



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 055

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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• (1505)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 55 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*English*]

The committee is meeting today pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a) and the motion agreed to on February 21, 2023, concerning foreign election interference.

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

For the first hour, we have with us today, from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., from the Privy Council Office, Jody Thomas, national security and intelligence adviser. From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Cindy Termorshuizen, associate deputy minister of foreign affairs. From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Shawn Tupper, deputy minister.

I see Mr. Cooper would like the floor really quickly.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a very brief housekeeping matter.

I would note that House resources are available until 11 this evening. Given that we have two hours with witnesses, it is my intent to move our Conservative motion that was put on notice, which, among other things, calls for Katie Telford to testify before this committee.

It is testimony that is essential to get to the heart of what is at issue, which is this: What did the Prime Minister know, when did he know it, and what did he do or fail to do about Beijing's election interference?

On that basis, Madam Chair, respectfully, I wish to indicate that you do not have the implied consent of the official opposition to adjourn at 5 p.m.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

You are not moving your motion at this time.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I will at 5 p.m.

The Chair: You plan to move it at 5 p.m.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes, or when we're done with the second panel.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

I believe we will now resume with our witnesses, who have so kindly joined us today.

Ms. Thomas, you will be providing opening remarks. We welcome them now.

Ms. Jody Thomas (National Security and Intelligence Advisor, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today with my colleagues.

[*Translation*]

My colleagues and I support the committee's efforts to examine foreign interference in Canada.

[*English*]

It is very important to reassure Canadians that the last two—

The Chair: Ms. Thomas, I would ask you to please hold on for one second. The translation is not working.

[*Translation*]

I'm going to check whether the interpreter can hear me.

Is it working now?

[*English*]

I see a thumbs-up.

We will start from the top again, if that is okay.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today with my colleagues.

[*Translation*]

My colleagues and I support the committee's efforts to examine foreign interference in Canada.

[English]

It is very important to reassure Canadians that the last two federal elections were fair and legitimate. Canadians have questions about foreign interference attempts during the last elections, and we will endeavour to answer those questions in the most transparent way possible within the limits of the law. We, as national security officials, have a duty to protect classified information. Unauthorized sharing of classified information is in fact prohibited by the Security of Information Act.

That is not to say that we cannot or should not talk about foreign interference. It is not a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to Canada. Like others, we believe this threat is on the rise and increasingly complex. The greatest foreign interference threat to Canada comes from the People's Republic of China, though other states, like Russia and Iran, are also attempting to covertly or coercively interfere in our affairs.

As highlighted in many public reports, including from CSIS and the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, foreign interference takes many forms, such as undue pressure on politicians, staff and public servants to obtain information or sway decisions; intimidation of diasporas and other communities, including, for example, by denying visas to visit family; mis- or disinformation to weaken Canada's societal cohesion—we have seen this play out in the context of Canada's support to Ukraine; encroachments into our territory or networks for intelligence collection; and theft of our science, data and research.

Measuring the short- and long-term impacts of foreign interference is a challenge. We know it costs Canada tens of billions of dollars annually in lost profitability; erodes Canadian technological advantages, particularly in emerging technologies; undermines national unity and sows discontent; threatens the safety of targeted individuals and their entourage or families; and challenges democracy.

Over the past few years, we have taken a number of steps to more effectively detect, deter and counter foreign interference in all its forms, including but not only during election periods. One effective way to do so is to talk about the threat and how we mitigate it without jeopardizing the sources and techniques used to gather intelligence and keep Canadians safe.

As I said, one of our responsibilities as senior officials of the security and intelligence community is to be as transparent as possible without further challenging national security or further damaging trust in our democratic institutions. As such, we have been engaging with communities, academia, industry and politicians to raise awareness and provide tools to help address this broad, complex threat.

Such tools include the security and intelligence threats to elections task force and the critical election incident public protocol. These mechanisms helped ensure that the 2019 and 2021 federal elections were indeed fair and legitimate, despite foreign interference attempts.

● (1510)

As described by Minister Blair in a December 2020 letter to members of Parliament, our broader counter-foreign interference

tool kit also includes countering mis- and disinformation, including using active cyber tools and leading the G7 rapid response mechanism; enhancing research security, including with guidance to research granting councils; protecting our networks from malicious actors, including through the creation of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security; and investigating, disrupting and/or prosecuting foreign interference activity.

We cannot paint an overly optimistic picture. Things change. Tools and methods change. Our adversaries adapt quickly and find innovative ways to interfere in our affairs, so we must continue to learn, including from one election to the next, to refine our collective defences and adapt to this evolving threat.

Part of this is better informing Canadians of the threats we face, and I will stress again that this must be done responsibly, without putting at risk the physical safety of our human resources—our human sources and employees—by publicly divulging classified material. Given the very nature of intelligence, individual reports, when taken out of context, may be incomplete and misrepresentative of the full story.

We must also carefully consider that, as recently suggested by Senator Shugart, in some cases publicly disclosing intelligence on foreign states' specific attempts to interfere may ultimately play into their hands, including by potentially affecting outcomes of electoral processes and creating confusion.

To conclude, while I was not in my current role in 2019 or 2021, I speak for the security and intelligence community when I say that we are clear-eyed in understanding the challenge posed by foreign interference. We are taking concrete steps to strengthen our counter-foreign interference approach, including by making sure that those who engage in such activities face consequences.

Again, as Minister Blair stated in his letter to members of Parliament, while “We cannot always make Government actions public in this sphere...our sustained efforts make a difference in the lives of Canadians.”

[Translation]

Once again, thank you.

My colleagues and I would be glad to answer any questions you have.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go into our question round, starting with six minutes.

We will start with Mr. Cooper, who will be followed by Mr. Ferguson.

[Translation]

After that, we will go to Ms. Normandin, followed by Mr. Julian.

[English]

Six minutes go to you, Mr. Cooper, through the Chair.

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

Thank you, Ms. Thomas, and thank you to all the witnesses for making yourselves available this afternoon.

I'll direct my questions to Ms. Thomas.

On February 24, 2023, Sam Cooper of Global News reported that three weeks before the 2019 election, CSIS officials gave an urgent briefing to senior aides in the Prime Minister's Office, warning them that a then Liberal candidate who is now a sitting Liberal MP had received assistance from Beijing's Toronto consulate in his nomination campaign. On what date was the Prime Minister briefed about this?

Ms. Jody Thomas: As I stated, I was not in this job in 2019, so I do not know when the Prime Minister was briefed.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I realize that you were not in that job, but would you undertake to confirm the date that the Prime Minister was briefed about that?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I will certainly do that and, as you're aware, the director of CSIS will be here at this—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, so you will undertake to do that.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much.

What are the names of the senior aides in the Prime Minister's Office who were briefed by CSIS about Beijing's interference to help this then Liberal candidate and now sitting Liberal MP?

• (1515)

Ms. Jody Thomas: Again, I was not at that briefing, so speculating on who was briefed.... CSIS will be here and they will be able to answer that question for you.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Will you undertake, given that you are the national security adviser to the Prime Minister, to provide the committee with the names of senior aides in the Prime Minister's Office, as reported by Global News, who were briefed by CSIS?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I will undertake to report the names of who was briefed as informed to me by CSIS.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Robert Fife and Steven Chase, in a February 17, 2023 article in The Globe and Mail, reported that the Prime Minister “received a national-security briefing last fall” in which he was told that Beijing's consulate in Toronto was involved with as-

sisting 11 candidates in the 2019 election. On what date was the Prime Minister briefed about this?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I don't have my calendar in front of me. I will give you that date.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You will undertake to provide that date.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much.

On November 7, 2022, Sam Cooper of Global News reported that the Prime Minister and several cabinet ministers received “a series of briefings and memos” about “Beijing's efforts to...subvert Canada's democratic process”, including interfering in the 2019 election. Can you confirm that the Prime Minister was briefed about this?

Ms. Jody Thomas: The Prime Minister is briefed quite continuously on foreign interference.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I asked a very specific question that was in regard to what Sam Cooper reported on November 7, 2022. Was the Prime Minister briefed?

Ms. Jody Thomas: What is the date you are asking about his briefing? You are telling me the date of the report, not the date of the briefing.

Mr. Michael Cooper: That began in January 2022.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Since January 2022, I will give you the dates on which we've briefed the Prime Minister formally. We also have informal discussions with him frequently about foreign interference and activities in the national security community.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Put it this way: Will you undertake to provide the dates on which the Prime Minister was briefed with respect to Sam Cooper's report of November 7, 2022?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I can't give you the dates on which the Prime Minister was briefed about media reports. I can tell you the dates on which he was briefed about foreign interference.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay. With that, how many times was the Prime Minister briefed about Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections?

Ms. Jody Thomas: The Prime Minister would have been briefed on foreign interference in the elections multiple times between 2019 and 2021 and 2022. We will endeavour to get you those dates.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay, so you will undertake to provide the dates and the agencies and those involved in briefing the Prime Minister?

Ms. Jody Thomas: We will endeavour to get the dates.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Every instance that he was briefed in respect of Beijing's election interference....

Ms. Jody Thomas: I will do my best, but again, I was not in this job at the time.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay.

A redacted report entitled “Daily Foreign Intelligence Brief”, dated February 21, 2020, from the intelligence assessment secretariat at PCO, provided to this committee in the production process, stated that there were—quote—“subtle but effective interference networks” by Beijing in the 2019 election and provides the following assessment: “Investigations into activities linked to the Canadian federal election in 2019, reveal an active foreign interference...network”.

On what date did the PCO share this information with the Prime Minister?

Ms. Jody Thomas: That information is widely circulated and is available in daily reading packages.

Mr. Michael Cooper: The Prime Minister would have received that.

Ms. Jody Thomas: It would have been in a daily reading package.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Would any ministers have received that?

Ms. Jody Thomas: In all likelihood, yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Can you describe what “foreign interference” means to the national security and intelligence agencies? Here, we're talking about electoral interference, but I'm certain the definition is larger than that, and that it deals with academia, businesses and other aspects of society. Can you briefly outline what “foreign interference” means to your community?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'm happy to.

Mr. Tupper is the deputy minister responsible for the agency, so perhaps he would like to weigh in.

Mr. Shawn Tupper (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): It's a great question, because it is a complex web of activity. We very much take a whole-of-society approach to looking at foreign interference.

You noted a number of areas that we look at, such as democratic institutions. We look at the particular communities within the country to ensure we have an understanding of what's going on and of the kind of interference that may be occurring in diaspora communities. We pay attention to economic and national security issues in terms of attempts to disrupt our economy, so that might be looking at banks and the rules and regulations that surround and protect our financial institutions.

Certainly, on the international affairs side, we would have fairly comprehensive reporting and awareness of our activities and our partnerships with our allies to jointly work together.

Finally, we pay an inordinate amount of attention to our critical infrastructure. The disruption of the grids or of our pipelines would cause a massive disruption in our communities, so we pay a lot of attention to that.

• (1520)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

Is it fair to say that foreign interference is not new? Have governments taken steps towards this? Are they taking steps towards this? Are national security agencies involved in that process to try to combat foreign interference?

Mr. Shawn Tupper: It's absolutely fair to say it's not new. I think that—

Hon. Greg Fergus: How long? How long would you say national security...?

Mr. Shawn Tupper: As long as governments have opposed one another, I would offer.

The real shift, though, has occurred in the last five or six years. The more typical activities of espionage—of suitcases full of money, of coercion—are things that we've known about for a very long time, but over the last number of years, through the use of social media and the ability to invoke cyber-attacks against states, it has really escalated our awareness and drawn our attention to the area, simply because it's more pervasive and more aggressive, and because the potential for damage to our democracy is that much more serious.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Social media has been around for a while. When did it first get onto your agenda?

Mr. Shawn Tupper: Largely it was post the 2016 American election, when we started to understand how foreign countries were trying to influence that election. It was a real learning point for us to understand, particularly, what the Russians have been doing. We have paid more attention since that time to really understand and make sure that we have awareness of what's going on in Canada and the kinds of activities that are centred on the Canadian state.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I want to talk about some allegations that I've been able to read from Walied Soliman, who has said publicly that he served as the Conservative Party's representative on the SITE task force in 2021. He said allegations of foreign interference were brought forward as a part of the SITE task force engagement with political parties but were not taken seriously. How do you respond to that?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Again, I was not on the task force or the panel at that time. We have very clear documentation from that representative of that political party, asking questions and stating concerns, along with a very detailed response back to him on or about October 22, 2021, indicating that the allegations were being taken very seriously but that we did not see evidence in the intelligence to support the claims he presented.

Now, there have been claims since then, and we're reviewing that information to understand the full picture as broadly as possible, but he was given a very thorough response at the time.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Thomas, is there anything to suggest that the facts have changed since that original assessment was made in response to his claims?

Ms. Jody Thomas: There is nothing that suggests that the outcome and the ridings he was concerned about were affected by attempts at interference by foreign actors. There certainly were attempts. We haven't denied that, but intelligence evolves and we get more information. We obtain more information. There are more sources that become available, and we have to continuously assess the picture and our understanding of any given situation.

Information has come to light since that response was given, and I've asked that we just review it and be able to understand and answer questions about it.

• (1525)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

Were there other allegations brought forward by other parties at the time?

Ms. Jody Thomas: There were none that I'm aware of, no.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to the committee, Ms. Normandin.

You have six minutes. Go ahead.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you.

Ms. Thomas, you said you weren't in your job when the allegations about China assisting a Liberal candidate were brought to the Prime Minister's attention. You are in the position now, though, and the Prime Minister is telling us that it's not CSIS's role to say who can and can't be a candidate.

The government is brushing off information that reportedly came from CSIS about a potentially problematic nomination, suggesting that it's not all that important.

You are the national security and intelligence advisor, so what message do you think it sends to those who may want to interfere in our democracy and skew things in a particular party's favour?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: I would suggest that's not the conclusion I would draw. The conclusion I would draw is that CSIS provides information. It builds an intelligence picture. It investigates and provides information to decision-makers, up to and including the Prime Minister.

I agree with the Prime Minister. CSIS does not determine who should be a candidate and who should not.

It provides for all parties—where there is a concern and if there is a concern—information that parties then use in their nomination process for their own purpose, according to their own rules, regulations and bylaws that govern that party. CSIS provides information to decision-makers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: All right. Thank you.

The Prime Minister hasn't confirmed that he was briefed about the allegations by CSIS. He hasn't denied or confirmed it. Clearly,

there are people at CSIS who had this information and leaked it to the media, putting their careers at risk or worse.

What message does that send about national security and intelligence? It shows that the Prime Minister didn't take the matter seriously to start with, doesn't it?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: This is a very important question.

We in the public service are the guardians of protected information. We share information with those people who have security clearances or who are in roles of authority in which they can make decisions. The unlawful sharing of information and the inappropriate sharing of information, I believe, jeopardize our national security and institutions. They also put people—both employees and subjects of investigations—at unnecessary risk. That's very concerning. I'm not going to speculate on the motivations.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: We are talking about a pretty critical issue. In order for this story to come out, the information had to be leaked to the media. Doesn't that warrant a broader examination, an independent, public inquiry to probe all the allegations of interference reported by the media?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: Inquiries like this one are very important in terms of understanding what happened, so I applaud that you are doing this. I think it is important to talk about foreign interference and the electoral process.

A public inquiry will have the same limitations that this committee does in that we cannot talk about national security information in a public forum. The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians was created for situations like this, so that we can be absolutely transparent with them and they can see secret, top secret and protected information that was used to make decisions and inform decision-makers.

If an inquiry were to happen, I would recommend that it be done through a body like that, because an open forum is going to have the same limitations that this body does.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: This could give the impression that there was something of a panic about the information that was leaked. Individuals who wanted to expose alleged interference in our elections were labelled racists. What do you make of that? Don't you think it makes people cynical, which is exactly what public inquiries, policies and the elections task force are supposed to address? Doesn't it fuel that cynicism?

• (1530)

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: It's important to note that members of the Chinese community came out yesterday and said it is important to talk about this. It is important that Canadians from diaspora communities and from countries that participate in foreign interference feel that their health and well-being as Canadians is being protected. A very essential element of Canada as a multicultural nation is having Canadians feel equal and protected by the national security community. I think that is why the work being done on foreign interference is so important, because it does ultimately protect citizens.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[English]

Mr. Julian, you have up to six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to start off by providing a notice of motion. This motion was circulated to committee yesterday with a 48-hour notice period. I would be moving it tomorrow.

The notice of motion reads as follows:

That the committee report to the House that it calls on the Government of Canada to launch a national public inquiry into allegations of foreign interference in Canada's democratic system, including but not limited to allegations of interference in general elections by foreign governments;

That this inquiry be granted all necessary powers to call witnesses from the government and from political parties, including but not limited to ministers, former ministers, chiefs of staff to the Prime Minister and to the leader of the official opposition during the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns and national campaign directors for the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns of the Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of Canada;

And that this inquiry have the power to order and review all documents it deems necessary for this work, including documents which are related to national security.

I will be moving that formally tomorrow. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to go to our witnesses.

Madam Thomas, you stated that you weren't in the position when the events that have been described happened, but you have, in your position, I'm sure, been able to read the articles written by Robert Fife and Steven Chase, and have seen the reports by Sam Cooper, of course, on Global News. Will you acknowledge that the allegations that are contained in those reports are factual?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'm not going to comment on information that was inappropriately obtained.

The concept and the problem and the severity of foreign interference are well documented. That there were attempts at foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections has been documented and is quite transparent in the reports done by Jim Judd and Morris Rosenberg, so I acknowledge that foreign interference has been attempted.

Mr. Peter Julian: If those allegations are correct, this constitutes criminal violations of the Elections Act, as we saw with the in-and-

out scandal back under the Harper government. Dean Del Mastro, of course, in that case, was a Conservative MP.

Does your evaluation include criminal activity?

[Translation]

What do you do in the face of alleged violations of the Canada Elections Act that constitute criminal offences?

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Shawn Tupper: The RCMP form a critical part of the team of people who assess activities during elections. They were aware of the information that was brought forward. They have looked at that information and have concluded that they will not pursue a criminal investigation.

I know that my colleagues from the RCMP will be appearing before this committee, so perhaps more detail on that can be pursued with them.

Mr. Peter Julian: Do you refer any allegations of violations of the Elections Act to the commissioner of elections?

Mr. Shawn Tupper: The commissioner of elections is an independent officer and indeed would pursue in their own right the ability to look at allegations as they're brought forward.

Mr. Peter Julian: That's not my question. If there were criminal activity or allegations of criminal activity, the commissioner of elections isn't necessarily going to be aware of that.

Is that part of what you do in a case where these allegations come forward?

Mr. Shawn Tupper: Indeed, the RCMP would pursue those portions of allegations that fall under the criminal law. There would be a conversation between the RCMP and Elections Act officials or commission officials to look at the corresponding violations that may occur under the act that they would be responsible for.

Mr. Peter Julian: That is something that you do: When these allegations arise, you do an investigation yourselves and you potentially also refer it to the commissioner of elections for possible investigation.

Mr. Shawn Tupper: Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'll go back to Ms. Thomas.

How do you evaluate the extent of foreign interference? I'm speaking specifically in this case both of the Chinese government but also of the Russian government and Russian actors that have been playing a major role, as we know, in disrupting democracies, including the United Kingdom and the United States.

Ms. Jody Thomas: That's a very important question.

We rely on the national security agencies, along with the Canadian Forces intelligence command, the foreign intelligence unit at Global Affairs Canada and allies to help us assess the depth and persistence of foreign interference in Canada.

As we said, it's not new and it's not restricted to or targeted at Canada in particular.

We use a number of tools and tradecraft, which certainly we're not going to discuss publicly. The collection of intelligence and the analysis of that intelligence in its totality—not the individual pieces—and understanding the veracity of it—whether or not it's reliable and whether there is conflicting or contradictory information—help build that picture.

Certainly the activities of proxies play a role in that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now continue with five minutes for Mr. Cooper, followed by Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Berthold.

Ms. Thomas, you said in answer to a question posed by Mr. Julian that you would not be commenting on what you claimed were reports of information that were inappropriately obtained. I would remind you of section 15 of the Security of Information Act, which provides that:

15 (1) No person is guilty of an offence under section 13 or 14 if the person establishes that he or she acted in the public interest.

Are you saying that it was not in the public interest for the public to know about Beijing's interference in our elections in 2019 and 2021? Is that what you are telling this committee?

Ms. Jody Thomas: That is not even close to what I'm telling this committee.

We have talked publicly about foreign interference attempts. The director of CSIS has. The panel of five did. Jim Judd did. Morris Rosenberg did, but—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Would you, Ms. Thomas, agree that it is important to shine a light on issues of foreign interference?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I would agree absolutely, Madam Chair, that it's important to shine a light on matters of foreign interference.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much. I have limited time.

Mr. Berthold.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I think it's important to do it in a responsible manner.

• (1540)

The Chair: I'm just going to pause the clock and give a friendly reminder. Perhaps, since it is a constituency week, we're not remembering that when multiple people are speaking on a microphone, it's difficult for interpretation, so as we are having a very important conversation, we need to make sure that when questions are posed, time is provided for answers so that we can get this information.

I will continue being lenient with some time, to make sure have that time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, go ahead.

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

Ms. Thomas, you said repeatedly that you weren't in your position in 2019 or in 2021, because you weren't appointed until recently.

Did you get a transition binder from your predecessor?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: No, in fact I did not receive a transition book from my predecessor. However, I had individual meetings with all the heads of the security agencies and my colleague deputy ministers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Since you've been in the job, were you made aware of any of the information reported by Global News's Sam Cooper on November 7, 2022 before it came out?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: I've read a significant amount of intelligence about foreign interference in Canada, and some of the information I've read is dated 2018 or 2019.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Did you share that information with the Prime Minister directly?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: I did not share information with the Prime Minister independently on incidents that occurred before I was here in this job.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Have you discussed those incidents with the Prime Minister since you've been in the job?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'm not going to reveal what I have discussed with the Prime Minister. We have had very detailed and thorough conversations on foreign interference.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Who's involved in those conversations?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: There is a range of people. Certainly there are people on his immediate staff, members of the national security community and often the Clerk of the Privy Council.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Could you send us the list of people who were involved in the foreign interference briefings you just referred to?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: I can give you general lists, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: You said earlier that a number of ministers received the daily foreign interference briefing.

Can you tell us which ministers are involved in those briefings?

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: What I said was that the daily foreign intelligence bulletin that was referenced in a previous question is distributed broadly to those who have clearance to read it, and it is provided to some ministers.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Did you have occasion to discuss those briefings with the Prime Minister and other cabinet members in relation to interference by the Chinese Communist regime?

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: The daily foreign intelligence briefing is an assessed piece that gives highlights of what's going on in terms of foreign interference on a range of subjects. I don't normally use it as a basis for briefing. Normally, I use.... It's not necessarily me briefing. The briefing material generally comes directly from the national security agency, rather than the assessed piece.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Did other cabinet members sometimes attend your briefings with the Prime Minister?

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: There is a range of briefings, but—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'm talking about the briefings that deal specifically with the subject of today's meeting, Ms. Thomas.

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: Generally, unless it is a discussion in cabinet or a cabinet committee, the briefings are with the Prime Minister.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

I could ask you the same questions about the information in the Global News story by Sam Cooper on February 24 and the February 17 story by Robert Fife and Steven Chase, and you would say that you were given various information in various reports.

I'm out of time.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull, it's up to five minutes for you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you Madam Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Thomas, I'm going to focus on some short-answer questions for you. I hope you can keep your answers short.

We've seen a number of concerning allegations over recent weeks with all the reporting that's been going on, so I want to get a very clear answer to this important question.

Do you agree that if CSIS, through its intelligence gathering, becomes aware of illegal activity, that information should be referred to the relevant authorities for further investigation?

Ms. Jody Thomas: The simple answer to that question is yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's perfect. Thank you.

I want to follow that up with some specific examples in the media reporting. There were reports that CSIS allegedly became aware of instances when the difference between the original political donation and the refund a person gets at tax time was returned to donors.

First, would you agree that constitutes an illegal activity?

• (1545)

Ms. Jody Thomas: That report was in the media. Of course, the intelligence that backs it up is more complex than is probably evident in the single clip or piece of that report that has been revealed in the media.

If there is a concern about criminal activity, the RCMP receives the intelligence. It is responsible for determining what it will investigate and what it will pursue. As you're very well aware, police independence is a critical element of Canadian law enforcement and our judicial system.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: My understanding is that it would be an illegal activity, if those allegations were true, and that CSIS would then be required to refer the intelligence to the RCMP and the commissioner of elections, or both, either through the SITE task force or otherwise.

Is that not true?

Ms. Jody Thomas: There are many ways that CSIS could refer information. It works very closely with the RCMP, and there are a number of mechanisms to ensure that the RCMP receives intelligence for its own purposes when CSIS has a complete enough picture to refer it to the RCMP.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's great. If charges were laid, obviously, that would become public, would it not?

Ms. Jody Thomas: There's a lot of process before charges are laid, but yes. If charges were laid and if there were an investigation, yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

Mr. Tupper, I wonder if you could comment on the next question. Do you know if the RCMP received information from CSIS on this particular allegation around political donations?

Is the RCMP investigating any matters regarding foreign interference from the last election?

Mr. Shawn Tupper: I can confirm that the RCMP is not investigating any of the allegations arising from the last election.

On the specifics of the first part of your question, I will endeavour to come back, because I don't have specifics on that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you. I appreciate that very much.

With regard to another report, in which CSIS allegedly found that business owners fired international Chinese students and assigned them to volunteer in election campaigns on a full-time basis, I want to ask the same question.

Would you agree that this is an illegal activity?

Ms. Thomas, that's for you.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I can't say that would be an illegal activity. I would have to have more information, and certainly I'm not the arbiter of what's illegal.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure. That's okay.

I feel very strongly that this would constitute an illegal activity if it were true. If so—if there were evidence to suggest that it was true and intelligence and CSIS became aware of that illegal activity, then it should obviously... Obviously, as per our previous lines of questioning, it would have to turn that information over to appropriate authorities. Is that not true?

Ms. Jody Thomas: In a simple world, the answer is yes. However, one single piece of intelligence, depending on how credible the intelligence is, multiple source reporting... There's a lot that goes into the translation of intelligence into evidence. It is a critical problem.

Often, the information that CSIS obtains can't be used for a criminal investigation because it is not evidence. Often, to proceed from intelligence to evidence means it would reveal sources or tradecraft that would be problematic in other decisions that are made in terms of how that information will be dealt with.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Normandin. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to follow up on the allegation that a Liberal candidate received assistance from Chinese authorities.

Would that ever be considered interference, yes or no?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: I think certainly it would be, if it were covert... As an example, diplomats around the world have lists of politicians who are friendly to Canada. We do the same thing.

When it becomes covert, not overt, not diplomacy but behind-the-scenes machinations and perhaps malevolent, yes—

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: You answered my question when you said it was covert, so I'm going to stop you there.

Are donations by intermediaries ever considered interference?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: Again, if it is not in keeping with the Canadian law, yes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: That means the incidents in the media reports could indeed be considered interference.

Before the story broke, was the possibility of disclosing that information to the public ever discussed?

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: Again, that intelligence would likely not be made public, for the reasons I have cited previously, but the discussion about foreign interference and the attempts at foreign interference to affect the election have been discussed publicly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: We know that the Chinese Communist Party puts significant pressure on members of the Chinese diaspora in order to obtain certain results.

If information on foreign interference isn't made public, how can we make sure the Chinese diaspora in Canada is protected against threats such as their visas being revoked?

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Tupper: It's a super important question.

The ability to build a trusting relationship with diaspora communities in the country, between those communities and government institutions, is critical to our work. To that end, we engage directly with those communities. I have an advisory board to me directly that helps me understand how we can better work with those communities.

The most perfect example of what you're asking us about is the recent questions around Chinese police stations in the country, where we were able to engage with communities. We were able to do public appeals, to post information and post police officers outside of those venues and engage with Chinese diplomats in the country. That has effectively stopped the activities of those five police stations, so it is working through the community, working in a public way as best we can, that allows us to resist and to push back against those kinds of foreign interference.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have two questions.

First, if I understood correctly, alleged violations of the Canada Elections Act that constitute criminal offences are automatically investigated. Is that the case, or do the agencies work together to look into the matter before referring it for investigation?

[English]

In terms of my second question, I touched just briefly on the impact of Russian state actors. We saw their impact in the 2016 election of Donald Trump, in the Brexit referendum and in the massive subsidies going to the United Kingdom Conservative Party.

There was the scandal that erupted when the report was issued after the Conservatives were re-elected, and of course concerns have been raised about the connection between Russian state actors and the convoy groups here in Canada. It was reported by the National Observer and others that a lot of the public Telegram channels were repurposed to support the “freedom convoy”.

To what extent is there an ongoing evaluation of Russian dirty tricks when it comes to our democratic system? Have you seen any impacts of this during our election campaign?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen (Associate Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I can answer one aspect of that, and that relates to the RRM, the rapid response mechanism, which was established in 2018 by Canada in the context of the G7 to ensure that we were monitoring disinformation and other online threats to our democracy. We've certainly been looking at Russian efforts at disinformation, as well as at the Chinese and other actors. This is something we monitor on an ongoing basis in both English and French media, but also in foreign language media, because you're absolutely right that this is something we need to monitor very carefully given its impact on our democracy.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm going to repeat my first question. When you receive information that the Canada Elections Act may have been violated, is the matter automatically referred for investigation?

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Shawn Tupper: Is it automatic? The community works together. The RCMP are part of the team that looks at this information. They do, in that sense, have ready and automatic access to that information. Obviously the use of that information under the Elections Act or under the criminal law has to be considered by the two agencies. Both have their own respective lanes in which they need to act. Certainly that information is made readily available to the agencies that would need it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll finish this round with three and a half to four minutes for Mr. Calkins, and then we will go to three and a half to four minutes for Ms. Sahota.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. My question will be for Ms. Thomas.

Would the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's immediate aides ever be briefed on foreign interference without the presence of the national security intelligence adviser?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I can't speak to what protocols existed before I became the national security adviser. They are not briefed by CSIS or an outside agency on foreign interference without my being present, or they haven't been, to my knowledge, unless I happened to be out of town, but then there would be an official there for me.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If, during an election campaign, a political entity lodged a complaint or provided intelligence that foreign interference was happening in a particular riding, would that information be shared with the Prime Minister?

Ms. Jody Thomas: It would not.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Where would that information go?

Ms. Jody Thomas: That information comes from the security-cleared member of each party, and how they will interact with the panel has been discussed. That information would go to the panel of five and the SITE team.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you very much.

I want to talk a bit about comments you made at the defence committee in December 2022. You said that no money was exchanged during the 2019 election. I believe your quote was, “The news stories that you have read about interference are just that, news stories.” You also said, “We have not seen money going to 11 candidates, period.” Can you confirm that those were your words before the defence committee?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I cannot confirm that was my exact quote, but the connection that was being made between 11 candidates and \$250,000 was inaccurate.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: In light of the stories that have come out this week, including those by Robert Fife and Steven Chase about an illegal donation to the Trudeau Foundation in 2015, do you still feel as though your statements from last December are accurate?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I still feel that my statements about that particular situation were accurate.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You referred to the NSICOP committee as a mechanism whereby we can be assured that information is being shared. Can you confirm that a member of NSICOP is not allowed to share information with his or her colleagues or his or her leader?

Ms. Jody Thomas: That is the premise of that committee.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: It would be your expectation that information is shared.

Ms. Jody Thomas: It would be my expectation—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Would an NSICOP report ever be released to the public without going through your office or the Prime Minister's Office?

Ms. Jody Thomas: The committee's unredacted reports are shared with the Prime Minister, and redacted reports are released to the public.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, three minutes go to you.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is for Ms. Thomas.

I understand that CSIS has authorities to disrupt attempts at foreign interference. While you probably can't get into operational matters, can you explain the types of tools that CSIS has available to disrupt foreign interference?

If there are any specifics, I would like to have you mention specifically what those tools are.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I don't think those are comments I can make in an open forum.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

How about...? For example, if CSIS was aware that a foreign official—more specifically, someone who works at a consulate—was trying to interfere in a Canadian election, would CSIS have the mandate to respond?

Could it, for instance, endeavour to use a tool to go and speak to that official at that consulate?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Certainly, it can use threat reduction measures, which is what they are formally called, to go and speak to an individual. It can also speak to the person being targeted.

• (1600)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Can you assure this committee that CSIS endeavours to use the tools, at least? Even if you can't get into specifics of what those tools are, does it at least endeavour to use those tools if and when it feels that there is a need, because of foreign interference?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes, I can assure this committee that CSIS leans forward and uses the tools at its disposal to the fullest extent possible and mandated by law and its act.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The instances we've been hearing about in the global news reports.... Do you feel, to your knowledge, that CSIS used the tools it has at its disposal to intervene in these matters?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Again, I'm not going to speak about specific cases and jeopardize the work CSIS does. The director of CSIS has more leeway to answer that question about his specific work than I do.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I intend to explore those questions with him as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is that it, Ms. Sahota?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

The Chair: That's excellent.

With that, I would like to thank our guests for joining us today. Thank you for your time and attention.

If there is additional information that has been requested, we look forward to your submitting it to the clerk, and we'll share it with all members of the committee.

With that, I wish you a really good day. Thank you for the good work that you do.

We will suspend briefly and have the next panel join us.

• (1600)

(Pause)

• (1605)

The Chair: I welcome back members and welcome our witnesses.

For the second panel this afternoon, we have with us Adriana Poloz, executive director, intelligence and international policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Tara Denham, director general, Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development; Adam Fisher, director general, intelligence assessments, Canadian Security Intelligence Service; Greg O'Hayon, acting director general, strategic intelligence, federal policing intelligence and international policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police; and Alia Tayyeb, deputy chief of signals intelligence, Communications Security Establishment.

I understand that Ms. Tayyeb will be bringing us opening remarks on behalf of all our guests today.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb (Deputy Chief of Signals Intelligence, Communications Security Establishment): Hello, Madam Chair, and thank you very much.

Thanks to the members of the committee for the invitation to reappear on the study of foreign election interference.

As was noted, my name is Alia Tayyeb, and I am the deputy chief of CSE's signals intelligence branch.

I appreciate the invitation to appear here alongside my colleagues from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Global Affairs Canada and the RCMP, the departments and agencies representing Canada's security and intelligence threats to elections task force, known as SITE.

[Translation]

We are here to discuss SITE's activities related to foreign election interference. These activities demonstrate our strong commitment to working with our partners to protect both the integrity of Canada's elections and Canadians' trust in our democracy.

• (1610)

[English]

I'll provide an overview of the SITE task force.

The SITE task force brings together operational leads and experts from CSE, CSIS, GAC and the RCMP with the aim of improving awareness, collection, coordination and action in countering foreign interference in Canada's federal elections. Each task force member plays an important role in addressing foreign interference in electoral processes. We work together, operating with our own distinct mandates, to address this threat.

CSIS collects and analyzes information about threats to the security of Canada, including information about foreign-influenced activities, and it provides advice, intelligence reporting and intelligence assessments to the Government of Canada about these activities.

GAC provides open-source research and data analysis on foreign state-sponsored disinformation and coordinates with the G7 and other international partners to respond to threats to democracy.

The RCMP has the primary responsibility for preventing, detecting, denying and responding to national security-related criminal threats in Canada and investigating criminal offences arising from foreign influence.

My organization, CSE, provides advice, guidance and services to help ensure the protection of electronic information and systems of importance, and collects foreign intelligence for the Government of Canada on threat actors.

CSE was the chair of the SITE task force between 2018 and 2022. As chair, CSE was responsible for convening and coordinating the task force, including joint products and briefings.

[Translation]

I will now turn to the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, which was created ahead of the 2019 general election as part of the plan to protect Canada's democracy.

As part of this protocol, for both the 2019 and 2021 general elections, a panel of five senior public servants was formed.

[English]

Part of the SITE task force's role was to brief the panel on foreign interference or other threats to the electoral process. The SITE task force advised the panel of any relevant information, and the panel was responsible for determining whether the threshold for informing Canadians was met.

SITE briefed the panel on several occasions before, during and after the elections of 2019 and 2021. These briefings ensured panel members had a shared understanding of the threat landscape. SITE also provided daily classified intelligence updates, which went to all SITE task force member organizations and the panel.

[Translation]

In addition to providing information to the panel, SITE was part of the Elections Security Coordinating Committee, which brought together members of the security and intelligence community with

representatives of Elections Canada and the office of the commissioner of Canada elections. This group met on a regular basis to ensure communication flows, exercise responses to potential events and discuss any potential threats to the electoral process. In that context, SITE provided regular threat briefings to this group.

[English]

The third set of regular briefings SITE conducted consisted of meetings with representatives from political parties, who had been provided secret-level security clearances, to build awareness of foreign threats to Canada's electoral process and provide any relevant foreign interference information. SITE briefed these representatives on several occasions before and during the 2019 and 2021 elections.

Meanwhile, throughout the election period, CSE and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security provided points of contact to all 16 federal registered political parties for further discussion on cybersecurity challenges related to Canada's democratic process. In so doing, political parties or candidates were provided with points of contact should they encounter any suspicious cyber-activity, and CSE designated a quick response point of contact for them.

In addition to our contributions through SITE, CSE has also issued numerous unclassified publications, advice and guidance to inform Canadians about current trends.

I can assure you that all the SITE members here take all allegations of foreign interference very seriously.

[Translation]

Although Canada's electoral system is strong, foreign interference can threaten the integrity of our institutions, particularly by sowing doubt and undermining confidence in the process.

[English]

We will continue to work within our respective mandates to protect Canadians and raise awareness about the serious threat of foreign interference to our country.

Thank you again for the invitation to appear. I welcome any questions you may have.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much for those comments.

We'll start with six-minute rounds, beginning with Mr. Cooper, followed by Mrs. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Then, we will go to Ms. Normandin, followed by Mr. Julian.

[*English*]

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for Ms. Denham.

An open data analysis by the rapid response mechanism, dated September 13, 2021—that would have been during the 2021 election, to provide some context—was entitled “GE44: Chinese Communist Party Social Media Accounts Spreading Negative Narratives about the Conservative Party of Canada”. This analysis, which we've obtained through access to information and which I will table before this committee when I have a translated copy, includes the following key findings:

RRM Canada has observed what may be a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) information operation that aims to discourage Canadians of Chinese heritage from voting for the Conservative Party of Canada.

A further key finding is that “[t]he narrative has...grown in considerable scale”.

Was this analysis shared with the CEIPP election panel?

Ms. Tara Denham (Director General, Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you for the question and for that report.

Yes, any of the reports that the RRM produced were shared with the panel. What I would like to just note is that in that report, it says that it “may” be. Again, what we do is open source analytics of the information environment.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much for that.

Around the same time, there was disinformation that was tracked on certain Chinese-language social media platforms, such as WeChat and Weibo. Some of the themes included disinformation about then member of Parliament Kenny Chiu's private member's bill around a foreign agent registry. It's noted in the Rosenberg report.

In the face of the key finding in the analysis of September 13, and given the additional disinformation about Conservative candidates that was being spread on social media platforms, at any point did the task force provide any warnings on any of these Chinese-language social media platforms that there was misinformation being spread around, to warn the public?

Ms. Tara Denham: Thank you, Chair.

If I understand your question, it's on whether or not any information was shared with the public.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Was there any warning about misinformation or disinformation in the face of the fact that such disinformation had been monitored and identified by the SITE task force?

Ms. Tara Denham: Thank you for that clarification.

As I said, in that report what we were indicating that we were noticing was that there “could” be. We were seeing amplification, and that's what we look for—artificial amplification of content in the social media landscape.

We were flagging the reality that there was that amplification, but in that report we were not able to ascertain whether it was directed by a foreign—

Mr. Michael Cooper: I don't mean to cut you off, but my time is limited and my question was specific: Was any warning issued to alert the public about disinformation that had been identified?

I would note that when we talk about, for example, WeChat, there are 600,000 WeChat users in the Lower Mainland. That's a lot of people on WeChat. It gives an idea of the magnitude to which this disinformation was spreading around throughout the Lower Mainland and causing voters to be misled about Mr. Chiu and about the Conservative Party. That's a big deal.

Was any warning issued—yes or no? I take it that the answer is no, but can you just confirm that?

• (1620)

The Chair: I'm going to pause really quickly. I get to do this every so often, as I just did in the last session.

I respect that it is your time, Mr. Cooper. We have asked our guests to come, and we have to provide them some opportunity to provide some information.

Ms. Denham, I turn the floor to you.

Ms. Tara Denham: The role of the RRM is to identify potential tactics or campaigns to amplify information. As well, as it has been explained, our role is to brief the panel on that information. The panel then takes into consideration not only information we are seeing, but the full spectrum of information that they're being provided, and it is the panel that then makes a decision.

What I can say in this instance is—

Mr. Michael Cooper: To clarify, are you saying that it would be up to the panel to make a decision such as issuing a warning?

Ms. Tara Denham: In terms of the protocol that is in place during the writ period, it is the panel that makes the assertion if any public announcement is made. Again, in this instance, what I can say is that without an ability to identify that it was a foreign entity—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much—

Ms. Tara Denham: —it could have been amplification from Canadian content—

Mr. Michael Cooper: You've made that point very clear.

I want to ask—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: On a point of order, Madam Chair, with all due respect to my colleagues here, we're trying to give people the space and time to answer legitimate questions. We're undertaking a really important discussion, as you've said, Madam Chair. I would really appreciate it if we could give our witnesses ample time to answer the questions, instead of talking over them.

The Chair: With the hybrid capacity, it's also harder for people who are watching to hear what's happening, so I think we should be mindful of that.

I am going to give the floor back to Mr. Cooper.

You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay. I guess my time has expired.

The Chair: Ms. Denham, did you want to finish the point? You were just saying something.

Ms. Tara Denham: For the purposes of clarity, because of the hybrid nature, as you said, the main message here is that, yes, we saw the amplification of content, but we were not able to ascertain if it was from a foreign entity or within domestic sources. That is our role. We flag what we're seeing for an analysis.

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado, up to six minutes go to you.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

My first question is for Ms. Tayyeb.

You mentioned in your opening remarks a bit of the overview of the task force. Can you confirm when the task force was created?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Absolutely. The task force was created in 2018.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Based on that, obviously, this coordination was not in place prior to the 2019 election, so previous elections did not have this level of coordination in terms of verifying and monitoring potential interference.

Is that correct?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: It's a fair point. They did not have it in this particular format. However, the security intelligence agencies that are represented here today have always worked very closely together on foreign interference or threats to any electoral processes.

We didn't have in place the formal arrangement that I spoke about earlier today, which is not to say that the coordination and the collaboration were not already taking place prior to then.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: That's perfect.

As we heard in the previous panel, the question of interference or attempts at interference is not something new, so I assume that the creation of the task force was really just to formalize, as you said, the coordination and sharing of information.

You also talked a bit about the briefings that are provided to a panel of senior public servants who serve on the panel and the political parties that participate in this process. Could you give us a

little more information on the types of briefings that would have been provided and their frequency?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Yes, indeed, Madam Chair.

It is important to note that every briefing was slightly different. I would say that in both the 2019 and 2021 elections, the briefings commenced with what I would call an overall threat briefing to provide a lay of the land and provide the political party representatives an expectation of what we generally see in the security intelligence community, what we view as ongoing foreign interference in Canadian society, what it looks like and some of the tactics used. We would call that a general threat brief, which would have been part of the first brief.

In some other logistics, we would have solicited views from the members in terms of how often they would like to be briefed and if there were any additional considerations they wanted us to be mindful of. We would introduce ourselves and we would walk through any logistics.

Subsequent briefings happened not exactly on a precise, regular basis, but I would say they were every couple of weeks throughout the election campaign. In 2019 and in 2021, there would have been a few. There would have been three, four or five, let's say, per election campaign, but I couldn't say that there was a set schedule on both occasions.

• (1625)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: That's perfect.

Based on the briefings that would have been provided by the task force to the senior public servants on the panel, they determined there was no incident or incidents that would have impacted the integrity of the election. Is that correct?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I'm sorry, but did I misunderstand your first question? I thought you were asking me about political parties. I just want to confirm that I answered correctly the first time.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: You did.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Okay. Thanks. Understood. In terms of the panel, similarly, yes, the panel was briefed regularly by the SITE task force in both electoral campaigns and ultimately did not find that there had been information that would reach the threshold required to advise Canadians.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

On the previous panel, we heard from Ms. Thomas. We heard often about the fact that they are guardians of protected information and that there's a duty to protect national security. The role is to detect, deter and counter foreign interference. She also mentioned that obviously in this forum we are in public and that members of PROC do not have the level of security clearance to be able to receive some of the briefings that perhaps NSICOP or other public servants would have received.

Is that accurate? For the sake of our national security, we obviously cannot have this information in the public domain. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Indeed I very much agree with that. Classified information by its very nature is that which is very sensitive. It could endanger human beings. It could endanger really sensitive techniques and tools that are utilized by the intelligence community, and revealing sensitive information certainly would pose a risk to Canada and Canadians should that information become available to our adversaries.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I have one more quick question. Obviously this is an evolving threat. Given what you may have seen in the 2019 election and what you may have seen in 2020 and 2021, would it be accurate to say that the SITE task force is constantly evaluating the methods it uses in terms of being able to gather this information?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: That is an excellent question. We have said on several occasions that the threat environment is challenging and evolving and that the techniques being used are more sophisticated. The SITE task force members continue to meet to discuss those and to evolve our techniques and ensure that we can keep pace with those developments.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

You have six minutes, Ms. Normandin. Go ahead.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I want to follow up on something I heard to make sure I understand correctly.

Once you know about a disinformation campaign, you have identified the source and, on top of that, you see artificial amplification of the content, you meet the threshold for informing the public. Do I have that right?

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I want to make sure I understood the question. Indeed we are tracking those trends on a regular basis. Those trends and any information that we as individual members have are briefed to the panel. The panel will make a decision as to whether that reaches a threshold that requires a public announcement.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Let's say you aren't absolutely certain that misinformation was artificially amplified or you have doubts as to the origin or source of the misinformation. Is there a

risk that you won't be able to recommend making a public announcement that a campaign may be under way?

• (1630)

[English]

Ms. Tara Denham: Perhaps I can provide a bit of context into what we've heard. This panel has heard a lot about how difficult it is in the disinformation landscape. When we look for artificial amplification, we want to understand that landscape. We're continually learning about it, but if we're not able to ascertain that there's a foreign aspect behind that, which is pushing that amplification, then again, from our perspective, that is not something we would be focused on. We want to be very careful that Canadians can also fully express their opinions. We don't look at the national dialogue. We're looking for foreign interference. When we can't see that, we don't focus on that.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Given how increasingly sophisticated technology is becoming, isn't there a risk that you can never really be sure that the source of the disinformation is foreign or that the content is being artificially amplified? That lack of certainty would mean that the protocol was constantly being circumvented and that the public was never being made aware of incidents.

Having a protocol is well and good, but isn't it an exercise in futility to some extent?

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I could add one point there. I don't want to prejudge the decision-making of the panel members. From our perspective, you'll hear that we are mandated to focus our attention on foreign interference and foreign-influenced activities. We don't monitor—any of us—the internal dialogue of Canadians, who have the right to express themselves.

Having said that, and as Tara indicated, we would brief the panel. The panel could—and this might be something to ask the panel—if they determined there was sufficient impact.... Again, the threshold for the panel is whether this information threatens Canada's ability to hold a free and fair election. I suppose that if they felt this threshold was met, even in the absence of foreign interference, they could choose to do that.

I think we are not in a position to talk through what their considerations might have been in a particular circumstance, but I hope that answers your question.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I'd like to hear about your discussions with the panel of senior public servants.

Did the panel share with you measures it may have been planning to take to counter the disinformation and ensure a more open and fair election? Did the panel inform you of actions it was considering taking?

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: The nature of the discussions with the panel was that our role, at least as SITE members, was to provide them with the information. Certainly, they would have had follow-up questions asking us for updates on any information we would have provided and seeking additional information, but the deliberations of the panel in any decision-making would have been their own, and we were not involved in those discussions.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I take that to mean that if the panel had ideas on how to ensure electoral transparency and fairness, it didn't necessarily ask you whether those measures would work. That wasn't the nature of your discussions with the panel. Do I have that right?

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: To clarify, the panel is the panel as formulated in the protocol. They're also a committee of senior officials and deputy ministers, and part of their responsibility would also be to discuss response options. If there was any information presented to them that they felt required a response that was not a public announcement but some other form of response, they absolutely had the ability to provide that advice, question or suggestion, or to initiate a discussion at least.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I don't have much time left, but out of curiosity, I'd like to know how the panel members are chosen.

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: That unfortunately is not a question I would be able to answer. The panel was established further to the protocol, which was undertaken by the PCO, so that would probably be best directed towards them.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I think I've used up all my time, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[English]

Mr. Julian, it's six minutes to you.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Madam Tayyeb, for being in front of us.

I'm going to ask the same question I asked Ms. Thomas.

I'm sure you have read the reports by Robert Fife and Steven Chase in The Globe and Mail and by Sam Cooper on Global News. You've seen them. Will you acknowledge that they are providing factual information?

• (1635)

Mr. Adam Fisher (Director General, Intelligence Assessments, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): I can maybe try to answer that. Thank you for the question.

Today, we're not prepared to validate any of the reporting that's been in the media or the alleged leaks.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Let's go further, then. The allegations are criminal in nature if there are violations that took place under the Canada Elections Act. These are serious allegations.

My two questions, then, are stemming from that. First, are you aware of the identities of the nine Liberal and two Conservative MPs that seem to be involved. Second, what do you do when there are allegations of criminal violations? Where do you go? What do you do in terms of referring that information?

Mr. Adam Fisher: The second part of that question is easier for me to answer. Certainly, during an election, and even prior to and after an election, the intelligence that's being gathered by the service and other agencies is shared with law enforcement, the RCMP and the commissioner of Canada elections. There is a process by which they have eyes on the intelligence. They're able to assess it. They're able to come back to us and potentially ask for more information and to pursue something in the law enforcement lane, but that's certainly up to them. As the NSIA pointed out in her remarks previously, there are some real challenges in that respect in transitioning intelligence into evidence in the law enforcement arena.

Mr. Peter Julian: Is it automatic that any allegations of a criminal violation of the Canada Elections Act, such as we saw in the in-and-out scandal during the Harper government with Dean Del Mastro, a former Conservative MP, are either investigated by the panel or referred automatically to law enforcement or the commissioner of elections?

Mr. Adam Fisher: I don't think I would use the term "automatic". Speaking for the service, when we receive information that points to foreign interference, we will investigate it. That is a certainty.

As I said, our law enforcement partners would be exposed to the fruits of such an intelligence investigation at a high level, and there would be opportunity there, potentially, to pursue a criminal investigation. There are different thresholds in the law enforcement world and the criminal world, so to say that anything would be automatic would be incorrect.

Mr. Peter Julian: You would investigate it further to see if the financial transactions violate the Canada Elections Act.

Mr. Adam Fisher: We would not be investigating it through the lens of the Criminal Code or crimes. We would be looking for foreign interference, which is defined in our act as deceptive activity on the part of a foreign state that is detrimental to Canadian interests. That's our threshold. It's a lower threshold than there is in law enforcement. We would certainly investigate any credible information that pointed to foreign interference.

I can't speak to what would be required in a law enforcement space in terms of pursuing a criminal investigation.

Mr. Peter Julian: That is concerning to me in the sense that obviously financial impropriety that violates the Canada Elections Act may not be something that comes to light until after a particular candidate has filed.

I've pushed the question enough. I haven't had a satisfactory answer, but I'll move on.

I did ask you if the panel was aware of the identities of the nine Liberal and two Conservative MPs who are referenced as being viewed favourably by Beijing in the reports. I'm not asking for their names, of course. I'm just asking whether you are aware of them.

• (1640)

Mr. Adam Fisher: Again, I won't be commenting on any reporting or alleged media leaks.

Mr. Peter Julian: I will then go on to my next question. This will be for Madam Tayyeb.

You referenced the threshold for information and the panel determining that threshold on a national basis, but we know that disinformation can have an impact at the riding level. Does the panel evaluate the impacts on a riding-to-riding basis as well? Something that might not hit the national threshold might have an impact at the riding level.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I can speak from a SITE task force perspective. We would have been monitoring, reporting and briefing on any threats. We don't necessarily make a distinction between the riding level and the federal level.

In terms of the panel's considerations, I would have to defer to the panel members, whom I believe are appearing at a later date.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

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

This question is for whoever can answer it. Having regard for the caretaker convention or otherwise, did the task force go back and seek input from the Prime Minister or any minister of the government during the 2021 election writ period?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: The SITE task force, as I indicated in my opening remarks, was responsible for providing briefings. I outlined the three sets of briefings that we were responsible for doing: one for the panel, one for the political party representatives and the third for the election security coordinating committee. Otherwise we did not separately brief the Prime Minister or any ministers.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Berthold, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Ms. Tayyeb. By the way, your French was excellent during your opening remarks. I encourage you to keep it up. That would make us very happy.

I'm not going to discuss what's been reported by journalists. I want to talk documents.

Has any of you seen documents showing how such a highly organized and well-oiled machine was able to operate in Canada with two main objectives: the re-election of a minority Liberal government in 2021 and the defeat of specific Conservative candidates targeted by the Chinese Communist regime?

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Fisher: I can't speak to specific intelligence I've seen on specific cases.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: That's the problem, Madam Chair. Since the beginning, every time we've asked specific questions in an attempt to shed a little light on the situation, we're told that the information is classified.

If I understand correctly, you just said you brief political party representatives who have the necessary security clearance. Do I have that right?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Luc Berthold: The individuals with that security clearance aren't allowed to share any of the information from the briefings. Is that correct?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: That's correct.

Mr. Luc Berthold: When you tell a political party representative something, that person can't share it with the party. The only place you can turn is the panel made up of senior public servants. You brief the panel, which decides whether or not to do something. Either way, all of the intelligence you gather cannot be disclosed to the public.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Thank you for your question.

That is indeed correct, and I realize that the process can be frustrating.

[*English*]

In answer to that, I would say that all of us who have been talking about foreign interference for a good amount of time in public try very hard to be as transparent as possible, but maybe—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: You can't be, Ms. Tayyeb. Sorry to cut you off. I appreciate that you all want to be transparent, but, under the law, you can't be.

What political parties find frustrating is knowing that people have the intelligence but can't act on it. You said it was a process. Whenever I hear the word “process”, I think of something long. An election campaign lasts 30 to 42 days.

What good is SITE if it can't act on the intelligence it has at election time?

• (1645)

[*English*]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Having been a practitioner in the security intelligence community for almost 25 years, I completely understand that point of view. It is a careful balance that we deal with every day. We are definitely attempting to put more information to the public about what we're seeing, about the threat of foreign interference and about the types of techniques that are used. What we're seeing today in the creation of the panel is a function of trying to do a better job at that.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: When you see disinformation on social media, it's already public. Everyone can see all the disinformation that's out there.

For SITE, when does that information it shares with people become classified?

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Thank you very much for that.

Go ahead, Ms. Denham.

Ms. Tara Denham: I could add to that.

There is a difference between being able to speak to intelligence that would have been shared with cleared party political members, who would have been briefed accordingly, and your question related to disinformation specifically.

The RRM works on open-source information. Those reports were shared with the panel. After the election, we did an annual RRM report. That is because, again, what we're driving for is being able to understand the tactics we're seeing. We work with our G7 colleagues to understand what they're seeing, and we share that.

The reason it wasn't shared during an election period.... The panel gives the opportunity for it to be shared in an instance where the panel feels it could impact the integrity of the election.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: The election that's under way isn't protected, though, because of this whole process.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

Ms. Tara Denham: What I would say to clarify that is the panel and the protocol are about protecting the elections at the time. For the last two elections, based on the information that was shared with the panel, at no time did it reach a threshold of notification.

Mr. Luc Berthold: No, not your threshold. The threshold of the panel—

The Chair: I'm sorry. I was trying to be good and then it continued.

Mr. Luc Berthold: We were waiting for you to stop.

The Chair: You were waiting. Mr. Berthold, that means a lot to me. Thank you.

Ms. O'Connell, it's up to five minutes for you.

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

Thank you, everyone, for appearing.

I want to follow up on a question that was asked in the first panel by my colleague. There have been allegations made by Walied Soliman, who was the representative from the Conservative Party. He alleged that he raised concerns on behalf of the Conservative Party with SITE in 2021 about foreign interference in the election. He claimed that his concerns were not taken seriously. We heard from

the national security adviser, who said that there was a lengthy response.

Could somebody here speak to those allegations? Can you speak to when specifically Mr. Soliman brought forward these allegations to SITE?

Mr. Adam Fisher: I'm afraid can't speak to the specifics of those allegations. I can certainly assure the committee that when allegations of foreign influence activity are brought to SITE or brought to the service, they're taken seriously, they're looked at and, if necessary, they will be acted upon.

I can't speak specifically to any case or instance.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Can you speak to the fact that these specific allegations were responded to?

Mr. Adam Fisher: No, I can't. I'm sorry. I know that the NSIA went a little further than I'm prepared to go, but I can't speak to specifics.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

I want to get back to the issues around the balance. There's a lot of conflation. Ms. Denham, I think you keep trying to speak to this, but it's getting cut off. I would like to hear the answers.

The suggestion about disinformation is out there. We can certainly see that. Isn't the point of SITE to make sure that it's disinformation being pushed by foreign state actors as a form of foreign interference to take away Canadians' determination?

Frankly, as politicians, I'm sure we've all seen disinformation from various sources in campaigns. Your threshold—the piece you were speaking about—and what SITE is responsible for are not about all the disinformation out there, and certainly not about all the disinformation that might be shared among some groups or other groups. It's specific to foreign interference, and SITE did not see that the threshold—that the origins were foreign state actors—was met.

● (1650)

Ms. Tara Denham: Yes, you are correct that for the RRM, which is a member of SITE.... Being able to look at the open-source environment, we are looking for tactics amplification that we may see. It's artificial amplification of content that we can ascertain has a link to a foreign entity. That's what our focus is.

As you said and as I've mentioned, in these instances, we were observing some amplification of content, and we were shedding light on any particular information we had in terms of sources. We were not able to ascertain if it was coming from a foreign entity or from within Canada.

I might add that this information landscape is really complex. You're absolutely correct that it's sometimes very hard to tell, and that's been mentioned already. However, the RRM, from when we started this work, has established an ethical and methodological framework that guides how we look at that information space so we can be really clear that we are looking for foreign entities aiming to amplify that content without interfering or having any say as to the ability of Canadians to engage freely.

You are absolutely correct that those sources of information could be coming from Canadians or other welcome debate.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Since the 2019 election and the 2021 election.... For example, Jim Judd did a report, and he appeared before our committee. It's my understanding that there were recommendations that would have reviewed SITE and the process.

Again, given some of the questions around that process, were changes made in this whole protocol between 2019 and the 2021 election, based on Mr. Judd's or other observations of how this was working?

The Chair: Does somebody want to respond quickly?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I could respond very quickly to that.

The main change, as I understand it, and I would encourage you to ask this question of PCO when they're here, because they were responsible for changing elements of the protocol.... From a SITE perspective, our mandates remain the same. We adhere to the mandates and the authorities we have. From a composition perspective, that didn't change. From a protocol perspective, I understand there were changes that I would encourage PCO to speak to tomorrow.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Ms. Normandin. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I want to take 20 seconds to put a motion on notice, and then I will send it to the clerk. I move that the committee report to the House the following motion:

That the House of Commons of Canada call on the government to conduct an independent public inquiry into allegations of Chinese interference in the Canadian democratic process and that the appointment of the Commissioner to conduct this inquiry be made following agreement among the recognized parties.

Now, I'd like to hear from the witnesses on the threshold needed to inform the public about certain incidents. My understanding is that it's much easier to meet the threshold in the case of a major operation, but that it's much tougher to meet when separate operations are carried out in a number of ridings.

Under that approach, aren't we likely to see increased interference at the riding level in order to circumvent the protocol? Isn't that a risk?

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Thank you very much for that question. I think I would address the following. I might have alluded to this earlier.

As members of the SITE task force, we are looking at instances of threats to elections, particularly from foreign interference, and we wouldn't make that distinction in the reporting we provide to the panel. How the panel views that question, though, would probably be best addressed to them.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: When you receive information on allegations involving potential candidates, do you inform the candidate in question?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Thank you for that excellent question.

[English]

The way that SITE worked with political parties, which is the general way SITE works, is that we provided threat overviews. We provided information that was relevant to all parties. When there was specific information to provide to a particular party on a particular incident, SITE endeavoured to have separate meetings with those parties on sensitive issues, and they were with the SITE agency or SITE department that was responsible for that particular incident.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Do you make the decision about whether to inform the candidate about potential interference in their riding, or is that up to the panel?

[English]

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Maybe just to clarify, in my answer I was talking about the cleared political party representatives. Maybe you're asking about the individual affected by that. I might ask my colleague to answer that.

Mr. Adam Fisher: Yes, absolutely.

There is a provision within the protocol that allows for outreach to an individual who we think is being targeted by foreign influence activity. My understanding is that the decision can be taken by the deputy head of the agency, but I stand to be corrected on that.

The Chair: Thank you. We didn't put the timer on, so we went over our time. Somebody might be timing this online and saying that it's gone over.

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

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Tayyeb, I want to come back to your comments about the impact on local constituencies. You said that you wouldn't make a distinction about something that could potentially have an impact at the constituency level, so the information would be referred to the panel.

How would the panel be aware that this information could potentially be election-determining or could have an impact on the election at the local riding level?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Thank you very much for that question and for allowing me the opportunity to clarify.

What I intended to say is that the agencies represented here reported any threat we saw to the panel. Whether it was something we saw locally or at a national level, all of that information went to the panel.

Insofar as how the panel makes its determination, I have to defer to the members of the panel to explain that.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: I have one last question for you.

You talked about the amplification of content. We all know about the alleged Chinese interference. We also know of numerous claims of interference by Russia, for instance, when Trump was elected in 2016 and during the Brexit referendum in the U.K. The Conservative Party in the U.K. is said to have received direct funding from the Russians and agencies in Russia. It's also alleged that Russia and Russian agencies had a hand in the "freedom convoy".

What do you make of the amplification at the hands of Russia and China? How do you measure the impact, precisely to protect us from Chinese or Russian interference?

[English]

Ms. Tara Denham: Perhaps I can start, and others can add as appropriate.

You're right that ascertaining the impact can be challenging, but I think what this committee has heard is that we understand there is intent by many countries to interfere, and that we really take this seriously and do everything we can to address it.

A lot of the role we play is to understand what those threat vectors look like, so it's about constantly trying to learn. I can speak for the RRM. That's part of what we contribute. We're trying to understand what the threat against Canada looks like, but as you said, there are examples internationally, and the RRM aims to share that information.

Again, it's about a focus on continuously learning what the threat looks like. It's very difficult to ascertain impact, but we know there is intent.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Calkins, you have four minutes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In the 2019 or 2021 election, was the public ever informed of foreign interference in any media platform during the election? Was

there ever a warning, was the public advised or was there an advisory in either of those elections? I'd like a yes or no.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Insofar as it relates to the activities of the panel and the public announcement function it would render should it deem this required, the answer to that question is no.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Nothing has met the threshold or test yet for the public to know.

In the discussion of amplifications, Ms. Denham, you said that you've witnessed amplifications of information or chatter—whatever the lingo happens to be—and you said that you could not confirm that it was foreign interference. That also implies that you cannot deny there was foreign interference.

Would you agree with my statement?

Ms. Tara Denham: I wouldn't agree with the premise of it. I think it's really important, when you're talking about disinformation and the source of it, to note that just because we aren't able to fully confirm it's a foreign entity... As I said, it's really important. It could be Canadians or it could be other entities having conversations, so I wouldn't want to imply that this means it is not foreign and that it is counter to that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If you can't confirm something, you can't deny something, and that's a very logical argument. I want to get you to clarify a statement that you just made in your testimony here today.

Through one of your answers, you said that you cannot tell if it's foreign or from within Canada. Does your definition of "foreign interference" mean it has to come from offshore? If it happens within the territorial confines of Canada, is it not considered foreign? That's how I interpreted your comment. Is that how you operate?

Ms. Tara Denham: No, and thank you for that question so I can clarify what I meant to say.

What we look for are those tactics. When I said that we couldn't confirm whether it was a foreign entity, I meant it could be a foreign entity using proxies in different ways to amplify content. You need to find the link back to a foreign entity that's directing that. That's just to clarify the statement.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you so much.

Your responsibility is to monitor elections, but your responsibility would not extend to nomination races and leadership races. Is that correct?

Ms. Tara Denham: RRM's mandate is specifically foreign threats to democracies. We look at the threat landscape more broadly.

Perhaps Mr. Fisher would like to add to that.

Mr. Adam Fisher: Sure.

Certainly, from a service perspective and mandate, any foreign influence activity is something we would be interested in and would investigate. That would potentially extend to party nominations outside of an electoral writ.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: There have been numerous conversations about turning intelligence into evidence. I think the Canadian public broadly accepts that there has been significant foreign interference in our democratic processes, and not a single individual has been hauled to the bar to account for any of this. There have been no charges laid by the RCMP. There have been no charges, to my knowledge, put forward by Elections Canada.

Where is the missing gap in turning intelligence into evidence so that we can actually prosecute those who the Canadian public broadly accepts are acting with impunity in our democratic processes?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Thank you for the question. It's a very good one. It is something that I suggest the government has been wrestling with for some time now, and it's not just in Canada. An issue that all of our allies face is trying to find a way to transition intelligence into evidence.

Ultimately, a policy development and probably a legislative fix would be required in that space, but that's well beyond my remit. I know that our colleagues at Public Safety Canada have this on their plate as something they've been looking at and studying.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fergus, I'll give you the same four minutes as Mr. Calkins.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll try to keep it brief.

[*English*]

I'm going to have probably two or three uncomfortable questions. Let me just get right into them.

National security expert Jessica Davis tweeted this: "The leaks are a big concern for me. They appear quite partisan in nature. This might be the nature of the interference and their targets. It might be a function of the reporting. Or it might be selective leaking." She then said, "We need to be very careful about considering the leaked information in context. We should probably all be paying a lot more attention to what's going on in committee when public officials are testifying. They're in a position to give better context."

What is your reaction to that comment?

Mr. Adam Fisher: My reaction as an intelligence professional and an employee of the service, speaking just generally of leaked intelligence, is that it's something we take extremely seriously. Obviously, protecting our sources, our operations and our tradecraft is essential to being able to conduct our investigations and do our business. Anything that puts that at risk is something we take extremely seriously.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

For two elections now, SITE has existed. Does the intelligence community have the resources it needs to counter these examples or concerns of potential foreign interference?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I can start off, but then I'll turn to my colleagues, because we each have a number of tools and authorities available to us.

From a CSE perspective, we certainly have a foreign intelligence mandate, so we collect foreign intelligence. For our cyber-defence mandate, we have the ability to protect Canadian government systems and other critical infrastructure systems. We also have new authorities that allow us to take action to disrupt threat-related activities from foreign threat actors.

From a CSE perspective, we feel that we have the tools necessary to counteract this. We do utilize these authorities in all aspects of foreign interference. I want to affirm that to the committee.

Mr. Adam Fisher: Yes, and I can add to that from a service perspective. In terms of resources, I think we face the reality that any organization does: We have to operate within the resources we're allocated. As the threat environment changes, we need to respond to that, and we've done that to meet threats that are developing and evolving.

In terms of tools—and it has been said before, I think, in front of this committee—the technology is evolving faster than our act has been able to keep up. We need to be able to do more data-driven investigations, and that is a difficulty for us, so certainly in terms of tools and improvements for the service, that would make a difference.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have about 40 seconds left, so we'll have to split this time pretty quickly.

In your answer to Mr. Calkins' question, you talked about problems that countries around the world are facing in terms of the intelligence-to-evidence problem. What types of legislative tools do you imagine could be useful, and have they been discussed with your colleagues around the world?

Mr. Adam Fisher: I'm sorry. That really is outside of my remit. I would probably refer you to the Department of Public Safety, where I have colleagues who have been looking at this issue for some time.

The Chair: That's excellent.

With that, I would like to thank our witnesses and guests for taking the time to join us today. We would like to thank you for your service and for being available. If there is any additional information you would like to provide, please share it with the clerk. The clerk will ensure that all members receive that information.

Committee members, whether in person or online, I'm going to suspend for 10 minutes, and we will return to the conversation that was at the top of this meeting. We will see you back here at 5:22.

Thank you.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I understand, Mr. Cooper, that you would like the floor.

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

I move:

That, given further media reports from Global News, revealing additional shocking revelations regarding Beijing's strategy to interfere and influence Canada's democratic institutions, the Committee, in relation to its study of foreign interference in elections,

(a) hold a third meeting during each House sitting week to accommodate this study, in addition to its meetings concerning its orders of reference related to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act;

(b) hold at least three meetings, each two hours in length, dedicated to this study, on each House adjournment week;

(c) 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;

(d) invite Jeremy Broadhurst, Liberal Party of Canada Campaign Director for the 2019 general election;

(e) invite Morris Rosenberg, author of the independent assessment of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP) for the 2021 general election, as mandated by the Cabinet Directive on the CEIPP; and

(f) order the production of all memoranda, briefing notes, e-mails, records of conversations, and any other relevant documents, including any drafts, which are in the possession of any government department or agency, including the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, the CEIPP, any Minister's Office, and the Prime Minister's Office, containing information concerning the efforts by, or on behalf of, foreign governments or other foreign state actors to interfere in the 2019 and 2021 general elections, including the documents which were quoted in the various Globe and Mail and Global News reports on this subject-matter and, for greater certainty, those regarding Canadian Security Intelligence Service warnings to "senior Liberal Party staff" in September 2019 regarding Beijing's foreign interference in the Liberal nomination for the riding of Don Valley North, provided that

(i) these documents be deposited without redaction with the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, in both official languages and within three weeks of the adoption of this order,

(ii) a copy of the documents shall also be deposited with the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, in both official languages, within three weeks of the adoption of this Order, with any proposed redaction of information which, in the government's opinion, could reasonably be expected to compromise the identities of employees or sources or intelligence-collecting methods of Canadian or allied intelligence agencies,

(iii) 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,

(iv) the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall assess the redactions proposed by the government, pursuant to subparagraph (ii), to determine whether the Office agrees that the proposed redactions conform with the criteria set out in subparagraph (ii) and

(A) if it agrees, it shall provide the documents, as redacted by the government pursuant to subparagraph (ii), to the Clerk of the Committee, or

(B) if it disagrees with some or all of the proposed redactions, it shall provide a copy of the documents, redacted in the manner the Office determines would conform with the criteria set out in paragraph (ii), together with a report indicating the number, extent and nature of the government's proposed redactions which were disagreed with, to the Clerk of the Committee, and

(v) the Clerk of the Committee shall cause the documents, provided by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel pursuant to subparagraph (iv), to be distributed to the members of the Committee and to be published on the Committee's website forthwith upon receipt.

Madam Chair, I bring this motion forward given last Friday's Global News report by Sam Cooper, revealing additional shocking revelations about Beijing's interference in our democracy.

Given Global News reports that senior staff in the Prime Minister's Office were briefed about this interference and did nothing about it, it is all the more important that the Prime Minister's chief of staff Katie Telford testify before this committee, which this motion demands.

As we seek to get to the bottom of alarming reports of interference by Beijing in the 2019 and 2021 elections, let me say at the outset what this is not about. This is not about Chinese Canadians who are, first and foremost, the victims of Beijing's interference activities.

● (1735)

What this is about is that under this Prime Minister's watch, there has been reportedly, based on a review of CSIS documents by Global News and The Globe and Mail, what has been characterized by both Global News and The Globe and Mail as a vast and sophisticated campaign of interference by Beijing in not one but two elections—again, under this Prime Minister's watch. Above all else, what this scandal is about is what the Prime Minister knows about this interference, when he first learned about it and what he did about it or failed to do about it.

So far, Madam Chair, there is absolutely no evidence that the Prime Minister has done anything meaningful in response to Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. By all indications, he has instead turned a blind eye to this interference in our elections and in our democracy.

CSIS advised the Prime Minister, including in a January 21, 2021, briefing, that the policy of the government in response to foreign interference be grounded in sunlight and transparency. In response to these troubling reports of election interference, the Prime Minister has done exactly the opposite of what CSIS advised. Instead of providing sunlight and transparency, the Prime Minister has refused to answer basic questions about what he knows.

Following the November 7 Global News report by Sam Cooper of a vast campaign of interference by the Chinese Communist regime in the 2019 election that, among other things, involved 11 candidates, the Prime Minister, following that, was silent for two weeks. He said nothing. Then, using carefully crafted language, he tried to mislead the Canadian public by saying that he was not briefed about candidates who received money from China, as if Beijing wrote a cheque to 11 candidates. No one alleged such a thing. Such a thing, on its face, is absurd.

If there's anything that's transparent about this Prime Minister, that was a transparent attempt on the part of the Prime Minister to hide, to misdirect, to cover up and to mislead the Canadian public about what he knows. When he was called out on that, the Prime Minister, despite repeated questions about whether he was briefed and what he knows, never provided a clear answer.

Following The Globe and Mail's recent report by Robert Fife and Steven Chase about Beijing's interference in the 2021 election, instead of being transparent about what he knows and instead of expressing concern about this reported interference, the Prime Minister's response was to shamefully go after whistle-blowers at CSIS for possibly shining a light and making the public aware of Beijing's interference, something that CSIS precisely advised the Prime Minister—transparency, shining a light, making the public aware. Yet he went after whistle-blowers.

● (1740)

He even went so far as to outrageously insinuate that those of us on this committee and others who want to get to the bottom of Beijing's election interference are somehow undermining democracy. I say that a prime minister who misleads, misdirects and covers up election interference is the one who is undermining democracy, not those who want to get to the bottom of foreign interference by Beijing.

He smugly attacked the accuracy of the Globe and Mail report of Robert Fife and Steven Chase, both well-respected journalists, only to backtrack the very next day and say that he was somehow misunderstood. The Prime Minister's non-answers, his repeated evasions and his attacks on whistle-blowers are not the actions of a transparent prime minister. They are not the actions of a prime minister who is interested in getting to the bottom of Beijing's interference. They are the actions of a prime minister who has failed to act, who turned a blind eye, and who is now trying to cover it up.

The need for the Prime Minister to come clean and tell Canadians what he knows is underscored by the shocking Global News report by Sam Cooper that was reported last Friday. In that report, it was stated that CSIS warned “senior aides from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s office” that a Liberal candidate in the 2019 election—now a sitting Liberal MP—was assisted by Beijing's Toronto consulate in his nomination campaign.

Instead of taking the warnings of CSIS seriously, they—“they” being the senior aides in the Prime Minister's Office—did nothing about it. They turned a blind eye. When the Prime Minister was asked just an hour or two ago whether he had been informed and whether he had been briefed about CSIS's warning that a Liberal candidate, now a sitting Liberal MP, was assisted by Beijing's Toronto consulate in his nomination campaign, he refused to answer. He misdirected again. He tried to change the subject. He tried to attack those who were demanding answers and who were seeking to get to the bottom of this interference.

Again, these are the conduct and the actions of a prime minister who is not transparent. They are the actions and conduct of a prime minister who has something to hide and who has a lot to answer for.

Given the seriousness involving these latest allegations reported by Global News, it is imperative that, at the very least, the Prime Minister's top aide and the most powerful unelected official in government, his chief of staff Katie Telford, appear before this committee. The Prime Minister said in 2015 that, when you're talking to Katie Telford or Gerald Butts, it is like you're talking to him. This is someone who is a critical witness in terms of getting to the bottom of what I again stress is the heart of the scandal.

● (1745)

What did the Prime Minister know, when did he know it and what did he do about it or fail to do about it with respect to Beijing's interference in two elections, the 2019 election and the 2021 election, under his watch as Prime Minister?

Ms. Telford needs to come clean and tell this committee and tell Canadians about what she knows about this CSIS briefing; explain why senior PMO staff turned a blind eye to CSIS warnings about Beijing's interference in our democracy; and explain why she may be one of those senior PMO staff who turned a blind eye. We need to know.

For this committee to be able to do its work to get to the bottom of Beijing's interference, we need to see the production of relevant documents. The production process so far has been inept. At this committee's meeting last week, I highlighted the inadequacy of this, showing that we have received pages and pages of production that are blank pages. That's why I put forward a motion that the parliamentary law clerk, who is independent, undertake redactions having regard for national security considerations.

That motion was gutted last week by the Liberals. Why was it gutted? It was because, almost certainly doing the bidding of the Prime Minister's Office, the Liberals didn't want transparency. The Liberals were quite content to see pages and pages of blank pages. The Liberals wanted to do the redacting themselves, even though it's this Prime Minister who is implicated, along with his staff, in this interference scandal.

They, the Liberals, didn't trust, and don't trust, the parliamentary law clerk, because, again, they're not interested in getting to the bottom of what happened. They're interested in seeing the Prime Minister's inaction and what he knows covered up.

This motion does provide, once again, that the independent parliamentary law clerk undertake the redactions. That would ensure that national security considerations are protected while at the same time providing as much transparency as possible so that this committee can do its work.

With that, I'm hopeful that the Liberal members opposite will stop doing the bidding of this Prime Minister and his PMO and do what is right in shining a light on Beijing's interference in our elections. That starts with not shielding but bringing to committee PMO officials like the Prime Minister's chief of staff and seeing an independent and transparent production process.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1750)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Just so that everyone is on the same page, on the speaking list is Monsieur Berthold, followed by Mr. Calkins, Mrs. Romanado, Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Julian, Madam Normandin and Mrs. Sahota.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I won't speak for long. I would simply like to address some issues just raised by Mr. Cooper.

It's extremely important, especially following the meeting we had earlier today. Despite the incredible number of documents out there—I have some here, in my notes, but I won't use them—and everything that's been reported in the media on this issue in the last several weeks, both by Global News and in the *Globe and Mail*, there are still a number of worrying issues which lead us to believe that we need a more in-depth study on the influence of the Chinese regime in our elections.

Every day, every hour, we are finding out new things. Canadians have the right to know what's really going on and to get to the bottom of things. That is what we want to do.

That is why the motion introduced today by my colleague in this regard calls for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to dig even deeper, to meet more often and draw up a more exhaustive list of witnesses so we can get to the bottom of things. As we have seen again today, despite all of the questions we are asking, we still can't get to the bottom of things. We still don't know when the Prime Minister was informed of potential Chinese interference, who would have told him, what he did when he was presented with the information and what he intends to do to protect the integrity of the next election. I would like to remind everyone that we are in a minority government and that an election could be triggered at any moment. It is therefore important that we move quickly so we can get to the bottom of the matter.

We are therefore requesting many more meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for this study and that the House provide the committee with the necessary resources to hold these meetings.

In particular, we are asking that Katie Telford, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, be called to testify on her own for two hours. I think that's the least we can do to get to the bottom of things. As Mr. Trudeau has said before, speaking to Ms. Telford is like speaking directly to him. So we would like to hear what Ms. Telford has to say, what she knows and especially what information she shared with the Prime Minister. We want to know what the Prime Minister knows, when he found out and why the government seems to have done nothing to counter foreign interference, when it obviously happened, based on the information we have today.

We are also asking for Mr. Rosenberg to appear, as he is the author of the independent assessment of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol for the 2021 federal election.

Lastly, we are asking for the production of a series of documents to shed light on this matter. These documents would obviously be redacted by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel in the interest of protecting information.

In short, I support my colleague's motion. I hope that my colleagues from every party will support this motion so we can shed light on all of the articles that have appeared in the media. As I said, I'll soon run out of space in front of me to lay out all of these news articles.

• (1755)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[*English*]

Mr. Calkins, go ahead.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Chair, if it's okay, could you just move my name to the bottom of the list?

The Chair: That's no problem.

Mrs. Romanado, go ahead.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague for bringing forward this motion today. I listened intently while he read the motion and explained the rationale for bringing it forward.

One of the concerns I have is that the focus is not on foreign interference. The focus is on the Prime Minister.

I'm very concerned about foreign interference in elections. The purpose of this study is whether, in fact, we have the proper mechanisms in place in terms of protocol and oversight, and in terms of what happened in the 2019 election and the 2021 election, and perhaps even in previous elections. Part of this motion doesn't refer to any of that.

With respect to the production of documents that was referred to, we just heard Ms. Jody Thomas, who was previously the deputy minister of national defence and is now the national security and intelligence adviser, explain very clearly that as guardians of “protected information”, obviously, the members of PROC do not have the security clearance to be able to see the documents that are classified as top secret. NSICOP, which has the necessary clearance, would be the appropriate place for parliamentarians to review documents in a non-redacted way.

When my colleague mentions blank pages, it's obvious he knows full well that none of us has the security clearance necessary to see unredacted documents of top secret clearance, and that releasing documents of top secret clearance would have major ramifications. While I understand where the member opposite is coming from, there are legislative prohibitions to releasing top secret documents. We have a mechanism in place to look at that, which is NSICOP.

We've just received a report from Mr. Rosenberg, the “Report on the assessment of the 2021 Critical Election Incident Public Protocol”, which has some recommendations in it that would be very worthwhile for this committee to dig into. That is something that I look forward to hearing more about.

With respect to this motion, quite frankly, it doesn't achieve what I thought PROC was looking for in understanding foreign interference and making sure that we have the tools in place. Are the tools in place robust enough to prevent this? There are questions still to be answered.

While I highly respect my colleague across the way, I think that this motion brings us away from the task at hand, which is to look at foreign interference in elections versus a focus on the Prime Minister. If that's his intent, that's his intent. My intent here is to look at foreign interference in elections to make sure that they are as robust as possible, and to make sure that the tools are in place so that we can protect our democracy.

Thank you.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I wanted to weigh in on this important discussion as well. I appreciated all of the comments made by colleagues.

I take this matter very seriously. I take the allegations that are circulating in the media very seriously. I think we all really need to see this as a non-partisan issue and approach it in, I think, a very good-faith attempt to understand how we can continue to evolve the ecosystem our government has put in place as clearly documented by Morris Rosenberg's report, which I think really puts substance to some of the questions I had. I took the time to read that last night. I found it very enlightening as to how much has actually been done.

I think our focus really needs to be on how we evolve the ecosystem to keep up with the emerging and evolving threat environment. I think we've heard from security and intelligence professionals that this is really their concern. I think there are some good recommendations that this committee could make. I think what started with—I thought, anyway—a very good-faith attempt on all parties' sake to really undertake this work has now really shifted. I'm really uncomfortable with this shift. It's become about a partisan attack on the Prime Minister and a partisan attack on one of our MPs. I realize that there are allegations. We heard in testimony today—it was very clear early—that no investigation is under way by the RCMP. To me, this points to questions as to whether those allegations are true or not.

When I look at this motion, I think we should really be approaching it with a good-faith attempt to try to improve our democratic institutions and the ecosystem that really is necessary with a multiplicity of strategies that help reduce threats to our democratic institutions.

With all that said, I have very specific concerns in relation to the motion that Mr. Cooper put forward. Perhaps instead of going through all of those, I'll just introduce an amendment. I have an amendment here that I've drafted and I would like to put forward.

I'll read that into the record, Madam Chair, as follows:

That the motion be amended by deleting paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d), and replacing the words in paragraph (f) with the following "the committee order the production of all memoranda, briefing notes, and any other relevant documents, which are in the possession of government departments or agencies containing information concerning efforts by, or on behalf of, foreign governments or other foreign state actors to interfere in the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2021 general elections, provided that—

• (1805)

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, do you have that in writing? Do you have it in both official languages?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes. I would be happy to provide that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Perhaps you can send that and we'll suspend for a second while we get it circulated around. That way people can follow it and interpretation can have access as well.

We look forward to receiving that, Mr. Turnbull, after which I'll give you back the floor.

• (1805)

(Pause)

• (1810)

The Chair: Please continue. We have all received a copy of it now. Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I believe I was at a point in a paragraph, and I'll start just before where I left off.

—foreign governments or other foreign state actors to interfere in the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2021 general elections provided that (i) the Departments and Agencies tasked with gathering these documents apply redactions according to the Access to Information and Privacy Act, (ii) these redacted documents be deposited as a complete package as soon as possible with the Clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

We have an amendment that's been moved.

I would usually start a new list, but I do know that I had Mr. Julian and Madame Normandin on my list.

Mr. Julian, would you like the floor?

You would.

I will continue with the list I have.

Mr. Julian, the floor is yours.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will be voting against the amendment that was put forward by my colleague. However, you'll recall, Madam Chair, that much earlier today, we circulated the NDP approach on how these hearings should be conducted. Mr. Turnbull has taken one small element of that, but has not taken the overall, comprehensive approach. I hope that once this amendment is defeated, I'll be able to move my more extensive amendment.

What we believe needs to happen is to ensure, first off, that we have a national public inquiry. That is something I hope we will debate tomorrow. I moved the notice of motion today. It will be in order to move it tomorrow, and I certainly hope that the motion for a national public inquiry will be supported by all members of this committee.

Until the government indicates it is willing to do that, we will have work to do as a committee. The key element, to my mind—this is where I would disagree with my Conservative colleagues—is that we need to be looking comprehensively at the Chinese government and state actor interference, but also at Russian state actor interference.

I want to flag the University of Calgary's school of public policy. It came out with a study just last summer indicating that in the Canadian Twitter ecosystem, around 25% of the accounts were "spreading pro-Russian talking points". These were accounts that were talking about the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

An article reads:

The analysis—

This is from the University of Calgary's school of public policy.

—of the content of the tweets found similar pro-Russian views expressed among right-wing figures and their supporters in the U.S. and Canada, he said.

He said supporters of the "Freedom Convoy" and anti-vaccine movement, some of whom may not realize they have been digesting messaging originating from Russia, were also tweeting messages in support of the invasion of Ukraine.

Finally, one member of the team from the University of Calgary's school of public policy who examined the millions of tweets that were required for this very extensive study said in an interview:

...that the Russian "state apparatus" is associated with many accounts tweeting in Canada, and is influencing posts that are retweeted, liked or repeated by different accounts again and again.

There is a concern of Russian interference, as I mentioned earlier, in the United Kingdom with the Brexit referendum. The result is attributed to Russian interference. It's the same with Donald Trump's election and the allegations around the "freedom convoy". The fact is, as we know from the report that the U.K. government finally issued after the 2019 election, that the Russian state actors were involved in heavily financing the United Kingdom's Conservative Party.

These are all of serious concern. If we do not have a public inquiry that examines all of those things, both Russian interference and Chinese interference.... As I mentioned earlier, Madam Chair, Chinese interference is to the extent that those allegations are serious enough that the electoral laws may have been broken. This requires the government and the Prime Minister to step up and call this public inquiry because of the seriousness of the allegations.

Violations of the Canada Elections Act are not something that should be taken lightly. I mentioned a couple of examples earlier today. We need to have the Prime Minister call this public inquiry. It needs to be comprehensive, on both Chinese state actor interference and Russian state actor interference, and there are a number of witnesses who need to be called.

As I've circulated to every member of this committee, in a way to be open and ensure that everyone is aware of what the NDP proposes in terms of a way forward, we will be proposing—and I'll move the amendment at the appropriate time—that Katie Telford and Tausha Michaud, chiefs of staff to the Prime Minister and former leader of the official opposition, come forward to this committee.

● (1815)

As well, we would be proposing that the national campaign directors for the Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of Canada during the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns also be brought forward and that we have an extensive request for documents that includes rapidly getting documents through to this committee, but also relies upon an agreement that we already have among all parties.

You will recall, Madam Chair, that under the Harper government, documents were almost impossible to come by. I remember those dismal years in which parliamentarians had no rights to documents. What we have put in place coming out of that, signed by all recognized parties, is a way of treating top secret documents, documents that deal with national security, that involves referral to that committee. If there is disagreement among the four parties for any reason at all, the national security document would be referred to a special committee of judges who would rule on whether or not they would be admissible or subject to national security. This is a way of ensuring that all documents are available to the committee and that we can compare the redactions as well.

This is a way of moving forward, Madam Chair, that is ensuring that we as a committee are doing our work.

I'll have a chance to move this later when, I hope, we will have defeated the amendment and there will be space for a new amendment to be moved.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

That's what I would like to do.

I think it's really important that we look closely at all of the allegations. These are serious allegations regarding Chinese interference in the last election campaign, but also of Russian interference in our democracy, and potentially in our elections, as well, as several studies and articles seem to indicate. We need to get to the bottom of this and get answers for Canadians.

The NDP amendment, which has been circulating for hours now, would allow the committee to fulfill its duty. If a national inquiry is launched, the committee could then move on to other things. If no inquiry is called, the committee will have to do the work. As far as I'm concerned, our amendment is the best way to deal with this serious matter in the interest of all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak during this round of questions. I hope it won't prevent me from speaking during a subsequent round, after we have debated this amendment, because I'd like to move a minor amendment to Mr. Cooper's initial motion regarding dates.

As for Mr. Turnbull's amendment, I won't be able to support it.

While we were discussing with witnesses here how the government has handled the interference, and while we are raising more questions here than are being answered, the Prime Minister held a press conference during which he strongly asserted that there are already enough tools to protect against foreign interference. This is the complete opposite of what our witnesses have told us today.

To reiterate, beyond what we can do as a parliamentary committee, we absolutely need an independent public inquiry. As for our committee, we must ensure that we continue to hear from more witnesses, including Ms. Telford, as stated in Mr. Cooper's motion. Mr. Turnbull's amendment would among other things remove the part of the motion calling on the committee to invite certain witnesses. Yet we need to hear from them because there are still many unanswered questions. The confidence that Canadians have in their democratic institutions is at stake.

We need to hear witnesses who can tell us what happened, who knew what, when, and why this was not made public. The Prime Minister has said that the existing mechanisms are effective, but I have the impression that is not the case. We therefore need to keep hearing from witnesses who can tell us that these mechanisms do not in fact provide for the timely sharing of information about foreign interference with Canadians. Further, these mechanisms do not assure us that foreign interference was not concealed in cases where it was politically convenient for the government, for instance, when that interference favoured its own candidates.

In light of this, I cannot support Mr. Turnbull's proposed amendment.

I hope we can now move to debate on the original motion. As I said, I have a very small amendment, which will be distributed to everyone in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mrs. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity.

I've been listening to all of the debate. It sounds like all of us, or at least the various parties right now, have some amendment or another to be moved or made. Some have been put on notice. I want to thank Mr. Julian for putting his thoughts on notice as well, and perhaps encourage Madame Normandin to also, if she wishes, maybe put her motion on notice too so that we can have some clarity as to what that might be.

I have some comments to make to the substance of what we've been talking about, but before I get to that, I thought I would just put it out there and suggest that perhaps, given that we're on so many different wavelengths and paths right now, we adjourn for today. We are going to come back tomorrow anyway for a three-hour panel meeting. We can at that time, or at least in between now and then, have some conversations and see whether we want to move to a vote on this amendment, or perhaps there are other things we could discuss and come up with given the fact that a lot of this is just new to maybe many of our members right now.

It's hard; I wish I was in the room and I could tell by the faces if there's some nodding or agreement to what I'm saying.

I'm looking to you, Madam Chair, to maybe let me know if you could get an idea as to whether there would be consensus to this suggestion, or not, at this point. If not, there are some remarks that I would like to make on the substance of the amendment.

• (1825)

The Chair: Mrs. Sahota, based on what I see in the room, and what I'm hearing, there is not consensus.

The clerk is asking, just to clarify, are you moving adjournment or are you wanting to hear where other people are on that?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I hadn't formally moved; I was looking to do it in a much more collegial way and see if we could be given some time in between today's meeting and the next to see where we might land on these four different motions and three different amendments that have just been brought up in today's discussion.

The Chair: Okay. So I'm not hearing you moving it.

Are you finished sharing your comments on this, or did you want to continue? There is no consensus to adjourn.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

The Chair: Would you like to continue speaking?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Sure. Absolutely. I have some thoughts to share, so I might as well share those while I have the floor. I'm sure this could go around in circles for a while, so I can always get back in line to share some more, but I want to give my initial thoughts on what's happening.

I was pleased with today's meeting. The motion that Mr. Cooper has brought forward and now the amendment that Mr. Turnbull has brought forward are giving me déjà vu. I'm sure they're giving the same feeling to many others in this room in that we're having a very similar discussion.

I know that the motion Mr. Cooper has brought forward is slightly different, but in essence, it's not all that different from the one we were discussing about a week ago. At that time, this committee came to a decision to move forward with studying and shedding more light and transparency on the issue of foreign interference. At that point, we voted to move forward and bring a whole bunch of witnesses to this committee.

Mr. Turnbull's amendment includes bringing Morris Rosenberg, who has just authored the "Report on the assessment of the 2021 Critical Election Incident Public Protocol". That is a very interesting report, by the way, which was made public just a couple of days ago. In that report, they've done a lot of work. In essence, that report has, I think, shed a lot of light on what has happened.

Mr. Cooper talks about sunlight and all of those things, but in essence, it seems to me that Mr. Cooper is more interested in who heard what, and when, and the Prime Minister, and is wanting to create a big show out of our security agencies and out of our system.

What I am more interested in is continuing on with our meetings. Even in the last several meetings, we have discovered some really good information. We've been given some good suggestions and ideas, whether through the report that Mr. Rosenberg authored or through the witnesses we have seen.

I know many issues have come up, such as widening the scope that the SITE task force has so that it's not just during the writ period. That's a very interesting suggestion. We've heard time and time again that we should probably move forward with adding a registry of foreign agents. We've heard that Australia has been successful in doing so. We've heard a few other suggestions as well. I think those are all really great ones, and I think we can continue with the witnesses we have, because they are essentially the ones who are responsible for making these decisions.

We heard today from the national security advisor that they have all the tools and that CSIS has the tools that are needed in order to prevent or interfere when they have knowledge of an incident of foreign interference occurring. They have that capability.

I don't know what.... There's a discussion of a big public inquiry, and I see that there are obviously benefits to the public being aware about what is happening. We are in a public forum right now. I'm really hoping and urging that we can put the partisanship away and suggest how we can make this about our democratic system.

At this point, the SITE force has already assessed that the integrity of the 2019 and 2021 elections was not compromised, although they did it under a framework that perhaps Mr. Cooper is not happy with. Interference did not rise to the level that would have had an impact on the overall election outcomes. I believe Mr. Cooper has even said so in several interviews, and I think we have agreement on that fact.

• (1830)

I think there is this desire to drill into issues when we know, as my colleague Mrs. Romanado said, that we will not be able to get unredacted documents on some things. A lot of what is in that original motion is wishful thinking. It's never going to happen. We're not going to get unredacted documents. I don't even think the law clerk of Parliament has the ability to pass those on to us in that manner. There is a process, and I think we are confusing the public through a lot of this back-and-forth.

As responsible parliamentarians, we know that no party wants foreign interference to happen, whether it's by China or any other country. We know that many countries are involved in this type of activity in Canada and that it's happened for quite some time, not just in these last two elections. Our goal and our mission in this committee, within what we have control or purview over, should really be about strengthening our future elections. As the procedure and House affairs committee, we should be interested in this aspect, since it is within our mandate. It's not about dragging in staff members and dragging the name of the Prime Minister through what has

been mentioned and whether he allowed somebody to run or didn't. It's really not about any of that. It's about protecting our democracy and our elections.

I think a lot of us already well understand the information and advice we've been given by our intelligence agencies and we understand what we should do in response. That's where I'm leaning.

Let's continue to have these meetings. We have a few more that are already laid out. After those meetings, we can see whether we're satisfied with the recommendations we can put forward at that point or whether we're not satisfied and there are other witnesses still to be heard from.

I'm sorry, but I think what the Conservatives are asking for is not for the greater good. It's about what happened in one particular riding, not about the overall election outcome. We've seen in the most recent report that it wasn't the case that this affected the general outcome of the election. Therefore, I think we should learn from what has happened. We should learn from all of the security agencies and the witnesses who are coming before us and we should take their advice. They see where the gaps are and they've been identifying the gaps for us. There are many other former intelligence officers we could also call forward to get their advice. Some have already come before our committee, and they've provided some good things.

I truly believe that if we put forth a strong report to Parliament, the government will be interested in acting on the advice of our committee and we could make a big difference through our work. If we want things to come off the rails and go sideways just so we can have a dog-and-pony show, so be it, but let's do this for the greater good and let's make a difference so we don't have to worry about talking about this again. We want to have transparency in future elections so this doesn't happen to any future candidates.

Thank you.

• (1835)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sahota.

Mr. Calkins, go ahead.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I listened to my colleague who just spoke and I couldn't disagree more.

I've been a member of Parliament for 17 years. I would hope that none of the work I've done could be referred to as a dog-and-pony show. This issue has captured the attention of the nation. This is the committee of the House of Commons that is charged with overseeing the integrity of our electoral system. The allegations are serious. The issues are serious, not only about the interference in the 2019 and 2021 campaigns most recently but even in nomination contests. They're two separate issues, but all have the same underlying problems.

It doesn't look like the third time is going to be a charm for the Liberals this time around. I would remind people who are watching this meeting right now that this is the third time my colleague Mr. Cooper has brought a motion like this before this committee. Once was on February 9. The Liberals and the NDP amended that motion to remove Katie Telford and others and remove the parts of the motion that dealt with the production of documents from that particular request on February 9.

Most recently, we did it again last week, and again the NDP and the Liberals amended the motion to remove Katie Telford and a few others, and again they removed the production of documents request from that motion. I am encouraged somewhat today by the change in tone from one of the parties here at the table that these kinds of amendments to basically water down....

If we took Mr. Turnbull's amendment, it would basically gut the motion. It would reduce the amount of work that this committee would do. It would remove summoning Katie Telford to the committee. It would remove inviting Jeremy Broadhurst to the committee. He was the Liberal Party of Canada campaign director for the 2019 election. It would basically remove the production of documents request and simply replace it with an ATIP request that any Canadian could do.

I think that undermines not only the intent of the motion but also the work that we do as parliamentarians. It continues to take this very serious issue nonchalantly. We're all supposed to sit here and just say that this Prime Minister and his caucus, his ministers....

They seem to be saying, "Just trust us. Everything's okay." Everything's not okay. In the course of this meeting alone, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation returned \$200,000 that it took. From the time this meeting started to where we are at right now, that has happened.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It's an admission of guilt.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If we are to believe anything, it's that this issue is not going to go away. Gutting a motion and pretending that everything is fine, that there's nothing to see here, reminds me of Leslie Nielsen in *The Naked Gun*, riding a missile into a fireworks factory that goes off and explodes all over the place, and then he advises the watching public, "Back off, folks; there's nothing to see here."

I doubt that Bob Fife and Steven Chase would agree. I doubt that Sam Cooper would agree. I doubt that Terry Glavin would agree. These are all credible investigative journalists who I think are doing yeoman's service on this issue.

I am glad to see the opposition members at this committee stand their ground, finally. The third time's a charm. Even though we haven't got a finalized agreement on what this motion will look like, at least this time—it appears, at least—the jig is up for the Liberal members at this committee to gut this motion.

● (1840)

I hope that all the opposition parties will work constructively to bring forward everybody and all of the information we need to make an informed decision and informed recommendations to the government, so that the people we keep summoning here—the people from CSIS, the people from the RCMP, the people from Elections Canada and the SITE task force and so on, the people who keep coming back here and saying that the current roles and the current protocols are not sufficient—can at least be provided with good information or good recommendations to their responses. This is what our job is as parliamentarians.

I look forward to continuing this conversation for as long as it takes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Next is Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all my colleagues for taking part in this debate, as we have a motion and an amendment before us, in addition to the two notices of motion that were presented earlier.

First of all, I would like to say that this is an issue that concerns me. I sincerely believe that it is of concern not only to the members around this table, but to all members, because we are talking about reputations and interference in our democratic system. As the witnesses who have appeared before us have noted, we are dealing with foreign interference in elections, but foreign interference is not limited to politics. It is widespread in academia, in business, in the economy, and in all sorts of other areas. If you spread a rumour, it spreads everywhere. All of a sudden, we read about it on our electronic devices, it's picked up by the newspapers, and so on.

Today we heard testimony from people responsible for ensuring national security, and from a group of people responsible for ensuring the integrity of our elections and monitoring foreign interference. Unfortunately, their findings invalidate many of the points that are in the motion introduced by my colleague and friend, Mr. Cooper. I am always willing to have a frank and non-partisan discussion to examine these issues. However, when I look at many of the points in this motion and listen to the speeches of my colleagues in the official opposition, I find that they continue to repeat allegations that are not supported by the facts presented by the experts who have testified today. I therefore find it difficult to support the motion.

We sometimes jokingly say that our colleagues are very consistent in that they always believe the same thing, no matter what happens from week to week. However, we need to take into account the evidence we have heard here.

• (1845)

The main weakness of this motion is that it asks for top secret documents to be produced before this committee, which is a very serious problem. We know that a number of countries that are not our allies, if I can put it that way, are monitoring the electronic devices of members of Parliament and are looking for every opportunity to obtain information. I am not convinced that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in its current form is the appropriate forum to receive this top secret information. There is a committee of members of Parliament that is charged with examining all such matters in a transparent manner and has access to all unredacted information: it is the Committee of Parliamentarians on National Security and Intelligence.

If we insist on retaining the problematic points in my colleague and friend Mr. Cooper's motion, particularly point (f), it will be very difficult for me to support it. The motion as it stands would cause us serious problems. Indeed, Canada could get into trouble with its allies, especially those who work with Canada to guard against foreign interference.

We now have four different motions before us. I want to give my colleagues the opportunity to debate them. I hope that we can also find common ground. Once everyone has presented their motion, I hope that we will have time to think things through and have discussions among ourselves. I think we can find a way to proceed, ideally without partisanship. I hope that we are up to the challenge and that we act in the interest of Canadians and in the national interest of our country, rather than purely political and partisan interests.

• (1850)

I want to share my thoughts with my colleagues. I hope they are listening. I already proposed a solution for this evening. I hope we can apply it and come back tomorrow with an action plan to deal with the suggestions before us. That way, we'll be able to really do the work that Canadians expect of us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerretsen is next.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Hello, Madam Chair. Can you hear me okay?

The Chair: Very clearly, and maybe too clearly.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Oh no. It's been a while since I've done this by Zoom. If I'm too loud for the interpreters, please interrupt me. If I need to adjust that, I'm happy to accommodate them.

I have a lot of notes here and a lot that I would like to talk about, but before I do that, I think I would like to reflect on the comments of my colleague Mr. Fergus, who spoke just before me and has raised a very good point.

Mr. Fergus, towards the conclusion of his speech—and actually at the beginning as well—spoke at length about the need for this type of work to be done in a non-partisan way, and I couldn't agree more. I think that at the heart of this we should all be very concerned about any foreign interference in our democracy. We all

should look at ways to further enhance and protect our democracy, very much like this government, in my opinion, has done since 2015.

A number of things have been brought into play, some of which the Conservatives actually voted against. I will get to those in a bit, but I am specifically concerned about the partisanship in this issue.

The first thing that comes to mind is how deeply concerned I am with the comments made by a member of this committee. Mr. Calkins, a member of this committee who is sitting in the room right now, when he was in an airport on his way to this meeting, said in a video as he was talking about what he was coming to Ottawa to do and about going after the Prime Minister, “what the Liberals did about...one of their candidates being an agent for Beijing.” Mr. Calkins said that in a video and posted it on social media. He made that comment about a duly elected member of Parliament. I find that deeply troubling.

I mean, if I were Mr. Dong and I heard that, the first thing I would be doing is contacting a pretty high-profile lawyer to take on this case, because I think there is an incredible opportunity to go after Mr. Calkins for defamation in this regard. I think what we are witnessing coming from the Conservative Party and Mr. Calkins specifically in this regard is the story, in my opinion. That's the story of what's going on here. It's about Conservatives not genuinely caring about how we look at this in a non-partisan way and how we go about ensuring that our democracy is kept safe. Instead, it's about how we can turn this into a “gotcha, Liberal” issue. It's about how we can fundraise and how we can defame duly elected members of Parliament by calling them—and I quote—“an agent for Beijing”.

To the NDP and Bloc members of this committee, I ask you if this is what you want to be going along with. Do you want to be associating yourselves with those comments Mr. Calkins made on his way to this very meeting? I think you have to really stop and think about that, because I am fairly certain that the NDP and the Bloc are genuinely concerned about election interference, as they should be, and as all democracies throughout the world should be.

Going along with the Conservative approach on this issue and the comments by Mr. Calkins I find to be so incredibly troubling. To associate yourselves with them by standing and supporting motions that they bring forward... I think the NDP and the Bloc either should reconsider their position or should go and talk to their friends in the Conservative Party about allowing comments like that from a sitting member of PROC and letting them stand.

• (1855)

I would really like to hear from Mr. Julian and Madame Gill whether they believe that Han Dong is an agent of Beijing. I'd like to hear from other Conservative members on this committee whether they think he is an agent of Beijing.

I'd like to talk about some of the stuff that this government has done and why I believe that Mr. Turnbull's approach is the right approach in attempting to make this as non-partisan as possible.

One of the things this government did very early on, which the Conservatives were actually against, was to introduce Bill C-76. Bill C-76 repealed a number of the initiatives brought forward in the so-called Fair Elections Act, which was introduced by no less than the member for Carleton, now the leader of the official opposition now. Another thing Bill C-76 did was to give and enhance the tools to combat foreign interference in elections. Conservatives voted against that. Conservatives voted against Bill C-76 despite the fact that they are using an opportunity now to grandstand on the issue.

I think it's important to look at what people are saying now versus how they were voting in the past and what actions they actually took. These Conservative members who are sitting on the committee weren't interested in putting resources into combatting foreign interference when it came to Bill C-76 in 2018; they actually voted against it.

The other thing this government put in place, which has been talked about a number of times—it was in place for the 2019 election and for the 2021 election—was the work to put in the critical election incident public protocol. This is a special committee of non-partisan experts, experts in the field of foreign interference, experts who come from our departments, public servants. They get together during the writ period and make sure they are ready to respond and have the authority to respond if any election interference is identified. They're also required to share that information with relevant parties when required. It's a tool that has been utilized in two elections, as I mentioned. Then, based on the information, reports are generated by a third party afterward. One of those reports regarding the 2021 election was tabled just yesterday. Those reports, both in 2019 and in 2021, indicated that the elections occurred in a transparent way and that there was no foreign interference, despite the fact that Mr. Calkins refers to the member for Don Valley North as an agent of Beijing. I think that's a very important tool. It's a tool that gives us the ability to have confidence in our democratic process and allows us to ensure there is accountability by non-partisan individuals and that a report can be generated after the fact, which we've seen.

The other thing, of course, that we have in place is NSICOP. I don't need to spell it out for you, because everybody on this committee knows what that committee is or what the acronym stands for. It is a committee made up of parliamentarians who have access to their heart's content to unredacted documents about these issues, what they need to look at, with the understanding that they have the classifications required to view these documents. The Conservatives have members on that committee when they decide to show up. Let's not forget that Conservatives used NSICOP as another political opportunity.

- (1900)

A number of times, Conservatives used NSICOP as an opportunity to politicize once again whatever their objective of the day was or whatever they were looking to fundraise off. The Conservatives did that.

The reality is that NSICOP is there for a reason. It's there to ensure that the members who are on that committee and have been appointed by the respective parties have access to that information.

They have the ability to look at those completely unredacted documents.

Mr. Cooper, Mr. Calkins and the other Conservatives on PROC want to have a public inquiry. As we heard today from Jody Thomas, the national security and intelligence advisor for the PCO, a public inquiry isn't going to be able to have any more access to classified information than this committee. We know that.

It sounds good: "Public inquiry" sounds really good. I can understand why Mr. Julian and the Bloc would be tempted into wanting to do that, because it's sensational, but it's not going to do anything that this committee can't already do. We heard that from the experts. They are those who are in control of that very important and sensitive information.

What she said today at this committee is that the best place for that information was in NSICOP. What's going to happen? I can already tell you what's going to happen. We're going to have a public inquiry, or this committee will look into this stuff, and Mr. Cooper and Mr. Calkins will be throwing their hands up in the air and screaming bloody murder because there are redactions on the documents. Mr. Poilievre will walk out into a press conference and hold up and wave a bunch of papers that have blacked-out information and say, "Oh, look, they're hiding all this information from us."

That's how you make it partisan. It's by doing things like that, and that's what you will do. That's what they will do, Madam Chair, if we get to the point of allowing this circus that Mr. Calkins and Mr. Cooper want to have. Quite frankly, that's where we're going.

It raises a question: Do we really want to get to the bottom of this so that we can protect our democracy and do it in a way that respects the classification of documents?

Why are these documents classified? It's because we don't want those foreign agents to know what's in them. That's why they're protected. That would never deter the opposition from taking an opportunity to exploit redacted papers with redacted information in them, saying someone's trying to hide something.

Mr. Cooper said it himself on a CBC panel just two nights ago. He said, "The Liberals will redact the documents. We don't trust them with them." He knows full well the documents are not redacted by the Liberals. He makes it sound like it's happening in a political party's headquarters, with people sitting there redacting documents, but he knows full well the way that it really happens. It's done by the law clerk. That's not to say that they wouldn't jump on the opportunity to politicize the clerk's office either, from time to time, as we've seen, and those institutions that we hold to give us that information, because they've done that in the past.

If it's not about playing a political game and it's genuinely about protecting our democracy, why won't we listen to the experts who came to the committee today? They are the people who are in control of holding this information, I might add. Why wouldn't we listen to them when they say, "You discuss this stuff in public. We won't be able to give you all the information, because of the nature of it"? They're literally guarding our... They're the ones who seem to want to protect our democracy more than Conservatives right now, so why on earth would we not listen to them? I mean, the NDP has representatives on NSICOP. Conservatives have representatives on NSICOP.

• (1905)

Madam Chair, I think I will leave it there for now, although I do have a lot more to add. I have a lot more notes here. Maybe I will get back on the list later.

I would really like to hear at some point soon, hopefully, comments from Mr. Julian and Madame Gill about whether or not they agree with Mr. Calkins that Mr. Han Dong, a duly elected MP for Don Valley North, is indeed an agent of Beijing. I would like to hear their comments on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Madame Gill is next.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I've just joined the committee, but I have been following its work with interest. With all due respect to my colleague Mr. Gerretsen, I'm a little bit surprised by his reaction to what my colleague Mr. Calkins said. I heard his whole statement. Basically, what he said was that, no matter our party, we were trying to politicize things. That is, however, pretty much what he himself did from the beginning of his statement. That is the subtext I heard. I understand that he is expressing concern. However, as noble and laudable as his words may seem when he utters them, these concerns seem rather personal, if not partisan, to me. At the same time, it is pure conjecture. It's science fiction. We cannot know what Mr. Poilievre or whoever else will do. I think it's quite a stretch to come here and talk about attacks.

We are talking here about protecting democracy. That is at the very core of all this, we all agree. I think that what we are asking for is also what our fellow citizens would want. I do not believe it would be a problem for a committee, a number of committees or a number of people to be given information, and I say this without specifying the nature of the information. It's also our duty. While there are experts who can look at this, at the end of the day, we are the elected members. Part of our role is to be accountable to the electorate, whether we like it or not, whether we are concerned about politicization or not.

Mr. Gerretsen said a number of times that much of the information is of a very sensitive nature. We are obviously talking about protecting the government and protecting Canadians and Quebecers. At the same time, we were told earlier that there was practically nothing to worry about, that there wasn't really any need to worry, and that it therefore wasn't necessary to tell Canadians and Que-

beckers about all this information. On the one hand, we are told it would be extremely dangerous and perilous to do so, and on the other, we're told there is absolutely nothing to worry about.

In short, I hope we will reach a consensus, or even unanimous agreement, on a motion so that the work can be done. All I see right now are attacks going from one to the other. We're told we have ulterior motives, myself included, when I don't see why I would comment on Mr. Calkins's statement. This is off topic, irrelevant, and we are being led down what could be a slippery slope.

We are not doing the work we are supposed to be doing, in my humble opinion. If the three or four meetings we want to add per week are actually going to be used to do exactly what is happening right now, that is, not say anything and not work for Canadians and Quebecers, that's completely unappealing.

I hope this is a good response to Mr. Gerretsen. I hope we'll be able to move on to other things quickly, discuss the proposals in front of us and do something constructive. I think it's what people expect of us, instead of seeing members make a big fuss about partisan hypotheses that may not even happen.

• (1910)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gill.

[English]

Mr. Julian, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, I would like to ask, through you to the committee, whether we have unanimous consent to call the question.

The Chair: You are actually my last speaker. I was going to call the question after you spoke if no other hands went up.

Are we okay to call the question?

We will call the question, and then I will go back to the list for the main motion, which I had kind of taken to the amendment.

Madam Clerk, we will call the question on the amendment by Mr. Turnbull.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: On my list now, to bring everyone up to speed, as per the main motion and based on the members who are still with us, is Mr. Julian.

Mr. Julian, do you have your hand up because you're first on my list? Okay.

I have Mr. Julian, followed by Mrs. Sahota and Mr. Fergus. I will then take additional hands as they are raised.

Mr. Julian, the floor is yours.

• (1915)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

What I'm going to do is move an amendment to the motion. This is the motion that the NDP distributed before the committee meeting this morning, so everybody has had it in their hands now for a number of hours.

However, as the amendment is a bit different from the main motion, our office is sending a minor modification around as I speak, but I will read it for the record. It begins with “That the motion be amended by deleting (b)”, which is the one that talks about holding three meetings in each House adjournment week.

I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting (b) and replacing the words in paragraphs (c) and (d) with the following:

(b) invite the following individuals to appear before the committee:

- i. Katie Telford and Tausha Michaud, Chiefs of Staff to the Prime Minister and the former Leader of the Official Opposition
 - ii. Jeremy Broadhurst, Azam Ishmael, Hamish Marshall and Waled Soloman, national campaign directors for the Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of Canada during the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns
 - iii. Jenni Byrne, Leader of the Official Opposition’s senior leadership advisor
- And by replacing the words in paragraph (f) with the following,

—this is on the production of documents—

order the production of all memoranda, briefing notes, and any other relevant documents, which are in the possession of government departments or agencies containing information concerning efforts by, or on behalf of, foreign governments or other foreign state actors to interfere in the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2021 general elections, provided that

- i. the Departments and Agencies tasked with gathering these documents apply redactions according to the Access to Information and Privacy Act,
- ii. these redacted documents be deposited as a complete package within two weeks of the adoption of this order with the Clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee in both official languages, and
- iii. unredacted copies of all documents referenced in this paragraph be referred within three weeks to the ad hoc committee of parliamentarians which was agreed by the Government House Leader, the Official Opposition House Leader, and the House leaders of the Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party on October 31, 2022, to review Public Health Agency of Canada documents related to the transfer of Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in March 2019, provided that those documents are to be reviewed and handled in the same manner as the documents originally referred to that committee.

That is the extent of the amendments.

Madam Chair, I believe it's quite extensive, so we may want to suspend until we're sure that every member of the committee has received the written modification. As I mentioned earlier, we did circulate this hours ago, prior to the committee hearing, so that every member of the committee would have the chance to look at the NDP's motion. This is a slight modification as an amendment to Mr. Cooper's motion.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to suspend for 10 minutes.

The Chair: Do we have agreement to suspend for 10 minutes?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No. I would actually like to move to adjourn. I think this is a good time for us to adjourn, take a step back to think about it and come back tomorrow.

The Chair: Are you moving adjournment?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm moving adjournment.

The Chair: We'll have to call the question on adjournment.

• (1920)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): “That the committee do now adjourn” is the motion.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The motion is defeated. We will continue with our speaking list.

Mr. Cooper would like to suspend. Can I have a show of hands on agreement to suspend?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: I'm going to pause for one second.

Thank you, Mr. Cooper. I just wanted to clarify what was going on.

Mr. Julian, the amendment that you presented was circulated, but I understand that you have amended the motion that you circulated. Is that true? Is our understanding correct?

Mr. Peter Julian: The motion that was circulated was a stand-alone motion. I have amended Mr. Cooper's motion. It does the same thing, but different wording was circulated.

The Chair: Has that different wording been circulated?

Mr. Peter Julian: I believe that it has just gone from Rachel Blaney's office.

The Chair: Is it in both official languages?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: As per the usual practice, we are going to suspend for a few minutes to make sure all members have received it. Then we will continue. I will bring us back and give you the floor, Mr. Julian.

We're suspending just to make sure that everybody has a copy of the wording of the amendment.

• (1920)

(Pause)

• (1930)

The Chair: Welcome back.

I understand that everyone has received the amendment presented by Mr. Julian.

With that, I will pass the floor back to Mr. Julian.

Just so that we're all on the same page—

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: As a substitute, I have not yet received the proposed amendment.

The Chair: It's on its way, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Kurek, you should now have that in your inbox.

Excellent. I see a thumbs-up. Thank you.

The floor will go first to Mr. Julian, followed by Mrs. Sahota, Mr. Fergus, Mr. Kurek, and now I see Madame Gill. I will take names as hands are up.

Mr. Julian, we will go to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Our preference, that is, that of our leader and caucus, remains a national public inquiry, because this in an extremely important issue. If the Prime Minister refuses to launch the inquiry, it is up to the committee to conduct an in-depth review. I hope the inquiry will be held but, in the meantime, we have to do our job, and that is what I am proposing with my amendment.

It's important to look at all foreign interference, not just from China, but also from Russia. There are also concerns at the international level about Russia's involvement.

That's why we are suggesting to hear from a number of people who were involved in recent election campaigns, not just on the Liberal side, but on the Conservative side as well. We want to hear from Katie Telford, chief of staff to the Prime Minister, as well as Tausha Michaud, the former chief of staff to the former leader of the official opposition.

We are also asking for documents to be provided quickly, and for them to be unredacted. What we are proposing is the best way to access these documents, which are still matters of national security.

• (1935)

[*English*]

The amendment that I'm offering does a number of things. First off, my preference, and the preference of the leader and of the NDP, is that the Prime Minister call a national public inquiry. It is important that this be public and that Canadians get the answers they are looking for.

The reality is that I do not buy the argument that there's nothing to see here. There are concerns that have been widespread. There are allegations that potentially the electoral laws of our country were breached. This is serious. It's not something that should be set aside. Having a national public inquiry allows us to respond to that.

We've also heard the leader of the official opposition talk about a national public inquiry, but in a very restrained way, talking about China's involvement, when we have seen on multiple occasions the involvement of the Russian state government, the Russian state actors. We saw it with Donald Trump's election. We saw it with the Brexit referendum. We saw it with the financing of the United Kingdom's Conservative Party. We have found allegations, credible allegations, around the involvement of Russian state actors in supporting the so-called freedom convoy as well in Canada, and concerns—I mentioned the University of Calgary study—that indicate a widespread misinformation campaign that is generated by Russian state actors. I don't buy what the leader of the official opposition is saying, which is that there's nothing to see here with regard to Russian implications and Russian involvement and Russian interference.

We need to tackle this together. That means ensuring that we are hearing from credible witnesses. I've mentioned the two chiefs of staff, Katie Telford and Tausha Michaud, the campaign directors of both the Liberal Party and Conservative Party's campaigns, and Jenni Byrne, who is the senior leadership adviser to the leader of the official opposition. We saw a great deal of activity around the "freedom convoy". Hopefully, there are no concerns there, but there are questions that definitely need to be asked. I think it is important that Jenni Byrne come before the committee to answer those questions—and ministers as well; the ministers that we are already convening, and we are looking at other potential witnesses as well.

Finally, there is the issue of documents. My colleague Mr. Turnbull had wording similar to what we put forward in a motion that I distributed this morning, talking about getting documents as quickly as possible from the ministry officials themselves. However, they would be redacted.

The Conservative motion—the original motion suggested by Mr. Cooper—asks for unredacted documents, but through the law clerk in a fairly cumbersome process.

I am suggesting the process that all parties had already agreed to in the memorandum of understanding that we all signed on October 31, 2022. That MOU allows an ad hoc committee of parliamentarians to look at those documents. If there are divisions as to whether or not they are concerned with national security, they would go to a panel of judges, who have already been chosen, that would allow the committee to ultimately have the unredacted documents that have been passed through that vetting process, in comparison with what we see from the ministry, which is likely to be, it's fair to say, substantially redacted. What this amendment does is provide for both sides, unredacted and redacted, in a way that allows access to the documents we need. That is what I'm proposing in terms of the amendment. It improves the committee.

I want to reiterate one more time that a national public inquiry is the way to handle this. That is not just me speaking or Jagmeet Singh speaking; I believe other opposition parties have also said the same thing. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the head of Elections Canada, has a significant and stellar reputation, and a number of other actors from right across the country have called for a national public inquiry. This is not something that is singular to one or two people. It is something that I think has a broad consensus within our country.

That would be the preference. We'll have that debate tomorrow, when I hope to move the motion on the national public inquiry for which I provided notice of motion today. I hope we can have the committee endorse that motion tomorrow. Ultimately, the Prime Minister needs to make that decision, and I believe he needs to make it in a timely way.

I thank members of the committee for their consideration. I know that we have a drop-dead time in a few hours. Hopefully, we'll have some debate in the meantime.

Thank you.

• (1940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I will now go to Mrs. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In terms of Mr. Julian's proposal that he will bring forward tomorrow, I think that the ask for a public inquiry is one that can definitely be explored as well. Once again, I think this committee should get back to the work we have planned for tomorrow. Something like that could end up becoming a recommendation that this committee could provide in its final report on foreign interference.

In terms of the amendment that has just been brought forward by Mr. Julian—and I like Mr. Julian a lot, so I don't criticize just for the sake of criticizing—I want to point out that once again I feel as though I'm having déjà vu and we're having the same type of discussion we had last week on these issues, except now, unfortunately, Mr. Julian is taking a different side of the issue, or a contradictory side, if I may say so.

Just the other day, when we went through a motion very similar to what Mr. Cooper has brought forward today, Mr. Julian sided with the position of not bringing forward or inviting staff. I can actually quote many things that were said in that meeting and many things on which I agreed with him then, and still do, in part. I just don't know which frame of thought Mr. Julian is bringing on any given day, because he did caution this committee against inviting staff.

He wanted to cite a number of people for the record and, Madam Chair, if you remember, you permitted him to quote many other people on this issue around having political staff being brought forward to testify, as opposed to ministers. He said they should come forward to explain what they did, what they knew and what actions they'd taken to ensure that whatever circumstance had occurred does or doesn't happen again. He quoted a former House leader, stating, "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." Mr. Julian quoted that day from former Conservative government House leader Jay Hill.

Then he moved on to name another member, a cabinet minister. He said:

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.

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.

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.

This is the member for Grande Prairie—MacKenzie, who is the current Conservative deputy whip, who was being quoted about the importance of not involving staff but of ensuring ministerial responsibility.

Then he even went as far as reading a third quote, which I still agree with, stating that this was a very germane conversation and, "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." This member was speaking again of the idea of inviting political staff rather than ministers. That final quote is from the member for Carleton, who is currently, as you know, the leader of the official opposition in the House of Commons.

● (1945)

Though Conservatives have said very eloquently in the past that we should not have political staff brought forward and that the issue of ministerial accountability is fundamental, and Mr. Julian then agreed with them. I have to say that I'm disappointed to see that Mr. Cooper has gone down that road again, and now Mr. Julian has switched sides and is also going down that same road of wanting to bring in staff instead of the accountable ministers and those who are in charge.

Once again, I have to state that I think we're onto something. We were on a good roll. Our meeting today was a great meeting. We had a really good meeting today. I could tell that everyone was eager to ask questions. I know that I have many more questions. I'd even be happy to have some of those same panellists from today come before us again, because they are the ones with knowledge as to what is happening in the foreign interference realm in this country. They are the ones who can best identify gaps.

From what we have just received, again, from the public protocol committee, we have many recommendations. I think that's something our committee could look at as well. I think on page 45 or so of the report, for those who have the report and are following along or who are intending to read through it, we have a good 16 really great recommendations from people who have good knowledge as to how we can better safeguard our democracy. I think we should also incorporate that report. Many of us have probably read it. We should debate and bring forward witnesses to discuss how they feel, perhaps, about some of these recommendations that are in the report, and whether they agree or disagree with them.

I think that's how we should move forward, ideally, so that we get value out of what is happening and not just headlines. I'm afraid that what we're doing is just chasing headlines right now. What we're not doing is making sure that whether it's in the grand scheme of the general election or whether it's in an individual riding... I know that this is the point of contention here, and that this is what Mr. Cooper and others and we all want to fight for and we all want to see not happen.

This is not the only time. I'm not just saying this off the top of my head. You can go ahead and google many other news articles on foreign interference taking place, whether it's in the election context or whether it's in between elections, to intimidate members of Parliament. In many countries that's taken place, and those types of activities.

I think it's really important that we keep abreast of them but that we do it in a very balanced way and that the public understands this in a responsible and balanced way. What we're seeing right now, through what I would say also.... There are some failures. I think it's great that the media and many journalists have brought the issue to light, but I think they bear some responsibility in the way they report the issues as well. I think we all bear some responsibility.

My colleague Mr. Gerretsen just said that it was a very irresponsible move for Mr. Calkins to have already decided that one of our members of the House of Commons is a foreign actor or agent. It just goes to show once again that we are coming at this from a very “minds made up” type of situation. We're not coming at it from an honest place, where we want to put in place a system that builds up on the system that our government has already put forward.

● (1950)

We've already taken steps. We are the first government that's properly acknowledging this and putting together a framework to address this issue. Is it enough? No. That's what we're realizing: It wasn't enough. These are initial steps.

This has never been done before. We are in an area where, yes, foreign interference has always been a thing, and that's what we're hearing from all our security advisers, but we're also hearing that there might be an increase from some actors over others. How do we go about protecting our institutions in a day of social media, which also wasn't a reality?

I can recall that in my 2015 election, social media were important, but not as important as they had become by the time the 2019 election rolled out and then by the time the 2021 election rolled out. It makes us all the more susceptible in our institutions, and it makes our election process more susceptible to the information that gets shared on these social media platforms or through WeChat or WhatsApp. We've all seen a lot of false information being spread. A lot of times, we don't know the origins of that information, and at times we've also read in many reports that the origins of that information come from abroad or through bots run by foreign actors.

What we need to get to the core of is, how do we not let that situation happen again? I think we all agree that interference has occurred. We have been told what level of interference there was and whether it rises to the point of making an impact on the general election or not. We, as a committee, can now change that framework, right? We can at least recommend to have that framework changed. If we think the threshold needs to be changed on all of those things, we can do that, and we have the knowledge and the people with the expertise at our disposal to come forward before this committee.

Once again, it is a public forum. Perhaps the government moves in a direction of a public inquiry in the future. Perhaps that's also something that we will recommend at the end of our report. I'm open to all of those discussions, but I think what we're doing right now is having an intermission, I feel, in the middle of our study, which is a valuable study.

I think we can discuss having more meetings so that we can accommodate redistribution and we can accommodate this extremely important topic, but I think that the way we are going about it, pretending and fooling ourselves that we can somehow receive all these unredacted documents and then also drag in all the staff who have ever served....

I have to thank Mr. Julian. At least he is to some degree being non-partisan and trying to bring in staff from both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. That's a good step forward, but it can still leave me a little confused, because I think the principle was

that the ministers are accountable and that the heads of departments, the deputy ministers, are extremely knowledgeable. That's what we should be doing: We should be having a very serious discussion about this and not just trying to make headlines and scare Canadians about foreign interference in a very irresponsible way.

I feel that we are headed down that path of irresponsibility, and once we go too far... Well, you know what has happened in other countries. I feel that if we go too far and exaggerate what is happening to the point where we devalue our own institutions, then we are going to have quite the reckoning in the coming years. It is up to us to protect our institutions. I'm not saying to keep them the same and I'm not saying “don't improve things” and I'm not saying to let foreign interference be, to let it occur; I'm saying “let's identify it”, which is what we have been doing. Let's identify the gaps and let's move forward. Let's fix this so that we don't have an increase in these types of incidents.

That's how I think we should all be coming together to approach this matter, this serious issue. Most of the articles and things that I am reading express concern, and constituents I've spoken to are concerned. They are worried about this, as am I. I am worried about this—this information.

● (1955)

I've been on this committee for a long time. There are a lot of things that keep me up at times. One of the main things is the stability and integrity of our democracy, and making sure that we continue to protect our democracy, because I truly believe in a democratic system. We are seeing authoritarian states emerge quite rapidly all around us, and I don't want to see us go down a path that leads us to end up destabilizing our own system. We should be very cautious, perhaps even about the influences that might be encouraging us to go down that path. Be mindful and be wary of why we're doing these things and of what you want as the end outcome.

If the end outcome is just “I want some flashy headlines”, “I want the Prime Minister to look bad” or “I want to be in power”, okay, because that's what it seems like. However, if the end outcome is, regardless of who is in government—and it could be anyone tomorrow—that we want to make sure that we continue to have strong, fair and free elections....

That is something that Mr. Rosenberg's report has indicated. It said we had a fair and free election, but it didn't deny the fact that there was interference. I don't think anyone is denying that, nor is anyone looking to bury that or walk away from that fact. That's still my position.

I'm going to have a hard time flip-flopping now and going back to supporting this amendment, because we've made it quite clear that we were all on a similar page. The Liberal members and even Mr. Julian were on a similar page when it came to not inviting staff and making sure that the ministers were those who were accountable.

I think this is becoming too sensationalized, and that's not the approach we should be taking in this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Sahota.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the amendment by my colleague for New Westminster—Burnaby, a great parliamentarian with years of experience. He is someone I have a lot of respect for.

Like my colleague for Brampton North, I have some reservations. I must say that I find it fascinating to see how quickly positions have changed on the need to invite staff of ministers or of the Prime Minister to appear. It almost gave me whiplash.

I clearly recall, at our last meeting, my colleague from British Columbia speaking very eloquently about ministerial responsibility being an important tradition. The principle is that ministers are responsible for their political staff. We were looking, at the time, at a motion tabled by my dear colleague for St. Albert—Edmonton, which was also aimed at inviting the chief of staff to the Prime Minister to appear. The motion was worded almost exactly the same as the one we are looking at today. The committee rejected that portion of the motion, however, mainly because of the fine and very relevant points made by my colleague for New Westminster—Burnaby, who said that we had to avoid inviting political staff. He quoted Jay Hill, former government leader in the House of Commons for the Conservative Party, and Mr. Poilievre, when he was a minister in Mr. Harper's government. He had set out a clear argument.

I'm therefore surprised at this sudden change of position. If Mr. Julian has the opportunity to do so, I would like him to take note of my question and tell me the reason for this change of heart, when he was saying just last week that it was not acceptable.

I do like a portion of his amendment, however. For members who do not have the clearance to access top secret documents, it would be useful to have a system similar to the one we had for documents from the Public Health Agency of Canada. I am ready to examine that portion.

We must find a way to ensure that we are not jeopardizing the people working in national security and intelligence while keeping the confidence of our allies who send us intelligence and, most importantly, we must make sure that countries that are not allies do not gain access to these documents and determine where the intelligence comes from, which could jeopardize the brave women and men who serve our country or our allies. Our main objective and our ultimate responsibility as parliamentarians is to protect the interests of Canadians and our great country.

● (2000)

I would like Mr. Julian to clarify something for me. He began his comments by saying that the best solution was to have a national public inquiry into these issues. In that non-partisan inquiry, secret information would be protected and we would get to the bottom of this situation to determine the extent of foreign interference in this country by not only China, but also other countries, like Russia, that are causing us trouble. Not only have these countries interfered in elections, but they have also influenced events such as the occu-

pation of Ottawa. Their actions have also had an impact on people who have been victims of misinformation.

All of this is intended to weaken our democratic institutions. Those countries know that our country's secret ingredient is the fact that everyone has the opportunity and the freedom to express themselves. This is very important. Those countries do not respect freedom of expression, but they take advantage of that freedom to spread misinformation. Through that misinformation, they want to weaken the democratic debate that is going on in Canada and in other democratic countries around the world.

I like the idea of holding a public inquiry. If this committee decides to support my colleague's motion or to make a recommendation to hold a public inquiry, that would be great. However, I want to get clarifications on something. If we get this tool, does that mean that an end will be put to all the studies on this subject that are currently being conducted by our committee, by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, by the non-partisan committee responsible for considering the issue and by the committee on China? After all, there are four parliamentary committees in the House of Commons that are carrying out studies on the same topic. I would like to know if the idea proposed by my colleague—that is, to hold a public inquiry—means that these other inquiries will end. That does not make sense. There is a first duplication and then a second one. It's like my Conservative colleagues like to say: triple, triple, triple the inquiries on the same subject. It doesn't make sense.

I would like to understand my colleague's intent a little better. I hope he will be kind enough to clarify that for me, for everyone around this table and for all Canadians listening to this debate at home.

● (2005)

This is a debate of fundamental importance. We are all concerned about this issue.

Under the best of circumstances, Canada and Parliament have been able to act independently of the petty interests of respective political parties. We have seen that a number of times, including at the beginning of the pandemic. All political parties and all members of Parliament rose to the challenge and rose to the occasion. It touched my heart deeply. We had targeted a common threat, the virus, and everyone did their part to help Canadians. Members of the Bloc Québécois, the Green Party, the New Democratic Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party all did a remarkable job. We were proud to work together, in every province and territory, from coast to coast to coast.

Once again, we are faced with a common threat, one that puts the health, sustainability and integrity of our democratic institutions at risk. These institutions deserve everyone's efforts.

I have been working here on the Hill for a long time. I arrived here in 1988. I remember when Mr. Bouchard left the Conservative caucus to form the Bloc Québécois. I remember very well the debates that took place outside Quebec. People wondered why some were dedicated to breaking up our country and questioned their place in the federal Parliament. Yes, I was a staunch federalist. Yes, I am a staunch Liberal. But I have always defended everyone's right to hold any viewpoint, and I will do so for the rest of my life. It is important. If a person can convince their fellow citizens to vote for them, they deserve their place in Parliament.

I say this because I believe it is much better to have discussions than to resort to violence. Our political institution—

● (2010)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

I really like what my colleague is saying. It's interesting for me to hear him remind us of the history of the Bloc Québécois' existence on Parliament Hill, but we may be getting a little off topic.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I want to reassure my dear colleague: If I'm saying all this, it's to highlight that it's in the common interest of all Canadians to defend and protect our political institutions. Canadians have a right to do so. It's our duty as parliamentarians to set aside our individual interests and make sure we can defend our political institutions from foreign interference.

This is therefore an invitation I'm extending to my colleagues.

I have no problem with maintaining a parliamentary committee. Unfortunately, currently, some colleagues seem unable to set aside their partisan interests. I say that with all due respect for my colleagues. Indeed, commentators in the political world even noted it.

That is why I really like my British Columbian colleague's idea of asking for a public inquiry. In fact, it could be a way of eliminating partisanship from an inquiry into the sources and extent of political interference in Canada's democratic institutions.

My colleague from Kingston and the Islands mentioned that one of our colleagues had accused another of being an agent for another country. I just found out about it, and I was disappointed as well. Indeed, that runs counter to the House of Commons Standing Orders. We have no right to sow doubt about another member's character. All members are honourable members. Saying that someone is serving another country goes well beyond what we expect in terms of an acceptable debate in the House. I hope that colleague will withdraw the tweet or video on social media. If he doesn't do so publicly, I hope he will at least have the decency to call the member he insulted and apologize privately. Let's hope so. I'm sure the member is an honourable man. Going off the rails can happen from time to time, but I hope he will apologize.

Recently, I myself apologized to Canadians. I didn't mince words. My apology was entirely sincere. It's important to say that anyone can make mistakes, that's not a problem. What we do afterwards and the way we react to a situation really give the measure of a person's character.

● (2015)

We have an opportunity here to set aside our partisan interests and act in citizens' common interest, regardless of their origins and political affiliations. This is a key moment in our history. I hope we will decide to look for the truth rather than defend overly narrow interests.

I'm concerned about another aspect of my colleague Mr. Julian's amendment.

Excuse me, I think I have the wrong document in front of me. I seem to have lost it, but there was something else in the amendment that drew my concern.

Wait, I think I have the right version of the amendment in electronic format.

Actually, I'm grateful to Mr. Julian for suggesting we look into the possibility that there was foreign interference in our country during the 2011 and 2015 general elections, as well as those in 2019 and 2021. I think it makes sense, especially since we've observed a disinformation trend for some time, since the beginning of social media. That's what national security experts and those who gather national intelligence said when I asked them the question. They said it started well before 2019. It became evident after 2016, but it did indeed exist before then.

The amendment therefore proposes that we look into "efforts by, or on behalf of, foreign governments or other foreign state actors to interfere in the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2021 general election". I think that's a significant improvement with respect to the main motion proposed by my colleague, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

As for inviting political staff, as I said, it doesn't reflect the principle of ministerial responsibility, which is part of a long tradition in the British parliamentary system.

● (2020)

I've just been informed that I was touching my mic while speaking, so I apologize to the interpreters. I hope I didn't cause them any problems. I'll do everything I can to keep my hands in front of me and not play with the mic.

I'd like to seize this opportunity to express, on behalf of all the members here, our deep gratitude to the interpreters and all members of the House of Commons staff. They work tirelessly to support us, not just during this late evening meeting, but every day.

As I said at the beginning, August will mark the 35th anniversary of my move here to the region. I started working at Parliament as a page, and I haven't left the Hill for 35 years. Every day, I'm very grateful to the Parliamentary Precinct staff, who do their best to make sure members can do their work and serve Canadians well. I congratulate and thank them.

Let's come back to the subject.

So, I was talking about ministerial responsibility. There's a part of the amendment that leaves me a little cold. It's point *i* in part b), which invites Ms. Katie Telford, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, and Ms. Tausha Michaud, the former official opposition leader's Chief of Staff, to appear before the committee. Again, there's some inconsistency.

I'll quote what Mr. Julian said last week. Unfortunately, I don't have the French version on hand, but here's the English version:

● (2025)

[English]

I caution on the issue of inviting staff. I wanted to cite a number of people for the record, Madam Chair, if you'll permit me. 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]

First, Mr. Julian quoted a former leader of the government in the House:

[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]

Mr. Julian quoted the former Albertan Conservative member, Jay Hill, who became leader of the Maverick Party in Alberta, which is demanding independence for that province.

Mr. Julian then quoted a second member:

[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.

[Translation]

We are talking here about the principle of ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Julian then continued to quote the member:

[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]

He quoted the member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, currently the official opposition's deputy whip in the House of Commons.

Mr. Julian concluded his statement with the following quote, which is really the icing on the cake, in my opinion:

● (2030)

[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]

Mr. Julian was quoting the member for Carleton, Mr. Poilievre, when he was a minister in Mr. Harper's government. He is now leader of the official opposition. I hope he has many years, or even decades, to master the role.

For all those reasons, I take issue with the amendment of point *i*, part b), in my colleague's proposal.

We have here an opportunity to make sure we do our job and do it without overlap, duplication or even triple, triple, triple, as conservative members habitually say dozens of times a day in the House of Commons. It makes me wonder if they accumulate points every time they say it.

● (2035)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Triple, triple, triple.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Exactly. I thank my friend, the member who represents Lac-Mégantic, in Estrie, one of Quebec's most beautiful regions.

Ms. Christine Normandin: No, it's Montérégie.

Hon. Greg Fergus: My colleague for Saint-Jean says it's Montérégie. I apologize. Indeed, the riding of Saint-Jean in Montérégie, and definitely the riding of Hull—Aylmer in Outaouais, are the most beautiful ridings in Quebec. That's why many of my colleagues have their second home in my riding. I'm very proud to be their MP while they're here for parliamentary sessions. Every election, I invite them to take one of my signs. We're not there yet, but that day may come. I remain optimistic, as always.

We can do many things. There are things we should do and others we shouldn't. For example, there shouldn't be any overlap. Three House of Commons standing committees are already conducting studies on the same subject. That certainly shouldn't be the case if a national public inquiry is launched. My colleagues are already very busy and have things to do to better represent their fellow citizens. I hope that if we arrive at a consensus for holding a public inquiry, they will be willing to drop the standing committees' studies. We would then be able to work to better serve Canadians.

In fact, many motions were proposed to conduct studies on all kinds of other subjects. We can plan and use our time effectively to really help Canadians on other issues. If we can do that, we will serve Canadians' interests well.

I hope the few minutes I took to express some of my thoughts on the subject will convince members to make significant changes to my British Columbian colleague's amendment. I repeat, I'm in favour of some aspects of his amendment, but not others. I hope we can find a consensus. That way, we can start the work that must be done.

I'll stop here, because I'd like to take a look at Ms. Normandin's subamendment.

Ms. Christine Normandin: It does not apply to this amendment. I'll be able to move my proposal later.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Very well. I look forward to it.

So, I'll end my remarks here, Madam Chair. I'll have other things to say later.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Cooper, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

At this time, I will be moving an amendment.

I move that the amendment be amended by replacing the proposed new paragraph (b) with the following: "(b) invite Katie Telford, chief of staff to the Prime Minister, to appear alone for four hours"—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, can you hold on for 30 seconds? We're going to get this amendment passed around. I understand that it has come to the clerk. We received it and we will make sure that it's sent to all members. It's in both official languages. We'll just note that there are some members who are not regular members of the committee, so it's just to make sure they receive it so that we're all on the same page.

I understand that everyone should have received it. I can see it in my inbox.

Mr. Cooper, it's back to you.

• (2040)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me start again, reading my amendment into the record. It is that the amendment be amended (a) by replacing the proposed new paragraph (b) with the following: "(b) invite Katie Telford, chief of staff to the Prime Minister, to appear alone for four hours, within two weeks of the adoption of this motion, provided that she be sworn or affirmed; (c) invite the following individuals to appear before the committee on a two-hour panel: Tausha Michaud, Jeremy Broadhurst, Azam Ishmael, Hamish Marshall, Walied Soliman, Jenni Byrne, Jennifer Howard and Anne McGrath;" and (b) by deleting the paragraph in the amendment concerning paragraph (f) of the main motion.

Madam Chair, I will now make some brief remarks on the motion.

First of all, let me just say that it is important that Katie Telford appear alone and that she appear to answer the questions of this committee, because Katie Telford is in an entirely different position from any of the other witnesses in that she is the Prime Minister's chief of staff. She has been with the Prime Minister through all of the relevant times concerning the 2019 election and the 2021 election. She has security clearance. She is privy to classified information. She's privy to briefings that the Prime Minister would have received, and she is not just any chief of staff. As the Prime Minister is reported to have said, "When you're talking to Katie Telford,

you're talking to me." It's important on that basis that Katie Telford appear on a stand-alone basis for four hours.

With respect to the names I have added—Jennifer Howard and Anne McGrath—Jennifer Howard is the chief of staff to Jagmeet Singh. It seems appropriate, if we're going to have other chiefs of staff, that Jennifer Howard, the NDP chief of staff, also be invited, as well as national campaign directors and managers of the Liberal Party and of the Conservative Party, to come before the committee, and that we also hear from Anne McGrath of the NDP. The motion is simply that we would hear from chiefs of staff and campaign chairs of all three parties, not just Liberals and Conservatives, all of whom may have insights regarding the 2021 election.

With respect to the production order, we are proposing...or the effect of deleting the rest of Mr. Julian's motion would be to maintain the production process that is set out in the main motion, which provides that the parliamentary law clerk would be in a position to undertake redactions or determine the appropriateness of certain redactions and make the final call, having regard for national security considerations.

It must be noted that the parliamentary law clerk is independent. He has a full security clearance. The language contained in our motion was drafted in consultation with the parliamentary law clerk.

I would note that there is a precedent for this. This is precisely the process that was proposed and adopted with respect to the Winnipeg lab issue.

• (2045)

The NDP voted four times for that type of production process involving the parliamentary law clerk, twice at the Canada-China committee and twice in the House of Commons.

With that, I urge the adoption of this subamendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Basically, we have a subamendment. I have a speaking list. I can either start a new one or continue with this one, and when we come back to the amendment I will still continue with this list and I will give you the right of refusal.

On my list currently are Mr. Turnbull, Ms. O'Connell, Mr. Fergus and Mr. Julian.

Mr. Turnbull, would you like the floor on the subamendment?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, I would, Madam Chair.

Maybe just before I get—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Madam Chair, before.... I'm sorry. I don't mean to interrupt Mr. Turnbull. I was just wondering, on a point of clarification, if procedurally... I believe, even from the title, that what Mr. Cooper has moved is a subamendment to Mr. Julian's amendment, which is amending his original motion within the subamendment now. I guess the first question is, can the mover of the original motion move a subamendment? Could I get that answered?

Also, then, the other thing is that the mover of the original motion is now subamending not just what Mr. Julian's amendment is but is also changing the timing of his original motion. Maybe he is free to do that, but I'm not sure. I just want to be clear on that procedure and whether that's allowed.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sahota, for raising that.

Mr. Cooper would not be able and any member would not be able to amend their own motion, but a member is free to subamend an amendment, so it's not directly their motion. Because he is amending Mr. Julian's amendment, it's fine, but he would not be able to amend his own. That's the rule. Basically, this subamendment is removing the bottom half of Mr. Julian's amendment.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. I have so many screens open that I was just a little confused as to whether one portion of the subamendment... It's clear that he can move a subamendment to someone else's amendment, but is he essentially also amending the original language of his own motion and not just subamending the amendment?

The Chair: No. He is just amending the amendment, and because he is amending the amendment, that becomes a subamendment. The amendment was amending his motion, so that's where it's all connected.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Is it as clear as mud?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's clear as mud.

The Chair: That's perfect. At this time of night, that's all we can ask for, so thank you.

I'm going back to you, Mr. Turnbull. Did you want to speak to the subamendment?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes. It's as clear as mud for me as well. It makes "the brain go 'round". That's a reference to a famous song, if anybody caught that.

I also have a similar clarification question. It seems that we're kind of going backwards, and I'm just wondering, further to Ms. Sahota's point, whether the now subamended version would revert back to something that we've voted on several times.

It seems to me that the will of the committee has been expressed through various votes on various different occasions to remove staff—political staff—from being included in this motion, so I just wanted to ask for a clarification on whether—again, procedurally—we can keep going back and forth on the same issue over and over again.

Perhaps I'm not well versed in the procedures of the House, but I thought there were some guidelines and rules on that, so I just wondered, and before I start my remarks, I'd like to get clarification on that.

• (2050)

The Chair: I feel like I just did that. Do you want to maybe say it again in my good ear? What would you like me to do, Mr. Turnbull?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Well, I think that in our past meetings we've had conversations about motions that expressed the desire to

have staff appear before the committee, and we voted those motions down. I realize that we're debating a new motion that has been amended and then subamended, but one of the key issues that keeps coming up over and over again is having staff appear before the committee.

Mr. Julian has talked about ministerial accountability in his past remarks, and members of this committee have quoted him, emphatically in agreement with him, and I'm just wondering whether this is the same issue that we're really contemplating and voting on over and over again. Isn't that redundant? Isn't there some procedural rule that prevents us from doing that?

Is that clear, Madam Chair?

The Chair: That was really well done. Yes, I needed you to elaborate that point. I thank you. The lights have turned on.

Yes, I think that's a very valid point you're raising. Based on this issue, there is an argument to be made that this question has been decided, unless there is a reason to understand that it is not the same question, which is where we would be able to debate it again.

With that, I think I could provide Mr. Cooper the opportunity to let us understand why this question is not the same as something that we have already addressed, because there is the narrative that this has already been answered, but it came to the floor of this committee. We've been debating it now for just a couple of minutes—it feels like days—and I would like to understand if we believe or feel that it's the same question or if there's a reason it's a different question.

Mr. Cooper, can you please explain if this is the same question or why you believe it's different? There are some people who believe this question has been decided.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It has not been decided. There was, between the last vote and the current motion before us, a change. This motion is referencing different reports, for example.

We are referencing, for example, the Sam Cooper Global News report that came out involving senior PMO staff being briefed by CSIS. That had not been disclosed. The committee was not aware of that at the time the last motion was debated and voted on. Now we have these very serious allegations that senior PMO staff were briefed by CSIS that a Liberal candidate, now a sitting Liberal MP, was assisted by Beijing's Toronto consulate in his nomination campaign. That is why we need to hear from Katie Telford, the chief of staff to the Prime Minister.

I would submit, therefore, that it's perfectly appropriate that this be included in the motion, debated and voted upon, and that she appear as soon as possible to answer questions instead of running and hiding as she has up until now.

• (2055)

The Chair: Okay. We are just going to take a pause from what's happening in regard to the motion; I think, in all honesty, that I would feel that this question has been addressed, but at the same time, it's for members to decide, and I am just here acting as your chair.

Mr. Cooper, I appreciated your comment. I think I've demonstrated that I'm always here to get along and find a way forward. I'm not sure what more I can do to demonstrate that I'm here to play nicely in the sandbox.

I would welcome other members who would like to share their thoughts: Do we feel that this question has been answered, or have the parameters changed enough that we have not addressed it? I'm going to give it a five-minute cycle and say that I would love to hear some thoughts.

We got to hear Mr. Turnbull. We got to hear Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Julian, would you like to speak?

Mr. Peter Julian: I would, Madam Chair.

I find this deeply saddening, such an unserious approach from the official opposition. They bring forward a motion and it's amended, maintaining that motion, and then they try to one-up it, throwing in all kinds of additional people who are not involved at all, in either the allegations of Chinese interference, which affects both Liberal—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Julian. Perhaps—

Mr. Peter Julian: No, hold on. Just a moment, Madam Chair—

The Chair: No, Mr. Julian. I need to just make sure. You're going to get the floor back with regard to the subamendment.

Do you feel that this question, the concern that Mr. Turnbull has raised, is a matter that has already been addressed? Or do you believe that there is enough change that this has not been addressed?

Mr. Peter Julian: I find the subamendment of Mr. Cooper ridiculous, and I'd like to move to adjourn.

The Chair: That just changed a lot.

The question has been called, Madam Clerk.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I need clarification, because I'm not sure whether we're adjourning the meeting or moving to adjourn debate. I don't know.

The Chair: It's for the meeting.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay. We're voting on adjourning the meeting. Thank you.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. We'll see you at 10 a.m. Have a good night. Thank you, everyone.

To staff and supporting people and interpreters for HOC, we really appreciate what you do to be here with us, and thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Good night and safe travels.

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