mentioned. I don't understand how they could, other than the fact that Mr. Poilievre was the one who had made it more difficult for people to vote.

Nonetheless, Bill C-76 was voted on. Conservatives voted against it. They voted against the idea of encouraging people to vote. They voted against, more importantly, closing loopholes or closing avenues that allowed foreign actors to donate within our political systems.

Then, of course, there's the other thing the government did—the most important thing, in my opinion. The thing that gets little attention outside these discussions was bringing in NSICOP and ensuring that we had a mechanism in place where parliamentarians had the ability to oversee the secrets that were being collected, gathered and held by our security agencies in this country.

I think that's extremely important, because we do need parliamentary oversight on that, and that's what we had out of NSICOP, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. That gave them the ability to monitor and watch what was going on. It gave accountability and oversight where it was needed.

When we talk about a public inquiry, as the opposition parties have insisted upon, I think it's important that we reflect on the fact that we have these great mechanisms that have already been put in place—that I just mentioned—that are there to ensure that we have the ability to make sure our elections are done in a free and transparent way and that things are kept in the hands they belong.

I think it's also important to reflect on the more holistic discussion that we're having today: that the last election was decided by Canadians, and by Canadians only. The suggestion, as I know the official opposition would like to lead you to believe, is that there was interference that changed the result of the last election. From all of the intelligence reports and from any questions that have been answered at this committee, that is not the case, full stop.

This isn't to say that we don't worry and shouldn't always be worried about what is going on as it relates to the public domain in terms of interference. I know that attempts at interference have been going on for a long time in one form or another, and we know this happens in other countries too. As a matter of fact, by the nature of democracies being open, they give the opportunity for attempts at interference. That's why it's incumbent upon us as parliamentarians to ensure that we put the right processes in place to allow for the necessary steps to be taken when it is determined that interference is potential or ongoing.

Let's not forget that the objective of foreign actors, when they look to interfere in our democracy, is to sow division. What they're trying to do, what they want to see, are the discussions that are going on right now in this committee. They benefit from it. They want Canadians to question their democracy. They want Canadians to stop and think about whether outside forces are interfering in their elections. Those actors become more powerful when we become less confident and less trusting in our systems, and in particular our democracy.

That's why I've always maintained that it is very important that issues like this are done in a non-partisan way. I know I'm the first to jump up in the House and aggressively display my partisanship from time to time. I get that. I know that. It's who I am. I also respect the fact that...

Are you concerned, Madam Chair, because you don't believe that? News flash: I'm partisan from time to time.

My point is that there are certain issues that I think have to be treated in a manner that is non-partisan. Where better to do that than away from the television cameras and in an environment that all stakeholders can participate in and not be influenced by that?

When I know that foreign actors are watching us and seeing the division that exists in our country, I am genuinely concerned, because I recognize it is not something that I would like to see. I think that people, at the end of the day, would rather know that we are capable of handling these things without having to worry about that, but nonetheless, here we are.

I've talked at length about various different individuals who have come forward, in particular Conservatives who have contributed to the discussion that's ongoing right now. I don't know how many more Conservatives have to come forward for Mr. Cooper to realize that Mr. Poilievre is right in that the proper place for staff is not at the end of a committee table answering questions, and that it is up to the minister to properly answer questions. The buck stops at the minister. The minister is responsible.

Let's be honest. If any staff person did something that Mr. Cooper found offensive, I'm sure that he would be calling on the minister to come and take responsibility for it. Why he wouldn't accept the minister's taking responsibility to answer these exact same questions is beyond me. I think it's a bit of an issue to be approaching it that way.

I know I've been dragging on here, Madam Chair, but the last time I spoke, I realized afterwards that I forgot to talk about this and I don't want to miss the opportunity again. Mr. Long brought this up in his conversation. It's about one of the other things we've done. I listed the three: NSICOP, the special panel during an election and Bill C-76.

What the Prime Minister just announced in the last couple of weeks was an independent expert—hopefully that's better terminology for the Conservatives to accept—who will look at where any holes exist within current organizations like NSIRA and NSICOP and determine if there is anything that needs to be done or make recommendations on how to further strengthen those organizations.

The other thing that the independent expert is required to do is to look at the issue of this foreign interference and determine the best place for a study to occur. The Prime Minister said in his statement that he would accept whatever they put forward. If the independent expert or the rapporteur—whatever we're calling them—agrees that Mr. Cooper was right all along that a public inquiry is the only answer here, we will accept that and we'll move forward with that, but we let an independent individual do that. We don't make it a partisan issue.

I don't see why, unless you're afraid that you will never find somebody who's impartial out there who will agree with a public inquiry.... If you're afraid that you'll never find that, then I can understand why you would be against the idea. Based on the information that's come forward, based on the experts who have come to this committee and based on Conservative senators and Conservative campaign managers, they all say the same thing: that NSICOP is the place where this belongs. It doesn't belong in the public forum.

If you're willing to accept a special expert to look at this, if you're genuinely worried about making sure that this is dealt with in the right way, if you strongly believe the right way is through a public inquiry, and if you feel that's the best way, then put your faith in an expert to decide that. Put your faith in that expert coming to the same conclusion.

The only reason they're not putting their faith in the expert is that they know that they're wrong and they know that the position they're taking is inaccurate. They know that, once that happens, the issue is over and they no longer have the opportunity to fundraise off this. That's why they're not giving up on this.

What I actually find really surprising, if I'm being honest, is the position of the Bloc and the NDP. I would have thought they would have come around to understanding two things: that a public inquiry is not.... This is not me trying to convince my Bloc and NDP colleagues. Just listen to the experts. Listen to the people who came to this committee whom we asked.

Not a single person who came before this committee actually said that the best place for this is in a public inquiry, not a single one. I get the Conservatives' politics on this. What I don't get is the Bloc's and the NDP's, because you would think they would be interested in listening to an expert and what an expert had to say about it, but they're not.

The other thing I take issue with in terms of the approach of the NDP and the Bloc is the approach of dragging staff before a committee. I don't know—in 2010 I wasn't here—what their position on it was back then. Maybe the NDP were in favour. They must have been at that time. I don't know the logic behind it. Perhaps they are being consistent. I don't know, but they must know that accountability does not lie with staff people, regardless of whether they are the director of communications or the chief of staff. Accountability lies with the minister. If a senior staff person did something wrong and the minister ought to have known about it, you would be calling on the minister to resign, not the senior staff person.

I've witnessed it many times in the House of Commons. To now suggest suddenly, against Pierre Poilievre's advice, that it is totally appropriate to be holding staff accountable, I think, is disingenuous and I think it's just playing politics.

As I near completion of my intervention at this point, Madam Chair, I'll just end where I started, which is that we all know—everybody sitting around this table knows—that it's not appropriate to bring staff before a committee and to try to interrogate them as though they are accountable to us, because they are not accountable to us. Staff are accountable to their minister, and the minister is accountable to us.

If the Conservatives were sitting on this side of the table, they would be arguing exactly the same thing. As a matter of fact, Mr. Poilievre has argued it in the past, so we know that.

If the NDP were sitting on this side of the table, they would argue exactly the same thing. Come on—this is the NDP. This is the party that purports to be on the side of labour, and you're trying to tell me that you think it's appropriate to drag staff, individuals, before the committee? You would never get away with that in a unionized environment, but it's suddenly acceptable because it's po-

litical staff. We know the NDP would argue the same thing we're arguing.

If the Bloc were sitting on this side of the table, the country might look a lot different than it currently does, in fairness to my Bloc colleagues here, but I know they would be doing the responsible thing too, which is saying that, no, staff should not be brought before committee. It's not for parliamentarians to drill down and ask staff questions in that manner.

When I was involved in municipal politics in Kingston, we didn't drag.... The only staff who ever spoke to city council were commissioners. These were the individuals who were charged with answering the questions. If you ever attempted to go and talk to somebody who was responsible to a commissioner, especially without the commissioner's knowing about it, that was considered to be a huge no-no.

That was considered to be extremely egregious, and I would suggest it's the same thing here.

I know that it's not as sensational to do it the way we're supposed to do it, because it doesn't play itself into the hands of the optics that the official opposition would like to see, but it is what it is. You don't have to take my word for it. You just have to take Pierre Poilievre's words for it—and I'll conclude with this, Madam Chair. He said:

The reality is that Mr. Soudas is not going to be testifying anyway, because of a tiny, little inconvenient problem that the coalition parties have, which is this 300-year-old concept of ministerial accountability, meaning that ministers answer questions on behalf of the government, and not staff.

We're not going to be changing 300 years of history all of a sudden, at the behest of the coalition parties. We're not going to have staff members appearing in question period to answer on behalf of the government. We're going to do it the old-fashioned way, the way it's always been done, right up until the last several months, and we're going to keep ministers, the guys in charge, responsible for their duties.

That was Mr. Pierre Poilievre on June 10, 2010, on CBC's *Power & Politics*, when he was the parliamentary secretary to Stephen Harper.

I don't have to listen to anybody else at this table. I listen to the incredibly insightful words of Mr. Pierre Poilievre to know that we're on the right side of this issue.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

I will now go to Mr. Duncan and Mr. Turnbull, and then I have Ms. Lambropoulos.

Go ahead, Mr. Duncan.

Oh, wait. I skipped one.

I'm sorry, Mr. Duncan. It is Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

I apologize.

Mr. Fergus, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to apologize to my colleague Mr. Duncan. He has to wait for his turn to speak, but I am very much looking forward to hearing the points he has to make.

I would also, in turn, like to congratulate my colleagues Mr. Gerretsen, Ms. Romanado, Mr. Long and certainly Ms. Vandenberg on their interventions. I hope I have not forgotten anyone. What they raised was very enlightening.

We are currently debating the amendment proposed by my colleague Mr. Turnbull to amend Mr. Cooper's motion. Like my colleague from Kingston and the Islands, I am vehemently opposed to the spirit of the motion for exactly the same reasons he mentioned.

In our country, which has a parliamentary system based on the Westminster system, ministerial responsibility has a long tradition. Mr. Gerretsen quoted remarks made by Mr. Poilievre in an interview with CBC when he was in government. Mr. Poilievre had mentioned that this tradition has been around for 300 years. Until the current government came to power in 2015, this tradition had only been broken once. Unfortunately, since 2015, in the seven and a half years that we have been in government, there have been two occasions when ministerial assistants have appeared before a parliamentary committee. Even though this has only happened three times in over 300 years, I am concerned that we are opening the door to political assistants appearing. Yet, I hope that this will always remain something quite exceptional.

There is a reason why ministerial responsibility has become a tradition. This is based on experience in various parliamentary systems around the world. It has been concluded that those who are accountable are the elected officials, the public servants and perhaps even some Canadians, not the people who work for politicians. These people did not put their names on a ballot. They are simply acting on behalf of their boss, who is an elected official, a parliamentarian. This is one of the many fundamental principles that make our parliamentary system work.

As M. Poilievre said in that 2012 or 2013 interview, it is not political assistants who answer questions during oral question period in the House of Commons, but their bosses. Similarly, we don't expect to have these people appear in committee to answer questions. We can invite their bosses, and that's fair and important. However, inviting the assistants, that is not done.

That is why we are having this extended debate today, if I can use that euphemism for filibuster. I hope that common sense will prevail among my colleagues in the opposition and that they will see to it that this part of the motion is withdrawn. Then we can move on, or at least talk about other aspects of foreign interference, which is taking place not only in the political world, but also in the academic, economic and social world. These issues are very important. So, I hope that we will have the chance to deepen our knowledge in this regard, to better understand, better act and thus prevent these kinds of undesirable interventions in Canadian society.

I spent much of the weekend reading the "Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar". I see similarities between what we are experiencing now and what happened in the case of Mr. Arar. I want to emphasize that the damage caused by the so-called leaks is dam-

aging the reputation not only of individuals, but of an entire community.

You may think I am exaggerating, but in reading about this commission of inquiry that ran from 2004 to 2006, something deeply saddened me. Unfortunately, I did not write down the page where I read this, but I will report it from memory. In speaking with those close to Mr. Arar, Mr. O'Connor learned that one of his great disappointments was the unwarranted smearing of his reputation. Mr. Arar said that after his release from Syria, after the year of hell in which he was tortured for fabricated reasons, he was repeatedly told by Canadians who passed him on the streets of Ottawa that they were in solidarity with him and that what he had suffered was unacceptable. What touched him deeply and saddened him was that some members of the Muslim community had been afraid to express their solidarity with him because these unwarranted leaks to the media demonized the entire Muslim community and these people did not want to be seen as being too close to him.

We can very well understand all that has happened to this community. Much more than regrettable, it is unacceptable.

We need to not only save ourselves a little embarrassment, but use a lot of judgment before deciding to publish unverified or verifiable information from so-called leaks without having other sources that could corroborate it.

I am a man of a certain age. In my youth, there was Watergate. Information had leaked out, and I think the journalists who received it had the best instincts and applied the best standards of the journalistic profession: they used that information as a basis for seeking independent confirmation, before deciding to publish that information.

It comes back to what all of my colleagues have raised and what we heard during the national security experts' appearance. They said that intelligence is often a matter of rumour. Indeed, we may hear someone say something or receive information from our allies. People are bound to be looking for that information. Sometimes you can see partial information in a report, like a snapshot. However, intelligence is gained through analysis, through the overall picture that can be painted after adding other information and placing it in context in a systematic way. Sometimes this is done by taking information from our allies who make up the Five Eyes alliance, that is, the countries with which we exchange information freely. These are great democracies of the world with whom we exchange an enormous amount of information, because we share the same values.

So sometimes people have had brief access to partial information and they pass it on to the media. I understand the reasons why journalists publish this information. However, I think it is much better when they follow the same journalistic standards that were applied during Watergate, when reporters sought a second source to confirm the information.

Otherwise, when people have only a small detail or glimpse of a piece of information, their imagination leads them to paint a whole picture of the situation that may not be well-founded or accurate. They may even imagine all sorts of falsehoods that will nevertheless have very real repercussions on individuals and on an entire community.

I know that there are Chinese Canadians who feel targeted, who are on the lookout and who are on the defensive because of all the things you read in the newspapers. I remind you that this is based on partial information that is certainly not impartial. It is partial and biased information, I should say. It is terribly unfortunate, because the consequences will be enormous. It all saddens me so much.

As Ms. Blaney said, we shouldn't put all the blame on journalists. If some publish just anything because they want to be the first to talk about an issue, that's their business. But my expectations of all of us as parliamentarians are much higher. Indeed, I expect us not to go off in every direction after receiving information that is not true or confirmed.

I take my hat off to the committee, which at least invited experts and responsible people from the various agencies involved to present information to us. What did they tell us? They told us at least four things. First of all, they described to us how they collect all this information. They also told us about the importance of not relying on partial information. You have to look at the big picture if you want to do a more accurate analysis. That's how you get to the analysis.

In all of this, there is one thing that is not mentioned. I personally don't have the security clearance to receive top secret level information, but everyone I've talked to who has been in sensitive positions in this area has said that context is very important to paint a picture. Often, they can tell that the information they receive is probably true. In other cases, they know that the information is not very reliable. Sometimes they have no idea if the information is true or not, but they take it into account because it comes from one of their sources. That said, the stories we read in the newspapers, after so-called leaks, did not include any such assessments. So we have no way of assessing the relevance of the material selectively reported by some journalists after these information leaks.

At the end of the day, I'm really saddened that we're in the situation now where this kind of investigation is being called for.

He was the one who chaired the commission of inquiry set up because of a huge injustice suffered by Mr. Arar.

It all started on September 26, 2002. I am sure that day is etched in Mr. Arar's memory, as well as in the memories of his family members and many Canadians. On that day, while transiting through John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, Mr. Arar was intercepted and then detained by U.S. authorities for 12 days. He was then sent against his will to Syria, where he was tortured for over 12 months.

Commissioner O'Connor then launched an investigation, much of which focused on leaked information. After months and months of investigation, he wrote this in his report:

The evidence shows that over an extended period of time classified information about Mr. Arar was selectively leaked to the media by Canadian officials. The leaks

date from July 2003, before Mr. Arar's return to Canada, to July 2005, during the course of this Inquiry.

So, even during the commission of inquiry, there were these kinds of leaks of classified information.

The commissioner continued:

I am satisfied that the issue of leaks falls within my mandate, as it relates directly to Mr. Arar and to the conduct of Canadian officials. While it is not my role to draw legal conclusions about possible breaches of Canada's Privacy Act, Security of Information Act or Criminal Code, I am satisfied that I should report on the nature and purpose of the leaks and the impact they had on Mr. Arar.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the identity of the Canadian officials responsible for the leaks remains unknown despite the fact that several administrative investigations have been conducted by the relevant government departments or agencies into the sources of the leaks. There is also an ongoing criminal investigation into a leak of information to Juliet O'Neill, a reporter for the Ottawa Citizen. Although there appears to be little cause for optimism that investigations will ultimately determine the source of any of the leaks, I do not consider that my mandate directs me to pursue such investigations. To do so as part of a public inquiry would be a huge endeavour and determining the source of the leaks is not sufficiently linked to my mandate to be warranted. That said, I do not consider myself constrained in reporting on the leaks by the fact that the specific sources are unknown. The evidence at the Inquiry is more than sufficient to enable me to comment on the origins of the leaks in general terms, their purpose and the impact they had on Mr. Arar and his family.

Madam Chair, I will give you the English version of what I am reporting. If it is possible, I would like to ask the clerks to pass it on to the interpreters. Our interpreters work very hard and do an exceptional job. I think that if they had the English version of what I am about to quote in front of them, it would make their job easier. I think that's important, if we all want to do our jobs well.

I will continue:

Criminal investigations are generally kept confidential in order to ensure fairness to individuals subject to investigation, who may never be charged, and to protect the ongoing effectiveness of the investigations. There is an additional rationale for confidentiality in the case of national security investigations: the need to protect classified information.

Nonetheless, the fact that an investigation is being conducted may sometimes become known, generating interest on the part of the media and the public. In those instances, government authorities with access to classified or confidential information are in a position to sway public opinion by selectively divulging information to the media. Because the public cannot know the full picture, leaks of selected information can be misleading [...]

I will repeat that:

Because the public cannot know the full picture, leaks of selected information can be misleading and unfair to individuals who may be subjects of the investigation or persons of interest to the investigation. This is especially so when the leaker adds a spin to the leaked information to get his or her message out.

Leaking classified information is clearly wrong and a serious abuse of trust. It can also be a dangerous practice if the information is subject to a legitimate national security confidentiality claim. Leaking classified information may harm national security, international relations or national defence.

This case is an example of how some government officials, over an extended period of time, used the media to put a spin on an affair and unfairly damage a person's reputation. Given the content of the released information, only individuals with access to classified information could have been responsible for the leaks. The obvious inference is that this was done to paint a picture they considered favourable either to the Canadian government or to themselves.

It is worth bearing in mind that leaks of government information can have different aims. In some cases, the leaker is seeking to disclose what he or she perceives to be government wrongdoing that would not otherwise come to light.

Other leaks, however, seek to advance the interests of the Canadian government or of government officials, in some cases by disparaging the reputation of another. This was the case with some of the leaks concerning Mr. Arar, which were aimed at tarnishing Mr. Arar's reputation and undermining his credibility. Some were likely intended to persuade the Government of Canada not to call a public inquiry.

While most leaks likely involve a breach of some form of confidentiality, using confidential information to manipulate public opinion in favour of the Canadian government's interests or the interests of the leaker of the information is obviously more egregious. This is particularly so when third parties are targeted in a way that is unfairly prejudicial to them.

Because it can be so difficult to counter this type of leak, one can only hope that some of the public and the media are sophisticated enough to perceive the reality of what is occurring and to reserve judgment until there is a fair and transparent disclosure of all of the relevant facts.

Moreover, I would never have the necessary context here, around this table, to judge and assess whether or not that information is relevant. Why? Because we don't have the necessary security clearance.

On the other hand, what is an appropriate place for that discussion? Clearly, one such place is the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. Why is that an appropriate place? Because the MPs who are members of that committee have the necessary security clearance to access all the information that has not been redacted. So they are able to accurately review the situation, make an appropriate assessment of what they are reviewing, and determine the accuracy of the information.

Our committee is not the place for those discussions.

To the Canadians watching us on television, I would like to point out something that all MPs know: any inquiry to get to the bottom of an issue, regardless of the subject, must have two components. One is a public inquiry, during which publicly available information can be discussed without impacting our intelligence agencies, our institutions or our allies. At the same time, we have to think of the hard-working men and women who in some cases put their lives at risk to gather certain information. Any discussion of such matters is always behind closed doors. Everyone knows that.

In spite of this, complete transparency is being demanded and Canadians who are not following these events closely are led to believe that everything will be disclosed. That is utter nonsense though. That has to be said. If we did that, we would not be living up to our fiduciary duty as MPs. I hope everyone takes seriously their duty to always ensure that Canadians are well protected. That is our basic duty as elected officials.

That is the challenge. Will we tell the truth or mislead Canadians by claiming that we will get to the bottom of things, while knowing very well that we cannot disclose classified information? We simply do not have the right to do that. That would be irresponsible.

Furthermore, perhaps too much information is classified or considered secret. That is indeed something we could discuss. That said, as long as we are not changing the rules, we will be in the same situation as we are today. Disclosing classified information would be a violation of the Criminal Code and we could be fined. In so doing, we would certainly be jeopardizing our seats in Parliament.

When journalists ask me if I am opposed to a public inquiry, I say I would be very glad to have one, but there would have to be two parts, like the O'Connor commission into the events relating to Maher Arar.

Ten days ago, the Prime Minister told Canadians that he would be appointing an independent special rapporteur who would suggest a better way of proceeding. I think that is the best approach. That person will examine, on a prima facie basis, everything we need to do to get to the bottom of what happened. He will determine the best course of action and suggest that to the Prime Minister, who has agreed to immediately disclose the results of that review and follow all the recommendations of the independent special rapporteur.

We have a good solution before us and I hope my colleagues will ultimately admit that this course of action is entirely reasonable and principled. In so doing, I hope that we, as members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, can finally move on to matters within our mandate which we can investigate in accordance with our skills and abilities.

We have to remember that our committee has other very important matters to consider. I am thinking in particular of the federal electoral boundaries commission reports. This is an important and non-partisan aspect of Canada's democratic system. We have the fiduciary duty to work on that. I hope we will be able to continue our work.

In reading Mr. O'Connor's report, I was struck by certain elements. I would like to quote a few passages, because I think we need to bear them in mind as we attempt to find a solution to this impasse.

By way of context, this report was written by Commissioner Dennis O'Connor, who was a member of Canada's judiciary.

I know that front-page headlines are appealing. My colleague from Kingston and the Islands noted that, for some people, they are a way to appeal for funds from the public. We have to ask at what cost, though. The reputation of certain individuals has really been tarnished. Regardless of their guilt or innocence, this is not right.

This report is a good warning to us all. We should recognize that there are certain lines we should not cross, but we are in the process of doing just that. As I said a few seconds ago, we have to consider what the cost is.

I will continue reading from section 5.2 of the report:

The Inquiry heard evidence of at least eight media stories containing leaked information about Mr. Arar and/or the investigation that involved him. Some of the leaks sought to portray Mr. Arar as an individual who had been involved in terrorist activities such as training in Afghanistan, had named other "terrorists" while imprisoned in Syria, and was "a very bad guy" and "not a virgin." The sources of the leaked information were both human (unnamed government officials) and documentary (classified or confidential documents).

Justice O'Connor then lists all the instances in which these leaks truly affected Mr. Arar's reputation.

The first leak occurred in the summer of 2003, before Mr. Arar's return to Canada.

I would add here that he was returning from Syria, where he had been tortured. Torture is never justifiable, and his detention in Syria was unjust. Let me continue:

[This was] a time when the public campaign to obtain his release from Syrian custody had intensified. An unidentified official was quoted as saying that Mr. Arar was a "very bad guy" who had received military training at an al-Qaeda base [this was patently false]. The article also noted that the unnamed government official had refused to provide further details, attributing the need for secrecy to ongoing intelligence operations [once again, this was patently false]. The apparent purpose behind this leak is not attractive: to attempt to influence public opinion against Mr. Arar at a time when his release from imprisonment in Syria was being sought by the Government of Canada, including the Prime Minister.

Around the time of Mr. Arar's return to Canada in October 2003, four more leaks were reported. On October 9, 2003, the *Toronto Star* quoted "an official involved in the case" as saying that American officials had contacted their Canadian counterparts when Mr. Arar's name had been noted on a passenger flight list (referring to Mr. Arar's arrival in New York on September 26, 2002). According to the unnamed source, conversations had taken place between American and Canadian officials about Mr. Arar, in particular about whether he had travelled to Afghanistan and whether he could be charged if returned to Canada. The next day, October 10, 2003, an article in the *Globe and Mail* cited unnamed Canadian government sources as saying that Mr. Arar had been "roughed up," but not tortured, while in detention in Syria.

Once again, the content of these leaks was patently false. The information was published without confirmation from a second source, which is the minimum required before deciding to publish such information. In this case, there was a serious impact on the physical and mental health of a Canadian. This infuriates me. The report goes on to say:

The latter comment that Mr. Arar had not been tortured is consistent with the reaction of several Canadian officials on Mr. Arar's return to Canada: they attempted to downplay the seriousness of the ordeal he had endured in Syria. The implication in this regard is that, if Canadian officials were in any way involved in what happened to Mr. Arar, it would be better from their standpoint if he had not been seriously mistreated.

Once again, this is infuriating. To continue:

On October 23, 2003, the CTV 11 o'clock news broadcast a segment quoting "senior government officials in various departments" as saying that Mr. Arar had provided information to the Syrians about al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood,

and cells operating in Canada. Mr. Arar was alleged to have implicated other Canadians in extremist activities. Again, the indirect suggestion was that Mr. Arar himself had been involved in extremist terrorist activities.

This is completely false.

As noted in an *Ottawa Citizen* article published on October 25, 2003, the leaks about what Mr. Arar might or might not have said to his Syrian interrogators were "particularly worrisome" and potentially very dangerous, not only for the Arar family, but also for the individuals allegedly named by Mr. Arar and still in detention in countries known to practice torture. The allegation that he had denounced others would also have been harmful for Mr. Arar psychologically. As noted by Dr. Donald Payne, a member of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, "it would be difficult for anyone to be pointed out as a betrayer of people, to be falsely pointed out as a betrayer of people."

Even Mr. Arar's first meeting with DFAIT officials in Ottawa on October 29, 2003 did not remain confidential despite an understanding before the meeting that what Mr. Arar said would not be disclosed until he chose to divulge it. On October 30, *CBC Newsworld* reported that Mr. Arar had met with Minister Graham and had told DFAIT officials that he had been tortured while detained in Syria. Although this disclosure appears to have breached a confidence, it obviously did not discredit Mr. Arar, as several others did.

In the press conference held in Ottawa, on November 4, 2003, Mr. Arar told his story at length and described the torture he had suffered in Syria. He strenuously denied all allegations that he was implicated in terrorism or associated with people involved in terrorist activities. He also called for a public inquiry into his case.

Four days after the press conference, on November 8, 2003, the most notorious of the Arar leaks occurred. Information from classified documents was published in the *Ottawa Citizen*, in a lengthy article by Juliet O'Neill entitled "Canada's dossier on Maher Arar: The existence of a group of Ottawa men with alleged ties to al-Qaeda is at the root of why the government opposes an inquiry into the case."

This front-page article contained an unprecedented amount of previously confidential information, including a detailed description of the RCMP Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) office in Ottawa, a place not accessible to the public, and specific reference to the "main target" of investigation, Abdullah Almalki. It indicated that "one of the leaked documents" contained information about what Mr. Arar had allegedly told the Syrian Military Intelligence during the first few weeks of his incarceration and then went on to describe this information in detail.

The article moreover referred to some aspects of the RCMP's investigation of Mr. Arar and cited a "security source" for the proposition that a suspected Ottawa-based al-Qaeda cell was at the root of opposition by the Canadian government to a full public inquiry into Mr. Arar's case [...]

These leaks, which were not validated, caused a great deal of harm. We are in exactly the same kind of situation as in the Arar affair. We must learn from our past mistakes.

When it is suggested that we become part of the problem, that we react on all fronts to information that is unverified, if not denied by the officials who appeared before this committee at the start of the month, that is a mistake and leads nowhere.

Throughout this report, Justice O'Connor indicates that the purpose of these leaks was probably to serve the interests of those who thought they had the truth about Mr. Arar. Yet, they were proved wrong. Why did those people act that way? As our witnesses told us two weeks ago, those people only saw part of the whole picture that was revealed in the information to which the officials had access.

We must do everything possible to avoid past errors. Those errors had a terrible impact on Mr. Arar. We mustn't do the same thing to other people when we have no proof that they did anything wrong or were disloyal to Canada. Let us save our energy instead to go after those who want to harm our country, and go after those who are responsible or guilty.

There is a very important section in this report. It will not take too long. I will read out the part about the effect of the leaks on Mr. Arar. I referred to this when I began speaking, and for the interpreters, it is in Section 5.4 of the report. Justice O'Connor wrote:

The leaks had deleterious effects on Mr. Arar's reputation, psychological state, and ability to find employment. The impact on an individual's reputation of being called a terrorist in the national media is obviously severe. As I have said elsewhere in this report, labels, even inaccurate ones, have an unfortunate tendency to stick.

While the Inquiry did not hear from Mr. Arar directly about the personal impact of the leaks, Dr. Donald Payne testified that, generally, such leaks would have a traumatic psychological effect on someone in Mr. Arar's position and would carry a likelihood of re-traumatization.

Before I continue reading, I should note that Professor Stephen Toope, who is mentioned, is a well-known Canadian academic. He was the president of the University of British Columbia. He was also vice-chancellor of Cambridge University, in the United Kingdom. It is very rare for a person who is not British to hold that position, which says a lot about Stephen Toope's excellent reputation. Let me continue.

In addition, Professor Toope, the fact-finder I appointed to report on Mr. Arar's treatment in Syria, made specific findings on the impact of the leaks. Professor Toope reported that the leaks had caused further psychological damage to Mr. Arar:

[Mr. Arar] was particularly disturbed by certain "leaks" from sources allegedly inside the Canadian Government that cast him in a negative light. These events compounded his sense of injustice dating from his detention and torture in Syria. All his advisers that I interviewed emphasised that Mr. Arar was "devastated" by these leaks. Some described him as "hysterical." He simply could not control his emotions, and it took many hours of constant conversation to calm him down each time new information surfaced in the press that he thought to be misleading or unfair.

Professor Toope also linked the leaks to Mr. Arar's feeling of social isolation from the Muslim community:

[Mr. Arar] told me that he is disappointed with the reaction of many Muslims to him and his story. Whereas other Canadians sometimes come up to him on the street to share a sense of solidarity, most Muslims stay far away from him. Mr. Arar thought that this distancing was exacerbated after the press "leaks" mentioned previously.

Finally, Professor Toope described the economic effect of Mr. Arar's ordeal on the Arar family as "close to catastrophic." Inasmuch as the leaks have painted Mr. Arar as a terrorist, it is reasonable to infer that they have contributed to his ongoing difficulty in finding gainful employment in his field.

Lastly, I note that Mr. Arar's time in Syria deprived him of something most Canadians take for granted: "control over the truth about oneself." The fact that this deprivation continued after Mr. Arar's return to Canada—this time because of leaks of confidential information by government officials—is both unfortunate and deeply unfair.

I am not accusing anyone here of treating others unfairly. I know that we MPs around the table are all trying to do the right thing and protect our country's interests, and those of our fellow Canadians, of course.

We had a warning in 2002-03. We have to resist the temptation of getting sidetracked by all the courses of action suggested. There are certainly rumours that are unconfirmed or that are from a single source. Let us hope the information provided by the sources is true. I hope the sources are not reporting false information.

Quoting small bits of information does not constitute intelligence. Intelligence is based on the analysis of the entire situation. Intelligence agency officials have all said that what was leaked to the media does not come from them. That should concern us. Moreover, even if the information is true, it does not provide an overview of the situation.

Finally, as Mr. Gerretsen, my colleague from Kingston and the Islands, mentioned, the fact that the RCMP is not investigating the information reported in the media shows us that the review of the entire picture does not reveal anything.

If that is the case, why is it that we committee members and MPs, who are committed to protecting our fellow Canadians, can be tricked and drawn into a situation, the only result of which is to tarnish the reputation of our fellow Canadians and of an entire community?

I do not know why we would go down that path. It makes no sense. If we continue along that path, I suggest that we proceed very carefully. At least, we should start with the assessment of the intelligence experts who shared their conclusions and stated that this is not something we should do.

I will now return to another aspect of the "Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar".

People might be tired of listening to me talk about this, but it is essential that we recognize that we are playing with fire.

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Madam Chair, a point of order, since Mr. Fergus has raised that possibility.

I know you have been very accommodating with regard to relevance. I am still trying to see the link between the "Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar" and the motion, which seeks to invite the national campaign managers from 2019 and 2021. Unless the author of the report was a campaign manager in 2019 and 2021, I am still looking for the link.

Could my colleague enlighten me on that?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I will be pleased to do so, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** We shall see if Mr. Fergus explains the link; I hope he does.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'm glad my colleague raised the issue of relevance. People play games. People can say that Mr. Arar was neither a chief of staff nor a national election campaign manager of any political party, and that is true.

I raised this point because we are debating something that intelligence and national security experts maintain does not exist. In their opinion, the most that can be said about the information leaked to the media is that it is incomplete and does not provide the whole picture.

Without disclosing any state secrets or security intelligence, these experts said there was no fire even if we think we see smoke. They said that foreign interference is indeed important and real, but that, in relation to the inquiry, we have to be careful about the information certain individuals have disclosed to the media and certain journalists, because those experts are not convinced of the truth of that information.

That is why I raised another situation in which information leaked to the media was revealed to be completely false. It was not simply a waste of time or a situation in which the victim emerged unscathed: there was a real victim in that case.

We cannot say that all individuals act in good faith. When a person who presumably works for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service decides to leak information even though their job requires them to swear an oath and not disclose sensitive information, we have to ask some questions. Not only is that person disclosing just a single aspect, but they are not living up to their professional commitments.

We can wonder whether such a person is reliable if they are willing to abandon their professional obligations and take the risk of being charged and going to jail for leaking information. I am not sure that is a reliable person. I would like at least to have a second source of information. It is unfortunate that, among the journalists involved in this matter, at least one journalist was involved in the Maher Arar affair and decided to publish information that proved to be false, which caused a great deal of harm to Mr. Arar.

I am tremendously concerned about this. That is why I am suggesting this, Ms. Normandin. That is why I think it is important to remember what happened, because I hope that will compel us to avoid something that could become or could be perceived as a major injustice. That is why I am drawing a parallel between the current situation and what happened 20 years ago. I think that is our duty.

I do not want to deal with this matter lightly. What we are discussing is significant. Aside from the principle of ministerial responsibility, what we are discussing here is essentially based on leaked information that intelligence and national security officials have rejected as false. If we cannot trust those people, who are committed to protecting us all, whom can we trust?

It would be a bit strange for us to continue to pursue what, by all appearances, is an injustice or an unwarranted path and claim that we will hold a public inquiry and ask individuals to break the law by coming here to disclose everything they know about the topic, including secrets and intelligence that are matters of national security.

I hope there will be an inquiry into foreign interference in Canada. Can we recognize the fact, though, that such an inquiry will include a public portion and a portion behind closed doors? I am willing to do that, but no one in the opposition has said so. I want people to say this instead of constantly demanding full transparency and inquiries that are 100% public.

I can see at least one member of the opposition nodding his head and I congratulate him. He needs to speak up though. That has not been stated in the motions presented thus far, since they refer to a public inquiry only.

An opposition MP just said off mike that the Maher Arar inquiry was a public inquiry. Let me repeat with my microphone on so that all Canadians understand my reaction and what I am about to say: there were actually two parts to that inquiry: one public and one behind closed doors to examine classified information. This is extremely important.

If that model were suggested, I would have no problem supporting it. I hope that is the model that the independent special rapporteur will recommend to the Prime Minister. I am confident that that person, a prominent Canadian, will provide an overview of the situation and make recommendations to the Prime Minister, who has agreed to follow them to the letter. Canadians can trust us because we will do what is best, without partisanship. I hope all my colleagues will be delighted to support the work of the independent special rapporteur. It is important.

Let me conclude with one final point, but I will certainly have more to say later on. We should not rely on the information that was disclosed, for a number of reasons. First, the officials told us that, even if that information were valid, it is just partial information and describes just part of the picture. Secondly, they also said that the conclusions drawn by the journalists and certain members of the opposition were false. Finally, if we continue to rely on information that the officials said is inaccurate, that might tarnish the reputation of certain elected officials or even an entire community.

I am not making this up: this kind of thing has happened in the past.

We already suffered a national disgrace when certain information about Maher Arar was disclosed by journalists. It was a grave injustice in 2002-03, which continued until 2005-06, and would still be an injustice today.

Let us use what happened in the past to guide us. Let us not repeat the errors of the past. Let us be innovative and make new mistakes.

For all these reasons, I implore my opposition colleagues to take a different approach.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

[English]

Mr. Duncan, thank you for your patience.

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Thanks, Madam Chair.

This afternoon, as Canadians watch either online or through a different form, it's important for us to make the case here and provide a context for where we're at.

We are now 17 hours into a Liberal filibuster to avoid having the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford, appear before this committee. We are getting near six hours today alone in which we've had Liberal members of Parliament come to the committee and talk about their work history and some of the traffic they've had in their constituency office. We've just had members reading from a book into the record to delay a vote on something that....

Frankly, we talk about being non-partisan. That was alluded to several times. We have Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP ready to vote right now and call the question to have the Prime Minister's chief of staff come and answer questions on the election interference by Beijing, and that portfolio, at the procedural affairs committee.

One of the things I wanted to put on the record today, as a lot has been said on the other side in the dither and delay of things, is that the Liberals act as if this is absolutely abnormal and unheard of to have the Prime Minister's chief of staff appear before a committee. I want to remind Canadians, and the Liberal members as they cite that, Katie Telford has, in fact, appeared twice at parliamentary committees during her tenure as the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

We remember, back in the summer of July 2020, she was forced to appear at the finance committee regarding the WE Charity scandal. The national scandal that emerged, the PMO's role in that and who knew what and when, as that all went along. She appeared a second time at the defence committee in May 2021 on the scandal of sexual misconduct in the Canadian military, having to answer questions about the Prime Minister's Office, what it knew and what it did, or didn't do, in those cases.

She has appeared twice before. Again, we are saying that, considering the context and considering the stunning news reports that have come out from whistle-blowers, it is absolutely appropriate and necessary for her to appear before this committee, in a public setting, to answer questions about where we're at.

We are, again, six hours into this meeting, and many Canadians would say it would not be informative. I've actually found today to be very informative. Canadians should draw that same conclusion, because every passing hour, every single MP that gets into the queue talks and reads the phonebook into the record about what's going on here, instead of calling the question for the vote and having this issue resolved.

We've now spent 16 to 17 hours trying to have Katie Telford appear for three hours. She could have been here nearly six times over and been done with it. At the end of the day, the question that Canadians have.... They've learned a lot, because every speaker that goes up, every hour that passes without the vote and resolution of this, Canadians ask the rightful question: What is the government hid-

ing? What are the Liberals hiding? What is the Prime Minister hiding? What is the chief of staff in the Prime Minister's Office hiding, and why won't she come forward?

When we talk about the reasons why the Liberals are delaying this, the firm reason is that I don't think it's good news. If Canadians knew what actually happened, and more importantly what didn't happen, when these serious allegations came forward to the Prime Minister and the PMO's attention, what they didn't do would be an embarrassment to them.

I think it's time to call the question. I was in municipal politics back in the day, and we called the question. Let's end the debate, and let's end the filibuster. Let's call the vote.

We are absolutely, on this side, ready to go. It is absolutely reasonable to have Katie Telford appear at this committee. She has done so before, when there has been a scandal emerging of national importance. In this case, it is of national and international importance.

Let's call the question. Let's get her here, and let's get answers. It's as simple as that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Duncan, I appreciate that.

What's kind of interesting to me about that comment is that I always maintain a speakers list, and when there's nobody on the list, I tend to call the question. The very last time I did that, members on that side were really upset that I was calling the question, when my list had been exhausted. I take the advice you have provided to me. I hope that members will come to an understanding, or a way to call the question. I, too, look forward to that happening.

Next, we have Mr. Turnbull, Ms. Lambropoulos, Mr. Fergus and Mr. Gerretsen on the list, but just before we get to Mr. Turnbull, I'm going to take a quick 15-minute health break.

I'm going to call it a 10-minute break, because I know it always takes 15 minutes. I'll see you shortly.

I'll suspend for 10 minutes.

• (1615) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Welcome back.

As I mentioned, our speaking list is Mr. Turnbull, followed by Mr. Gerretsen and then Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Turnbull, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that, and I appreciate the attention of my colleagues.

I have a lot to say today. I've been doing a lot of research on this topic. As always, I pride myself on reading a lot and trying to learn as much as I can about such an important topic.

I do appreciate my colleagues' trying to get to a point of consensus on this committee. I put forward an amendment to Mr. Cooper's motion in a good-faith attempt to extend this study a little more and to have a few other witnesses come before the committee.

I think Mr. Gerretsen was right to point out in his remarks that the leader of the official opposition, years ago, made many of the arguments we have been making. It's funny how the Conservatives have pointed out, quite a few times in our deliberations on various topics, that the Conservatives seem to switch positions when it's good and convenient for them.

Pierre Poilievre has argued for ministerial accountability, MP Julian from the NDP also made that argument in previous meetings, and now we seem to have a complete 180° on that. I don't understand why members want to do that, when we've covered the fact that, during an election within the caretaker convention, there are public officials who oversee the panel and the protocol. All of those officials have come before this committee.

Within the rest of the time, there are ministers who are responsible for the all-of-government approach, which is referred to by Rosenberg as the "electoral ecosystem approach". It's clear to me that those ministers are accountable and have come before this committee. If there are any who haven't come, I'm sure they would be willing. All we would have to do is make those requests, if they haven't been made already.

Instead, we see an attempt to make this a partisan undertaking, and it shouldn't be. There are those of us who have been working on election interference, including the leadership of our government, for many years. The last intervention I made was quite substantive. I took the time to read through all the various reports. I came up with an outline, year by year, of all the things that our government has done either to try to prevent foreign election interference or to combat, essentially, interference in our democracy and democratic institutions as a whole. There is much work that's been done.

Again, I will not let people just say things that are completely false. The things that the opposition parties have said are not true. In particular, the Conservatives have said over and over again that the Trudeau government hasn't done anything. Well, that's not true. That's patently false. It's false on every level, and I will never stop saying it's false. You'll never get me to agree with that because it's just false.

I have many examples, counter-arguments and substantive steps that we have taken to combat foreign election interference. Therefore, you're never going to get me to lay down and just accept the fact that you guys are going to propagate falsehoods. To me, that is what's happening here.

We also heard from the Leader of the Opposition recently. In the press gallery, he was giving remarks to what I think was a hypothetical question that a reporter asked. Mr. Poilievre said, "The question...was...would [I] go in and...get briefed about secrets of the state...the answer I gave was 'Of course not, because then they would use that to silence me from speaking out any further.' It would then become illegal for me to speak out."

I don't know about you, but I just find it shocking that the leader of the official opposition, who claims over and over again to want to get to the truth of the allegations that have circulated in the media, would not want to get a briefing on these matters if he were given the opportunity to get to the truth.

Is he really committed to getting the truth or is he more interested in casting stones at Justin Trudeau and our government, all else be damned, basically? That's how I read that statement. I don't know about others, but certainly it doesn't reflect well on the leader of the official opposition in terms of actually getting to the truth in this matter.

I really [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Mr. Duncan's ploy to try to appeal to the committee that we're blocking this or blocking that. We're not. We're actually speaking—

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Turnbull.

I'm not sure what it is, but your Internet tends to be a little unstable. You cut in and out. It was going fine until now. I'm not sure if, once again, you want to close some windows or what it might be. I'm going to give you back the floor, but I just want you to be conscious and cognizant of that.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Sure, Madam Chair, and thank you. I'm not sure what I can do about that other than close some windows on my computer, which I will try to do quickly here to see if that helps.

As I was saying.... Can you still hear me, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, we can. While I have you there, do you want to just lower your boom slightly?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Sure. How's that?

**The Chair:** That's excellent. I'm going to hope that.... That's excellent. We'll go back to you.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay. That's great. Thank you.

As I was saying, I think one of the things that I would like to note or go back to for just a moment here...and I will tie all of this into the relevance of the amendment that I put forward. It is a good-faith attempt to trying to reach some consensus on this committee about how to move forward. I recognize that it feels like we're at a bit of an impasse, but I hope that opposition members—in particular, the Conservatives— will see the light based on my arguments today and, hopefully, agree that we can move forward with consensus based on having the national campaign director for the Conservative Party and the other members who are noted in my amendment come here. That, I think, makes perfect sense, and I can tell you why.

One of the things that struck me in the Rosenberg report was... I've already gone through a lot of the substantive things that our government has done to combat foreign election interference, but one of the projects was the Canadian election misinformation project. What's interesting about this is that there was an attempt to work, and I think successfully to some degree.... I think we can look at how successful it was and actually drill down on key questions that committee members have. I certainly have a lot of questions about not just foreign election interference but misinformation campaigns online, of which there were some—and I would say many—during the last two federal elections. I would like to get into a little more detail on that to say why campaign directors would be useful to hear from, because of course they would have quite a lot of information and an ability to provide information on things they've witnessed and observed during their campaigns. That might be useful for us in terms of learning.

One of the things that I was going to reference in Morris Rosenberg's report is that there was an analysis done of the role that social media platforms play in spreading false information. That's not to say that they intentionally do it, per se. It's just to say that there's a role they naturally play in today's society that allows for the spread of that information.

Madam Chair, am I still coming through okay? I noticed that Ms. Blaney was kind of squinting, so I wondered if I was coming in clearly.

**The Chair:** You are. Rest assured that I will let you know if I cannot hear you clearly. Thank you.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Mr. Rosenberg, on page 20, says, “They found that, notwithstanding more assertive moderation and election integrity policies, large social media platforms continued to be home to widespread misinformation.”

It's sort of interesting to think about this topic in relation to this work and study, because there is evidence documented that some of the social media platforms used to spread misinformation related to Conservative candidates in the last election. I think it's interesting to dive into that area and find out more, because we've heard, from our national security and intelligence community, about the fact that our election was free and fair, and that there's no evidence there was any impact on the overall results of the election. Otherwise, it would have triggered the protocol.

In fact, I know we heard.... I'll have to dig out this quote. I remember it, but I can't remember who exactly said it. I think it was David Morrison, but I will check and come back to the committee in a future intervention to verify that. He said something to the effect that the panel did not deliberate as to whether or not any misinformation or attempts at foreign interference in the election reached the threshold. They didn't. The debates and deliberations they had were only around whether or not something actually counted as foreign interference.

This is an interesting distinction, because those are two very different things. Of course, the protocol and the threshold associated with it is quite high on purpose. Notifying the public of foreign election interference is set at a fairly high level to ensure it's only in times when an election has actually been affected. I think what he was saying in his remarks.... Again, I will check as to who said that

for the committee members. I'll come back with that specific reference.

Listening to the national security and intelligence advisers' community.... I think it's been very clear in the testimony we've heard to date. There are many other things that point to this, in terms of what they were able to say or not say. It was very clearly implied in what they said: If CSIS had that information, as has been claimed, it would have been provided to the RCMP and the commissioner of Canada elections. It would have been investigated. When asked, the RCMP said there were no investigations under way.

You know, we heard from national security and intelligence experts as prominent as the director of CSIS. They said they could not verify whether or not this leaked information was coming from CSIS or some other organization. To me, there's no confidence. I think Mr. Fergus eloquently spoke to this in his intervention. It's quite concerning when we see uncorroborated allegations floating out there. Obviously, they are dangerous in and of themselves when they're based on likely partial or pieces of intelligence that might not be interpreted correctly, or might not have been analyzed and converted into evidence. I think that's a very big gap, in terms of what's being said, claimed or reported.

These are all very important points to consider. They're all good reasons for understanding the fact that anybody who has a security clearance would be breaking the law if they came to our committee and said things they're not allowed to say.

I don't know what opposition members are hoping to get out of having the chief of staff of the Prime Minister come to the committee, other than trying to perpetuate some kind of false narrative that there's some big cover-up of some big scandal, which to me is just playing politics with a really important issue. What we heard from Fred DeLorey in the Toronto Star article that he wrote was very clear, and I'm going to quote him. I know others have quoted him and I've quoted him in the past. I don't think I used this exact quote, but this is an even better quote. He wrote:

As the national campaign manager for the Conservative Party of Canada during the 2021 election, it's important to clarify one critical issue. I can confirm, without a shadow of a doubt, that the outcome of the election, which resulted in the Liberals forming government, was not influenced by any external meddling.

The national campaign manager of the Conservative Party of Canada is saying that he can confirm “without a shadow of a doubt” that whatever forms of attempted interference were present did not have an impact on the results of the election. Be that as it may, I think it makes the case for having him come to our committee and speak to why he says something like that with such a degree of confidence.

We have many Conservative members claiming all kinds of things that are untrue, as sensationalistic and absurd as claiming that the Prime Minister is working against the interests of Canada, which is treasonous. Those kinds of claims are hyperpartisan, sensationalistic. They're not true. They're disgusting and they detract from the overall stability of our democracy as a whole. I don't know how anyone who's a member of Parliament can utter such things without having some basis for making such absurd claims. They're completely unfounded claims.

For me, if we have Fred DeLorey, a person as prominent as the national campaign manager for the Conservative Party of Canada, claiming that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, there was no impact on the election results, we should probably hear from that individual. Certainly, hearing from the national campaign director or manager of the Liberal Party of Canada would be great and the NDP's manager, etc., and other parties' managers, would be very helpful as well. I think it would allow us to dive into a very important topic, which is to what degree online campaigns of misinformation and disinformation were present and being spread throughout the country during and perhaps before the election.

I know that during the election there was an independent third-party analysis done for the 2021 Canadian federal election. Despite what Mr. Barrett said, which I found very offensive when I made a point of order earlier and he implied that I had just got out of bed at something like 11 o'clock or something like that—I don't know why he would say such a thing—I was actually up early reading this quite extensive 80-page report on misinformation and disinformation during the 2021 Canadian federal election in preparation for our meeting today. I have lots and lots of observations and, I would say, insights from this report that I would like to share.

It all goes to the argument that we should really be having national campaign managers come before the committee because, of course, they would be best placed, in my view, to comment on the level of misinformation that was circulating during the election, and probably corroborate some of this independent report that has been done by a group called the Media Ecosystem Observatory, which consists of the centre for media, technology and democracy at the Max Bell school of public policy at McGill University, and PEARL, which is the policy, elections and representation lab at the Munk school of global affairs and public policy at University of Toronto.

Prominent individuals in their field have all participated in this work. There's a long list of contributors. For anybody who wants to look up the report and read it, it's called "Mis- and Disinformation During the 2021 Canadian Federal Election". It's dated March 2022. It's been around for at least a few months, long enough for us to have a review and read it. I've spent quite a lot of time looking at it, because I think it has quite a lot of really useful information.

Why is this report important? It's important because we know that, dating back to at least 2018, there were reports done by parliamentary committees on threats to Canadian democracy. Let me put it this way: The major factor that seems to be evolving or changing the threat environment....

We've heard from every national security and intelligence professional that the threat environment is evolving. Why is it evolving? You could say it's evolving predominantly because of the spread of online information, digital platforms and the prevalence with which they're used by Canadians. That is one of the most important vehicles for the spread of information that may mislead Canadians, erode Canadian democracy and change intentions in the voting behaviour of the public.

If that's the case, I would go back to Morris Rosenberg's report. In the report there are instances of misinformation listed. Some of them do target candidates in the last election, but what's interesting

is that we can't just immediately jump to conclusions about that. We already know that domestic and foreign interference online is happening all the time. It's ubiquitous. Literally every single day there's information being spread that's not entirely accurate. Sometimes it's entirely fabricated, but most of the time it's partially inaccurate or partially true, so it's stretching the truth, in a sense. What's interesting about this is that it actually has an impact on the population over time. We should be looking at how we make useful recommendations out of our work today and over the course of this study on that topic.

What's interesting is that in the very first pages of this report, they have a summary. I've read the whole thing, so I'm not going to quote from the executive summary. I've done the work here. The most extensive documented misinformation in the last 2021 Canadian federal election was on COVID-19 misinformation and widespread claims of voter fraud. Those were the two biggest misinformation campaigns online. They also note at the beginning that a lot of the discussion has focused on Chinese interference, which is interesting, because there is actually a lot more evidence that COVID-19 misinformation and claims of widespread voter fraud circulated on social media platforms. They should actually be part of our conversation on this topic. We're not looking at all the threats to our democracy if we're only focusing on the forms of foreign interference coming from China. We actually have to broaden our scope and look at all forms of foreign interference related to misinformation spread online.

One thing that I think is important for us to note is that Canadians are generally able to detect false stories. That's kind of important when considering this topic. There's really strong evidence here that Canadians are able to detect what is false from what is true. That's not to say that the rapid spread of misinformation isn't having an impact on the population. It is to say, thank God for Canadians' ability to discern what is true and not true. That is somewhat holding up in an era where misinformation and disinformation is so rampant and far-reaching.

The third point in the summary is, "we find no evidence that Chinese interference had a significant impact on the overall election." For that to be on the front page of an executive summary is pretty important.

That's not to say that there weren't attempts. It also says, "Misleading information and information critical of certain candidates circulated on Chinese-language social media platforms." There's a lot of comment in the report about that. However, that it did not have an impact and that there's no evidence of its having an impact on the overall election again corroborates what we've heard from national security and intelligence experts, from the national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister, from all the public servants who are part of the panel that oversees the protocol during the caretaker period and also from ministers who have come before this committee.

If we trust the experts—the people whose job it is to do that work and to protect us in our democracy—we have to say that not only have we had every level of accountability come before this committee, we also have independent reports and professionals from outside of government commenting and corroborating the same conclusion, which is that it did not have an impact on the overall election results.

I think that's important for us to note. I speculate that it's probably why someone like Fred DeLorey, a Conservative campaign manager from the last election, could so confidently say.... I would also say that maybe he could confidently say it had no impact on the election results probably because—and I don't know this for a fact—he had an opportunity to participate in some of those briefings that were given. Again, that is a mechanism our government set up during federal elections—to have party briefings during the election on attempts of foreign interference.

I think it's good to note that in this research study that was done by the Media Ecosystem Observatory, they certainly have verified the fact that most Canadians believe the election was safe from foreign interference and a minority of Canadians believe that misinformation was a serious problem. That may be changing in our discourse today, as a country. Maybe more Canadians are believing it's a bigger, more serious problem. I think that raises public awareness. If, out of all this, we get a greater degree of public awareness around this issue, that's probably a good outcome, but in terms of this committee's work, I think we have to be working to get to the bottom of things to make really good, clear recommendations on how to move forward.

One thing that struck me as a conclusion that they drew from this huge body of research—and I'll go into a little bit more detail as to how extensive the research was—was that a “cohesive misinformed and misinforming group has emerged”, which is interesting. They said that there's a “rise of a 'big tent' of misinformation, where groups who hold false or conspiratorial beliefs about one topic appear to adopt similarly distorted opinions about a broad range of topics.” That's a direct quote from the report, by the way.

What's interesting to me about that is how we see that the sliver of the population that buys into misinformation campaigns gets co-opted by these distorted opinions they're receiving through online sources and memes. They are then further susceptible to absorbing other sorts of conspiratorial beliefs and opinions that come at them online.

It's interesting, because that coincides with my personal experience at the doors in the last election campaign. I saw that the prevalence of that was becoming more clearly identifiable. It's very disconcerting to me that the population of individuals who might already be slightly susceptible to that will then consume more of that misinformation and adopt it into a world view that becomes more and more extreme.

In other circles and conversations we've had on Parliament Hill, that's part and parcel of the challenges that online digital media presents to an evolving era of information consumption in how we get news, media sources and information today, and how we absorb that. How much do we question it? How prevalent is it in our lives?

It's really important for us to think about that and to think through how we combat that ubiquitous kind of foreign interference. We have to be asking ourselves at every step along the way what the truth is and what is factual about how this is done. How is it being adopted by Canadians? To what degree are people buying into it? To what degree is it impacting their behaviour?

There is some good news in this report, and there's some bad news. There's some good news in relation to foreign attempts at election interference when it comes to misinformation, which is probably the vast majority of the attempts at foreign interference in our elections. It really came through misinformation online.

I think that's fair to say. I'm not a national security and intelligence expert, but if we read through the reports and information, I think there's a lot of work to be done in this area, at the very least. It is certainly something that has been documented over and over again, the changing threat environment that we need to be responding to. It continues to evolve very quickly.

One of the other things that they outline at the very beginning of this report is the vulnerabilities that we have as a Canadian society. One of them is what they call “A fracturing of the Canadian information ecosystem”. I'll quote this, because it's probably better said by them than by me. They said:

Canadians are increasingly obtaining their political information from a range of untrustworthy sources. There is an increasing danger of echo chambers or filter bubbles where people will mostly be exposed to information that supports their existing worldview and/or promotes a narrow political view.

This is one of the big vulnerabilities. We've talked about algorithmic transparency and the need to understand how the algorithms that social media companies utilize are feeding people information based on their preferences, and how that can take them down the path to becoming more polarized and potentially having more extreme views that coincide with their overall world view over time. That leads to heightened divisions within Canadian society and less tolerance for sitting down and talking through our differences and really respecting and appreciating the perspectives of others.

One of the other vulnerabilities that is mentioned is “Increasing difficulties in detecting disinformation and coordinated information operations”. What's interesting is that it's hard to detect. The report says:

The rise of platforms focused on privacy that exercise minimal moderation has led to a more vibrant and chaotic environment that can provide opportunities for those seeking to mislead, misinform, or manipulate.

That is another aspect of this that we need to take quite seriously. It's difficult to detect. It's becoming easier and easier to mislead and manipulate that information.

One of the other vulnerabilities was a “gap between the reality and perceptions of mis- and disinformation”. This one's quite concerning as well. This is probably true for our foreign adversaries who are attempting to mislead and misinform the Canadian public, whether during elections or outside of election periods. Many times we've heard our members say this. I'm sure we all acknowledge it. Their intentions are to draw out of us and sow the seeds of division so that our society becomes less trusting, more chaotic, more extreme and more polarized. It really erodes the fabric of our democracy.

This is one of the gaps they mention in this report. It is that over time, in a way, we're sowing the seeds of distrust of all information sources. It doesn't matter whether you're a politician, a journalist or an online platform. Wherever people are getting information, they're able to say, “I don't really trust that.”

How do they really know whether something is truthful or not? Over time, it's shifting. I was happy to hear that the findings in this report still showed that Canadians were generally able to discern what's truthful and what's not, but I think that is changing. There are more and more Canadians who are consuming misinformation and not necessarily identifying it as false or being able to pull out the pieces of falsehood from information that is combined with some truth. You cloak your lies in truth, or the opposite.

It reminds me of my philosophy course called “Truth and Propaganda” when I studied at Carleton. Randal Marlin from Ottawa taught us about truth and propaganda. I won't get into that.

The other thing is the emerging distrust in Canadian democratic institutions. This is another vulnerability that was highlighted in this report. It's pretty significant. They link that with individuals who have really tried to use the pandemic to sow the seeds of distrust. They say there is a growing number of individuals who no longer share the same factual reality as the majority of Canadians do. To me, that's really scary. It's scary, because there's a growing percentage of the population that doesn't share in the factual reality of the majority of Canadians. If there was ever a symbol or sign that we should be concerned, that, to me, is it.

I would say that, if democracy is about anything, it's about the pursuit of truth. It's amazing that in terms of our work here on this committee we're not taking more seriously the threat of misinformation online. It would be great to do some more in-depth work on that.

I'll go to another section here. I think it's important to note a few things that are really helpful for our work. I feel they are important and that they relate to why we would have a campaign director component to this and have the national campaign managers come before this committee.

One of the summary notes on the global context, which is one of the chapters in this report, is that “The tactics used by large-scale, foreign influence and disinformation operations have increasingly been employed by non-state actors including hate groups, extremist organizations, and populist political parties.” That's really interesting, because one of the big summary points, conclusions or findings is about non-state actors using disinformation. Foreign influence

isn't just about state actors. It's about non-state actors as well, which is interesting.

I think we should also be looking at that in our study, in our work, which is to say that if information is coming from foreign sources by non-state actors and that information is being picked up and spread in Canada within our elections process, that potentially has an impact on Canadians. Again, I'm going to call into question how much of an impact that has on Canadian voters' behaviour and intentions. I think there's some interesting data in this report on how much misinformation coming from China had an impact on the voting intentions of voters, even in the ridings that individuals are saying were impacted. It's interesting to look at what this independent report says about that, and there are some really interesting findings there. I'll get to that in a few minutes, but I think it will be eye-opening for a lot of us.

There's another finding here from the summary that says, “Disinformation tactics are no longer simply the dissemination of ‘fake news’ stories by easily identifiable bot networks. They now include more subtle manipulation of pre-existing polarized issues, such as immigration, equity-advancing policies, climate change, and LGBTQ+ rights.” It's interesting that the issues that are already polarizing are the ones that these disinformation tactics and campaigns seem to centre around. If you were a foreign actor, what would you do to try to disrupt Canadian democracy? You'd focus on the more contentious issues and try to amplify the amount of discord in the Canadian public over those issues.

It's interesting that those are some of the tactics that are being used, again, by Conservative members making this a partisan activity. They're playing right into the hands of our foreign adversaries. They're essentially sowing seeds of distrust in our democratic institutions by doing that. They're pushing that narrative and claiming all kinds of untrue things and then having the public start to....

This is a tactic. It's a tactic straight out of the playbook of our foreign adversaries, and I don't know why they would perpetuate that. It doesn't make any sense to me that they would take that approach when we're all sitting here as rational human beings and saying, “Let's do what makes sense and what all the intelligence experts and advisers are telling us, and what many Conservative senators, former senators and their national campaign manager have said.” The former director of CSIS Ward Elcock has said the same thing.

I don't understand why they're continuing to call us back to this committee over and over again to debate something that is so clearly a rational approach, which they just don't want to admit, for whatever reason. The only conclusion I could draw is that political gamesmanship is more important to them than doing real work on this issue. Obviously, to do that, they would have to admit the factual reality that our government has done more on election interference than any previous government, as far as I can tell.

That's another example of how they're not living in the factual reality most Canadians are living in, which is something we've seen quite a number of times, from the denial that climate change is real to.... There are many other examples. I won't get into all of those.

I think the fact that disinformation campaigns are exploiting those polarizing issues is quite concerning, as well. We should be looking at that—at how misinformation wraps around, gravitates to, or is really heightened during times when Canadians are focused on big, polarizing issues.

It's also important to note that one of the big challenges they identified was the accusation of election fraud in the United States in the 2020 presidential election, and just how much that sort of campaign seeped over the border, through our social media platforms, networks and chat groups, etc. That was present during our last federal election campaign.

They also note that Canada has, historically, been relatively resilient to misinformation and disinformation, and has adopted a series of measures to limit the spread of misinformation over past years. Again, this acknowledges the work our government has done, which I made mention of in my previous remarks. The Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online was adopted in 2019. All of the major social media platforms signed onto it. Well, it's not just social media platforms: Google, Microsoft, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, etc. all signed that declaration. Then, we updated it. Before the last election, it was signed again.

There was also quite a lot of awareness-raising around citizen preparedness. This included the digital citizen initiative, led by Canadian Heritage, which increased digital literacy skills, and a public awareness campaign called “get cyber safe”. There was also training for journalists and all political parties, etc. Again, no one can say our government isn't taking these threats seriously. I would say it has done some very significant things. One public awareness campaign reached over 12 million Canadians. That's pretty significant. No one can say reaching a third of the Canadian population isn't significant, in terms of its reach.

How much impact would an awareness campaign have on Canadians? Certainly, it would allow them to, perhaps, start to identify when they're seeing misinformation. Perhaps it even prevented some of the impacts of attempted election interference, both domestically and from foreign sources. We don't know that. It would be hard to establish a causal link, but it's certainly something we could look at. That's a lightning-bolt idea: How do we determine which awareness-raising and citizen-preparedness initiatives have had a positive impact on the Canadian public, in terms of being able to identify and pull apart a question...what is true and not true from what they're consuming online? That, to me, is a worthwhile pur-

suit, because we could then optimize our strategies and approach to have the greatest impact. To me, that's very rational.

Another thing was a section on Canadians' attitudes towards misinformation. There are some very important findings, here. I'll quote from this, briefly, then discuss why it's important:

Canadians perceive many common political phenomena as misinformation, from politicians exaggerating their promises to the publication of completely made-up stories by a media organization to [as extreme as] hate speech. There is significant ambiguity and politicization of the term.

That doesn't help, obviously. Politicizing misinformation as a term is going to create more challenges and exacerbate things, because what we really need to do is understand what it means and what it is, stick to a common definition and then educate the public around it. I would opt for that in terms of an approach.

Another finding in terms of the summary was that “[a]pproximately [one-]quarter of Canadians reported seeing misinformation during the campaign, while approximately 40% believed misinformation was a serious problem during the election”. That's interesting: A quarter of Canadians, or 25%, reported seeing misinformation and 40% believed it was a serious problem.

This is another finding: “A strong majority of Canadians believe that misinformation is a threat to Canadian democracy, [and] is polarizing Canadians and threatens social cohesion.” That's a strong majority, so there you go: A strong majority of Canadians believes that misinformation is a threat to Canadian democracy. I think that's a significant finding that demonstrates why in this work we should have a focus on misinformation and look at that seriously.

Here's another finding, which relates to the Conservative Party:

Supporters of right-wing parties (Conservative[s] and [the] People's Party) report higher levels of exposure to misinformation. However, they [do] not think of misinformation as a more serious problem during the election and tend to perceive misinformation as less threatening to democracy.

That is really interesting. In fact, the Conservatives and the People's Party, the right-wing parties...and this is not me saying this. I'm just quoting from this report, so don't get mad at the messenger here. What it says is that right-wing parties in general report “higher levels of exposure to misinformation”, which is interesting in itself, but then they don't see it as a serious problem, which is really interesting as well. Why would right-wing perspectives or people with those values...? I don't know what the answer is to that, but I find it an interesting finding in this very thorough work and research.

It brings up questions in my mind as to why, if the opposite of that is true—that left-leaning parties are less likely to consume or less likely to be exposed to misinformation but then see it as a greater threat to democracy—what does that mean? It's interesting. It might enable us to come to terms with some of the differences we have and maybe even highlight a way forward if we were to unpack that a little bit together. I'm not saying that we'll have the opportunity to do that, but I think that would be worthwhile.

It also states: "Canadians are largely in favour of content moderation but tend to believe that social media platforms and not governments should be making moderation and banning decisions." Interestingly, the Canadian public seems to want content moderation, but most of it should be done by social media platforms, which is kind of interesting as well.

Also, then, it states: "There are significant differences in perceptions of misinformation and support for content moderation across partisan lines, socio-demographic groups, and media consumption patterns." That's interesting as well.

There's lots more in here. There are some big aha moments. Maybe I will flip to those and give you some more important findings.

One is that as shown on page 23, they have done an interesting kind of experiment in taking four stories that are based on facts, four stories that are partially true or that they would consider misinformation—stories online—and then two stories that are completely fabricated, and then looking at the "exposure" of individuals and their perception of the "truthfulness" of those stories. It's interesting to compare those and see what the results are and what that tells us.

There are two or three findings from that piece of research that seem pretty interesting. "Conditional upon exposure to the story, factual stories were perceived as more truthful than misinformation stories both during the election...and post-election", so it's good news for us that stories that had misinformation in them were more likely to be perceived as false, and factual stories were more likely to be perceived as truthful.

"While exposure might increase the likelihood of believing that a story is true, exposure to the stories might also be driven by citizens' predispositions, with those denying the existence of climate change being more likely to be exposed to the climate lockdown story, for example", which is interesting.

This speaks to why algorithmic transparency or algorithms can be so impactful when you think about how often someone is exposed to a story that has misinformation in it. What it says is that if you're exposed once, you're likely to be able to determine that it is not true, but if you're exposed over and over again or if you have a specific predisposition to not believing in climate change for whatever reason, for example, and then you're exposed to a piece of misinformation like the one they document from MP Gallant, which is about climate lockdowns, you would now start to believe that over time.

This is important for us to understand. It's not just about one exposure; it's about the prevalence of this and how often you are exposed. We know even from marketing professionals and how marketing works that exposure to something over and over again even-

tually weakens your ability to determine that it's false and you become lulled into believing that something is true.

I think another really important quote or finding from this is that "a partial truth is perceived as more credible than completely false information". This is interesting because it suggests that there is a trickle.... I hope one of the points members take from my intervention today is that we should be looking at misinformation, but we should be looking at it not just during election campaigns, because what we need to understand is that there is a slow trickle of misinformation that is happening throughout our society every single day. When you mix partial truths with things that are not true, that is, predominantly, what misinformation is. Parts of the stories and the things that are being reported are actually true, but there is some exaggeration or there is a spin on something or there are things that are being drawn from what is truthful but they are actually false, so they're extrapolated and they are more prevalent. However, they're also more effective at lulling people into that false sense of security and getting them to let down their guard and just absorb that information passively and having it affect their world view.

What I read from this is that it's happening all the time. If we're to take foreign election interference seriously, we also have to be considering what happens outside of the writ period. We have to be considering what misinformation and disinformation is circulating out there and where it is coming from. I don't think it's easy to determine where it's coming from all the time. We heard from security and intelligence professionals who came before us that it's not always easy to determine where information is actually originating when it comes to online sources.

I have covered that and I think that's important.

Here is another really big important finding.

What's interesting is that the highest volume of misinformation in the last election, generally speaking, was on Twitter. It's the highest volume of discussion of misinformation, because people are commenting more, and engaging more with misinformation on Twitter.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** We have a point of order by Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'm not calling relevance, because this is very relevant, and it's great. I apologize for interrupting my colleague, but I believe there is a member of Parliament, Ms. Jennifer O'Connell, who needs to be made a participant. She's waiting for that to occur, so she can join the meeting.

**The Chair:** That was very important. We don't know what happened, but we will look into that.

Ms. O'Connell, welcome to committee.

Mr. Turnbull, the floor is back to you.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. It's no problem at all that my colleague intervened there. I'm glad that MP O'Connell is joining us. I know she'll have a lot to offer on this important conversation.

I was just about to cover a few other findings of this misinformation and disinformation report that was done by the Media Ecosystem Observatory and that I think are really interesting. They did a comparison of the volume of misinformation related to the 2019 election and the 2021 election. Their analysis was based on 166,000 stories pulled from 159 Canadian media outlets that posted articles to their Facebook page. They did a seven-day rolling average. The graphs show that in 2019 the number of mentions and spread of misinformation and the volume of related discussions was much higher than in 2021.

That's interesting, right? It seems that this topic is coming up in our discussions now, and what's interesting is that it didn't come up as much after the 2019 election. We could talk about that in terms of why the 44th Canadian federal election had less misinformation and less discussion about it on average than the previous election. I think that's kind of an interesting question to ask ourselves: Why? I would have anticipated, based on all the opposition's focus on foreign election interference, that you would see...and the fact that most of foreign election interference is probably misinformation and disinformation online. I think it's interesting to compare and contrast the two elections.

There's another thing that I think is important in terms of the summary, which said, "Misinformation related to the election and to COVID-19 was detected on all social media platforms examined." As well, "Despite more assertive moderation and election integrity policies, large social media platforms continued to be home to widespread misinformation." What's funny is that when I was reading this report, I didn't realize that this was actually the direct quote from Morris Rosenberg's report, where he cites that exact finding. It's a signal to us and to the Canadian public in terms of that public report that we need to do more thinking and more work on the prevalence of misinformation. As the threat environment evolves, misinformation needs to be an area of focus for us in terms of our work in preventing foreign interference in future elections.

Here's another important finding: "The strong link between misinformation and social media has been well documented in recent years." I mean, they don't talk about just one social media platform. They really talk about Facebook as being by far the most-used social media platform, at 79% of the population, followed by YouTube at 61% of the population, Twitter at 35%, Reddit at 14% and then TikTok at 14%. All those findings are really interesting. I thought it was also interesting that more than 60% of Canadians aged 18 to 34 report that they are using Facebook or Instagram as a source of political news, as compared with only 20% of those 65 or older.

What do we take from all this? I think we know, but I think it's important for us to ask these questions in our work.

Here's another finding: "Social media use is also strongly associated with whether individuals believed misinformation stories." That is really interesting. They found a direct correlation between how much you use social media and how much you believe misinformation stories or stories that include misinformation.

There are many examples of this. I note that some of the mainstream social media platforms have made attempts to limit the spread of misinformation online, and some of them have done a reversal on that in recent months as well.

Another really important factor in all of this is that there are niche social media platforms. They mention platforms that include Rumble, Gab, Gettr, 4chan, Telegram, Audacy, Discord, Substack, Locals, BitChute. I've never been on any one of those, but I think there's this concept that there are other niche social media platforms that are playing a part in many of the.... What they say is many of the individuals who seem to be predisposed to wanting to consume this information, who are getting hooked, are now moving to these other niche social media platforms. That's where a lot of this misinformation can circulate more readily and without any sort of regulation because they're contained and not as open, which is also scary.

You can see that perhaps this sort of movement to radicalization or polarization of the Canadian public and their views can be further brought to extremes by cordoning off, going into these other chat groups and social media platforms that are niche. That's, to me, quite scary as well.

Probably the most important part of this report, I would say, is chapter 7, on "Disinformation and Foreign Influence". This one I'll spend considerable time on because it really flies in the face of some of the things that have been said at this committee in terms of some of the perceptions or opinions of members. I think it's important for us to spell some of this out. I think it has again a direct impact on whether we ask campaign directors or managers to come before the committee, which is what I had proposed, so it's directly relevant to the amendment that I put forward.

The first finding here is, "A majority of Canadians are somewhat or very confident that Canadian elections are free from foreign interference. Canadians believe that China is the country most likely to have interfered in the election."

That's I think consistent with what we've heard, and why we're all here talking about this. It is pretty important as a finding. Again, it couples the fact that Canadians have confidence in our elections and then also that Canadians believe that China is most likely the country that would have interfered in the election, which is interesting.

Another finding is, “Chinese officials and state media commented on the election with an apparent aim to convince Canadians of Chinese origin to vote against the Conservative Party.”

That's clear. So misinformation coming from state media, Chinese-sponsored state media, did try to encourage voters to...so that's wrong, that's 100% wrong. We should be cracking down on that. Again, it's another reason why I take this so seriously.

However, I think the latter part of that finding is “However, we find no evidence that Chinese interference had a significant impact on the overall election.” They also say, “We cannot fully discount the possibility that some riding-level contests were influenced.”

This is important.

This is an independent report that suggests that there were attempts at interference through state-sponsored misinformation campaigns, and we have that. The Rosenberg report includes examples of that. It's in this report.

What's interesting is that we can dive into this topic. There are some really key findings here, and I think we should know about how that was done and what impact it might have had or might not have had.

Why are these experts, again, all lining up and saying the same thing? Why is the previous Conservative campaign manager saying, without a shadow of a doubt, that there was no impact on the federal election results from 2021? Why are they all saying the same thing? All the experts are saying the same thing, yet we all know that there were attempts at interference, that there were misinformation campaigns put out there and that they did attempt to interfere. No one's denying that. No one has ever denied that. No one will deny that, yet we need to take it seriously and do the work associated with this.

In a recent media article, Ward Elcock said, “Chinese interference is not news.” He is a former CSIS director. To paraphrase him, he says that this is not the big media story that it should be because it's been around for a long time. That's what we've been saying all throughout our committee's work on this topic.

Ms. O'Connell has said that. I've said that. There are many members of this committee who have said that. For whatever reason, the Conservatives just woke up now to this and want to make a media story out of it for their political advantage. That's why they want to continue this charade, when we want to get down to work on the real issues. It's really too bad.

Here's another important quote: “...those who frequently consume political news on social media are less likely to believe that our elections are safe.” I found that really interesting. The more you consume political news online or through social media sources, the more distrust you have for our system, which is interesting as well. It shows a direct correlation, and they've done the research to determine that result.

Another finding is that “Canadians are critical of foreign propaganda, with 78% considering that it is either quite harmful...or very harmful...for democracy.” Canadians are agreed that foreign propaganda or misinformation will have a harmful impact on our democracy. I think that's important.

They cite examples of specific Chinese language social media and Chinese language platforms. They've found that the largest amount was confined to a single platform, which was WeChat, which is where there are several views that were presented during the election campaign that could have had an impact on voter intentions.

What's interesting, though, is that they looked at Chinese state-affiliated social media accounts. They say, “...we evaluated known Chinese state-affiliated social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter to assess the extent to which they were commenting and potentially influencing the election.”

They used publicly available lists of Twitter accounts and others, and they yielded a total of 29 Twitter accounts and 17 Facebook pages. Of the 4,094 unique articles that were shared on Facebook pages since the beginning of the 2021 election, only 33 mentioned Canada, the Canadian election or Canadian Chinese issues. That's 0.8%, so less than 1% mentioned Canada, the Canadian election or Canadian Chinese issues.

On Twitter, out of 32,317 tweets shared by Chinese state media accounts, only 261 mentioned Canada, the Canadian election or Canadian-Chinese issues. Again, that's 0.8%, which is interesting in itself. Out of all of the information that was shared, just a fraction, less than 1%, was on the state-affiliated social media accounts.

The information they were sharing during the election was less than 1% on Facebook and Twitter, which are the two main sources of political information, and where people comment. Less than 1% made any reference to Canada, the Canadian election, or Canadian-Chinese issues. That's interesting in itself.

Then it says, and this is really important, “When Canada was referenced, it was almost always in relation to Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou and the cases of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig.” That's also interesting.

What's interesting is that the vast majority of misinformation shared online by state-affiliated social media accounts from the Chinese government can be directly linked in some way. Out of all of this, a very small fraction, less than 1%, related to the Canadian federal election, or to Canadian-Chinese issues at all, and almost all of that was then focused on Huawei's executive and the two Michaels. That's really interesting to me. It suggests quite a different focus from what the Conservatives have said.

Again, this report documents very clearly that there were members of different parties who were targeted, and that there was misinformation online. There's no doubt about that. There's no denying that. We have examples that are documented in this report.

What's interesting, though, is that of all the social media platforms that the majority of Canadians use for political information, i.e., Facebook and Twitter, when doing the analysis....Most of the information that was being shared, or articles that were being shared, a lot of it, 99% of it, did not focus on the Canadian election, for one. The portion that did focus on the Canadian election was almost exclusively focused on Huawei's executive and the two Michaels.

Remember, the two Michaels came back to Canada four days after the federal election. That's also interesting to note. At the time, there was tension between Canada and China, and pressure to get those two Michaels back, of course, because we all wanted them back. What they went through was just horrifying.

Was this a positive thing? Did the information somehow skew voters? This isn't even documented as misinformation. These are just the articles that were shared. The specific instances of misinformation related to some of the views that....

They're documented here. They stated, "Notably, anti-Conservative mentions and articles increased, and a set of false or misleading claims and narratives emerged; the CPC would sever diplomatic relations with China once it takes power; CPC politicians were targeting Chinese Canadians for political gain; the CPC does not care about anti-Chinese discrimination; and all ethnic Chinese with ties to China would be required to register as foreign agents." These were views shared by the Chinese language social media during the campaign.

No one has ever denied that it's true, that it's not right and that it should be stopped.

Are the Conservatives opting to regulate social media companies to prevent disinformation that targets candidates of all political parties? I've never heard them say that once. They've never acknowledged that most of the information was spread through online platforms and that, perhaps, we should be looking at further regulation in order to deal with the misinformation and disinformation that circulate online and that may impact voter intentions. I haven't heard them say that. It's interesting.

Another finding that's here is, "We find that, overall, Chinese state media tends to get far more interactions on Facebook." That's interesting, too. That the Chinese state media tends to get more interactions on Facebook means they're targeting Facebook more often, because they probably know it's more effective and it's going to get more engagement.

Here's a big finding that I think will shock everybody.

They did a major look at engagement on Facebook and Twitter posts by Chinese state-affiliated social media accounts during the Canadian federal election of 2021. They looked at engagement across both platforms. What's interesting is they said they observed "no substantive differences in engagement between Canada-related content and other content." This tells me that Chinese state-affiliated social media content that was pumped out on Twitter and Facebook did not have more engagement than any other social media content. That's a really important finding for us. When you think about how disinformation and misinformation coming from state-sponsored actors, specifically China, impacted voter intentions and

voter behaviour...it didn't get any more engagement. That is what this report independently concludes. That's interesting.

There are some other findings here that are interesting, too.

This is an assumption, but I would say it a true assumption. If there were the true intention of the Chinese government to influence voter behaviour—and I'm not saying they didn't have that intention, but I'm assuming that if they did that—they would have tried to amplify content on social media around the election period. What's interesting is this report suggests there was minimal spread. In fact, the finding is, "Overall, we find no evidence that content produced by these or other Chinese state media were amplified during the election and their limited spread appears organic." That information spread online, but it wasn't amplified.

We've often talked about bots on Twitter, etc., and how they're in campaigns that try to spread that information online. They're not organically spreading it; actual people are sharing it. That's a really interesting finding, too. Not only did that shared content not get more engagement, it also didn't get amplified superficially using a subversive strategy to try to amplify that. That's an interesting finding, too.

Again, this is not me saying this. I'm looking at this independent report done by researchers across Canadian institutions as reputable as McGill University and the University of Toronto. They have done this independent research and review of the 2021 election and are making these observations and conclusions based on their research. I trust that they have no political motivations.

Again, it comes back to the point that, over and over again, the Conservative Party wants to pursue this for political gain.

We want to do the work based on reality, evidence, science, facts and information to make our country and our democracy better, safer and, essentially, to protect it from the threat of foreign interference. It really is, truly, a threat that we take seriously.

The next section is even more telling for me. It's the section called "Evaluating impact". It evaluates the impact of foreign interference in the federal election in 2021, related to misinformation and disinformation through online campaigns.

I would like to share a couple of findings on that, which I think are really important. Here is the big one: "If it is these Chinese Canadian voters who shifted against the Conservative Party, it should be detectable in the survey data. We evaluated whether Chinese Canadians switched their vote intentions or changed their evaluations of the Conservative Party using survey data collected during the campaign and just after election."

"We compared Chinese Canadians' vote intentions during the first two weeks of the campaign to their vote intentions during the last two weeks, with the results in figure 22." I can't hold it up because it would be a prop, but you can look at the report yourself.

“The two left panels show that there was no change among Chinese Canadians from the first two weeks to the last two weeks for overall evaluation of either the Conservative Party of Canada or Erin O’Toole specifically. The third panel shows that there was no shift in intention to vote for the CPC among Chinese Canadians between those surveyed during the first two weeks and those surveyed during the last two weeks of the campaign.”

Again, there is another graph in figure 22. “The far right panel shows self-reported vote for the Conservative Party among Chinese Canadians which closely resembles stated vote intention the pre-election period.”

To me, this is a “wow”, because this is one question I’ve had in my mind since we started this study. To what degree can we honestly say this happened? The misinformation that we know happened during the 2021 election, which circulated online although a very small amount, was a sliver of information that spread organically, it was not amplified and it did not impact voter intentions or voter behaviour. There is no evidence of that. It was independently verified by researchers at universities across the country.

In fact, remember what I said: It was less than in 2019, and it was 1% of all the state-sponsored articles that were shared on social media. Less than 1% related to Canadians. The vast majority of the articles and information were related to the Huawei executive and the two Michaels.

The reason our security and intelligence experts are saying this over and over and over again is because it’s true—

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I’m sorry. I was getting a little amplified there. My apologies.

**The Chair:** I appreciate your noticing that. What happens is the interpreters get to hear that amplification, exponentially.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I’m sorry about that. You’re right.

**The Chair:** I appreciate it, because it is a very serious issue.

The points you are raising are welcome, so I’m going to give you back the floor and remind us all about that.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I’m very sorry about that. I hope I didn’t cause the interpreters any discomfort or injury. That was never my intention. I got a little carried away, there. It’s probably from sitting through the many hours of this committee and doing all this research. I apologize.

I keep coming back to this point: The truth really does matter in our democracy. What we’ve seen is, these misinformation campaigns have an impact. They are a real threat. We need to be evolving our approaches and strategies to combat them.

In this particular case—where we have Conservatives claiming things that are, quite frankly, not verifiable or corroborated by any evidence—we have to be very careful and cautious. We have to hone in on the key questions, here. Are these misinformation campaigns having an impact on Chinese Canadian voters’ intentions, as has been claimed?

I think the answer in this report, again, is another corroborating piece of evidence, in addition to expert testimony. They came to the same conclusions through independent means. When you have multiple pursuits that are independent of political influence coming to the same conclusion, you have to go, “Okay, maybe those are approximating the truth pretty closely.”

That’s the conclusion I’m drawing from all of this, which I think is quite rational. I pride myself on operating on the principle of sufficient reason, which is this test: If you say something that conflicts with my world view, argument or position on something, and I think it has merit—even if it has partial truth—I will take it into consideration. I will try to understand how I can benefit from that and change my perspective based on that. In this particular case, however, I feel as if opposition parties are just denying the facts. They’re saying, “No, we’re going to believe the allegations flying around and not look at the facts and information.” That’s why I’m very animated about this, Madam Chair.

It’s a shame that it’s in my constituency week. It’s not that I’m opposed to doing great work on behalf of Canadians in a constituency week. I would be doing that whether we were in this committee or not. It’s just that I’m diving into extensive reports on this topic during a constituency week. I would rather—as Ms. Blaney said, the other day—be meeting with my constituents. I feel they are very important to meet with. I’ve had to cancel meetings for the day. All of that is fine. If opposition members would rather do this, then it’s fine. I will continue to bring facts and information to this conversation. My arguments will be based on that.

I’m going to get back to this report. There are a few other findings, here, that I want to share. I think they’re important ones.

Another key finding, on page 66 of this report, is that, “Canadian voters do not consider China to be a top electoral issue during the 44th Canadian election.” They did an analysis of all the federal election issues. China, or foreign affairs related to China, was not one of the top issues in the last election. Again, it’s not me saying this. It’s an independent report that surveyed all the different issues. I think it’s interesting to conclude that. People are claiming things like, “This had an impact on the election”. We’ve had some extreme cases and claims made by Conservative members of Parliament and the leader of the official opposition related to this.

Other times, we’ve had more, I would say, benign claims that it’s going on. Again, the argument is this. If independently verified groups have done work to say that China and foreign affairs related to China weren’t a top election issue and we can also see that the relative response and engagement of the online misinformation campaigns that were state-sponsored had no verifiable impact at all on voter intentions or behaviour and were a very small slice of what was happening during the election, then why would anyone ever try to claim that somehow the overall election results were changed as a result of foreign interference, when we know that the vast majority of it was online? That, to me, goes to the heart of some of the arguments and perspectives that we’ve heard.

Another finding: “We see no evidence that China-related issues were consequential for the election, nor that the content circulated on social media had any influence on opinions at a national level.” That’s another pretty telling conclusion, which I think speaks volumes to how disappointing it is that we’re continuing to do this.

Finally, maybe I’ll just quickly summarize some of the recommendations. I think there is some real importance to these, and there are only four. Bear with me for a few more minutes and I will wrap up by summarizing these conclusions.

One of them is to develop a community of practice focused on tackling misinformation in Canada. This is the type of recommendation that I would put a lot of weight into and say, yes, this is something the PROC committee could be recommending. It’s something that probably coincides with some of what we’ve heard from the experts in this committee. This relates to that fracturing of the information ecosystem that I talked about at the beginning, which is one of the key vulnerabilities.

If you developed a community of practice that includes government bodies, researchers, media organizations and civil society organizations all working together, that would really help combat that fracture in the information ecosystem. In other words, that coalition or the community of practice, which would share best practices, could really leverage all of the expertise and the reference points and perspectives that people have in order to enhance our ability to tackle this in a really comprehensive way. That, to me, is a really solid recommendation. I think we should heed that advice from these professionals and recommend that in our future report.

Another one is to engage in strategic countering of misinformation. I found this one really interesting as well, because the focus here is on strategic. I think they’ve concluded throughout this report that there are certain things that spread and have more influence than others, and there are certain segments of the population that are, perhaps, more vulnerable or more predisposed. There are social media platforms that are targeting information based on critical issues, based on polarizing issues. There’s the amount of exposure one has. There are a whole bunch of factors, and I don’t think they are saying that a spike in misinformation during the election period is the biggest threat. I think they’re actually saying the biggest threat is the ongoing ubiquitous nature of misinformation throughout Canadian society, which is being consumed every single day and polarizing the views of our population over time.

To me, both of those kinds of observations would require us to be very strategic about where to focus resources. What’s having the most impact on Canadians and what is the biggest threat to Canadian democracy and our electoral process? To me, I think that is another really worthwhile recommendation.

The third one is, “Increase public resilience to misinformation”. I think this is one that our government has done considerable work on, but I think we could certainly benefit from a lot more. This, again, is that public awareness piece, the digital literacy skill building of the public to be able to identify misinformation when they see it, which is not easy. I, myself, have moments in my political career where I’m looking at information online and wondering if I should I really share it. Is that a view that...? I don’t know. It’s questionable. We need to be promoting that critical lens.

There are a whole bunch of aspects of developing public resilience to misinformation that I think we could do. There are some more specifics in this report.

Lastly, the fourth recommendation is, “Extend initiatives to limit and counter misinformation to non-election periods”. This is something Morris Rosenberg had mentioned in his report. He basically says that we should be looking at foreign interference outside of the caretaker period during the writ. Outside of elections, we should be monitoring and tackling this stuff.

I would say the government has been doing that, but I think we need to step it up. Based on these conversations, I think we could probably all agree that we should be doing that. I think there’s a lot of opportunity there to dig in deeper. Outside of election periods, we could look at all the misinformation that’s being circulated.

Here’s another quote: “The threat to democracy may lie more in the slow, steady erosion of factual agreement, institutional trust, and social cohesion than in a flurry of election activity.” I think that’s where we need to focus. That’s the true threat to Canadian democracy. It’s not just during election times.

I’m not saying we shouldn’t be monitoring and doing all we can to prevent foreign interference during election times, but we have set up the processes for doing that and they are working. Could they be improved? Yes. I think we have said that from day one. We’re open to that and all of us, I think, take that responsibility very seriously.

I think it involves continuing to adapt our efforts and include more strategies that will work and tactics that are better suited to that evolving threat environment. That includes non-election periods. That would be now. We should be monitoring and trying to combat misinformation online all of the time.

There are some specific recommendations here. One of them is, “Governing bodies may also wish to examine whether a regulatory regime in place during elections should be broadened to cover non-election periods, including but not limited to ad transparency, algorithmic audits, and limits on the use of foreign funds for advertising and partisan activities.”

Our government has done work on that.

Again, I'm not saying we can't improve things, if there are additional things we can do. We should look at those. Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act, prohibits third parties from using foreign funds for partisan advertising, and prohibits foreign entities from spending on partisan advertising both during the pre-election period and during the election period. It requires online platforms to publish a registry of partisan advertising. There are significant things we've already done on foreign funds for advertising for partisan purposes. The algorithmic audits and algorithmic transparency are things we've been talking about, and government has had quite a few conversations about them in open forums. I've gone to several events to talk about that with colleagues and debate that topic, and we could be looking at that.

There's lots to do, and there's a lot of benefit to working together, but I don't see how we get past the impasse we're at when opposition members won't agree to being fact-based, and look at the reality of what the government has done, and also look at the independent reports that are corroborating some of the big findings we have all heard now over and over again. It's not as if people can claim they haven't heard, or they didn't know, when they're going out saying misleading things. They know there is credible evidence of all the things our government has done to combat foreign election interference.

We've heard from the national security and intelligence community about all of the independent mechanisms. It said the last two elections were free and fair. We've heard all of this corroborated in multiple ways. The things that are being claimed are just, you know...It calls them into question. It's really disappointing, when you feel, as a member of Parliament, you're putting your best foot forward and want to do good, meaningful work for the benefit of the public, and we end up having to play partisan games. We're roped into it in a constituency week, when we should be with our constituents. I'm sure many of us would rather be working in our communities, meeting with our constituents today.

I'm happy to talk about this, and I have lots more to say. I have quite a few other really substantive reports that corroborate what we've heard from all of the experts, both the folks on the panel, the critical election incident public protocol, and all of the national security and intelligence experts. We've had it mentioned again by Conservative senators, and the former Conservative campaign manager from the last election. We've heard it from the former CSIS director. We've heard it over and over again. Hopefully, we can base ourselves in some factual information, move forward with this study, and get wrapped up with some really solid recommendations that the government can use to protect our democracy from these very serious threats.

With that, Madam Chair, I will wrap up here, and cede the floor.

I look forward to hearing from my esteemed colleagues.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

For the purpose of everyone knowing who's on the list, it's Mr. Fergus, Ms. Blaney, Mr. Barrett, Ms. Normandin and Ms. O'Connell.

Mr. Fergus, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will once again quote the "Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar", but this time, I will go back to the beginning of the report, specifically the part where Justice O'Connor talks about a misperception that was widespread at that time. It is important not to say things that are false. We have to proceed very cautiously in conducting an inquiry and not rely on information that is not sound, so to speak.

The current debate, which is bogging down the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, was sparked by the *Global News* report, based on information from a supposedly certain source, a person who works for an intelligence agency. We have to be careful though because we don't know if that person works for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. If they do, they have broken the law.

We don't know if that person has the full picture. I seriously doubt that they had access to the analyses on which the intelligence agencies base their work. The testimony from intelligence and national security officials makes me doubt that.

Another thing that makes me very cautious is that the officials said it was partial or inaccurate information. They expressed their doubts about the veracity of the information. Yet, people still want an inquiry into this.

My colleagues opposite are asking why I am so reluctant. They are saying that if everyone is innocent and everything is in order, I have nothing to fear. Yet, we are in the process of changing everything.

We are elected officials, and our privileges by far exceed the burden of proof that prevails in courts of law. We have privileges that no one else in Canada has. In my opinion, having those privileges requires us to be very thoughtful. It is a tremendous responsibility to trigger a process that can damage the reputation of other Canadians, if not of an entire community.

That is why I am reluctant to pursue that avenue, but it is also because I have access to relevant information, as everyone around the table does. We have seen this kind of thing before. It was between 2002 and 2006, in the Maher Arar case. I think it is entirely appropriate to consider the inquiry conducted by Justice Dennis O'Connor, to read his "Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar", and to examine the key points in our current situation.

I assume that my colleagues are in good faith, and I hope they will exercise good judgment and show restraint before embarking on an inquiry that could hurt the reputation of a number of individuals, including that of an elected colleague.

I would ask the interpreters to refer to part 3.4 of the “Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar, Analysis and Recommendations”.

In this part, we see how Justice O'Connor arrived at his conclusions. He gives an overview of his conclusions. He talks about Maher Arar and the right not to be subjected to torture. He talks about the sequence of events, such as Mr. Arar's detention in New York and his being sent to Syria. He talks about Mr. Arar's incarceration and the mistreatment he suffered in Syria. Saying he was mistreated is a euphemism because he was in fact tortured. Justice O'Connor does not mince words in presenting his conclusions.

If that were the end of it, that would already be a parody of justice, but the truly horrible part is that leaks of false information persisted after Mr. Arar's return—relating not only to Mr. Arar, but also to two other individuals who were involved—and even during Justice O'Connor's inquiry.

It is beyond me that all this happened. Justice O'Connor had many recommendations to make. It is in our general interest to remain aware of this information.

The part of the report I want to quote is the overview Judge O'Connor gave of the misperceptions regarding Mr. Arar.

At the beginning of the Inquiry, many people within government and likely some members of the public believed that Mr. Arar had not been tortured while in Syria and that he had voluntarily admitted links to terrorist activities.

It is instructive and disturbing to trace how this misunderstanding grew. Let me recount a few of the milestones. After the Canadian consul first visited Mr. Arar in Syrian custody on October 23, 2002, it should have been apparent that Mr. Arar had likely been tortured in the preceding two weeks.

This is rather serious. Mr. Arar was tortured for two weeks and incarcerated for over a year. I will continue reading the report:

Some Canadian officials, including Gar Parly, Director General of Consular Affairs at DFAIT, operated on that assumption. However, others did not, saying they required more evidence.

At the beginning of November 2002, the Syrian Military Intelligence gave Canada's ambassador a brief summary of a statement Mr. Arar had apparently given Syrian authorities during his first two weeks in custody. In that statement, Mr. Arar had said that he had attended a training camp in Afghanistan in 1993. DFAIT distributed the statement to the RCMP and CSIS without attaching a note cautioning that it was likely the product of torture and that, even if true, the admission was of doubtful significance for establishing terrorist links.

This part is very important. It comes down to highlighting the importance of setting the context. In leaks to newspapers from an anonymous source, there was no warning. What did our national security and intelligence experts tell us? Every time they received a bit of information or heard a rumour, they put it in context.

We may sometimes think that information is coming from a reliable source. We could then think that it is true. Others will say that it is coming from an unreliable source; that we should not give it too much importance. That's how this is presented to us, because it's information that was passed along on the ground. However, there's no context around it.

There is a fine expression: "A text without context is pretext." It means that a text unsupported by verified information serves as a pretext to justify a hasty conclusion or a baseless one. That is exactly what happened to Mr. Arar. We have to be cautious with everything we are doing, because if we continue this inquiry without

knowing the context, it means we are here only to prove a point, that we've drawn a conclusion without evidence to support it. It makes no sense to act this way.

I will continue by quoting another passage in the report on the events surrounding Mr. Arar:

In late April 2003, a briefing note to the RCMP Commissioner indicated that Mr. Arar had “volunteered” to Syrian authorities that he had attended a training camp in Afghanistan in 1993, the implication being that he might have terrorist links.

What was this information based on? Once again, it was determined to be completely false.

In July 2003, the Syrian Human Rights Committee published a report saying Mr. Arar had been tortured while in Syrian custody. The Canadian consul visited Mr. Arar on August 14, 2003. Syrian officials were present throughout the visit, and Mr. Arar, who was anxiously hoping to be released, was very careful about what he said in front of them, indicating that the truth would come out when he returned to Canada. He also stated that he had not been tortured, beaten or paralyzed. Understandably, the consul was sceptical of this last comment, given the circumstances in which it was made.

Finally, we have a bit of context. When surrounded by people who are torturing us, it's very unlikely that we will tell the truth, isn't it? That is the reason for which the courts do not accept testimony from someone subjected to violence.

These are fruits of the poisonous tree. We should always remember that.

I will continue reading the report.

Later the same day, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs made a public statement about the consular visit. He had not been properly briefed. He indicated that, during an “independent” visit, Mr. Arar had confirmed that he had not been tortured. This statement created an inaccurate picture, as the visit had not been independent. Syrian officials had been present throughout. Moreover, the Minister made no reference to the need to view Mr. Arar's statement about not being tortured with scepticism.

If an MP or citizen had heard the minister tell such a story without specifying that Mr. Arar was not alone when he made his statement, the minister would surely have been told that Mr. Arar would have had to be alone when making that statement. Indeed, if the people who illegally detained Mr. Arar for nine or 10 months were present, I would not have expected Mr. Arar to tell the truth. Everyone knows that doesn't make any sense.

I will continue:

When Mr. Arar was released on October 5, 2003, he flew back to Canada with the Canadian consul. He gave the consul some details about his ordeal, stating that he had been beaten on occasion during the first two weeks of his detention. The consul reported his conversations to other officials at DFAIT a few days later. However, subsequently, in memoranda, he reported that Mr. Arar had said that he had not been beaten. No mention was made of the statements Mr. Arar had made on the plane trip back to Canada.

Mr. Arar first spoke publicly of what had happened to him in early November 2003. He described how he had been beaten during the first two weeks of his imprisonment and had given the Syrians a statement. Although somewhat more detailed, the description was consistent with what he had said on the plane. Professor Toope found Mr. Arar's description completely credible.

In the months following Mr. Arar's release, there were a number of leaks from unnamed government sources indicating that Mr. Arar had admitted to having terrorist links in Syria and stating that he was not a "nice guy" or a "virgin," as would be seen when the truth came out.

It is fair to assume that some government officials and members of the public had the impression that Mr. Arar had admitted to having connections to terrorist activities and they formed a negative impression of him. If nothing else, some assumed that "where there is smoke, there is fire." Certainly, at the beginning of the Inquiry, it was obvious to me that many within government believed that Mr. Arar had not been tortured and that he had voluntarily admitted links to terrorist activity to the Syrians. They were of the view that the truth would come out during the Inquiry.

Well, the truth did come out. When Professor Toope's report was made public over a year later, the government did not challenge the findings in the report and, indeed, through counsel, the government indicated that Mr. Arar had given "a credible" account that he was tortured.

The disturbing part of all of this [once again, I am quoting the Justice] is that it took a public inquiry to set the record straight. Getting it right in the first place should not have been difficult, and it should not have been a problem to keep the record accurate. However, over time, the misperception grew and seemed to become more entrenched as it was reported.

In this report, [Justice O'Connor said] I speak often of the need for accuracy and precision when collecting, recording and sharing information. Inaccurate information can have grossly unfair consequences for individuals, and the more often it is repeated, the more credibility it seems to assume.

We have before us partial, incomplete allegations, which experts have denied. However, around this table, some of my colleagues insist on repeating those allegations, which haven't been corroborated and, according to officials, are completely inaccurate. Yet they continue to repeat them. As Justice O'Connor said, the more often information is repeated, the more credibility it seems to assume in the minds of Canadians. Wow. It's very important to keep that in mind.

I'll continue quoting the report:

Inaccurate information is particularly dangerous in connection with terrorism investigations in the post-9/11 environment. Officials and the public are understandably concerned about the threats of terrorism. However, it is essential that those responsible for collecting, recording and sharing information be aware of the potentially devastating consequences of not getting it right.

The burden does not belong exclusively to those who head our national security and intelligence services. Indeed, they're an extremely important part of that responsibility, but it's a burden we all carry.

As elected officials, we enjoy certain privileges. No matter what we say in Parliament, we are never held accountable for those words, because a certain degree of freedom is required if elected officials want to be good parliamentarians or senators. However, those privileges come with responsibilities.

What I find infuriating is the fact that the people in charge, who have a much more complete overview than we do, or at least more than I do, came to the conclusion that there's always foreign inter-

ference in Canada, that the allegations we read in the newspapers were neither truthful nor credible and that they mislead Canadians.

If we want to question these people, we are all lost at this point, because they are an aggregate of experienced people who want to protect us. They've learned lessons from the past and do their work sincerely. They have information sources coming from our Five Eyes allies, meaning the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. They probably have other sources coming from our other allies. That said, I do not want to spread misinformation. At the very least, I can say they have access to that information.

The witnesses who appeared before us did not reveal any national security intelligence. They answered our questions frankly and came to the conclusion that what was reported in the newspapers was false.

In that case, why are we persisting with all this? Why do we want to break parliamentary traditions by forcing political aides to testify? Why are we accusing certain people of being influenced by foreign interests? How is it that we think it's acceptable to say this about a prime minister? It makes no sense. Everything is upside down.

I am sure that at least one country is laughing up its sleeve, and that's China. Other countries under an authoritarian regime, such as Iran or Russia, are probably watching us.

We're getting all worked up. Some people insist on repeating falsehoods for partisan reasons. Others have good motivations, but they're still playing the same game. According to our heads of security, they may be doing it for lofty reasons, but possibly for bad reasons too.

It is beyond me when they continue to repeat things that undermine Canadians' confidence in our institutions, even when experts tell us that our institutions have successfully resisted attempts at foreign interference.

That doesn't mean we can rest on our laurels. We must always remain vigilant. We must always adapt our measures to respond to the growing abilities of countries who want to wreak havoc in all democracies around the world.

I don't know if it was Ms. Romanado or Ms. Vandenberg who said that the real challenges today aren't the struggles between capitalism and communism. One of the real challenges is the division between authoritarian governments and democratic governments. It was Ms. Vandenberg who said that, because she has broad international experience. She worked in developing countries and saw the struggles that come with an authoritarian system.

Some people in those countries are working very hard to establish good governance so that they can enjoy the same advantages available in Canada. These people need help. I hope Canada will always stand up to help them. Ms. Vandenbeld saw what is happening for herself. She spoke of the importance of having exemplary practices and adapting them, depending on the situation.

Ms. Vandenbeld said this morning that Canada is seen as a world leader on these issues. She talked about her past and the way we can start to democratize and to share, as much as possible, the responsibilities linked to national security issues.

It started with the proposal from the former prime minister, Mr. Paul Martin, which was to establish a national security committee.

Mr. Paul Martin sought Parliament's support in order to create a national security committee that would be made up of parliamentarians. These parliamentarians would be sworn in as members of the Privy Council before they could be briefed on matters of national security.

Unfortunately, Mr. Martin did not win a majority vote in the election. He headed a minority government, the first one for decades, and lost the following election.

The next prime minister claimed at the time to very much care about national security. However, he never followed up on this claim by striking an advisory committee to deal with such matters.

It wasn't until 2015, when Mr. Trudeau's majority government was elected, that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians or NSICOP was formed. Not only did his government set up the longed-for committee, it also created a review agency called the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency, the NSIRA.

We have dealt with these matters through another committee comprised of public servants, whose mandate is to uphold our national security on behalf of Canadians. We have also set up an organization that brings together all the recognized political parties in the House of Commons and their campaign directors. Again, all these people have sworn an oath. The members of this committee pool all their information on threats or any major attempts at foreign interference in our electoral system. This was another fantastic innovation.

Today, my colleague from Kingston and the Islands read out comments made by Mr. Fred DeLorey, the national campaign director for the Conservative Party in 2021. Mr. Fred DeLorey said that there was no doubt in his mind that there had been no foreign interference in the 2015 election. The results of the national election reflected the will of Canadians in each riding.

What's more, and this is relevant to the debate that we're having right now and that Canadians are also watching, he came to the conclusion that his party was unfortunately engaging in petty politics. That's a shame, because this is a matter of national security.

He is not the only great Conservative to say that this type of work should be dealt with by the NSICOP. After hearing the Prime Minister's statement last Monday, Mr. DeLorey came to the conclusion that the Prime Minister went even further than Mr. DeLorey

himself would have done and that we should seize the opportunity to have an inquiry that would be untainted by partisan interests.

I think that Mr. DeLorey's conclusion is probably the same as the one to which the vast majority of Canadians have arrived, i.e., that these matters should not be the subject of partisan political debates. That's very important. I am happy to see some people nodding their heads here around the table. It is encouraging and leads me to believe that we will perhaps find a fair solution that will get us out of this impasse.

As I said, Mr. DeLorey was not the only Conservative. There was a former RCMP assistant director, a former chief of the Ottawa police and a former Conservative senator, Mr. Vernon White. I discussed the issue of making Wellington Street a pedestrian zone on many occasions with Mr. White. We had the idea of making it a more welcoming and useful space, a pleasant area where Canadians could come to celebrate Canada or even protest on occasion.

Mr. White conducted an in-depth study on security within the Parliamentary Precinct. He came to the conclusion, as did I, that we are exposing government to risks that can't be justified. We have to protect the Parliamentary Precinct.

I don't want to keep banging on about the subject, because it's not relevant to our debate, but I did want to say that the former senator Vernon White cared about our national interests. We were able to set aside partisan interests and hold discussions that were very fruitful. I consider him to be a friend. Indeed, over the weekend, I listened to him speak on *The House*, the CBC radio show.

Mr. White is known for his candour. He said that the NSICOP was not the ideal place to hold these discussions, because parliamentarians can see everything, even classified information that hasn't been redacted. The committee is all set up and is fully independent, which means that it does not subject to any influence from the current Prime Minister.

Mr. White was a member of the committee that does incredibly important work on security matters. There has never been a leak from that committee. All committee members, both current and former, have taken their work seriously. They do not deserve the insults that have been hurled at them by some people who believe that the committee is a tool of the Prime Minister. According to Mr. White, this is utter nonsense. We must maintain our support for the NSICOP. We must avoid tarnishing the reputation of its committee members.

Mr. DeLorey and Mr. White came to the conclusion that these are two very useful tools. We can use them to really get at the heart of the matter quickly without spending too much of taxpayers' money. At least two great Canadians are of this opinion.

My colleague from Kingston and the Islands spoke of a third Conservative who had expressed his support, i.e., the former senator from Kingston, Mr. Hugh Segal, another great Canadian who enjoyed a stellar career. He was, amongst other things, chief of staff for Prime Minister Mulroney and the senior political advisor to Mr. Bill Davis, the former Premier of Ontario.

I am a Quebecker and I remember clearly that Mr. Davis was always considered one of the best provincial premiers. In an article published recently in the *Toronto Star*, Mr. Davis expressed the same opinion as Mr. White, the former senator, and Mr. DeLorey, the former Conservative campaign director, which is that the NSI-COP is a good forum to discuss these matters and that the Prime Minister made the right call.

We have to stop all this petty political chicanery on an issue as important as our country's national security. This is obvious.

I would like to continue, but I know that other MPs want to speak. I would dearly like to hear what my colleagues have to say, especially my colleagues from the opposition. I hope that they won't just keep parroting the same thing and state that we have been going on and on about this for hours.

Once again, this is an important issue. We will take the time that we need to look at it closely. Period.

If my colleagues have any new ideas or new arguments, I am all ears. However, I do hope that this will go both ways, and that my colleagues will also listen as I would listen to them, and take into account the points that I have raised.

I believe that we should respect our parliamentary traditions. In order to do so, we should end this debate, withdraw the motion and let the committees with the proper mandates do their work. Matters that can be looked at in public will be looked at in public. Matters that need to be examined behind closed doors will be examined in such a manner, in order to protect information that deals with national security. Afterwards, there will be a report, which must always be published.

I will stop here in order to hear what my colleagues have to say.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

[*English*]

I will go next to Ms. Blaney. After that, I will give us a quick health break. Then we will resume with Mr. Barrett.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Chair. I hope the sound is good. I was gone for a short period of time. You'll let me know if the interpreters have any concerns, because I definitely want to make sure they're supported.

Madam Chair, this is a serious issue. I don't take any of this lightly. We are talking about how elections are done in our country and the impacts of foreign interference. That is incredibly serious, and I take that very seriously as I move forward in these discussions.

I do want to say that when I look at Mr. Turnbull's amendment, I have no problem with it if it's added to the content that we have already in the motion. I just don't see it replacing.... I don't think it's appropriate. There's a long history in the NDP—and I've heard many of my Liberal friends remind us of that—of not pulling in staff. Unfortunately, we're in a situation where this keeps coming out in the media, and it is impacting constituents and Canadians.

I was really surprised to listen to an earlier member from the Liberal benches today talk about how it's no big deal, about how no one in his riding is contacting him. I don't know his riding. He knows his riding better than I do, but I can assure him that I am not here because I enjoy being away from my constituents when I should be with my constituents. I'm here because my constituents have contacted my office enough for me to understand that they are experiencing some serious concerns around our democratic institutions, and we need to take that seriously.

That, to me, is the very point of this. This is why we've been calling for a public inquiry. This is why we've been saying repeatedly that it must be a process that is transparent, public and independent. We've now gotten to a point where all people hear is the Liberals justifying, instead of us saying, "Okay, we're now at a point where we have to have a public process because Canadians are getting concerned and those institutions fundamentally matter."

I too trust our institutions, and I agree that they could be stronger and better. This is why a public inquiry is so important to the NDP. I think it's very concerning that the Liberals have been pushing back against a public inquiry by suggesting that it's unable to deal with secret information. We know that's not the case. We've seen that happen before. It can happen again.

I'm also very concerned because I heard MP Sahota, when she was here the other day, dismissing them because they cost a lot of money. Again, that's really concerning to me. It isn't about us as politicians. It's about Canadians in this country having faith in our systems. When she compared it to the LRT inquiry, suggesting that it wasn't worth the cost, I'm not sure that people from Ottawa would share that opinion.

I want to bring this forward. This is concerning to me. This is a position right here in this committee where we are very partisan. That's the truth of politics. That's why we're asking for it to be in a venue that isn't partisan, that really takes Canadians' concerns seriously and lets us know what's happening. That's it. It's a transparent process.

I want to point out that I've been listening to my friend Mr. Ferguson speak for over an hour and a half, I believe, about the Arar commission and how that investigated intelligence leaks and misleading leaks from government sources, which, I think it is important to note—I think he noted it as well—was a Liberal government at the time. I agree that we got a lot out of that report, and I think this is the part that I find most perplexing. It is an excellent example of how relying on a public inquiry to get to the bottom of things, to get information out for the public to have faith in that.... It's like watching the member argue for what we're asking for. I'm not sure why that is not happening. There's a really great opportunity. It sounds like he's calling for a public inquiry. I support that. Hopefully, we can get some actions done.

I also want to come back for a moment just on a personal note. As you know, we saw something happen today where we had a member raising their voice. I want to recognize that it was dealt with and I appreciate the apology that was made, but one of the things that is sticking with me is the difference between intention and impact, and that when we're talking about these decisions that we make, we must be always focusing not on our intention but on the impact.

When I talk about a public inquiry.... To me, it's about what will be a good impact. I hear from the Liberals that they have great intentions. They feel they've done a great job dealing with these issues, and I respect, fulsomely, all the members of NSICOP. However, the impact of what's happened in this country is this: More Canadians are not trusting their public institutions. I want to remind everyone that we need to focus not on our intentions but on the impacts of the things we do and the actions we take.

It was referenced about the importance of spending time, in constituency week, with our constituents. I couldn't agree more. I've had to move a lot of things to accommodate this day, and I did it because I take my job very seriously, as I know everyone around this table does. I don't want to miss time with my constituents. In fact, I was thinking of Ms. Romanado, yesterday, when I was in Gold River. I was talking to the fire chief of Gold River and Tahsis, and was very disheartened to hear, from the fire chief of Tahsis, that they have no space to deal with their contaminated suits. Their building was condemned and everything is now in a sea can. When they do anything, they have to think about it very carefully, because, if they get any kind of moisture on their suits, how they're going to dry those is particularly hard. They don't have the proper infrastructure.

When I think of the work we are doing today, and the fact that we are sacrificing precious time with our constituents.... Everybody in this room needs to honour that. I honour it, especially because there are volunteers in my riding who will run to the fire and save people's lives and houses the best they can, yet they don't even have the right place to decontaminate their suits. That is wrong, in this country. It's shameful, in this country, and there's a lot of work to be done, here.

I also want to say that, when we see something come forward that is public, independent and transparent, I am very happy to move quickly. I appreciate that a special rapporteur.... I agree that is something used all over the planet. It's a role that's very specific. I think most Canadians know what that is, because Canadians are in-

telligent. I appreciate that. However, it is a baby step on an issue that is front of mind for far too many Canadians. I want to see it taken out of this partisan place. I don't want to see this issue used to make political wins. I'm seeing the parties using it to make political wins. I worry about that. I worry about how it's being used to create more fear. I don't like that. I don't do that easily. I never do that, personally. I want us to get to a place where we can vote on this and move forward. I listen to what Canadians are saying. I see what's in the media. We need to remember that, if we do not have these issues dealt with, in a way Canadians can have faith in the process, it will become increasingly partisan.

I'm asking everyone to work together, please, and try to get to some sort of solution. Let's go to the vote. Let's get to work for Canadians. Hopefully, we'll see something happen quickly around a public inquiry. I think we can all agree that Canadians deserve answers. This is the clearest way forward, in my opinion. Numerous opinions have come out supporting that. Of course, our leader Jagmeet Singh has been very clear, repeatedly, in the House of Commons, that this needs to happen.

Let's work together. Let's get to work around the boundary redistribution. I am also concerned. I have members in my own party. I've heard from other members who have put forward concerns. They want to be talking to the committee about getting that work done. I think we need to focus on that work, but we're stuck here, because the Prime Minister won't call a public inquiry. It's simple.

I hope you all figure something out. I hope that all of us remember our impact is way more important than our intention, and work for Canadians.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to release the floor to the next speaker.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

With that, I am going to suspend for 10 minutes; it will end up being 15 minutes. We will take a quick health break.

Thank you.

● (1925)

(Pause)

● (1940)

**The Chair:** Excellent. It's good to have everyone back.

Yes, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, before we get going again, I just wanted to follow up on the status of the consolidated response from CSIS and the PCO. That was from March 1 and March 2. Although there wasn't a commitment to provide it within a specific timeline, I had asked that it be provided within a week. It's now been two weeks. I'm curious as to where things are with that.

I don't know, Madam Chair, if you have any insight or if the clerk could follow up and report back to the committee.

**The Chair:** The clerk has whispered to me that she will follow up.

I don't have any additional insights. I can assure you that when we receive anything, it is sent out fairly quickly. We will follow up. Thank you for raising that, Mr. Cooper.

We will proceed with our speaking list. It will be Mr. Barrett, followed by Madame Normandin, Madam O'Connell, Madam Lambropoulos and then Mr. Ferguson.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

We've had nearly 21 hours of filibuster on this issue. It's quite straightforward: The majority of members on the committee have asked for the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford, to appear at this committee and testify on the briefings she received on foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections.

This request from opposition members was precipitated by reporting in *Global News* and *The Globe and Mail*, based on their sources with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, that detail the attempts of the Communist regime in Beijing to funnel money and influence and resources into specific ridings, ridings that were targeted to affect the outcomes of our democratic processes. It is obviously unacceptable that a foreign state would engage in that. Conservatives have called for an open, public, transparent inquiry. Concurrently with that, we are looking to have the most senior non-elected person who works in this place, the right hand to the Prime Minister, who received those briefings, his chief of staff—the same person about whom the Prime Minister is said to have told members of his caucus that, if they're talking to her, it's the same as talking to him.

We're likely going to eclipse the 24-hour mark in this filibuster today, and Canadians want that cover-up to end. They want the filibuster to end. We should vote on the subamendments and amendments and vote on the main motion. As I will often tell my children, just because you get your say doesn't mean you get your way. I think we've seen over 20-plus hours that everyone has had the opportunity to get their say.

I won't go over two minutes and 30 seconds with this intervention, because I think all that needs to be said has been said. Let's get to a vote here.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Madame Normandin, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I, too, do not wish to speak for too long, because like others, I would like to get to a vote quickly. That said, I would nonetheless like to go over certain comments that were made today. I think it is useful to do so once in a while in order to re-centre the debate.

I have been hearing something today that has raised questions in my mind. We have been told that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, the NSICOP, is the best forum for this type of work. I get the impression that some people are trying to oppose the work of the NSICOP, which would entail an independent public inquiry, with that of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of the House of Commons. But there is no need to oppose all three entities, or even others, because their work can be complementary.

We are currently holding a debate to determine if we should invite Katie Telford to testify so that we may hear what she knew and what she did with the information that she had. Today, some people have rightly said that this will not be the first time that Ms. Telford has been called on to testify before a committee. She has indeed testified before the Standing Committee on National Defence during its study on sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces, which dealt with the allegations made against Jonathan Vance, amongst other things.

We would do well to remember that at the time, Ms. Telford stated that she had not advised the Prime Minister that she had received certain information. Since my Liberal colleagues are talking about cabinet confidentiality, the following question comes to mind: How can we have cabinet confidentiality if the Prime Minister is not aware of the situation? That certainly raises questions and is a compelling reason to summon Ms. Telford as a witness.

So what has happened is that either the Prime Minister was aware of the situation and the measures that he took were wrong, which would bring up the issue of cabinet confidentiality, or that the Prime Minister was not aware, which raises questions about internal governance. In both cases, we have to find out what happened, so that we can change our way of doing things in the future. That would actually be the goal of any testimony heard through a public inquiry.

The aim is to reveal any problems with the decision-making process that cropped up in the past in order to avoid such a situation coming up again, and by that same token, increase Canadians' confidence in democratic institutions.

Unfortunately, as we see now, we have to get information through the media in order for anything to actually happen. We have seen this recently on the issue of Chinese police stations. The more information we receive about these police stations, the more the various levels of government take measures to ensure that any funding for these police stations is cut off.

It is in our interest to understand what has happened. In that way, we will be compelled to take certain measures. The impression that we are getting now is that if everything falls under cabinet confidentiality, no measures will be taken. This seems to have been the case during the 2019 and 2021 elections, according to the information that we have that still needs to be validated.

A lot of people have spoken about partisanship this evening. We have been told that the opposition is playing political games. Personally, I think that is the opposite is true. I would like to underscore the position of the Conservatives. I do not always agree with what they do and how they do it. Their approach is perhaps a tad more aggressive than mine, but at the end of the day, it's a question of preference.

It is nonetheless important to note that the Conservatives are seeking to hold a public inquiry. I will just say in passing that we have heard many opinions on a public inquiry. I will remind you all that the committee has already voted on this issue and we don't have to revisit it. The Conservatives voted in favour of a public inquiry even though the media has reported that certain Conservative candidates may well have gained an advantage because of foreign interference. The Conservatives are therefore ready to discover what happened in the past, even if it will hurt them. By the same token, they have accepted a friendly amendment requiring that their campaign director also be summoned to testify. If that does not show a lack of partisanship, I do not know what does.

In this context, the only ones who seem to be guilty of partisanship are the Liberals. By digging their heels in, they are running the risk of sullyng their reputation further. Canadians' confidence in democratic institutions and the Liberal Party will be weakened. I get the impression that the Liberals are shooting themselves in the foot by drawing out proceedings.

We could now vote on the intent of the motion, which is simple: either to invite or not invite Katie Telford. Some people are saying that three hours would be too long. I would ask them to amend the motion so as to reduce the length of time, instead of simply saying that we shouldn't invite her. Otherwise, we get the impression that that is what is really intended. If ever we decide that three hours is too much time, we should suggest another timeframe.

We can debate the intent rather than talk about all sorts of things that have absolutely nothing to do with summoning the Prime Minister's chief of staff. Let's just get on with it and make a decision as quickly as possible for the benefit of Canadians and more importantly, the democratic institutions that we are supposed to represent.

I've had my say. I will let the next person speak.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

Over to you, Ms. O'Connell.

[*English*]

Ms. O'Connell, we haven't done a sound check. It's your first time speaking, so can we hear about how you're doing today?

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Yes, I've switched microphones. This is a House of Commons-compliant headset. The Internet's plugged in.

Is the sound coming through okay?

**The Chair:** Can I get a hands-up or a thumbs-up? Are we hearing it okay, for the interpreters?

Yes, tell me a bit more about your day. You celebrated a birthday. Was it a good birthday?

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Yes.

I will give a shout-out to the wonderful staff at Staples in Pickering who made sure that they had extra headsets available when mine were no longer on the approved list.

**The Chair:** We got a thumbs-up, probably for your team members, as well as for the sound.

With that, the floor is yours. Thank you.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm glad to be here and to be able to participate once again in this debate.

I've listened intently to the various conversations, and I find them interesting.

I would like to start off with Mr. Barrett with respect to his comment that he feels that everything that needs to be said has been said and therefore the debate is over. While he may speak to his children in that way, we are not children. We have every right and ability to raise our concerns as much as we feel is needed, as we all have earned the right in this place to speak.

I have sat through numerous filibusters from the Conservatives as they literally read out of a phone book or different literary novels. The fact is that the Conservatives are now criticizing Liberal members who are not, in fact, reading from a phone book but are raising very legitimate issues and concerns. To be chastised that they're heard enough doesn't really hold any water with me. I'm not surprised that they don't want to hear it, because, again, as I've said before, their minds are made up, and let's not be confused with the facts.

Madam Chair, I also heard throughout this debate some of the comments around having a public inquiry or not having a public inquiry. I understand those debates. I think it's fair that people would want to be talking about the merits. If you look in the media, you see, as my colleagues have pointed out, that many Conservatives have gone on the record on why a public inquiry isn't the right thing or why it would be. That's part of the public discourse. It's something that many people want to chat about and share their views on. For me, I don't have an issue with whether that is the appropriate debate. I think that's a very fair and reasonable thing that people want to debate the best way forward.

In fact, the Prime Minister has even said that nothing is off the table. The appointment of this special rapporteur means he will be able to look at those options to allow NSICOP and NSIRA to do their work, the work that PROC could put forward if we ever get down to talking about recommendations for this study. A special rapporteur could then say, "Here are the gaps. Here is where I think we should move forward or not", etc., as an independent, impartial person. Something the Prime Minister acknowledges is that this debate is a fair and legitimate one.

The point I would like to raise, though, is that's not the motion on the floor that we're debating. We're debating whether staffers should be invited to this committee to answer for the government. We heard that time and time again, and Mr. Julian from the NDP was the first to raise the fact that it was Conservatives, when they were in government, who, time and time again, rallied against bringing staffers forward and insisted on the idea of ministerial responsibility.

We've had Ministers Joly and LeBlanc twice. We have opportunities to invite others, if that's the will of the committee, but that's not what this is. We're not debating, as I mentioned before, whether we bring in additional witnesses to look at how European Union countries are dealing with this or how Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. are dealing with foreign interference. We're not debating how to get the best information; we're debating bringing on one particular staffer, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, which is who the Conservatives seem to be most fixated on.

While I sit here and listen to the argument for or against the public inquiry, that's not what we're voting on.

Given the fact that this motion is about bringing in the chief of staff to the Prime Minister, the motion, by its very nature, is purely partisan. That's what we're debating here today. What I find so egregious is that we are not using committee time to move forward in the study, which we have all said is important. We have extended the study. We've agreed to additional witnesses and to bringing ministers back as new information becomes available. We've put forward ideas. Even the foreign registry was something this committee was starting to talk about. There are lots of opportunities to discuss various things dealing with the very serious issue of foreign interference.

That is not what's preoccupied this committee today or on the other days we've been talking. The discussion has been purely partisan, and that's what my comments are going to be reflecting, because it's the partisan nature of the motion that I find not helpful to Canadians. I don't find it helpful in dealing with foreign interference when there are opportunities for NSICOP and NSIRA and for a special rapporteur to look at all of the information and, if anything is sensitive in nature, to treat it through NSICOP in a manner that handles national security with the care and sensitivity it deserves, something that PROC just frankly can't do. As much as Conservatives have time and time again tried to access national security documents or tried to make them public, luckily cooler heads have prevailed on national security and the security those documents deserve has been taken into account.

I'll go back to the partisanship that is really what all of this is about. For any Canadians watching, make no mistake—that's really what this is. It is a motion to try to get the Prime Minister's chief of staff to come in, to try to get some clickbait for Conservatives and their followers. It's not about making democracy stronger. It's not about protecting from foreign interference in future elections. If it were, we'd have serious witnesses in to deal with, as I said, how other countries are dealing with this and how we are going to move forward in protecting our institutions to make sure they maintain the level of strength that they have had up to date.

The national security community has confirmed for us time and time again that it was Canadians and Canadians alone who determined the outcome of the 2019 and 2021 elections, but we have to continue to be diligent with that. We can't take that for granted, and so there is an opportunity for this committee to do that work and to make recommendations.

The threats around foreign interference and how foreign state actors engage in it are constantly changing, so what we are talking about today versus even five years from now could be totally different, and a future PROC committee could be seized with this issue and with how to change and adapt once again, but again, that's not what we're discussing. We're not discussing the forms of foreign interference. We're discussing one particular staffer the Conservatives are hell-bent on having appear on an issue of national security when they know that in a public forum there will be limitations on any sort of testimony that deals with national security. It would be irresponsible for someone to come forward and share national security information in a public manner.

I don't know what the Conservatives' ultimate goal is. I think it's just clickbait. Is it to try to release national security information? I don't understand why they think that would be a good idea for Canada or for Canadians or for the security of this country, but I don't try to or pretend to get into the heads of Conservative strategists, because I think those would be very dark and scary places.

Madam Chair, that being said, with respect to the issues around partisanship, I want to get back to something that the leader of the official opposition said to Minister LeBlanc during question period when we asked why the Conservatives, when the leader of the official opposition was the Minister of Democratic Reform, opted to do nothing about foreign interference issues when he was the minister responsible, even though there had been warnings from the national security community during the Harper government.

His response was—I'm paraphrasing here—that there was no partisan reason or advantage for them to do anything about it. I think that says it there about what all of this is about. The Conservatives seem to take national security and foreign interference seriously when they believe there is some sort of partisan benefit for themselves.

I want to dig deeper into this partisan rabbit hole that the Conservatives have been doing down for a number of years because, interestingly enough, it was actually Mr. O'Toole who first claimed that there was some sort of foreign interference after the 2021 election, and it was Conservatives who said no, that wasn't true.

In fact, a Conservative senator had to apologize to Mr. Hsu for calling him a liar over the issue of foreign interference. In 2021, Erin O'Toole was talking about how he lost eight ridings, and then it changed to nine ridings, and then 13 ridings, and they blamed foreign interference. Then Mr. Hsu said no, it was Conservatives and Erin O'Toole's stance. This is all documented in media reporting. What's so interesting to watch about this is that going back at least a year, if not two, there has been this infighting among Conservatives about the Erin O'Toole campaign strategy, and there were talks about how there was a whole press conference held by a group of Chinese-Canadian Conservatives who called on Erin O'Toole to step down as leader because they said—I'm reading here from an article about it—the reason for the loss in the 2021 election was that there was a shift towards the centre politically, a lack of outreach to the Chinese-Canadian voters and a failure to embrace Peter MacKay, who lost the Tories' last leadership race to O'Toole.

There was this feeling amongst even Chinese-Canadian Conservative members and politicians from Toronto, from B.C., who actually held a press conference asking for Mr. O'Toole to resign because they felt he did such a poor job of engaging with Chinese-Canadian members of the community that they didn't want him as leader anymore and they felt that as Chinese Canadians, they had a hard time within these communities to sell their Conservative message.

I find it interesting after all this—and again, this is all documented online—that now the Conservatives are coming out and saying no, no, no, it wasn't their messaging with the Chinese-Canadian community and it wasn't Erin O'Toole's failed leadership.

By the way, I would also like to point out that in B.C., part of the time when Mr. Hsu had been talking about seeing a decline in support in the election was also the time Erin O'Toole flip-flopped on gun control, which is a very important issue in many communities but it's significant in the greater Vancouver area as well.

The Conservatives, including Mr. Hsu, have changed their positions on whether it was Erin O'Toole's lack of leadership, and now you have Conservatives saying no, it's absolutely the result of foreign interference.

We actually had the non-partisan national security community testify before this committee a couple of weeks ago. They confirmed that although they saw a lot of chatter against the Conservatives, especially in the Chinese diaspora community, they couldn't determine that it was actually foreign state-based.

Why that's so important is that there can be groups, whether it's seniors, the Chinese community—as in this case—different diaspora groups or groups of individuals. Young people can come together and start campaigns on political issues that they don't agree with. It doesn't matter their cultural background, their religious beliefs or how they identify as a group; they are Canadians, and that's a Canadian-based, normal political activity.

We heard testimony that they could not find evidence that the increase in chatter or communications against the Conservative Party was foreign-based. It's not to say that foreign interference isn't real or that it wasn't attempted, but I think that if you're going to claim that a particular election was won or lost based on foreign interfer-

ence, you really need to be able to back that up. That's a pretty serious accusation. It would be a very serious failing of our institutions. I don't think you can just say that without clear evidence. That's something that the national security community, who are non-partisan professionals, demonstrated: They couldn't find that connection to a foreign state.

I think that's really important, because making those accusations without being able to back them up undermines Canadians' trust in our institutions. If our institutions are failing, then we have to deal with that, but you can't just make that claim without evidence and create this fear.

I'll bring up an example of another kind of base of misinformation, and it was Canadian-based. A group of Conservatives got together in the last election and the 2019 election as well. I received their misinformation in my riding and I think Mr. Turnbull probably did in his as well. They sent mail to every single household in our ridings saying that a Liberal government was going to tax your primary residence. It wasn't true. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Housing had debunked it many times. It was an organized, coordinated effort to mislead and to create a political outcome.

Nobody said that it came from Russia. Nobody said that coordinated and targeted misinformation campaign came from China. That's a form of politics that I think most Canadians find really disappointing. It creates confusion. It might change some votes. It certainly causes local elections to have to quickly pivot and make sure that they are answering those questions and clarifying what the real position of the party is. Those things do happen.

I don't think there's any doubt that there were serious concerns from certain communities that were upset with the Conservative policies and agendas. As I said, there were Chinese-Canadian Conservative members who came out and said very clearly that Erin O'Toole failed to connect with the Chinese-Canadian community. If those members of the community shared information and Conservative policies that they were upset about, that's exactly what our national security community was alluding to when they testified. It was that there are campaigns locally, or Canadian-driven information sharing, in which many politicians, depending on where they stand or what their position is, may say, "Hey, that's not our position."

It's just like when Conservatives or Canada Proud put out stuff or the Canadian gun lobby puts out misleading information. It's not pleasant to deal with, especially when you know it's not true in a local campaign, but those are Canadians expressing their views. I find it a bit rich that now the Conservatives—who can be some of the worst, I find, at putting this disinformation into local campaigns—are now, without evidence, suggesting that a similar sharing of displeasure towards Erin O'Toole and the Conservative policies of the time is now somehow not okay.

It wouldn't be okay if that were directly related to a foreign state action, full stop, but the national security community that monitors this was before our committee and saying that they couldn't make that connection. It's not the Liberals saying that. It's not the NDP, it's not the Bloc and it's not the Conservatives: It's the national security community saying that they couldn't make that connection.

It also reminds me of when the Conservatives in 2015 started the cultural barbaric practices hotline. Well, that really motivated the Muslim community across Canada to be outraged and organized—all very legitimate things to be upset about—and to organize against local Conservatives because those policies were outrageous. Again, that's part of the democratic process that the national security community does not engage, as long as they can't determine that it's foreign state-based. That is the sort of political discourse, whether you like it or not, in which communities can come together and say, “We don't like the direction of this policy or whatnot, and it impacts us.” Conservatives came together to oust Erin O'Toole because they didn't like the direction of his policies.

I have actually sat in question period and watched as Liberals pointed out that the Conservatives actually ran on a platform of pricing pollution and I watched how many members on the Conservative benches said, “I didn't, I didn't”, but you literally run on a platform, under the way the party system works, and the Conservatives literally ran on a platform of pricing pollution. Because now they don't like it and they got rid of that leader, they say, “No, I didn't; I didn't.” Members of the Conservative Party are disavowing their own platform from the last election, but yet they're surprised that maybe voters also disavowed their policy platform.

That's the partisan stuff that's really underneath all of this, because I think it's not about foreign interference for the Conservative Party. If it was, they would have been talking about it, as I said, in 2019 when NSICOP first tabled this report in the House of Commons. They didn't. They didn't talk about foreign interference then. They didn't talk about it in 2020 or 2021. It was in 2022 when I guess they started to wake up to the issue because they felt the partisan reasons for doing so now made sense, based on the Leader of the Opposition, who clearly demonstrated that until it was going to make partisan sense for them, they weren't really interested in the issues of foreign interference.

I also want to bring up now.... Again, if I thought this motion was about the merits or how we're going to move forward in dealing with the issues of foreign interference or what the best next steps are or what the recommendations are that are going to come out of this committee, I'd be talking about those, but since this is a purely partisan exercise to bring in partisan staffers instead of the ministers responsible, I'm going to continue to talk about the partisan nature and the partisan hypocrisy coming from the Conservative Party.

What I find interesting is that once again the Conservatives have woken up to foreign interference just now, even though it's something we've been really focused on and thinking about. It's funny, because when the SITE committee was created before the 2019 election and the critical election task force was in place for the 2019 and 2021 elections, I find it interesting that I didn't see any Conservatives raising their hands and saying, “Hey, what is this? Let's have some more scrutiny on this. Are there better recommen-

dations for how these groups could operate?” No. They showed up to the foreign interference and the national security briefings and they didn't raise any flags there either. They took the briefings. They were fine moving forward with that process.

They didn't raise any issues in the past about how this structure existed. They didn't bring forward recommendations back then on how to deal with foreign interference either. Why now? Why are Conservatives only caring now? Well, it's because they think there is a partisan reason to do so.

It reminds me of the U.S., with then President Trump and the slow undermining of election results and political institutions. It started slowly with Republicans in the U.S.—not all Republicans, but certain Trump Republicans, I would say—undermining voting rights. One thing that the current Leader of the Opposition, formerly the democratic institutions minister, did was to just make it harder for Canadians to vote. We see those mirrors in the U.S. We see the “stop the steal” rhetoric out of the U.S., and then we start to see Conservatives here using similar language. I saw Mr. Cooper talking about collusion. Where is this language coming from, talking about “corrupt”, about how there's something to hide, suggesting that the elections were not determined by Canadians? Is it from our neighbours to the south?

Then, when they're directly asked—because I think Conservatives must have done some polling, or they know that being too closely aligned with Trump-style politics is probably not very favourable in this country—they say, “No, no, no; we trust the results of the election, but we think there was collusion. We think the Liberals are in partnership with China. We have no proof of that, but we'd just like to sow doubt in Canadians' minds.”

They're doing a good job, actually, of sowing doubt, but only among their own voters. I saw a poll today that said 48% of Conservatives think the election outcomes were not determined by Canadians. For Liberal voters, it was 7%. You're seeing an erosion in Conservative voters of the trust in our democratic institutions.

We watched that same erosion in the U.S. and then what eventually happened there. When you start building this vacuum of mistrust in our institutions, what happens is that a group of people will really believe that the democratic process is no longer fair and free. When confirmation or proof doesn't exist to back those things up, you start to think it's a giant conspiracy. When that vacuum of concern and anger has nowhere to go, look at what happened on January 6 in the U.S. A group of people just couldn't believe that the outcome of the U.S. election was what it was.

That's a dangerous game, going down this road. It's not to say that dealing with foreign interference isn't something that should be done—it absolutely is—but creating this mistrust without evidence is what the dangerous game is. It's not just in the U.S. We've seen it in other countries.

When we see numbers like 48% of Conservatives don't think the outcome of the election was free and fair, that is when every single Canadian should be concerned. There has not been an impartial, non-partisan person through Elections Canada, the national security community or CSIS.... Nobody in those impartial circles has said there's evidence to suggest that it wasn't Canadians who determined the outcome of our elections. Stoking this misinformation and disinformation means we are seeing that certain groups no longer believe the impartiality of our public service.

We saw that in the U.S. We saw how that played out.

While Conservatives might think this is funny clickbait or that this is fun and games, look at those numbers. Look at the base. I mean, look at Twitter—not that I think that's a very reliable source of information. Look at the extreme hate on this issue.

I was part of the group of parliamentarians who were actually banned from China, with Conservative Michael Chong. It was the same round. I was banned from China because I was on the study that condemned the treatment of Uighurs. I actually voted in favour of the Conservative motion to ban Huawei. I have made known my concerns and my positions on things.

By the way, being banned by China is a point of pride. I have absolutely no issue with that. I stand firmly in my stance on the treatment of Uighurs and how deplorable that is.

After all of this, there are calls that I'm an agent of China. The most ridiculous things are said because facts don't matter in this world anymore. Those are the dangerous games that....

As politicians, we can't control what goes out on social media. We can't control what is amplified by certain groups that think it's beneficial. What we can control is how we behave. In saying things like “collusion”, we know exactly what that dog whistle is because we've seen it. We've seen it play out. We've seen the violence play out.

Then we see that trend continue. We talk about the convoy that came to Ottawa. If the Conservatives were consistent in their outrage over foreign interference, then why was there no condemnation of the widely reported foreign funding for the convoy? I didn't see the members of the Conservative Party, who stood proudly with convoy members, say that this is a great movement, but no foreign funding, please; let's keep this Canadian. No, of course not. They didn't want to upset this angry base that they could tap into.

The funding of that convoy, for example, would never have actually passed Elections Canada election financing rules. It's interesting that I don't see condemnation for that behaviour, which wouldn't have passed the test for our own election rules and our financing rules. Conservatives seem to be silent on that.

The other partisan piece of this, once again, is that if Conservatives were truly worried about foreign interference in the Canadian democratic process, then why have I not seen any of the members

sitting around here in the House condemn the Conservative caucus members who met with Christine Anderson, the far-right European Union politician who met with Dean Allison, Colin Carrie and Leslyn Lewis?

Ms. Anderson has been known for spreading anti-immigrant hate and anti-Muslim ideology. She has publicly tried to downplay Nazi crimes and the Holocaust. Her party, the Alternative for Germany Party, is under surveillance as an extremist group.

Why is it that when foreign state actors and foreign extremist groups come to Canada and share their political hate and views, the Conservatives are okay with that? If you really want to get to the bottom of foreign interference and ensure that misinformation and disinformation from foreign actors are not welcomed in this country, where's the condemnation for an alt-right hate group coming to Canada and meeting with Conservative members? Is it because Conservatives share those values that it's okay? I sure hope not.

I have a lot Muslim friends and neighbours in my community, and to see some of the hatred and vitriol coming from that party and to see it embraced here by Canadian Conservative members scares me. I have sat with members of my Muslim community when there have been attacks against Muslims in Canada and around the world. I've seen the fear they have. To see that hate embraced once again by the Conservative Party of Canada scares me for them. It scares me for our Jewish community. We are seeing anti-Semitism on the rise. To see that a person, a foreign actor, with these hateful views being embraced by the Conservative Party of Canada.... Why are we not calling that out? Well, we are. Why are the Conservatives not calling that out? I think there's an opportunity here.

By the way, CSIS has raised the alarm bells on alt-right hate groups for many years, domestic and foreign. If the Conservatives are going to say, “Well, we're talking about China right now, and foreign interference and what CSIS is reporting”, I can tell you that CSIS has raised the alarm bells on alt-right hate, domestic and foreign, and the Conservatives sit here and embrace a member of a foreign state who's under surveillance for extremist views.

I don't know how any member of the Conservative Party sits in this place and thinks that there isn't a giant hypocrisy in their positions. How can they let that go unchallenged? How can they let that meeting go unchallenged? One of the members who met still sits in the Conservative front benches. How can the Conservatives can sit here and say that they are solely focused on standing up for Canadian democracy when they themselves, within their own party, are welcoming extremist hate groups that are under surveillance from foreign states? It only suits the Conservatives to stand up for something if they feel there's some partisan advantage.

It was interesting that Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Conservative Party, condemned the views of Christine Anderson in a statement, but he didn't share it on his social media channels. Why was that? It's interesting.

Why was it that when he was asked, once the House resumed, if he'd be condemning those three members who met with her, he all of a sudden walked back his comments about how vile her views were? How do you think members of the Jewish or Muslim communities feel about his no longer calling her views vile?

I guess it shouldn't be a surprise from a party and from a leader who bury misogynistic hashtags in their social media views. This hate and mistrust in our democratic systems don't fulfill the goals of the Conservative Party these days. It's sad to watch. It's like watching the Republicans in the U.S.—I have never really shared Republican views—seeing members in their own party trying to get back to their morals and values and to get off this hate-filled mission, and I know there are probably members of the Conservative Party who feel very uncomfortable with this alt-right, hate-filled turn. We need them to stand up, frankly.

I keep going back to the 48% of Conservative voters who think that Canadians didn't steer the outcome of these elections. I'd be curious to see what their viewpoint was just a year ago or six months ago, before all of the Conservative rhetoric started spiking and going crazy. There seems to be, as Mr. Poilievre has said, a partisan advantage to it. There wasn't a partisan advantage to doing anything about foreign interference in the past.

I think it's incredibly scary to see the partisan nature of this motion that we're debating. We're not getting to the work of actual recommendations on how to protect our democratic institutions from foreign interference. We're not making those recommendations. We've been debating.

Conservatives will complain about how many hours we've been talking. We've not been talking about the merits of one recommendation over the other. We've been talking because Conservatives want to turn this into—as they do—a partisan hit job. They want nothing more than clickbait. If they were serious about getting to the bottom of this, we'd be talking about how we're moving forward, the recommendations that PROC could make, things we'd want to see with a special rapporteur, and how PROC can inform that process with our own recommendations, because we had started this work previously. We're not doing any of that.

As I said, Conservatives are focused solely on partisan points. If they weren't, then they'd be dealing with all of the things I already spoke about, like condemning Christine Anderson and the MPs who met with her for her vile views and her rhetoric as a foreign actor who's under surveillance since her party is an extremist group. The Conservatives would not be stirring up rhetoric about collusion and elections being stolen. It's only a matter of time, I feel, before the Conservatives are going to do their own “stop the steal” campaign.

They're ramping up their rhetoric to the point where 48% of Conservative voters have lost trust in democratic institutions. It's going to be really hard to undo it once you let that genie out of the bottle. As I said, look at January 6 and what happened in the U.S. and

think very clearly before you start using rhetoric without being able to back it up with evidence.

I've talked about how Mr. O'Toole, as leader, was asked to step down by his own Chinese-Canadian Conservative caucus members or party members because of his lack of connection with the Chinese-Canadian community, and how those things seem to be completely under the radar now. Actually, Mr. Julian raised it numerous times too. The Conservatives, in their talking points, never seem to mention the media reporting that it was actually Conservative members who were identified as well.

I'm not going down the road of “Let's play that game”, but the point is that I find it interesting. The Conservatives stand on their soapboxes to say they're just trying to get to the bottom of it, but they leave out the fact that they too were named in all of this.

Again, if it was a genuine concern for democracy, a genuine concern for standing up for what's right, then why aren't they standing up for everything that's right? That's the problem I have with this motion. That's why, despite Mr. Barrett's uncomfortableness or feeling he's heard everything he needs to hear and there's nothing left to say, I'm going to keep using my voice, because there is such a hypocrisy. What's coming from the Conservative Party is so partisan that I can't sit here and pretend the motion that is being discussed is some way to improve our democratic institutions. If the Conservatives were genuinely concerned, they would have raised all the issues, all the things that were mentioned in the reporting, such as the accusations about their own party members. They would have raised the issues of Mr. O'Toole, and, again, the fact their own caucus abandoned the platform he ran on, but they seem to think that Canadians didn't. I find that to be the most interesting.

As well, there's the fact they don't even condemn foreign funding that wouldn't be acceptable under our Canada Elections Act and they don't condemn alt-right foreign actors coming to Canada to spread misinformation and hate. Until the Conservatives come to terms with their own hypocrisy and at least are honest with Canadians that this is nothing more than a partisan issue, then yes, I'm going to keep using my voice to highlight all of the hypocrisy and all of the ways we could be actually working to make our democratic institutions stronger.

I'm also going to continue to shine a light.... What is it that Mr. Cooper loves to say? Shine a light. Transparency. Sunshine. I am going to be the sunshine shining a light on the Conservative hypocrisy, the Conservative inability to condemn the foreign interference that seems to be happening within their own caucus and the inability to stand up for our Jewish communities here, for our Muslim communities, and condemn that vile rhetoric instead of welcoming those members with open arms.

Yes, I'm going to continue to shine a spotlight. I'm going to use a voice on Conservative hypocrisy, on the partisan nature of the road they've taken us down. When they are ready to deal with the real work of protecting our democratic institutions from foreign interference, I'll be right there, ready and willing to work.

Madam Chair, I think I'll leave it there for now. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. O'Connell, for those comments. They are greatly appreciated.

I will now give the the floor to Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I am happy to be able to continue to express myself on the issue at hand.

First of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague, Ms. O'Connell, who has brought up some useful points and who has gone to the heart of the problem. I am talking about what is called “psychological projection,” which is when we project our intentions on others.

My Conservative colleagues are saying that we are indulging in “petty politics.” That is not the case. We are defending our position based on well-founded principles, such as the fact that we should not summon political staffers to testify before parliamentary committees. My Conservative colleagues have often stated that Ms. Telford has already testified twice before such a committee. Actually, it has happened three times in all of Canadian parliamentary history that someone who holds such a position has testified before a parliamentary committee, and in two of those three cases, it was Ms. Telford. That's it.

Why would we seek to establish a new tradition? Is it really to study the issue or to find out what the Prime Minister knew? There's another way for any MP to go about this, and that's to put the question directly to the Prime Minister. We have the privilege of being able to ask the Prime Minister questions many times a week during question period. The Prime Minister even spent a whole day answering all the questions put to him by MPs in the House of Commons. That is the best forum to do this.

If we would like our wonderful parliamentary traditions to be respected, we have to stop seeking the testimony of a political staffer. It makes no sense, and I won't tolerate it.

It is unfortunate that people have cobbled together a bunch of falsehoods to lead people astray. Once again, I will go back to this wonderful saying: “An out-of-context text is but a pretext.” People are claiming that because Ms. Telford has already testified twice, she can testify a third time.

The context is a political assistant has appeared twice before a House of Commons committee, which has never happened in the history of Canadian Parliament, and they may appear a third time.

Given the circumstances, you can understand—Canadians who are watching us do—that this is the exception that proves the rule. We're well aware that calling assistants to testify before a committee is not a parliamentary tradition.

In addition, my NDP colleague Ms. Blaney, for whom I have a great deal of respect, asked why the Liberals so dead set against holding a public inquiry and seem to believe that an independent special rapporteur will be able to reach the same conclusions as an inquiry. The reason I think it's important to let the independent special rapporteur do their job is that they may choose to hold a public

inquiry. If they do, I would applaud that. We will support that, and I'm sure that individual will explain to Canadians how the inquiry would proceed.

I imagine that if a public inquiry were held, it would be very similar to the inquiry conducted by the commission under Justice Dennis O'Connor in the early 2000s. It would have the same type of guidelines.

I can already hear the comments from here, out of context: We want a transparent public inquiry, we'll want things cleared up, and so on.

However, what the people making those remarks will forget is that a public inquiry involves reviewing documents about national security matters. Yes, an inquiry may involve such documents, but it's wrong to think that it could be done in a completely transparent manner. It cannot. Part of the inquiry must be conducted in camera to allow for the review of certain documents. In fact, that is what Justice O'Connor did to produce his report on the Maher Arar case.

What we were able to read in his report was public information that he had the right to release. However, there was other information I didn't see. Perhaps members of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians have seen the full version because they have the required security clearance. That's good what is out oh I'm good thank you.

If we're on the same page about this, that's great! I invite my colleagues in the official opposition to say so publicly. I know my colleague Ms. Normandin said she was prepared to do that and that's very good. When you're grounded in reality, you can have a discussion and negotiate. However, we can't continue to talk nonsense and mislead Canadians by saying that it's possible to get all the information when we know full well that it's not.

That's deceitful, and it would only make Canadians more cynical. I wish they could focus on one political party, but all political parties will suffer. There's a reason why airlines don't run attack ads against each other. It's because people don't distinguish between Air Canada and WestJet when it comes to safety. Only in politics do parties fight each other, and people are allowed to smear the reputation of politicians who aren't of the same stripe.

Some people believe that this has no impact on politicians. That's not true. Canadians can feel betrayed by all political parties. It's very important that we don't overstep the mark in terms of acceptability in political debate. If we do, we will ruin the system. We will taint that pool of good faith that all Canadians have in all politicians. So I urge my colleagues to come to their senses, if they can. Let's not overstep the mark and disappoint them in our political debates.

We've seen what happens when boundaries are crossed. We've seen it in other countries, including the United States, where anything goes now. As my colleague Mr. Turnbull has very clearly explained, we're only making Canadians more cynical of their own government, of their own representatives.

We really need to overcome this challenge and get back to what's reasonable. We need to provide Canadians with real options and have clear, genuine, reasonable discussions about what we can and cannot do.

If we do that, we can strengthen our democratic system. We mustn't subject it to undue stress. We need to make sure that we're always able to negotiate with our allies on sharing security-related information.

With respect to what we're discussing today, to get us out of this impasse, we could quickly decide that our discussions will be frank but difficult, and they will always remain reasonable.

Madam Chair, I will turn the floor back to you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Ms. Saks, you now have the floor.

[*English*]

It's your first time speaking at committee today, so I want to do a quick sound check, Ms. Saks. Can you tell me how you're doing?

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.):** Good evening, Madam Chair. I'm doing well. I'm home in my constituency in York Centre with my daughter and family, and I'm pleased to be here. Thumbs-up.

**The Chair:** I will assume that the thumbs-up is for your sound as well as your being in your constituency.

Ms. Saks, the floor is yours. Welcome to PROC.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, colleagues, for taking the time. I know we've been in discussion for many hours.

At the crux of this, there are two things that really strike home for me.

I'd like to thank my colleague Ms. O'Connell. I'm a Jewish woman, and she really highlighted the impacts of misinformation and disinformation when they become the crucible for fostering and fomenting hate against the many communities that are a part of our diverse and inclusive Canada.

My colleague Mr. Fergus talked about the importance of being reasonable and the importance of measured and important discussions. We always have to remember why we are here. We are here to represent our communities. We are here to make sure that their voices are heard, that they have a sense of knowing we have their backs and that we will stand up for what is right.

What is right is that so many of us came from so many parts of the world to choose Canada because it is safe, it is a place of diversity and it is a democracy. Many of us came from different places, whether it's us or members of our families, who may be second-generation or third-generation Canadians, and we made a choice to

be part of a country that is anchored in democratic principles. We have a sense of collective responsibility towards one another and our communities to ensure the institutions that were built.... We have the privilege and very acute and heavy responsibility to uphold the reflection of our communities and to uphold the principles we were put here to represent—those of our communities and our neighbourhoods.

Colleagues referenced the convoy of last year. They referenced several Conservative members who met with Christine Anderson from AfD, and my community members in York Centre were appalled by this. They were hurt last year. When I was walking through the convoy on a daily basis, I saw Jewish Stars of David as buttons. I saw swastikas flown. I know that, at the core, many of the speeches by the leadership of the convoy were really about marginalization and about distrust of minority and ethnic communities, which are part of the fabric of this country.

The fuel to the fire of the convoy, and what happened on January 6 the year prior, was really misinformation and disinformation spreading at warp speed. Where does it spread? It spreads online. It's the power of the platforms.

About 98% of Canadians are online on various platforms, and when we think of every age, every background and every community from coast to coast to coast, there's no doubt that digital platforms and social media platforms become lifelines for communication. They certainly were for many during the pandemic. They also keep our diverse communities informed and in touch with friends and family who live abroad. That's the nature of the world we live in today. It's also a place where misinformation and disinformation can fester, grow and create stereotypes, racist tropes and hatred toward communities. It moves at warp speed.

A perfect example of that was in a recent Toronto Star article. It said that concerns about foreign interference are based on speculative information. They're not based on facts. They're not based on clear markers of information that have been provided. It's a lot of talk, and it's moving at warp speed. I want to lean into what happens when misinformation and disinformation move at warp speed.

I've heard members of the Chinese community talk about the fear of anti-Asian hate against them, yet again. They just endured two years or more of that through the pandemic. We're now moving down into a rabbit hole rather than having constructive and clear discussions about how we ensure that all of our institutions are safe and secure and that Canadians know they are voting in a democratic process with as little influence as possible—or none, frankly.

We now have communities that are afraid of being questioned over their right to be here. I speak about that from a personal perspective. It's no secret that aside from being Jewish, I am Israeli, and I get accused of dual loyalties all the time as part of anti-Semitic tropes. It's one of the oldest forms of hate. We could go as far back as the Dreyfus trials, which were about dual loyalties.

Frankly, I cannot believe that in 2023, we are here, and this kind of hatred could potentially bubble to the surface. It already has for some communities, as Ms. O'Connell mentioned. Muslim communities, Jewish communities and many other communities are feeling marginalized and isolated right now because of the spread of misinformation and disinformation. This is no different.

Partisan foils are being thrown out without any sense of accountability by Conservatives in what they are putting into the Twitterverse and in how they speak. There's no apology either. I haven't heard the Leader of the Opposition be public and firm about members who dined with Christine Anderson. As a member of Parliament who represents a predominantly Jewish community, I find abhorrent and offensive, as do members of the Muslim community, her anti-Islam views, her Holocaust denial views and her lack of responsibility in understanding the facts of history.

We've seen the power of this in other forms. It was the Russian foreign minister who, in his disgusting justifications of the illegal war against Ukraine, claimed there were Nazis in Ukraine whom Russia was trying to foil, or that, alternatively, Russian soldiers will be enduring a Holocaust in fighting the war.

This kind of rhetoric, this type of use and abuse of language and this Holocaust denial seem to be free flowing through Twitter and other social media platforms. We see the same weaving and turning of language being used by colleagues across the way when it suits them, or they close their eyes to it when it suits them. Frankly, it doesn't suit Canadians. It doesn't suit our many communities, whether it be the Chinese community, the Muslim community, the Jewish community or any other community, to become weaponized by the type of partisan behaviour we're seeing from colleagues across the way. It makes me very sad.

When we talk about recreating trust, we must do it by what we model, what we do and the actions we take. To be fast and loose with language.... The Leader of the Opposition called NSICOP a secret committee, but it's far from being a secret committee. It was a committee put in place by this government, understanding full well that there are issues of national security impacting the daily lives of Canadians, whether they relate to espionage, cybersecurity, defending our borders or making sure we keep terrorism out.

I come from a country where terrorism is rife and where security is a paramount issue on a day-to-day basis. There's an understanding, at least where I come from, that there are things we can talk about with transparency but some things get talked about behind closed doors. In order for the good work to be done to protect state security, sometimes not everything can be public right away; it needs to be reviewed.

NSICOP was set up for exactly that purpose, and it's not a partisan committee by any sense of the imagination. It is a place where all members from every party are sworn in to have unfettered ac-

cess to secure documents in this country to know what is happening in terms of surveillance and intelligence studies and to understand how we keep Canadians safe and keep our systems free of foreign interference.

There are no secrets in that committee. Everyone is free to ask the questions they need to ask. Everyone sees the same unredacted and clear documents they need to see so they can weigh in on some of the most serious matters of state security and safety. Sometimes that information can't come out right away, as it may be happening in real time. It may be that they are following a trail to understand where.... I lived overseas, and when tracking terrorist cells, it can take weeks, months or even years to understand the web of information that needs to be gathered to identify perpetrators and act proactively, either to prevent harm or to mitigate continued harm if some harm had been done already. How do we put cracks or a break into patterns of espionage and interference?

Some tell the public, really recklessly, that it is a secret committee and that only the Prime Minister can decide. Well, no, this is Parliament. We've all been elected to uphold the institutions of this place. Even Vern White, a former Conservative senator, acknowledged the fact that there's an entire structure around NSICOP to ensure the work being done there is done carefully and that it has the capacity to do important work, such as inquiring about and doing a study on foreign interference. To him, it's a good tool to use for this issue.

However, my Conservative colleagues continue to spread misinformation about this and to paint a picture of systems that, frankly, when they were in power... When the leader was in power, he chose not to address this because it wasn't within his interests to do so. How denigrating is that? It wasn't in their interests to do this. As a governing minister, it wasn't in his interest.

Really? Our interests are the interests of Canadians. Our interest to uphold trust and a sense of belief that our institutions are free and clear of foreign interference, and to know that Canadians can choose their elected officials with their own convictions and without fear, intimidation, influence, misinformation and disinformation, is frankly an obligation. Each and every one of us sitting in this Parliament has a role to play in ensuring that this system stays in place.

Time and time again, I see the Conservatives picking and choosing what works for them and what doesn't work. The Leader of the Opposition said so. He didn't work on this during his time because he chose not to.

I sit on the ethics committee, and the Conservatives, through Mr. Barrett, brought a motion there for a foreign interference study as well. Mr. Fergus, who is here, and I had lengthy discussions on it. Frankly, we weren't against doing the study. We said that would be fine. We just wanted to extend the scope. We wanted to make sure we weren't looking at just 2019 or 2021 but that we would go back, because we know this has been a growing issue for some time. It's no secret. The leader of the opposition said so himself. He knew about it; he just didn't deal with it. We decided to go back.

At this moment, it's about China. However, we also know there's foreign interference from other countries. While China may be the main perpetrator at this moment in time, we know that Russian foreign interference has had an impact, particularly when it came to U.S. elections. It spreads perniciously through these social media platforms at warp speed. It is difficult for us to track it, trace it and identify it.

That is why we have these discussions. As my colleague Mr. Fergus has said, they need to be responsible. They need to be reasonable. They need to take into account the real concerns that Canadians have and recognize that Canadians in this country come from everywhere. They come here with a sense that they've come to safety, that they've come to a place where they can participate openly in a democratic process that is fair and free. Then they see the language used by some of the members across the way, who describe this as secretive, as collusive, as evasive. I could go on. The point is, how are we building trust in Canadians?

I say this for all of us. I would caution my Conservative colleagues that it works both ways. It's not just about a Liberal government, and it's not just about members from the Bloc or the NDP. It is our Conservative colleagues as well. This type of mistrust gets sown equally among all politicians, among all parliamentarians, because it erodes trust in the system. I caution my colleagues about that, because they too are part of the system. However, they pick and choose when they are participants in it and when they are not.

We continue today to try to find the path forward on this motion, and if they are truly interested in working on behalf of Canadians to get to the bottom of this, I would remind them about my constituents in York Centre from the Chinese community who have come and asked me, "Do I belong here?" I would remind them of my own experience of being accused of having dual loyalties. I would remind them that we all have a responsibility, a deep and profound responsibility, to ensure that trust in our democratic institutions means that our communities can trust that the exploration and assessment of information in the work we do here in these committee rooms, whether it's at NSICOP, PROC or the ethics committee, is done in a way that gets to heart of the problem. The heart of this problem is the pernicious spread of misinformation and disinformation that is used to ratchet up emotions and ratchet up hate.

My colleague Mr. Fergus and I, when we were at the ethics committee, put forward a motion at one point, because we really did want to do an expansive study on foreign interference and go back. We wanted to include an amendment to the proposed study that would include the impacts of xenophobia and racism as a result of foreign interference. We actually had to wrestle and tug that out with colleagues across the way. For shame. We represent all of our

communities here and a diverse and vibrant country with a strong democracy that we have a responsibility to uphold.

I would caution my colleagues across the way about the potential recklessness of using certain language or meeting with individuals who utilize that language, such as the member from the AfD, who quite a number of them felt comfortable dining with. Remember that we model what we see, and we know that Canadians are watching what we do. When they are so cavalier and so willing to use language that results in consequences that make our communities feel at risk, and when they say that it's done in the name of upholding our institutions without using the appropriate tools we have and are willing to discuss more, they are doing a gross disservice to Canadians, our democratic institutions and our systems.

I'll leave it there, Madam Chair. I've said my piece for the moment. I'm sure there are others who want time on the floor, so I will cede my time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Saks, for those comments.

I have Mrs. Romanado, followed by Mr. Housefather, Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Fergus.

Go ahead, Mrs. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Before I begin, I'd like to thank Ms. Blaney. She mentioned that she had an opportunity to meet with local firefighters and local fire chiefs. I know she's been a great supporter of my bill, and I want to thank her for that, because she has been advocating for her firefighters in her communities, and she has a lot of fire departments in her very large constituency.

Thank you, Ms. Blaney, for that.

She also brought up a really important point. She said two words: intention and impact. When we think of the word "impact", we need to remember that everything we say and everything we do has consequences.

In my intervention earlier today, I asked a question: What is it we want to achieve and what is our objective? Well, depending on what we want to achieve, there are different tactics we can use.

[*Translation*]

With respect to the public inquiry, we didn't say it wasn't a good idea. The special rapporteur will establish the best way to proceed. On the other hand, we know that a public inquiry has its limits. It will be called an independent inquiry because those conducting it will not be parliamentarians, but will be appointed by the cabinet. The same thing goes for the rapporteur: The Prime Minister will appoint them. On the other hand, it's well known that those undertaking a public inquiry can't have access to secret documents.

So it has its limitations, but that doesn't mean it's not a good idea to go down that road.

Our committee is also validating the information. We've already heard from many witnesses. We want to call several more. Some key witnesses have clarified a lot of things, but we have others we could call. The Prime Minister announced today that he will appoint a special rapporteur as soon as possible, in the next few days. He announced it today at a press conference. So we'll find out who that person will be. As soon as we know, the committee can decide to pursue its studies. Otherwise, we don't know.

The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians is also being asked to conduct a review to assess the state of foreign interference in federal electoral processes. The committee has stated that it will begin this review.

With respect to that committee, I want to make sure that everyone is aware of its mandate. The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians Act authorizes the committee to review:

- a) the legislative, regulatory, policy, administrative and financial framework for national security and intelligence;
- b) any activity carried out by a department that relates to national security or intelligence, unless the activity is an ongoing operation and the appropriate Minister determines that the review would be injurious to national security; and
- c) any matter relating to national security or intelligence that a minister of the Crown refers to the Committee.

Madam Chair, it's very important to note that the committee members are drawn from both Houses of Parliament, all have top-secret security clearance and all are bound to secrecy in perpetuity under the Security of Information Act.

The committee members take an oath or solemnly declare that they will obey and comply with the laws of Canada, and that they will not disclose or misuse information obtained in confidence in the course of their responsibilities relating to the committee.

On this basis, the members of this committee are able to receive classified minutes and materials related to the committee's work, which is very important.

In fact, since 2017, the year the committee was formed, a number of members from all political parties have served on it. When we look at the committee members, they have clearly included some outstanding parliamentarians. Right now, someone I would call an expert sits on the committee. Ms. Normandin served on it from 2019 to 2020.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** I only attended one meeting.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** She only attended once, but she still can't tell me what she learned, because it's confidential.

Things have been said about the work of the committee. Its work is said to be secret, and apparently there have been secret deals, so there's a whiff of espionage to it all.

But that's not true. Every year, the committee must submit a report to the Prime Minister that includes the reviews conducted in the previous year. The committee may also issue a special report at any time on any matter within its mandate. That's important, be-

cause all Canadians can go to the committee's website and see the reports it has tabled. Of course, they're partially redacted, since the committee works on classified matters, but it is important.

Former senator the honourable Vernon White had given an interview in English.

[*English*]

As to the question on reports, people may mention that these are secret meetings, that secret committees meet and nobody knows what is happening and that nobody can question whether the members on this committee know anything about the subject matter. He said, in response to the work done at the NSICOP committee, that this committee works. He said:

If you haven't, I think you should go back in the India report. Read it. I don't think anybody read that report and left there saying, "I don't know what happened." I think everybody left there saying, "I do know what happened and there are some things I'm not allowed to see." That's life. You're never going to get it all. That's the way this is going to be, no matter who does it. But I think NSICOP will be quicker than a public inquiry [and] a hell of a lot cheaper than a public inquiry....

[*Translation*]

The reason I bring this up is there are many ways to go about getting information on foreign interference in our elections.

[*English*]

Again, I'm going back to Ms. Blaney's comment about intention and impact. If the intention is to strengthen our system to deter and counter foreign interference in our elections, there are many avenues to take. Maybe it is a combination of those tactics. Maybe it is the naming of a special rapporteur; the work this committee is doing; the work of NSICOP, SITE and the panel; or parliamentarians from across Canada providing their input, giving suggestions and flagging issues.

As I said, if candidates see things during an election and Canadians are aware of things, having those mechanisms in place makes this a team Canada effort. Canadians want to know they can be part of the solution. They take it as seriously as we all do. Rather than fighting among each other for a gotcha moment, we can combine all of these tools at our disposal to tap into what Canadians know, what candidates know and what political parties know.

That's where this amendment comes in. It's inviting the national campaign directors not just of two parties but of each recognized party. That also includes the NDP and the Bloc in the conversation. What are they seeing? What have they seen? What recommendations do they think we should put in place to combat this? That's why I think it's incredibly important for this to be a team Canada approach.

[Translation]

The involvement of the 2019 and 2021 national campaign managers from each party represented in the House of Commons was very clearly inclusive, as was the security clearance obtained for representatives of each party.

Earlier, I mentioned it was important to have the required security clearance to share information confidentially. I also talked about the importance of listening to members of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, the rapporteur, members of this committee, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, so that we have the information and recommendations we need to strengthen our system.

[English]

This is a bit like what we heard regarding what intelligence is. Intelligence isn't evidence, so we're going to take the pieces of those tools, and with them together, the rapporteur will be able to provide feedback.

I don't doubt that when we talk about intent and impact... I like to believe in the good of parliamentarians and that everyone wants to...that the intent is in the right place. We want to make sure that our systems are in place so that foreign state actors do not cast doubt and do not make Canadians turn on their democratic institutions.

We also have to be mindful of the way that we do it, so that the impact does not amplify the anxiety that this issue can bring. It is important for us, as parliamentarians, to be mindful of that impact. Sure, I could say, "Bring everything out in the open and put everything out there." Not only would the Government of China have access to information, but so would Russia, Iran and other state actors.

I had the pleasure of serving on the national defence committee for my first mandate. I had the chance to go to NORAD in Winnipeg and be briefed on issues of national security when it comes to NORAD and NATO. They weren't classified briefings, Madam Chair, so I can speak to this. I can attest that these conversations are happening with our Five Eyes partners. We need to trust that those who work in the field of intelligence-gathering know what they're doing. I have full trust in the parliamentarians who sit on NSICOP.

As I've said before, when we talk about impact, my concerns are that, if we were to do something that put at risk our relationship with Five Eyes and those who work in the intelligence community... Who would want to work with Canada, knowing that we were very cavalier with issues of national security? Who would want to join the Canadian Armed Forces and work in a domain where national security was not taken seriously? The impact of what we do may have unintended consequences.

I don't think there is a cookie-cutter response to this. I really don't. It will be a combination of tools in the tool kit. I think we will know in the next couple of days—in fact, I don't think; I know we will know—who the special rapporteur will be.

[Translation]

As soon as we know who the rapporteur is, I hope we can continue this discussion in a respectful and collaborative manner. I also hope that we will show that we clearly understand the major consequences our decisions or actions can have.

I hope that the members of this committee will continue to think about recommendations to improve the system we currently have.

[English]

Complementing the work that NSICOP will do and complementing any other actions that are taken—whether it be from the rapporteur's recommendations, from the panel, from SITE, from Elections Canada or from the commissioner of elections—there are many actors around the table trying to reach that common objective.

As I said earlier today, if the common objective that we all claim we have is there and it is about detecting, deterring and countering foreign interference, many parliamentarians have been here longer than me. Many may have worked in the field of police or intelligence—gathering or international relations, as we heard from MP Vandenbeld earlier today, and have a wealth of expertise in that. I really, truly think and truly believe that, if we were to combine forces in terms of all these actions that we can take and information that we can gather and recommendations that can come forward, we can come to some really great recommendations on a united front.

The reality is that this is not going to diminish. Foreign interference or attempts at foreign interference will continue. We need to be proactive in this regard. We need to not fight amongst each other. Quite frankly, if I were the People's Republic of China, I'm sure I'd be giggling with glee right now, watching Canadian politicians and people fight about this rather than focus on them.

With that, Madam Chair, I know that quite a few people would like to get some words in. I do ask members to reflect on what Ms. Blaney said about intention and impact. I think those are two really important words, and we need to be mindful of them.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Housefather, I believe this is the first time you're speaking today. Can we just do a quick sound check? Let me know how your day is going. Tell me what you're up to.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Absolutely.

I was in my riding today. I was very happy to be part of a tribute to Marc Garneau, our former colleague here, who left the House last week.

**The Chair:** That must have been out of this world. Excellent.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Is the sound coming across okay?

**The Chair:** Yes. Thank you. We got the thumbs-up.

The floor is yours, Mr. Housefather.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you.

I want to thank my dear friend Ms. Romanado for the last speech. She used the term “secret handshake” when she was speaking French, and I’ve been desperately trying to remember what secret handshake is in French.

[*Translation*]

Our colleague Ms. Gaudreau can correct me.

I’m honoured to be attending the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs meeting today.

[*English*]

Kelly McCauley often says, “The mighty OGGO”, when he opens up meetings of our committee, but I think I can just as easily say, “The mighty PROC”, because the role that PROC plays is so important to everything done in the House of Commons. This is definitely one of the most important discussions that PROC has: the question of how to avoid, how to remedy and how to stand up against foreign interference in Canadian elections. There’s nothing more sacred to a democracy than knowing that each and every Canadian citizen over 18 who’s qualified has the ability to vote and that they are the ones who make the decisions as to who their 338 representatives in Parliament are.

As Ms. Romanado said, I also believe that parliamentarians can work together for the greater good. I’ve always believed that. I don’t think that most issues should be partisan, and this issue is probably the furthest away from what should be partisan. This is such an important job the committee is doing today, despite, as I know, how frustrating it must be for people who have spent hour after hour listening to this debate. Sometimes it feels like you’re talking past each other.

At the same time, you’re figuring out what the role of PROC is going to be as a part of a greater effort to tackle foreign interference. NSICOP is no doubt going to play a part. I was incredibly proud when our government introduced the NSICOP committee of parliamentarians after the 2015 election. It was one of the campaign promises I talked a lot about because it’s something that’s being done and has been done for a very long time in the United States and in the U.K., where politicians have top secret clearances and they’re truly able to have supervision over the intelligence services.

There has to be political accountability for the intelligence community, not just at the executive branch but also at the legislative branch. I know, having spoken to colleagues from all parties who have served on NSICOP, how valuable they feel that work is. I do believe that the mandate the Prime Minister has given NSICOP is incredibly important.

I also look at the enhanced role given to the intelligence community, the question of how we deal with the security of elections and the elections task force that was set up to deal with threats to the 2019 and 2021 elections, and the fact that parties were briefed by that group when necessary.

I think there’s a lot that has been done, but there’s still a lot more to do. NSICOP will play a role and no doubt PROC will play a role. The witnesses who have already come to PROC have made some important statements, and I think the amendment that is before the committee, the question of who to call as further witnesses.... I’ll remind everyone the amendment is to invite the 2019 and 2021 national campaign directors of each recognized party in the House of Commons and the security-cleared party representatives to the security and intelligence threats to elections task force during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, to come testify before the committee.

[*Translation*]

I believe it’s very important that we meet with these witnesses. It’s very important that we hear from representatives of each political party represented in the House, so not only representatives of the Liberals and the Conservatives, but also those from the NDP and the Bloc Québécois. It’s really important that they appear before the committee, that they report what they’ve heard and that they make recommendations on how to improve the system in the future.

Perhaps it should include a clear duty to inform candidates in ridings where issues have been raised.

[*English*]

I think there’s a lot that everybody here wants to do and accomplish when it comes to election interference. Again, I believe all parties want to see the greater good being done. Sometimes it’s too bad that these debates go on and on, because, often, discussion among the parties, away from the cameras, would be more beneficial in trying to arrive at a solution where there is disagreement. However, I want to plead with my colleagues—when it comes to this issue—on two points that I think are very important, which my colleague Ms. Saks previously raised.

The first is the question that Canadians deserve to be able to believe in their election system. That doesn’t mean we don’t take the threat of foreign interference seriously. That doesn’t mean we speak down the threat that exists, that we know exists and that has existed not only in the last couple of elections but also for many elections and cycles—not only from China but also from Russia, Iran and other foreign actors.

However, what we cannot do is make this into a political circus that causes Canadians not to believe in the fairness of their political system. We all saw what happened in the United States. We have all seen how one discredited former president has been able to convince millions and millions of Americans—indeed, the majority of people who support his party—that he won the 2020 election, which he lost by almost 10 million votes and by over 70 votes in the electoral college.

We have all heard of the court cases brought in the United States and the absurd claims that voting machines from Dominion changed votes from Trump to Biden, and that this company somehow developed their applications in Chavez's Venezuela, when nothing could be further from the truth. We heard allegations that, somehow, the machines didn't count ballots if they were made out to Trump; that people in Atlanta were stuffing ballots and only counting Biden ballots; that, somehow, something went wrong, because ballots were being counted after 11 p.m. or midnight of election night; and that mail-in ballots—which, by the way, were almost the totality of ballots in certain states that have gone to mail-in voting, many of which previously favoured Republicans—were somehow defective or tampered with.

It means that the words of politicians matter. We have to take this seriously and not overstate certain things. We have a right to be concerned. We have a right to fight for the integrity of elections, but we can't overstate facts to make Canadians believe that elections weren't fair or free, or that their votes didn't count. No evidence has come forward that allows people to make these general, absolute claims. Again, as we saw in the United States, when certain politicians make these claims, no matter how absurd they seem on their face....

We all knew the Democrats would use mail-in ballots more than the Republicans in the 2020 election. We knew it, because all polls showed that Democratic voters were more concerned about COVID and that Republicans were heavily influenced by Trump telling them not to vote mail-in. Therefore, we knew, in the states where election-day ballots were counted first, that a Trump lead would gradually go down, because the Democratic mail-in ballots and absentee ballots would be counted after the fact, such as in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Georgia. We knew that, in other states, where they counted the mail-in ballots before election day, like Ohio, a Biden lead would eventually turn into Trump votes from election-day votes coming in and surpassing them.

There was nothing unpredictable about this. What is scary is that this one man's belief that he had a right to tell everybody who won the election, with no evidence, got into so many people's minds that they distrust the system. They distrust mail-in voting. As a result, there is a lack of confidence in the system, which is one of the fairest and freest systems in the entire world.

Whatever we think about the United States, it is one of the strongest democracies in the world. Its Constitution was even able to overcome an insurrection on January 6, 2021. It is our closest ally. We need to hope and pray that Americans believe in their election system, which is fair and free, in the same way that we want Canadians to continue to believe in our election system, which is fair and free.

This is why the work that PROC is doing here is so important. It's in order to make sure that we look at election interference while maintaining the confidence of Canadians in the integrity of our elections. This is the idea on which the permanent members of PROC and those who are replacing them can absolutely come together and arrive at a motion, whether taking this amendment or making a subamendment to this amendment, that everybody can agree to.

I want to give you an example of how politicians came together to support me on what was perhaps one of my worst days in Parliament, and it dealt with an issue like this one.

One day a few years ago, I believe it was 2017, I was accused, along with my colleague Michael Levitt, who used to represent York Centre, by a man who eventually ran for the leadership of the Green Party and came second. I will not give him the credit of mentioning his name, but he accused me and Michael Levitt of double loyalty, saying that we were more loyal to Israel than we were to Canada. There was no basis for this claim other than the fact that I and Michael Levitt supported the State of Israel, but it led to a flood of threats and nasty messages that I and my staff received that were hurtful, that were demeaning and that made me feel like nothing, like I didn't deserve to exist.

I fought back. I went back on social media and reminded everybody that this was a little bit crazy. I was born in Canada. I am a Canadian citizen only. I've never lived anywhere else in my life. My parents were born in Canada. They were Canadian citizens. They never lived anywhere else in their lives. My grandparents were born in Canada. They were Canadian citizens. They never lived anywhere else. My family has been in Canada since the 19th century. I've never lived in Israel. I've never been a citizen of Israel. The idea was far-fetched and with no basis, yet people believed it because it was said on social media.

We have to be so careful here not to accuse Canadians of double loyalty, because it is offensive not only to the elected officials who serve Canada and Parliament, no matter whether they're dual citizens, single citizens, born somewhere else or born, like me, here in Canada. It also hurts the many Canadians who identify with those ethnic groups that are being singled out in that way.

What happened at the time was that every leader of every party jumped in, stood up and supported me and Michael Levitt. Not only did the Prime Minister do it, but Andrew Scheer, the Conservative leader, did it. Jagmeet Singh, the NDP leader, did it, and Elizabeth May, the Green leader, did it as well. They all jumped in.

[*Translation*]

From the Bloc Québécois, my friend who represents the riding of Drummond also took part in the debate to defend me.

[*English*]

It meant the world to me when that happened, because it showed that, across political parties, Canadians and their leaders did not feel that such an allegation of dual loyalty was part of Canada's tradition, was part of Canada's politics or was any part of what any politician should go through in a democracy.

I plead with everybody, as we go through this debate and there are going to be a lot of discussions about China and Iran and other countries, that we make very clear that citizens of Canada who come from those countries are not the ones we are targeting when we talk about foreign governments meddling in elections. There cannot be one broad brush on any community. We have to be very careful about that, because there's nothing that makes someone feel less Canadian than when they're targeted in that way.

My colleague, Ms. Saks, dealt with it very eloquently, but I thought I would simply add a little bit about the personal experience that I had and the fear I have. This debate cannot disintegrate into blaming different cultural communities that live in this country that often feel stigmatized and vilified—

I'm sorry, Madam Chair. Am I supposed to stop? I see a microphone went on somewhere.

**The Chair:** No, you're great. Keep going.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you, Madam Chair. By the way, you're doing an incredible job chairing this committee. I've been watching this on TV, and I have to say that you have infinite patience and I'm very impressed. Obviously, I want to say the same about many of my colleagues here today. I've seen infinite patience from Ms. Blaney, and I've seen infinite patience from all of the members, so thank you for that.

Coming back to the question of whom this committee should call as witnesses, I do believe it is important to hear from the national campaign directors. The national campaign directors of each party have more knowledge than anyone about the election in each of the individual 338 Canadian ridings.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Housefather. Just because we have the opportunity now, would you like to move your boom just a little bit lower?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Absolutely. Is this better, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** That is much better. There is so much excitement with what you're saying that we might have to start all over. I'm kidding.

Continue. Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Coming back to that question, the national campaign directors of each party are the ones who hear back from the candidates and the organizers across the country. They take into account what they're hearing, especially the unusual facts they're hearing on the ground in different ridings. Those people would come to the committee, I believe, with a wealth of knowledge about where the committee might want to look and what it might want to look at in investigating foreign interference.

Right now we're talking about potential financial foreign interference, passing money through intermediaries or directly, and the question of whether nominations need to be governed by Elections Canada. The national campaign chairs would probably have opinions on that.

[*Translation*]

I feel it's very important that the committee call representatives of the Liberals and the Conservatives, but also of the NDP and the Bloc Québécois. That way, everyone will share their perspective on the issue, which is quite interesting.

[*English*]

There's then the question of bringing the parties' representatives to the security and intelligence threats to elections task force before the committee. Again, these were the people who were given secu-

arity clearance. These were the people who were told they had a job to interface with the threats through the elections task force.

They would share the perspective of how they were communicated with, where they felt they should have been communicated with at an earlier time and what they think the thresholds should be for that type of communication. Maybe those thresholds, as we saw in the report we recently received from the retired civil servant, were not at the right levels. There were a lot of good recommendations in that report that these people would be able to add on to if they come before the PROC committee and are given the opportunity to share their recommendations. I believe it's valuable to receive that perspective from each and every one of the different parties, not just two of the four recognized parties in the House of Commons.

Finally, Madam Chair, as I wind up my remarks, the main issue here is that there are many different multi-faceted ways in which we need to deal with election interference. Election interference will not be countered by only one intelligence service or by only one way of going about it.

I strongly support the foreign lobbyist registry, which is now being consulted on by Public Safety and Minister Mendicino. I strongly support NSICOP looking into the threats we faced in 2019 and 2021 and making recommendations.

I strongly believe we need to continue to have a non-partisan group of civil servants who warn politicians. We probably need to have a better ability for all people running in elections to be warned by either Elections Canada or CSIS as to what threats they may face in an election campaign.

All of these things are looking forward. The main thing I would leave the committee with is that we need to look forward as to how we improve on what is there now and how we do it in a way that each and every one of us, from all parties, can agree upon and feel we're adding to something by doing it.

[*Translation*]

I'm confident that this group of parliamentarians with representatives from all political parties, colleagues whom I respect very much, will be able to come to a good understanding.

Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this evening.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Housefather. I appreciate those comments.

I have a speaking list that has grown all of a sudden, really quickly, so I'm going to suspend this meeting. We will continue with this discussion, hopefully, on Tuesday, but if anything else changes, I will let you know.

Thank you for your time. Keep well and safe.

To all of the supporting staff, we appreciate your service.

Have a good day.

[*The meeting was suspended at 10:09 p.m., Tuesday, March 14*]

[*The meeting resumed at 11 a.m., Tuesday, March 21*]

**The Chair:** I call the meeting to order.

We are resuming meeting number 57 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

We are picking up where we left off last Tuesday. The committee is continuing debate on the amendment by Ryan Turnbull.

Comments should go through the chair, as you know. The clerk and I will maintain a consolidated speaking list. From last time, we have, based on who is present, Mr. Fergus, Mrs. Romanado and Mr. Barrett making up our speaking list.

Would you like to be added? Okay. That's perfect.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Chair, I withdraw my name from the list for the time being. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mrs. Romanado, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Madam Chair, I also withdraw my name for now.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** For my sanity, you're not asking to be added to the list. You'll let me know if you want to be added back onto the list. That's excellent.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Madam Chair, it's been nearly 24 hours of filibuster on the amendment and the main motion.

I saw on my way into committee a message sent to the media by the Prime Minister's Office that Ms. Telford is volunteering to come before the committee. Hopefully, that puts other members' minds at ease.

It's important that we're able to get to the heart of this matter and find out what Ms. Telford knew, when she knew it and what the government did in response to that knowledge. Canadians are looking for transparency, and they're looking to us to bring that to them. That's our role. I would hope that we'd be able to get to a vote on this matter right away.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to be subbing in at procedure and House affairs. As Mr. Barrett just mentioned, Katie Telford has agreed to testify before the procedure and House affairs committee. I think that's significant.

I would like to call the question on the motion that is before the committee.

**The Chair:** That's exciting, because my list is coming to an end, and I'm not seeing signals. I'm just going to let those who are on the list also speak to it.

I have Mr. Cooper, followed by Madam Gaudreau.

Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to move a subamendment. We will distribute it among members. It's translated.

**The Chair:** Why don't we do that, and then I'll give you back the floor.

We'll have the subamendment emailed to everyone, and we'll go from there.

We'll have a quick suspension.

● (1100) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1120)

**The Chair:** Excellent.

I believe everyone has received what they were supposed to receive.

Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

We have, first of all, an amendment to my motion to call Katie Telford to testify before this committee. That is an amendment brought by Mr. Turnbull, which would be to remove Katie Telford from the motion entirely. That amendment needs to be dealt with first.

I believe there is agreement among the parties to have a vote on that motion.

**The Chair:** I think there is an understanding that we would like to have a vote on Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

The amendment that Mr. Turnbull proposed was actually not to change (a). It was changing (b), so it was actually not removing Ms. Telford. Just to correct the record as to what amendment we're on, it was changing the same section that Ms. Blaney had changed.

I stand corrected. It was replacing everything.

Now we will have the vote, if there is agreement, on Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Are you rising on a point of order, Mr. Baker?

**Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Could I just ask the clerk to read what we're voting on?

**The Chair:** We'll give you a copy, Mr. Baker.

**Mr. Yvan Baker:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll bring copies to Ms. Sudds as well.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** The interpreters will also have a copy of it.

[English]

**The Chair:** While that is happening, I'll just say that today, March 21, is World Down Syndrome Day. I was pleased to be able to share with all of our colleagues socks from the Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society. I want to give a shout-out to Caleb. Because I won't be in Waterloo to acknowledge March 21, I want to bring Caleb's greetings to all of you. I hope you do learn a little bit more. I know that many of you also already know about it.

It is exciting that I am from Waterloo and the vice-chair is from Wellington. It's a society that represents our region.

With that, I believe everyone has the amendment now.

We will call the question on Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** I will come back to you, Mr. Cooper, as I said I would.

Sophia, I want to thank you for calling that vote. The last time you called a vote it was unanimous, so I was hoping for the same outcome.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Given the filibustering that had taken place over nearly a 24-hour period over four days, my motion proposed that Ms. Telford appear last week. Given that the time has passed, I now move an amendment to my motion.

It is that the motion be amended by replacing the words “during the week of March 13, 2023” with “between Monday, April 3, 2023 and Friday, April 14, 2023”.

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion?

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I'll be very brief, Madam Chair.

This time frame recognizes that next week is budget week and provides a two-week window during the constituency weeks where this committee could convene and hear from Ms. Telford.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Are there other comments on this?

I have Mrs. Romanado.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Madam Chair, just because we've had Ms. Blaney's motion that passed as amended, I want to make sure it's very clear.

We have some substitutes on committee today. I'd like to make sure that we all have the right motion that Mr. Cooper is referring to. Is it possible to make sure that we all have what he's proposing circulated to us?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The amendment has been distributed, Sophia has confirmed, so why don't we just take a second to check our inboxes to see if it has been received?

Sophia, if we can perhaps have a printed copy, that would be great.

I understand that everyone has received it.

Mr. Cooper, I'm just going to ask you to reread it into the record, if that's okay, to make sure we're all on the same page.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I propose that the motion as amended by Ms. Blaney be amended by replacing the words “during the week of March 13, 2023” with “between Monday, April 3, 2023, and Friday, April 14, 2023”.

**The Chair:** We have the amendment in front of us. Does anyone want to discuss this?

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Madam Chair, I will have another amendment to offer in a moment about a minimum of two hours, but I think we should dispense with this first.

**The Chair:** Would you like to “friendly amend” this one? This would change the date to a period, and then the three hours.... If that's what you're changing, we could do it at the same time.

Would there be a desire to have a friendly amendment?

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** There's been a lot of confusion. We've had a lot of different motions, amendments and subamendments over a period of time.

I would suggest that we dispense with my amendment to the motion as amended. If Mr. Julian wishes to then move an amendment, we can deliberate on that.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** That would be easier.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus, you have the floor.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I want to make sure I understand, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

We had some very useful and fruitful discussions, but I would like to make sure that what Mr. Julian is going to move is in order.

Can the clerk or the chair confirm that?

**The Chair:** All right.

Should Mr. Julian wish to make an amendment to Mr. Cooper's amendment, he could do so now. However, because Mr. Julian wishes to move another amendment—he wants to change the number of hours—we will do that afterwards.

[English]

I don't see any hands. I'm going to call the question on Mr. Cooper's amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** I see your hand up, Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think this will probably be the last amendment. Hopefully, we'll be able to vote on the main motion.

I'd like to change, after "to appear" to add "for a minimum of two hours". It would read, "invite Katie Telford, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, to appear for a minimum of two hours by herself". It would then go on to the amendment from Mr. Cooper.

[Translation]

The French version reads as follows: "*à comparaître seule pendant un minimum de deux heures.*"

[English]

**The Chair:** You are changing it to "a minimum of two hours" and for her to appear by herself.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I would change "to appear alone for three hours by herself", to "appear for a minimum of two hours by herself".

**The Chair:** I'm going to take names, and it's going to be Monsieur Berthold.

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, did you raise your hand? No?

Mr. Cooper has the floor, followed by Ms. Sahota.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** No, Madam Chair, I'm prepared to potentially accept this as a friendly amendment. I just want to confirm—

**The Chair:** This is not a friendly amendment, because we voted on yours, so this is a new amendment.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** That's right. It's my motion.

**The Chair:** We've voted on your amendment, Mr. Cooper.

I'm going to have Mrs. Sahota on the list followed by Mrs. Romanado.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I'm just going to make my comments first, and then perhaps Mr. Julian will see as a friendly amendment or subamendment to his amendment removing the words "by herself". It is customary for there to be officials present when a witness like the chief of staff appears, so I would just ask Mr. Julian whether he would accept that as a friendly amendment. If not, then I could explain a little further why and would perhaps then formally move a subamendment.

**The Chair:** Would you like to answer, Mr. Julian?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Well, we'd be removing the word "alone". It's superfluous.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** But there are two words, on either side of the request.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Yes, it kept repeating.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** It says, "to appear alone". You removed that and then "for a minimum of two hours" and that is followed by "by herself". I don't know why it was ever worded that way, but I guess somebody really wanted to make that emphasis, that she be alone and be by herself at the same time.

I think both should be removed.

**The Chair:** So, Mr. Julian, would you like to accept that as a friendly amendment or do you not see it as a friendly amendment?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** We've removed the word "alone". I think that's sufficient for what Ms. Sahota is speaking about.

**The Chair:** Ms. Sahota is suggesting that if we have her come by herself she will not be able to have her officials with her, and she is suggesting that it would be more customary for someone to appear with officials.

You are suggesting you want her by herself and not with officials.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** We have taken out "alone", and it's for a minimum of two hours. I don't see that as instructing her not to be with officials. Officials would be sitting behind. She's consulting with them. That is normal practice at committee.

**The Chair:** I think there's a difference between officials sitting behind versus being at the table with you to be able to consult. I think that's the nuance.

Mrs. Sahota.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** So if removing "by herself" is not seen as a friendly amendment, perhaps I can suggest adding more words to say she may or may not be accompanied by officials? I think it would be easier just to remove the "by herself". If you're not opposed to officials coming then that is...she would be here. I think the whole point, at the end of the day, is to have Katie Telford appear. That is what we've been talking about for a long time. We're making progress on making that happen and so now it seems a little bit silly that we're struggling with this wording.

**The Chair:** I'm just going to go back to Mr. Julian, before I go to Ms. Romanado.

Mr. Julian, it's your amendment. Do you see that as a friendly one or not? It's okay either way.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I see with this amendment that officials could accompany her, and she could consult with them. That is something that happens at committee.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Okay, then I'll move a subamendment.

**The Chair:** If I could use the conversation the clerk and I just had.... It's a public meeting. If the deputy is in the room and somebody asks a question, and she says, "My deputy is in the room, if you would like the deputy to elaborate", it's a public meeting, so technically you could bring them to answer that question. If the person really wants the answer, the deputy could.... We'd have to just agree to it. If the person doesn't want the answer from the deputy, then that, I think, speaks to the person who doesn't want the answer from the deputy.

Am I perhaps being too logical? I don't know. Ms. Sahota looks concerned.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** No, I think it's good that we're having this conversation. It clarifies things. I like the perspective you're giving and the reassurance that Mr. Julian seems to be providing, that his intention is not to exclude officials from the meeting. As long as they're not excluded from being present....

Am I correct in assuming, Mr. Julian, that that's not your intention?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I think the way the chair just spelled it out is exactly what the committee would understand as well.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Romanado, go ahead.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Actually, I was going to ask for the same clarity from Mr. Julian, in terms of whether Ms. Telford would like to have officials with her. We've already had that conversation, though, so that's fine. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for clarifying that.

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** This is just on the point of clarity, and then I will move on, but just to understand what Mr. Julian's understanding is, and perhaps what all members' understanding is as well. If Ms. Telford is here with officials and it's a public meeting, they can be here. I get that. For my purposes, would they have name tags and be sitting at the table so I could at least know who they are and the roles they play?

**The Chair:** What I would suggest is that if, let's say, the witness were to say, "I would like my officials to be able to elaborate" and the member was satisfied with that, yes, somebody would come and bring them a name tag, because they'd be at the table to answer the question. They can't answer it from the back, so the minute they are seated at the table, yes, there will be a name in front of them.

I wasn't sure if you wanted to say something back.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Good luck to the clerks on having name tags prepared and ready to bring up to the table. Good luck as well to the analysts in perhaps providing us with a bit of background beforehand, as they normally do.

**The Chair:** I'm understanding there is agreement that if officials are providing insights, we can ask Ms. Telford to let us know who will be accompanying her in the room. That way, if there's a line of questioning, we are ready with the name tags and what they do.

Does that provide some satisfaction? I tend to usually have some leniency to make sure members are equipped for a successful meet-

ing. I will use that leniency unless someone tells me I don't have it. Are we good there?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** That would satisfy me, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** That's always a goal. Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Nater? Okay, thank you.

I am going to call the question on Mr. Julian's amendment. For the record, the amendment is that the word "alone", which is after "appear", be removed. Keep "for", insert "a minimum of two hours", remove "three hours", and the rest reads until the next part.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Unless there is conversation and discussion, we can go to the main motion as amended, as amended, as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The motion as amended multiple times passes.

With that, I'm hoping we can get an hour of our lives back. Does anybody else have something else to talk about?

I'm going to give you a quick update on redistribution. We did, as was requested, send out a chart to show you the breakdown of everything. We will have some conversations among colleagues in the subcommittee to figure out the way forward for redistribution. Maybe we can get to that next week, as it is budget week.

Following that, as per the motion that just passed, we will be setting up a time for Ms. Telford to come. The clerk will reach out to find out her availability, and then we'll try to start working on some of that information so that we are prepped for that meeting accordingly.

I see heads nodding. Excellent.

With that, I'm going to adjourn the meeting.

Have a great day.







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<https://www.noscommunes.ca>