



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 039

Monday, November 14, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Monday, November 14, 2022

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 39 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today at the request of six members of the committee to discuss media reports that the Chinese Communist Party tried to influence the 2019 federal election.

[*English*]

I want to take a minute to thank the clerk, analysts and party teams for actually making this meeting possible. We don't usually meet today. I'd also like to thank veterans affairs committee members for providing us their space.

Before we start, I remind everyone that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair. The clerk and I will maintain a consolidated speaking list of members wishing to address the committee.

I see that Mr. Cooper would like to speak.

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

I'd like to move a motion. It will be distributed to members at this time, but so that it can be entered into the record, I will read it.

That,

(a) given the Global News report published by Sam Cooper on November 7, 2022, revealing that intelligence officials informed the Prime Minister and several cabinet ministers in January of 2022 that the Chinese Communist Party actively worked to influence the 2019 Federal Election, the committee extend its study of Foreign Election Interference by four meetings to investigate this report;

(b) these meetings shall be scheduled immediately and override and be prioritized over any other business of the committee;

(c) the committee recall Elections Canada, CSIS, and the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(d) the committee invite The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(e) the committee invite The Honourable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(f) the committee invite Jody Thomas, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(g) the committee invite Vince Rigby, former National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(h) the committee invite David Morrison, former National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(i) the committee invite Dan Stanton, former CSIS officer, to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(j) the committee invite David Mulroney, former Canadian Ambassador to China, to testify on the report referenced in (a);

(k) the committee invite Dennis Molinaro, former CSIS analyst, to testify on the report referenced in (a); and,

(l) the committee order the production of

(i) all relevant briefing notes, memorandums and documents presented to the Prime Minister and members of Cabinet referred to in the report, and

(ii) all relevant memorandums, briefing notes, and documents concerning Chinese Communist Party interference in Canadian elections which are in the possession of the Prime Minister's Office, the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, the Office of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, and the Office of the Minister of Public Safety, provided that,

(iii) these documents be deposited, within one week, with the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel,

(iv) the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall promptly notify the committee whether the Office is satisfied that the documents were produced as ordered, and, if not, the Chair shall be instructed to present forthwith, on behalf of the committee, a report to the House outlining the material facts of the situation, and

(v) the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall make redactions to the documents, to protect the identities of employees or sources of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service or allied intelligence agencies, and as soon as reasonably possible, provide the redacted documents to the Clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee in both official languages.

That is the content of the motion.

Madam Chair, this motion arises from the very troubling Global News report by Sam Cooper of November 7 that—

• (1105)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but if the member is going to speak to the motion, it would be helpful if we actually had it in front of us. Is there a copy?

The Chair: I understand that it has been circulated. Are you asking for a paper copy?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Yes. I don't have it.

Mr. Michael Cooper: We have paper copies.

The Chair: Are they in both official languages, Mr. Cooper?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes, they are in both official languages.

The Chair: Could you please give them to the clerk?

Mr. Michael Cooper: All right.

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado and Ms. Sahota, can you give me a nod to confirm that you have it in your email? Excellent.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

The motion before us arises from the very disturbing Global News story from November 7 by Sam Cooper detailing that the Prime Minister and several members of cabinet were briefed as early as January of this year by Canadian intelligence officials about a vast campaign of interference in our democracy by the Chinese communist regime, including during the 2019 election campaign.

Let me just say at the outset that I want to be very clear that we're talking here about interference by the Chinese communist regime. This has nothing to do with the people of China or with Chinese Canadians. It is specifically with regard to actions by the Chinese communist regime, and the Chinese people are victims of that totalitarian regime.

The briefings from CSIS are alarming and note the sophisticated campaign by the Chinese communist regime to subvert Canadian democracy, which includes funding a clandestine network of at least 11 candidates through Chinese communist intermediaries, corrupting political financing laws to advance the interests of the Chinese Communist regime and placing agents in campaigns to direct, control and influence candidates. The scope of the interference goes beyond that. It includes placing agents in MP offices to influence policy, corrupting Canadian officials to advance the interests of the Chinese communist regime and mounting aggressive campaigns to harass, intimidate and politically undermine elected officials whom the Chinese communist regime believes do not share or align with the interests of that regime.

There are also some alarming revelations about the role that Chinese consulate offices in Canada are playing to interfere in our democracy and in our elections. For example, according to the briefs, the Chinese consulate in Toronto directed funding of at least \$250,000 to this clandestine network of candidates, and the funds were distributed through proxies of the Chinese communist regime. It was also the Toronto consulate that directed a campaign worker to prevent a candidate from meeting with certain officials, including representatives from Taiwan.

Beyond the 2019 election campaign, according to the briefings, the consulate in Toronto has been directing significant sums of money, potentially millions of dollars, to interfere in our democracy.

- (1110)

That included, allegedly, \$1 million that was transferred from the Chinese consulate in Toronto to proxy groups. In turn, they organized protests in support of a continued partnership between the Toronto District School Board and the Chinese communist regime's state-funded Confucius Institute. The briefs further outline that President Xi's united front operates through consulates in Canada, from which officials direct funds into Canada's political system using Chinese communist regime proxies.

These are very alarming reports. Given what the Prime Minister was evidently briefed on, they would demonstrate interference by the Chinese communist regime in not one but two consecutive federal elections. We know of significant Chinese communist interference in the 2021 election. It was interference that was detected by the rapid response mechanism of Canada at Global Affairs, which observed Communist Party media accounts on Chinese social media platforms spreading disinformation specifically targeted at Conservative candidates.

In the face of these very serious instances of interference by the Chinese communist regime as part of what appears to be a very sophisticated campaign that involves intimidating elected officials, corrupting former officials, corrupting elected officials and an effort to influence the outcome of not one but two elections to serve the interests of the Chinese communist regime, Canadians deserve answers. We need to get to the bottom of this interference.

It is disturbing that the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet were briefed about this earlier this year in January—10 months ago, perhaps sooner—yet nothing appears to have been done on the part of the Prime Minister or on the part of the government. Despite evidence of interference by Chinese consulate officials, no one has been expelled from Canada. No one has been charged. There are no apparent investigations being undertaken. There has been no action taken on the part of government to respond legislatively, even though Canadian officials, former CSIS officials and our former ambassador to Canada, David Mulroney, have stated that Canada is more exposed than other western democracies to Chinese communist interference.

In light of that, the motion before us is a straightforward one. Elections fall within the purview of PROC and we are undertaking a study on election interference. Given the alarming report, it is incumbent upon this committee, pursuant to our mandate and pursuant to the study we are currently undertaking, to expand the study and to hold at least four hearings so we can hear from the appropriate agencies; hear from ministers who may have been briefed; hear from the current and former national security advisers of the Prime Minister, from the time of the interference in the 2019 election campaign through to the time that the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet were briefed; and hear from others, including former CSIS officials and our former ambassador, David Mulroney, who can provide insight into our exposure and our vulnerabilities. They are in a position to provide recommendations on how those vulnerabilities can be addressed.

• (1115)

This is to ensure that going forward, our security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies have all the legal tools and all the resources necessary to combat this kind of interference. This interference is simply intolerable. It is unacceptable. Canadians—and Canadians alone—ought to decide the outcome of elections, free of foreign interference and free of this kind of corruption that is being advanced by the Chinese communist regime, with witting and unwitting actors, according to the brief.

We need to know what the Prime Minister knew and why he has failed to act to address this interference. This motion is a starting point in that regard.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Berthold.

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

First, I want to thank my colleagues for making this emergency meeting possible. We are here to address an extremely hot topic of considerable concern to Canadians, and rightly so. Voters have a right to have access to honest elections that they can trust. That right is currently threatened according to revelations that Global News made on November 7 that the 2019 election was subject to organized interference planned and even funded by the Chinese communist regime. This goes far beyond anything we've heard to date in the study that we've begun on foreign interference in elections in Canada.

I would note that the committee has already started a study on foreign interference in the 2021 election in which we received very clear confirmation of foreign interference in the Canadian electoral process. We heard from representatives of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, who explained to us the measures in place for detecting foreign interference activities. I must say that, since little time has elapsed since the 2021 election, we wanted to go further and determine what steps would be taken in future to counter foreign interference.

According to an article published by Global News on November 7, the foreign interference concerned dates back at least to the 2019 election, and people knew about it at the time. That completely changes everything and requires us to alter the previous direction of our study on foreign interference in that we must now recall the experts who previously appeared and discuss the 2019 situation with them. We want to know who was made aware of this, which ministers were informed of it and what measures the government took starting in 2019 to prevent further foreign interference, particularly by the Chinese communist regime, in the subsequent election held in 2021.

We must ensure, for Canadians, that the democratic process is above all suspicion and especially free of any foreign interference on the part of any dictatorial regime whatsoever, particularly that of the Chinese communist regime in the matter before us.

The first victims of this surveillance and interference are the members of the Chinese community here in Canada, as well as their fellow countrymen living in China, who can't exercise any right to speak out without being subject to undue influence, pressure or intimidation on the part of the regime currently in power in that country. For those people, we have a duty to shed light on what has happened, considering the Global News revelations of November 7.

For the purposes of this study, we request that four meetings be added to the committee's calendar.

We further request that the representatives of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Elections Canada and the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force be recalled to testify on the events reported by Global News.

We also request that Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities; Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Jody Thomas, national security adviser to the Prime Minister; Vincent Rigby and David Morrison, former national security advisers to the Prime Minister; Dan Stanton, former Canadian Security Intelligence Service officer; David Mulroney, former Canadian Ambassador to China; and Dennis Molinaro, former Canadian Security Intelligence Service analyst appear to shed light on what Global News has revealed.

We also request the production of a series of documents because we must absolutely shed light on the circumstances surrounding this foreign interference in our elections by the Chinese communist regime. As I noted a moment ago, we want to know who was made aware of this, how we learned of this foreign interference, why we knew nothing between 2019 and 2021, why Canadians were not made aware of it and, especially, why the Prime Minister clearly did nothing to protect the 2021 election from the foreign interference known to have occurred in 2019.

• (1125)

We have a duty to voters, to Canadians. That's why I will support my colleague's motion. It's important to shed all possible light on the democratic process. I also hope my colleagues will support the motion for the sake of the next election in Canada. We don't yet know when the next election will be held, but one thing is certain, and that's that there will be others.

Thank you.

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

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

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

I would like to thank my two colleagues who just spoke and all my other colleagues who signed this letter to ensure we would discuss this important issue.

And it is indeed an important issue. All of us are concerned about the influence exercised by foreign governments and their interference in our political affairs here in Canada. We are all the more concerned in this instance given this entire story that we can read in the media about the Chinese government.

I believe there's a very broad consensus on this matter, and that's precisely why we gave priority to this study among our items of business this fall. We agreed, in extraordinary fashion, in a way that I think reflects what's best in our parliamentary tradition, to conclude our parliamentary precinct study, to begin and complete a study to determine whether we want our Parliament to continue working in a hybrid manner and to commence our study on political interference. As a result, we have already begun consideration of that topic. We have already agreed to devote a number of meetings to it, and I'm entirely in favour of holding four additional meetings.

However, pardon me if I seem somewhat confused, because I don't see the urgency. We previously agreed to study the issue, and I agree the study should be extended; that's not a problem. However, I don't understand why a meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs was rescheduled so we could hold this meeting this morning, when we had planned that our committee, the Senate Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, was going to meet to discuss this matter.

The motion calls for many things, in particular the appearance of additional witnesses and the production of briefing notes, memoranda and other documents. Once again, I would point out that this isn't a problem for me philosophically. I nevertheless think that this isn't the right place to produce those documents. The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, on which members of the official opposition now sit alongside members of all the recognized parties, can receive all those documents unredacted.

I'm a reasonable person, at least I hope so, and I think the idea behind what we're doing is entirely legitimate. However, we must ensure that the documents that are produced are communicated to parliamentarians in such a way that everyone can form a clear picture of the issue.

• (1130)

For that reason, I thank the official opposition members for agreeing to join the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, after previously refusing to do so for so long. I think that agreeing to sit on the committee was a good decision on their part, and I tip my hat to them, even though they may have made the decision a little late.

As a result, all the members of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians can access all the requested documents unredacted. As we all know, we have a fully functional and secure system for doing so.

There is just one part of the motion that greatly concerns me. As I said, I'm in favour of the idea behind the motion and the fact that we would be ordering the production of documents, but those documents must go to the right place. Having said that, I don't understand why these additional meetings should be held immediately

and before every other activity of this committee. We're about to complete two of our studies. The draft report of one of them is already in our email inboxes, and I think it will only take one more in camera meeting to finalize the text of it.

[*English*]

I'm not certain I see the emergency on this, given that these are the stories referring to the 2019 election and given we've already started the study on this exact issue. This is the reason they're asking for an additional four meetings, which I think is perfectly fine. However, this would displace the other two studies, and we had come to a very parliamentary decision on them in the best traditions of Parliament. We came together to agree on them and we're just about to finalize these two committee reports. I'm not certain if I see the fire that would require us to put off those two committee reports, which could effectively be done in one week's calendar time and perhaps two or three meetings of this committee's time. Then we would go on to do what Mr. Cooper and Monsieur Berthold have suggested we should do.

Madam Chair, I'm keen on introducing an amendment to this, but I would like to hear from my colleagues.

[*Translation*]

In particular, I'd like to hear the views of my Bloc Québécois and NDP colleagues.

Madam Chair, I'd like you to add my name to the speakers list so I can speak again once all my colleagues have had a chance to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ferguson.

I am sure you'll also want to hear from Ms. O'Connell, to whom I give the floor.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to my colleagues for bringing this motion forward. It's nice to see that the Conservatives have finally woken up to foreign interference and finally want to make this a priority. They refer to the media stories, but I refer them to the House of Commons, where they sat when a 2019 NSICOP report on this very subject was tabled. That was before the 2019 election and before the 2021 election. I'm looking at it right now. In the public version, which they could have accessed, the information was there, so where was the sense of urgency then?

The Conservatives have sat on their hands when it comes to fighting foreign interference and ensuring that our democratic institutions are upheld. I mean, they stood outside these doors and stood with convoy members who suggested that the entire government should be overthrown. Where were they on protecting our democracy then?

I have no issues with continuing this study. In fact, our members have been actively engaged in continuing this study. While I have no issues with moving forward, I think Canadians should be very concerned with some of the rhetoric we hear from Conservatives when it comes to foreign interference. As I said, is this an attempt to rewrite the history of attempts to overthrow democratically elected governments and the Conservatives' support of those types of movements, which Canadians have overwhelmingly rejected?

Again, in the context of this motion, having more meetings and more people attend.... I don't think you needed to cancel a veterans affairs committee to continue a study we're already doing, especially right after Veterans' Week. However, that's the Conservatives standing up for our members who served this country.

They don't accept yes as an answer. We're doing the study. Do you want more witnesses? Let's have more witnesses. I don't see why that's a problem. There were reports tabled in the House of Commons in 2019. What was the Conservative reaction to the work that NSICOP was doing on this? They pulled their members off NSICOP. If the Conservatives are truly concerned about foreign interference, they had ample opportunity to continue to do that work. Instead, they took their toys and went home.

In addition to that, I think Canadians should hear that disguised within this motion, which seems very reasonable in the sense of wanting to address foreign interference and protecting our democracy, are a couple of little tidbits that I think Canadians should be very alarmed about. Where is the mention of other countries or bad actors of foreign interference? From the 2019 NSICOP report, in addition to what we heard here in testimony, there are other countries engaged in foreign interference. The Conservatives are only focusing on China, and it makes me wonder why. If they want to defend our democracy and want to ensure that we have all the tools available to ensure that our elections are upheld and not interfered with, why don't they talk about Russia? Is it because the testimony we heard on this study was that Russia was targeting Liberal members?

Let's pinpoint something that Mr. Cooper said. He said that China, in the reports, was targeting "Conservative candidates" to influence the outcome of the elections. I read those media reports. I didn't see them saying that China targeted Conservative members. It targeted "candidates". If the members opposite have evidence that only Conservative members have ever been the focus of foreign interference, I welcome them to table it. They have mentioned only one race that they feel has been influenced, but in these reports, I think they talk about something like 11.

• (1135)

In this motion to take a very serious issue and continue to study it and push for strengthening our democracy, the Conservatives are disguising their real intention, which is this: When they lose, it's China's fault, and when they win, it's because they have won. It reminds me of former president Trump during the midterms. He said that if Republicans don't do well, it's their fault, but if Republicans do well, it's because of him. That's precisely what I'm hearing when it comes to foreign interference.

This is precisely what foreign bad actors want. They want Canadians to mistrust our democracy so that when certain candidates

lose.... May I remind you that they refer to Mr. Chiu and his election outcome constantly for this study, but he was rejected in 2015, so he was rejected once before, then supported and then rejected again.

I have no issue studying foreign interference. In fact, it's something I'm quite passionate about because I do think we need to make sure that our institutions are—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Then support the motion.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Excuse me. I know it must be hard to listen to a woman and not be able to control your emotions, but I sat quietly while you spoke, Mr. Cooper.

While I am passionate about studying this topic because I think it is something every Canadian should be aware of, let's not use this as a guise to suggest that when Conservatives lose, it's foreign interference. By the way, it's only one country; they don't bring up the other countries that have been cited by CSIS and others on the public record. I find that troubling. I would like to expand this to make sure that we're looking at all targets and all actions that are taken where we can, and at how we then support democracy so that Canadians have trust in our institutions.

I do not want to get into the U.S. rhetoric of rigged elections, and this is what we're heading towards. Let's stay focused on protecting our democracy and ensuring that our security agencies have the tools they need. I want to have that conversation. I think we should hear about what's been happening in this space and how we're going to protect these institutions, but if we're going to do it under the guise of certain parameters that the Conservatives think benefit them, then I think we're actually feeding right into what foreign state actors that engage in this activity want, which is mistrust in our systems. I have no issues bringing more people in, having more conversations and having more meetings, but the Conservative awakening to the fact that this is a problem is actually astonishing to me because we've had multiple reports tabled in the very House where many of them sat in 2019 and, I'm sure, before.

The other point I would throw out there—and perhaps I'll wait until I hear from other members—is that I'd like to know how... Our government introduced the briefing of political parties, in advance of elections, on foreign interference and threats, and I'd be very curious about whether other parties were not engaging with their candidates on how to prepare for this and how to protect themselves with security measures and things like that. Perhaps we should have those conversations with party members and party leadership, who would have also been briefed. It was something new and implemented by our government to ensure that going into elections, parties have information and can help protect their candidates and ensure that their candidates know what to look out for. I think that's something the Conservatives have missed in their drafting, but I'm happy to have that conversation.

As I said, I'm happy to move forward. I think there are some concerns, once again, in terms of the production of documents and the Conservatives' continuation of not understanding how to properly handle documents of national security, but I'm sure we can figure out a solution to that and how to have that information. I suggest they don't pull their members off NSICOP again if they want access to national security information, but time will tell with their leadership and what they actually take seriously.

• (1140)

In terms of the seriousness of foreign interference, we've been working on this and we've been talking about this, so I'm glad the Conservatives woke up and are now taking it seriously.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

• (1145)

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

I want to remind all members that I was one of the people who signed this ask for an emergency discussion. I really appreciate our differing opinions. I think it's always important to have space for that. I just want to recognize that.

I also want to mention that we should not be heckling in committee. It really disturbs me. This is about having civility. These are hard issues that we're facing and we should disagree—that's important for democracy—but how we disagree is important. I just wanted to put in my two cents on that.

The reason I signed on to have an emergency meeting is the fact that this recently come out. I think it behooves us all to take it seriously. We've heard testimony in the last couple of weeks on something that matters a lot to me, which is that there really aren't good strategies around supporting rural and remote communities to make sure they are not getting intense disinformation. That it is directly linked to having strong local media. We heard very clearly that indigenous and ethnic communities across this country do not necessarily have a strategy. We need to pick up on some of these things.

We cannot have interference at this level. We know it's becoming more realistic and we know that it is happening more frequently, so it makes sense to me that our committee would push this study out a bit to have a further specific discussion about what is happening

with China. We've heard that the Prime Minister has been briefed on this. We need to see what's happening at our level as well.

I do have a few concerns with this motion. I would like to talk about them. Hopefully, Mr. Cooper can respond to some of them once he is on the list again.

I am a little concerned that we're getting ahead of ourselves. There are too many witnesses, and it's not giving our committee leeway to focus on revelations. I am supportive of having witnesses at the committee from paragraphs (c) to (f). I think that makes a lot of sense. I would like to hear from them and then decide on the next witnesses we should have. Usually our process is to have parties put forward witness names. I'm not saying these folks shouldn't come, but I don't want us to limit ourselves to this and then we are not able to respond meaningfully to any revelations or things that we learn.

I also think it is important that when the subcommittee meets tomorrow, we look at what the plan is moving forward. We know that we have just a few weeks left in the House. A few reports are still on the table.

I have concerns with paragraph (b). I think it should be a priority for the committee, but I think it would be best if the subcommittee met, went over the schedule and brought something forward for the whole committee. As we all know in this circle, the subcommittee does that work and the whole committee agrees moving forward. I think that would be the best step to take. I'm not proposing anything particular here because I would like to have feedback before I do that.

I'm also concerned about the one week. It doesn't sound feasible. When I look at the production of papers, it usually takes quite a bit longer—up to 30 days. I don't want to put undue stress on the people who work so hard for us. Perhaps they can't get that done, and I think we should have a discussion about it.

The other thing is that it's really important that we protect potential whistle-blowers and the people who are coming forward. I think it's worth having a discussion about where this belongs. Does it belong in this committee? Is that going to be the best place for it? Should it go to NSICOP? I don't have a decision made on that, but I think it's an important thing. We do not want information getting out into the public realm that is going to put our elections more at risk. I need to have some assurances on the process. Maybe we need to discuss that more fulsomely.

Those are just some of the thoughts I have. I hope we can figure this out together because these are really important issues. Canadians need to trust in our systems. I hope that all of us have that commitment as we're having these discussions.

We also know that this is the role of our committee. Our committee is really meant to focus on the procedures to make sure that they're clear for Canadians and that Canadians have trust in them. As we look at this, I think it's important we stay within our lane. If we think more work needs to be done on some of these issues, then we may need to discuss whether this needs to go to the Canada-China committee.

I want to hear thoughts from Mr. Cooper on this. That's all I have at this time.

The Chair: That is timely.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to be surprisingly brief and provide a short summary of the various points that have been raised.

All of us around this table agree that we should shed more light on this matter. In the initial meetings that our committee held on the issue, we tried to determine whether there had been any foreign interference in Canadian elections. The answer was yes. Have we gathered enough information? The answer is no.

Should we be accountable to voters? Should we work hard to increase their trust in the electoral system and, especially, to protect our democracy? The answer is yes.

Some of us are wondering if we'll have enough time. We'll discuss all that tomorrow. We have five weeks before we complete the business we've planned. I just want to tell all the members of this committee that we took the initiative of preempting our study on the possibility of making the hybrid form of parliamentary proceedings permanent. We started examining the matter sooner than planned, since we don't have to give a response until June.

Looking at this from the outside, I put myself in the shoes of the voters wondering if they're safe, considering the article that Global News published on November 7. I don't think they're reassured.

By holding four more meetings and calling new witnesses, our committee can determine what the next steps should be. We've even discussed the Department of National Defence. I thought we could also dig a little deeper to determine why we don't have a complete picture of the situation. Our committee must pursue this matter to the end. As the saying goes, we need to strike while the iron's hot. We're conducting the study and we have to finish the job. That's why the Bloc Québécois signed this letter giving its consent to the motion.

I've spoken longer than I wanted. I hope that, within the hour, we'll have managed to vote on the motion so we don't use up the

time normally reserved for other committees and that we've concluded this meeting properly, in the same way it started.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Fergus is correct; it is a very important matter. It is one on which there ought to be consensus. Unfortunately, as I am listening to some of the rhetoric from some members of the committee, it would appear that there is no such consensus, which is very disappointing. I would note that, although it is not new, the Chinese communist regime, Russia, Iran and other foreign state bad actors have interfered in and are interfering in our democracy and in other aspects of Canadian society.

What is new are certain facts pertaining to the following: funnelling at least \$250,000, directed by the Chinese consulate in Toronto, to at least 11 candidates; coordinating efforts to install agents within campaigns to try to control the activities of candidates, including who they met with; placing agents in MPs' offices; corrupting Canadian officials; and mounting an aggressive intimidation campaign against elected officials. We have learned—again, this is new—that the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet were briefed about this in January 2022. What we know or believe we know at this time is that no one has been expelled. No charges have been laid. No investigation has been opened. No action has been taken by the Prime Minister. In the face of these very serious instances of interference and of directing funds to try to influence the outcome of an election in 2019, it is incumbent upon us to get to the bottom of this and to do so in a transparent way.

There doesn't appear to be, based upon the comments I've heard from my colleagues, any real objection to the contents of this motion. More than once a point has been raised about the production of documents. Let me say that at this time we don't know what the contents of those documents are, so it's premature to judge that. What the motion provides for is that the law clerk, who has a full national security clearance, could go through them and undertake appropriate redactions in respect of national security or other considerations. I think at this point in time, given that there's much we don't know, it's quite appropriate to leave this in the hands of the law clerk. If the law clerk identifies issues, I'm sure the law clerk will flag those and we as a committee can respond accordingly.

With respect to this motion, the issue is based upon new revelations and based upon briefings the Prime Minister and his cabinet had. We need to do this in an open and transparent way. That's what this motion offers. It provides an appropriate list of witnesses. It's not unreasonable, I believe, in the face of these very serious allegations, to hold four more meetings and to do so as expeditiously as possible, all within the context of this broader study that we are undertaking relating to election interference and foreign interference.

• (1155)

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair.

I've listened very quietly and patiently to all of the arguments being made. I appreciate all of the comments of everyone on the committee. From my perspective, any foreign interference in our elections is of concern. That's why all members on this side supported the original motion to study foreign interference in our elections in the first place. We feel it's important.

I agree with Mr. Fergus, though I don't see the fire in the need for Standing Order 106(4) considering we were already engaged in a study on this topic. It could have easily been extended through a good faith discussion, as we've done before. I'm not sure what precipitated this particular meeting or the need for an extra meeting, which obviously disrupts other committee schedules.

Regardless, I would like to make a few comments related to some of the arguments that I've heard, because I feel I need to correct a few things. Based on testimony that we heard—I wasn't at the meeting, but I read the notes—Mr. Marcus Kolga said:

In 2014, those accounts—

He was referring to the Russian government's Twitter accounts.

—were actively doing the same. They were attacking the Harper government on various issues. They are agnostic with regard to any sort of political party. They will sink their fangs into the left and the right, and they will tug on any specific issue until it tears us apart. This is what they do.

It doesn't matter who's in government, whether it's the Conservatives one day, the Liberals the next, the NDP another day, or perhaps the Bloc one day.

He also said that all of the parties, even when they're in opposition, are subject to these types of attacks. It's important for us to recognize that all of the parties, no matter which party is in government, are equally vulnerable to foreign interference. I think that's important.

I would also quote from a November 7 Global News article. Mr. Cooper, unfortunately, spoke only about Conservative candidates being targeted in that article. It reads, "The briefings did not identify the 2019 candidates. But the alleged election interference network included members from both the Liberal and Conservative parties, according to sources with knowledge of the briefs." I think it's important for us to put that on the record as well.

• (1200)

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

To correct the record, the comments that I made, specifically with respect to the Conservative candidates, were based on the information that had been gathered by the rapid response mechanism of Canada at Global Affairs, pertaining to the 2021 election campaign.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That sounds like debate.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I'm clarifying, because the comments by the member are misleading based on what I stated.

The Chair: I'm going to mention a couple of things for colleagues about the way we handle ourselves. We are limited in time.

The committee cannot proceed after one o'clock because of limited resources, so you get to use your time as you like.

It sounds like everyone is saying this is an important topic. Let's have important conversations—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I hadn't finished my comments.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, would you like to finish your comments?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

Just to go back to what I was saying, I will go back to Mr. Cooper's opening remarks on this and double-check the record afterwards. Thank you for the point of clarification from him.

I also wanted to mention that despite the fact that, clearly, based on Mr. Kolga's testimony, much of this election interference and disinformation campaign went back to at least 2014 under the Harper government.... In fact, I would just point people to the Library of Parliament briefing, which we were all given and clearly states:

In January 2019, the federal government announced an action plan to safeguard Canada's elections and democratic institutions in anticipation of the October general election that same year. Since then, elements of the plan have been evaluated, and measures have been improved and renewed for subsequent elections.

It details that the plan has "four pillars", including "enhancing citizen preparedness; improving organizational readiness; combating foreign interference; and building a safe information ecosystem". Then it goes into more detail on combatting foreign interference.

It's a mischaracterization for anyone to say that the current government has not taken steps to prevent foreign interference. It in fact has an action plan, and it has set up SITE, which is the security and intelligence threats to elections task force, as well as the G7 rapid response mechanism, and there's more.

I think it's a mischaracterization to say that nothing has been done. I think it's important to put that on the record.

I also agree with Ms. O'Connell when she asks, "Why the focus only on China?" I mean, we've heard testimony from CSIS that had indicated Russia and Iran. It's also in our other briefing documents. I think it's important for us to consider all foreign state actors in terms of interference in our elections. It would I think be important for us to ensure that if we're doing a fulsome study we consider all threat actors.

The last thing I really wanted to say is about paragraph (b) in the motion. I have no problem extending this study and having some additional meetings and additional witnesses. I think it's great. I don't see why we needed a Standing Order 106(4) meeting today to determine that, because we could have done that based on consensus quite easily without this meeting, in my opinion. I do think that paragraph (b) is problematic, which is based on our good faith agreement to finish two other studies, one on hybrid and the other one on precinct security. Those would be overridden by what's been put forward today. I have a real issue with that, because we had a good faith agreement on it and I really don't think it's appropriate for us to now override that.

Certainly, I could see a situation where that might happen if something were extremely urgent, but in this case, we already had decided to do this study. I think we're already in agreement that we could have some additional witnesses and some additional meetings. It just doesn't strike me that this should all of a sudden super-vene things or become the highest priority on our agenda when we have two other studies that clearly were priorities before.

We clearly decided to study foreign interference as the third priority. Now we're saying that all of a sudden foreign interference in our elections should be the first priority. Well, we already decided that the priority among those three studies would be to complete the two that were already started and to then move on to this one. That was a good faith agreement that we had. Members on that side had all agreed to that. I'm not sure why they would renege on that agreement now. I think it's important for us to call that out and to actually work through setting our priorities.

That's all I have to say. I do have other things, but I'll leave it at that for now. Thanks.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As I previously indicated, I wanted to listen to the comments of colleagues from all political parties before moving an amendment to Mr. Cooper's motion. I listened closely to Mr. Cooper as well, and I think he'll find the amendments I'm going to propose reasonable.

[*English*]

To that end, Madam Chair, after listening to all the members across the way and hearing my colleagues on this side, I'll propose an amendment to the motion, which I have just sent to the clerk in both official languages. Let me read it out.

[*Translation*]

By this amendment, I move first that paragraph (b) be deleted from Mr. Cooper's motion.

I further move to delete paragraphs (g) to (k). We can determine whether to call more witnesses once we've heard those referred to in paragraphs (c), (d), (e) and (f).

I also move that the text of part (l) be amended as follows:

the committee order the production of

- (i) all relevant briefing notes, memorandums and documents which are in the possession of the relevant government Departments and Agencies, provided that,
- (ii) the Departments and Agencies tasked with gathering these documents apply redactions according to the Access to Information and Privacy Act,
- (iii) these redacted documents be deposited as soon as possible with the Clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee in both official languages.

[*English*]

I think I've captured most of what our colleagues have mentioned around the table. I think there's been some give and take on all of this. I think we will get to what we're trying to get at in an expedited and timely manner, but not such that we will undo our excellent work during the probable three meetings or 10 calendar days that are required for us to finish our work on the other two studies. They have been worked on very assiduously by all members around this table and certainly by our analysts, who have put together an excellent report that we are just at the final stages of considering.

• (1210)

I hope this amendment respects the important will around this table to extend the hearings we currently have and to make sure that we bring forward the right people and leave open the possibility of going even further, depending on what we hear from some of the opening remarks from witnesses. If necessary, we will go further. I hope this will be taken as a good statement.

Madam Chair, I am not the chair, and I am not being presumptuous in suggesting this, but perhaps we could profit from a couple of minutes for members to talk to each other to see if we've found the right way of going forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

I had Mr. Cooper on the list. Obviously, we're debating the amendment.

Yes, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, Mr. Fergus has provided his amendment to the committee clerk. Perhaps the clerk could provide the proposed amendments to the rest of the committee.

The Chair: I understand that it's been sent around. There's confirmation that it has been received by members. I'm guessing no one wants to have a quick side conversation, so Mr. Cooper—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I have a question before we begin consideration.

I'd like to know why, in his proposed amendment, my colleague wants to delete the part of the motion ordering the production of documents from the offices of all the ministers mentioned: the Prime Minister's Office, the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, the Office of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and the Office of the Minister of Public Safety. Under the proposed amendment, no politician would be held accountable for foreign interference, only departments.

I'd like to know why my colleague deliberately chose to delete the part of the motion specifically stating that all the ministerial offices would be ordered to produce memoranda and relevant documents.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, do you want to debate the amendment?

Mr. Michael Cooper: The point that Mr. Berthold raised was one I was going to raise as well.

The Chair: That's perfect.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I want to thank Mr. Berthold for his question.

I have two points to raise.

First of all, as regards the politicians mentioned in Mr. Cooper's proposal, I would note that Dominic LeBlanc and Mélanie Joly are among the first witnesses I would propose to the committee. I added Ms. Thomas from the Privy Council Office, considering her role as national security adviser to the Prime Minister. I thought that was very important. So there are some politicians among these witnesses.

Second, as you can see, I have amended subparagraph (i) so that we would be ordering production of "all relevant briefing notes, memorandums and documents which are in the possession of the relevant government Departments and Agencies". I thought that was more elegant wording, or broader wording, some might say, than what appears in Mr. Cooper's motion.

• (1215)

[English]

The Chair: Is there anybody else who would like to jump into this question?

Mr. Michael Cooper: I think we need to suspend briefly.

The Chair: There's agreement to have a quick pause. We will suspend really quickly. We'll be right back.

• (1215)

(Pause)

• (1245)

The Chair: Welcome back to PROC. I hope that was a fruitful conversation.

We're going to continue with debate on the amendment. I'm just going to make a quick list, if anybody else wants to join right now.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

We are prepared to compromise from a scheduling standpoint. The Liberals seem very insistent on completing the two outstanding studies. We're prepared to get those studies finished. At the same time, we're amenable to shortening the witness list to hear from the witnesses listed in paragraphs (c) through (f), inclusive of (f). Then there will be an opportunity to perhaps call additional witnesses based upon what we learn from the initial witnesses.

However, the real problem, as I see it right now, with the amendment proposed by Mr. Fergus is with respect to the production of documents. As I read Mr. Fergus' amendment, it guts our production request. The issue is this: What does the Prime Minister know and what do ministers know? What were they briefed on? What have they done or not done as a result?

That is the heart of the issue. Mr. Fergus' amendment completely removes the essence, the heart, of what it is we are seeking to get to

in order to get answers and learn the truth. This is not about departmental notes. There is a mountain of departmental notes. The issue is what is in the possession and control of the Prime Minister and ministers.

I wouldn't want to impugn the motives of Mr. Fergus, but as it appears on its face, the reason for the amendment and the significant change in wording is an effort, on the part of the Liberals, to cover up what the Prime Minister knew, what ministers were briefed on and what they failed to do as a result.

• (1250)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Cooper.

I do appreciate your willingness to by and large accept the amendment that I'm proposing. I know that in talking to my colleagues from the other parties, a subamendment or two might be needed to clarify some things.

I'm also reminded of an old joke. I wish I could remember which MP said it. I think it was George Baker. He once got up—a Liberal from Newfoundland and Labrador—and asked Mr. Speaker if he could call another member x, y, z, which was unparliamentary language, and the Speaker got up and said, "No, you can't do that." Then George Baker said "okay" and sat down.

I know you're not impugning my motivations, but let me just defend what I'm saying. I don't think I've gutted the motion at all. As a matter of fact, I think I've enhanced it.

Neither the Prime Minister, nor a minister's office, nor the Prime Minister's Office is on the front lines of making determinations on national security. That always comes up, and it's legislatively required to come up, from the different departments or agencies that are concerned with those matters.

When I put in the amendment that we bring in all relevant documentation that comes from all departments, ministries and bodies responsible for this, I think I made it more open to understanding the information that was seen by cabinet than what was being suggested. It wasn't my intention to gut the motion. It was just about finding a more elegant way of writing it.

That's what's behind the amendment, and I think members will actually end up getting a fuller picture than what was just described in Mr. Cooper's motion.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I guess the spirit of compromise is only working in one direction. The reality is that the report from Global News published by Sam Cooper back in November specifically listed documents and people. These are the same documents and people appearing in the motion that was put before this committee today.

Mr. Fergus has argued, not only here in public but in the little sidebar conversation we had, about the things that are important to his initiatives. We've compromised on those things. Now he's saying that we don't need the bureaucratic witnesses in paragraphs (g), (h), (i), (j) and (k), which are the ones he's asked us to not consider bringing—

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have a point of order.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: No, this is how I'm interpreting what he said, so—

The Chair: He's making a point of order, Mr. Calkins.

The floor goes to Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, I would like the member to perhaps provide some proof of the allegation that he's making against me, because that's certainly not the case.

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, I hope you can—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm entitled to my opinion and my opinion is that the witnesses in paragraphs (c), (d), (e) and (f) are, for the most part, political witnesses. The witnesses in paragraphs (g), (h), (i), (j) and (k) are largely bureaucratic witnesses.

He's asked for the politicians to come, but not with the documents. He's asked for the bureaucrats to not come, but we can get their documents instead. We're going to have politicians answering from bureaucrats' documents. That's basically where this is going to go. I don't agree with it at all. The crux of the matter to me is the production of those documents.

There is nothing wrong in the language in paragraph (l) of this motion. As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility—at least in the opposition—to hold the government to account. There are serious allegations in the news report published by Sam Cooper, which revealed, as said in the motion, that “intelligence officials informed the Prime Minister and several cabinet ministers in January of 2022 that the Chinese Communist Party actively worked to influence the 2019 Federal Election”.

I'll go back to the Parliament that happened before the 2019 election. This very committee had a motion before it to study foreign election interference, and the Liberal majority at the time actually killed it. Now they're in a minority situation and they're scrambling. I know what scrambling looks like when I see it.

The documents that are being asked for here are going to help parliamentarians make a determination of the level and extent of the threat and the abilities of not only the Chinese Communist Party, but, to Mr. Turnbull and Madam O'Connell's point, any foreign state actor that is not working in the best interest of Canada. We need to know as parliamentarians what the actual lay of the land is. Our constituents demand it, and defending our democracy demands that we have this information.

The Liberals seem agreeable, but they are obfuscating with regard to getting any results, having this committee get results and having Parliament and parliamentarians get the information we need to make an informed decision.

If we're not going to come to an agreement on this, we would yield to deleting paragraph (b) and we would yield on paragraphs (g), (h), (i), (j) and (k). However, we will not yield on the amend-

ment to paragraph (l) or anything about that matter. Otherwise, I will work with my colleague from the NDP, who in my opinion is reasonable in suggesting that seven days might not be long enough. I'll let her make that argument if she wishes to. We need to have these documents before Christmas.

• (1255)

The Chair: I'm going to once again say that committee members will be leaving me with no choice regarding what has to happen after one o'clock, because I've been clear about the resources that are available.

With that, we'll go to Ms. Blaney and then Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: In light of that, I will be brief.

I don't have any subamendments to make. We'll just leave this as it is. I do think we should vote for this separately, though. It sounds to me like there's a very clear message that we have three different parts. That's something I would like to provide feedback on.

I also want to say that I am concerned about information coming through our committee that could harm us in the future in terms of elections. I'm still not 100% convinced that this is the right place to do this. It should perhaps be done at NSICOP. I'll leave that for people to determine.

I also want to say that regardless of how we vote on this, there has to be some honesty from the ministers coming before us. If we don't hear it at this table when they're sitting in front of us, I think we'll have some other discussions that might be a bit harder. I want to hopefully have the Liberals share with their ministers that we want to know what is happening. We need to have some level of transparency so that our constituents understand what's happening.

We cannot lose faith in our systems. If there's a problem with our systems, we must fix it immediately.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. O'Connell.

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

I'll follow up on what Ms. Blaney just talked about. I agree that there has to be transparency, but what we risk in this forum is providing the same transparency to the foreign state actors that we want to prevent from having this information. This is precisely why we created NSICOP. It's why we have an agreement with the parties to create a system for the review of redacted documents by people who have the right security clearance.

There is a suggestion that we have to produce these documents, or they have to be done a certain way. Is this not, to Ms. Blaney's point—

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but I see that we're getting close to one o'clock. I note that there isn't consent from the committee to adjourn at one o'clock, but in foreshadowing that this discussion will probably not wrap up in the next 30 seconds, perhaps as a compromise we could resume this meeting tomorrow during our regular committee time slot. We could suspend until tomorrow at 11 o'clock, resume this meeting and then potentially adjourn to the subcommittee if there's time tomorrow.

• (1300)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

If you're going to rule to adjourn, I'd like to have my spot continued in this order. I'd like to continue speaking, but I'll go as long as I can until you cut me off or until I'm finished.

I think that the issue is, again, not about continuing the study. The issue is about handling the documents with care. In the past, the Conservatives have not cared about maintaining national security protections. I think Ms. Blaney's comments are exactly right. We want this information, but we also don't want it in the hands of the people who want it most, to be quite honest. There needs to be a way for all parties that have the proper clearance to have this information, but doing it in an open forum is counterproductive to the very real issues of foreign interference.

On the point about witnesses, every study is based on how committees move forward and bring forward their witnesses. I don't see why the Conservatives are focused on predetermining things and boxing this committee into specific witnesses at this time.

To what Mr. Fergus said, I heard clearly—I may be paraphrasing, because I didn't write it down—that we should hear from these first witnesses in paragraphs (c) through (f) and then determine who the next round of witnesses should be or would be.

The suggestion by Mr. Calkins was that politicians are answering for bureaucrats, but that was never the suggestion. It was to hear the testimony and see where that goes, and then as a committee determine who would be best to bring forward next. I don't think it's in anybody's interest in this committee, with the limited hours and resources we have, to box ourselves into not being able to open this up to the type of testimony we need.

I think the assertions are completely inaccurate, based on the conversations that have happened here on ensuring that we have the ability to call further witnesses. The subcommittee can look at that, with the regular process of each party determining and putting forward their best set of witnesses.

Again, I think if we're willing to be open and talk about how best to handle these documents, I don't think Mr. Fergus's amendment did anything to limit that. He said we wanted all relevant information. At the end of the day, these documents are not owned by ministers' offices. They're owned by the departments that produced them, so his amendment did nothing to restrict things. In fact, as he said, it probably made what is relevant within the motion more broad.

I worry. If we're going to have a serious conversation about foreign interference and the safety of our democratic institutions, we

need be very honest about intentions here. If this is just an attempt by the Conservatives to get redacted documents and then say to Canadians, "They're hiding something".... Mr. Cooper said that the government has done nothing on this and the Prime Minister has done nothing. He has no basis to make such a suggestion. He's never seen the documents. The information he has seen in the public realm is about things we've put in place.

Our government put in place the panel that discusses foreign interference during elections. Our government put in place the SITE committee, which provides all parties with information. There's this notion about what Canadians want to know and about how candidates protect themselves. Those are very real concerns. If you look on the CSIS website and the CSE website, they provide information on how Canadians and political parties can protect themselves and what to look out for. There is information out there. I think we should talk about it.

• (1305)

I think more Canadians should be thinking about cybersecurity, and political institutions need to ensure that we're protecting ourselves. However, I also think it's really important to note that attempts to influence our elections do not necessarily mean that they were successful. That's the point of the non-partisan panel: to make that determination so that it's not political when one political party over the other may have a reason to benefit in a particular instance, because it's true that all parties are targeted.

I think it's really important to note that if we're going to have these conversations, the worst thing we can do is have these ridiculous gotcha moments when it comes to producing national security documentation and the handling of it. That's not to say the information shouldn't be available, but the handling of it has to be done in a secure, safe way so that we're not providing it to the very actors who would love to have this info.

I don't know where we're going to go in terms of the back-and-forth in figuring this out, but I think the handling of these documents is important and it's worth continuing that conversation. Let's make sure the information is there and that we do so in a way that protects our national security.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I have a request. I think we showed that we members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs were capable of moving forward. My understanding was that we still had a few minutes left. I also want to thank the interpreters and all those people who are working so we can continue our meeting.

I leave it up to you to make good decisions and to propose something to us, having regard to the fact that we have five weeks left before Christmas and our committee will have a major task ahead of it.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I just want to clarify what's going on here.

All the parties are having a very interesting discussion in an attempt to find a way to proceed that will help us get answers to the questions asked, not by the members of the official opposition or other opposition parties, but rather by Canadians, regarding foreign interference, particularly as a result of this article that Global News published on November 7.

While the people watching us may not have seen it, the parties are nevertheless having a major discussion in an attempt to come up with a compromise. The official opposition wasn't at all reluctant to introduce its motion, and we're prepared to work with it to get to the bottom of this matter and advance the analysis.

The Liberals have moved an amendment that has led us to change our position. We don't agree on everything they propose, and that's precisely why they'd like to force a vote on an amendment that doesn't work for us at the very moment we're trying to discuss it.

The official opposition and other opposition parties have shown that they're sincerely and genuinely amenable to the idea of advancing and shedding light on the serious events that occurred during that 2019 election. I would recall that a foreign regime knowingly organized and funded activities designed to directly influence the results of elections here in Canada. According to the Global News article, 11 candidates were directly targeted.

It's in the interest of all Canadians that we determine exactly what the Prime Minister, the ministers named in the motion and their offices knew. To do that, we must have access to the documents we've requested and set a deadline for their production. Unfortunately, if we proceed too quickly to a vote, we may lose our chance and cause discontent in the committee.

I think we should continue talking and trying to convince the party in power, the Liberals, of our goodwill. We're prepared not to demand that this study take priority over the other two, which is a major concession. We're also prepared to withdraw half of the names from the list of witnesses we wanted to call first, which is another major concession. However, there can be no compromise on one point, and I believe people will understand this: we want to know what the ministers and their offices knew about this situation. That's what we're seeking in our motion.

So we're showing considerable openness. People may try to portray us as blinkered individuals who refuse to change, but that isn't true. We want answers for Canadians. We want to reassure voters and to be able to tell them that no foreign country, not even the Chinese communist regime in this instance, can step on their toes or undermine their legitimate right to express themselves and choose their representatives. We owe it to the Chinese Canadian community. People must be able to exercise their right to vote without undue

influence or intimidation from any regime in the world whatsoever. However, we won't be able to give them that assurance unless we have all the necessary information and can disseminate it.

It's also important to bear in mind that, when it comes to elections, it's solely up to Canadians to determine what's right for them to know. We're talking about their fundamental right.

I believe my colleague wants the floor, Madam Chair. I promise to yield to her shortly.

• (1310)

I will close by saying this: if there's one thing in which transparency must be widespread and automatic, it is elections. Elections are the basis of our system, of our democracy. However, if we begin to conceal from Canadians what we consider irrelevant information about how foreign countries interfere in our elections, it will unfortunately undermine their trust in that democratic process.

For that reason, I ask that the committee take into consideration all the concessions that have been made. We are prepared to move forward, and we want to move forward, but we must ensure that Canadians have access to all the information.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you. I apologize to my colleague. I was just trying to get the chair's attention. I wasn't trying to disrupt him.

My perspective is that we just need to call this to a vote. I heard very clearly that we have only a few weeks left. We need to get on this study. We need to make sure that it's done. I just hope you will call the vote so we can get this done.

Tomorrow our subcommittee can meet with a good strategy to make sure this study is a priority.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just want to suggest one very small subamendment, which is about the documents to be deposited. The motion says within one week. I don't think that's actually possible.

Could we just agree that it should be as soon as possible but not exceed 30 days? I think that would be more reasonable, actually.

• (1315)

The Chair: Currently we are debating the amendment. There is no mention of that period of time in the amendment, so you are trying to amend the motion. We have to deal with the amendment first.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I think it's a subamendment.

The Chair: The amendment to the motion does not mention the time frame. Therefore, you are trying to amend the motion, not the amendment. We are currently on the amendment.

Do you want to change that? Do you know what I am saying?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I understand what you're saying, yes.

That's fine.

The Chair: Do you want to wait until we're done with the amendment?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Perhaps in an effort to move things along, I could offer a subamendment to the amendment.

What I would propose as a subamendment is that everything from paragraphs (g) through (k) be deleted. That would have the effect of removing from the main motion the prioritization part of paragraph (b). We would remove the additional witnesses in paragraphs (g) through (k) but would keep the production of documents in there.

You can't sub-subamend something. You would have to deal with the amendments. However, perhaps if people are willing to keep the subamendment that I just proposed, we could look at a way to change the timeline to 14 days or as soon as possible. Effectively, what I'm proposing is that we compromise on the first part. We would take out the prioritization one and take out the additional witnesses but keep the production of papers and documents as is, with the understanding that when we get to the point that we can amend that, we can change the timelines.

That's what I offer as a hopeful compromise and solution that maybe our colleagues would be willing to accept.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: It's Mr. Fergus and then Ms. O'Connell.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I call a vote on the subamendment.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Chair, mine is just a procedural issue for the clerk.

Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Clerk, but with respect to what was just proposed, you can't provide a subamendment that is exactly like the amendment that's already been proposed. Eliminating paragraphs (b) and (g) through (k) was in Mr. Fergus's amendment.

Can we get clarity on what's being proposed? If the Conservatives want to amend his amendment, then we need to be very clear on what we're voting on. They just moved, as a subamendment, the exact amendment that was already moved.

Can we just get clear on what we're actually voting on?

The Chair: The subamendment that Mr. Nater is proposing is to remove paragraph (b), as Mr. Fergus mentioned, to remove paragraphs (g), (h), (i), (j) and (k), and to keep paragraph (l).

Mr. John Nater: Basically, I'm proposing to amend Mr. Fergus's amendment by dropping the second part of it.

The Chair: You're dropping it. That's perfect.

Mr. John Nater: The effect of that is keeping paragraph (l).

The Chair: I think the hardest part of it is following what we're doing.

I am calling the question for the subamendment proposed by Mr. Nater.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I am now calling the question on Mr. Fergus's amendment.

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

The Chair: I will now call the question on the main motion.

● (1320)

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair....

Mr. John Nater: No. There has to be debate. We're back to the debate on the main motion.

The Chair: I've called the question.

The Chair: I just called the question.

I didn't have a speaking list. You see the pace we're travelling at.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You never offered one....

The Chair: I don't have to. If there's a speaking list, I will respect the speaking list.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I saw him asking for the floor before you asked the clerk the question.

The Chair: I have called the question.

Mr. Clerk, do a roll call.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I saw him.

I have a point of order.

The Chair: The question has been called. Take it up in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I clearly saw Mr. Nater request the floor before you called the question. With all due respect, I ask you please to give the floor to Mr. Nater, who actually requested it. He raised his hand before you called the question, and you didn't see him. It isn't Mr. Nater's fault that you couldn't see him, Madam Chair.

We do have to have a debate on the main motion, which now includes the amendments moved by Mr. Fergus in his amendment. It is completely unacceptable to call the vote immediately on this motion without giving Mr. Nater a chance to speak, particularly since I clearly saw him request the floor before you called the question. I give you my word. We've always said in the House that we must rely on the good faith of parliamentarians. I repeat, in all honesty, that Mr. Nater did request the floor before you called the question, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Now we're on the main motion as amended. I would make an amendment to add, after "these redacted documents be deposited as soon as possible", the words "but not later than 14 days after the adoption of this motion". Then we would carry on with "with the Clerk of the Committee to be distributed to all members of the Committee in both official languages."

I think that's putting a timeline on it. That's the extent of my intervention.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'll be equally brief, Madam Chair.

I would like to make a subamendment to Mr. Nater's amendment to replace "15" with "30".

The Chair: Is that instead of "14" days?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Excuse me. I would replace "14" with "30". I think it stands to reason.... That's what was talked about among colleagues beforehand.

The Chair: I'm going to call the question on Mr. Fergus's subamendment.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I will now call the question on Mr. Nater's amendment to the motion.

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

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

The Chair: Thank you. Everything has been voted on. Everything is good.

We will be having a subcommittee meeting tomorrow. It appears that you have received the draft report for the precinct study, which we will continue. The motion that we passed today is adding a few names. Lots of them are names that were already on the list for the foreign interference study.

If my understanding is correct, just so the clerk and I know, the names that we've already submitted, plus the names that have been added through this motion, are the ones we will slot into our meetings on foreign election interference.

Go ahead, Madam Blaney.

• (1325)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think the priority is the list we had today.

The Chair: Okay, that's fair.

With that, have a great day. We'll see you tomorrow.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

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

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

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

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

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