



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 076

Thursday, May 25, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, May 25, 2023

• (1405)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 76 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today pursuant to a meeting request under Standing Order 106(4). I'm sure everyone has seen the 106(4) in regard to the parameters around the appearance of the Right Honourable David Johnston.

As we know, we as a committee have decided that he should be appearing. I will confirm that to date he's been very receptive to appearing.

I will now recognize members for the discussion of this request.

We'll hear from Mr. Barrett followed by Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a motion that I'll read into the record, and then I'd like the opportunity to speak to it if that's all right.

The Chair: I'm just going to make sure that it's been circulated in both official languages.

Mr. Barrett, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. Thanks.

I move:

That, in relation to its studies of foreign election interference, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a), and of the intimidation campaign orchestrated by Wei Zhao against the Member for Wellington-Halton Hills and other Members, pursuant to its order of reference of Wednesday, May 10, 2023, the Committee

(a) direct that a summons be issued to the Special Rapporteur, David Johnston, to appear before the Committee, by himself, for three hours, no later than seven days following the adoption of this motion; and

(b) report to the House forthwith that it re-affirms its support for a national public inquiry, expressed in its Twenty-fifth Report, which was concurred in by the House on Thursday, March 23, 2023, and calls upon the government to begin consultations, among the recognized parties, on the appointment of that inquiry within 24 hours with a view to launching it within two weeks.

Madam Chair, over the last several months, we've seen mounting evidence, reporting in media and reports from Canada's spy agency that there has been escalating foreign interference in our democratic process by the dictatorship in Beijing.

The House of Commons voted by majority for a public inquiry to be held into this matter. Instead the Prime Minister tapped his friend, a member of the Trudeau Foundation, essentially to run interference against this direction of Parliament and the call from a majority of Canadians to have a public inquiry. There is clear evidence that Beijing has undertaken and continues to interfere in our elections.

We know that Beijing used the Trudeau Foundation as a vehicle to target Canada's Prime Minister in its campaign of foreign influence.

All of the opposition parties have agreed that we need to hear from Mr. Johnston, and it's essential that we do hear from him as to why, following Parliament's direction to the government that a public inquiry be held, he has advised against it. We want to take a closer look at his conclusions, a look under the hood, and that's why we've put this motion forward today.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1410)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

[Translation]

On my speaking list, I have Mr. Berthold, Ms. Blaney, Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Turnbull.

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

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

The only person not in favour of holding an independent public inquiry to get to the bottom of foreign election interference by the regime in Beijing is the Prime Minister. He chose the car, the driver and the destination for determining whether an independent public inquiry was needed. As though by chance, his driver of choice, the special rapporteur, as he called him, was his ski and cottage buddy, not to mention a member of the Pierre-Elliott Trudeau Foundation. The special rapporteur came to the same conclusion as the Prime Minister. Now there are two people who don't think a national independent inquiry into Beijing's interference is needed. Conversely, all members of the opposition parties in the House of Commons, so the majority of members, voted in favour of a motion calling for a public inquiry. On top of that, a survey has revealed that 75% of Canadians are in favour of a public inquiry.

For two months now, the newspaper revelations have kept coming, exposing startling facts, most of which have turned out to be true. Now we are finding out that the independent public inquiry Parliament is calling for is not going to happen, because the Prime Minister opted to take the recommendation of the driver he himself chose to drive the car—the car that was supposed to arrive at a recommendation regarding a national independent public inquiry into Beijing's interference.

That is why the committee absolutely must hear from Mr. Johnston. He needs to answer the committee's questions so we can get to the truth. We need to understand the process that led him to his decision and, above all, the reason why his recommendations disregard the fact that the majority of parliamentarians are demanding a national public inquiry into Beijing's interference.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

We now go to Ms. Blaney.

[*English*]

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

It's a bit disappointing that we're having to do this today. I'm not content with the outcome of the report that Mr. Johnston provided to us. For me, the focus has always been on how serious this is and how important it is that Canadians trust their institutions. Here we are in this position again. I am sure, like many of the members in this place.... I have many important meetings that I am planning to do with constituents right after this meeting. I have had to move everything to accommodate them, so it's disappointing that we're here. It really outlines the reality that Canadians need to see a process that is transparent and clear and that they can have trust in, and this process is certainly not feeling to be that.

I have a couple of questions, Madam Chair, and then I will listen to my fellow members.

The first question I have is for the chair. Do we have a date or a tentative date for Mr. Johnston to come and be with the committee? I know you were working diligently on that. I think that is an important part of this conversation. The other aspect I am curious about is this: If we don't have a date, is there any indication of when he is proposing so that we can at least have that context in the conversation?

The second question I have is for the mover of the motions, and it just focuses on why we're going directly to a summons. I'm just curious whether I could have a bit of understanding. I know that I submitted a motion to have the special rapporteur come to speak to our committee. That was something I felt was really important as we address these issues of serious concern. I guess I am just trying to understand that process. Is there any indication, from either the chair or from the member who put forward this motion, that the special rapporteur is not willing to come to see us? I certainly hope that isn't the case.

I'll leave that to you, Madam Chair. Then if could you just add me on to the list whenever we are next, and I'll put up my hand.

• (1415)

The Chair: Do you want Mr. Barrett to respond first, or would you like me to respond first?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I will leave it to you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I appreciate Ms. Blaney's comments and question.

It's been just shy of two full months since the committee passed the motion for Mr. Johnston to appear. It is been 56 days, by my quick count, since Ms. Blaney asked the question. I guess your answer may shed some new light on the situation if there is a date that's been proposed and that the committee's going to be made aware of. However, absent the commitment of Mr. Johnston to appear at the committee after two months, that's the rationale for a summons being the wording and the tool used in the motion.

The Chair: I should start by saying, in case there's ever a question about it, that I graduated from the University of Waterloo. At the time, David Johnston was my president. Today, he's the Right Honourable David Johnston, but at that time, he was the president of my university and his signature is on the piece of paper I have.

I'll put that on the record. I'm a proud graduate of the University of Waterloo, and I encourage anyone watching to consider the fine institution that it is.

Mr. Barrett, I know you're not a regular member of this committee, though we appreciate your coming every so often. As I have shared with members, Mr. Johnston responded to confirm that he would not be able to appear before May 23, as was requested by committee members. However, he promptly responded to our request and confirmed June 6 as the date he would be appearing, as it was the first date that was possible after the report was provided. That is information I have shared with members, but, I guess, not in this forum.

To your question, Ms. Blaney, we have not had reluctance on the part of the Right Honourable David Johnston to appear. He has provided a date that would work, as long as it worked within the committee's business. We've slated him in for that.

On the point about the number of days, we've also had to go through redistribution and a series of different things. Something I've also stated is that the priority of this committee has been changing on a daily basis. It almost feels like that.

For the clerk to be slotting in witnesses.... What we've seen on multiple occasions is that witnesses will confirm their appearance, and then we have to change them and reschedule them because we change our focus on the day.

I hope that answers your questions, Ms. Blaney.

Now we have Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I'd like to thank you, Madam Chair, for the answer you just gave. I was actually going to ask the same question as Ms. Blaney. Why did the member go straight for a summons in his motion, when the witness has thus far been very transparent with the committee about his intention to appear after his report is released? His report came out two days ago, and he told you that he was available to meet with the committee on June 6. I imagine that date was chosen after some back and forth between the Right Honourable David Johnston's office, the clerk and you, Madam Chair.

It's very important to ensure that the tone of this debate is respectful. It's a very sensitive issue. The Prime Minister appointed a Canadian I firmly believe has always sought to serve his country, including as governor general. Mr. Johnston is a former president of the University of Waterloo, as you mentioned, Madam Chair. As a proud Quebecker, I would be remiss not to point out that he is also a past president of McGill University. Mr. Johnston was even chosen by the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, then prime minister, to play a role in the prickly inquiry into the dealings of a former prime minister, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. Mr. Harper was of the view that Mr. Johnston was a reputable person with a record of service to his country. The current prime minister, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, was also of the view that Mr. Johnston was someone worthy of being asked to get to the bottom of an issue.

Personally, I think Mr. Johnston did an outstanding job. I read the 53 pages of his report, and I think he took his work very seriously. It's reassuring to hear that he is amenable to the committee's request and has confirmed that he will appear to explain his thinking and the merits of his findings. That illustrates he is still someone who is equal to the task, someone who respects Parliament and Canada's institutions.

I'm sorry to have to say this, but I was disappointed by the responses of the opposition leaders, except for the leader of the NDP. The other two opposition leaders are refusing to act responsibly and take the steps necessary to receive the briefing offered to them by the government in order to examine the issues. These are very important briefings. I realize that the leader of the Bloc Québécois doesn't aspire to become prime minister, but the other two opposition leaders, Mr. Singh and Mr. Poilievre, do want to become prime minister of Canada. Only Mr. Singh, however, is acting responsibly and agreeing to be briefed. He knows that briefings would be a daily happening were he ever to become prime minister. That goes with the job of prime minister.

• (1420)

We are all members, and we all need to fulfill our responsibilities. Our number one priority is ensuring the safety and security of Canadians. We must use every democratic means possible and every tool at our disposal to do that. The members of all political stripes who sit on the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, or NSICOP, have access to that type of information. Each of us has a responsibility to do everything in our power to obtain all the information our security clearance affords us.

At a very minimum, we must invite Mr. Johnston to come before the committee to share whatever information he is able to disclose publicly and explain his rationale. Members with higher security

clearance than I have must do everything in their power to obtain all other information available to them. It's very disappointing, as I said, that two of the opposition leaders haven't done that. It's reassuring to know that at least one opposition leader intends to get the information.

That's all I will say about the motion, Madam Chair. You are the one deciding whether it is in order or not. I assume you've already determined that it is in order. Nevertheless, it is irresponsible to suggest that Mr. Johnston isn't willing to appear before the committee, when he made clear that he was amenable to doing so on June 6. We should take advantage of that opportunity. There is no need to play partisan games and claim that Mr. Johnston is refusing to appear before the committee. He has said clearly that he will.

I will leave it there for now. I'm eager to hear what my fellow members on both sides of the House think.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

[*English*]

Ms. Blaney, your hand is up next.

I have some details, so we can all be on the same page. After the motion and the list of witnesses were approved by this committee on April 28, the clerk made a phone call to request that the Right Honourable David Johnston appear. We received a reply on May 1. Within that reply, they confirmed, because of the contents of the report, that they would not be able to discuss what was in the report until it was released.

They then offered us the earliest date that was available on our schedule and what we were offering, which was June 6. On May 5, it was confirmed that the Right Honourable David Johnston would be willing to appear on June 6.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney, followed by Madam Gaudreau.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm surprised by that. I thought there were other members before me, but I will take up this time.

Thanks to the chair for outlining the committee process. I remember that as well. That's why I was just questioning the bit about the summons. I thank her for the clarity on that.

I did want to point out as well one thing that is making me very concerned. I too read through his report. I have no interest in protecting him as a human being. I think that's up to Canadians. I think as politicians in this space, who represent constituents from across Canada, our job is to focus on Canadians and what they need to see to feel clarity and trust in their systems. Right now we're seeing that erode through this bit-by-bit process, where things keep coming out in the media. It's quite concerning. I did review his report, and one thing I felt very concerned about was that there was not really any significant mention of the gaps in legislation that we've heard witnesses talk about repeatedly in our study on this issue. When we talk about how this is going to be addressed in a long-term manner, I was hoping to see that. Those are some of the things I have questions about for Mr. Johnston, so that he can explain himself.

I'm hoping we can do a couple of things in this committee. The first is to make sure that our goal is focusing on Canadians and taking this issue as seriously as it should be taken, recognizing the fact that the way the information is being exposed, through the media, is very frustrating. We know clearly from Mr. Chong's intervention and the work he has done that there is something fundamentally wrong with our process, because candidates and MPs can be facing significant challenges and not even be told. How do you deal with something if you don't even know the context and that it's happening? There are obviously some key things, and I hope we remember that's why we're here.

Just in closing, Madam Chair, "as soon as" the 6th—I'm just trying to clarify—does not mean "on" the 6th. I'm just confirming that, at this point, "as soon as" the 6th is all we have. We don't have an actual confirmation for the 6th.

I have a second question for the chair. If he is coming on the 6th, will the House have the resources to make sure we get those three hours? I think that's absolutely pivotal. I think we need to make sure that it's part of our consideration as we go through this process.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1430)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Before I go to Madam Gaudreau, I just want to state that we do have a confirmation that he's willing to appear on the 6th. We do have our regular meeting slot on June 6.

The way the House of Commons works is that we put in deviation requests. That's something I've said to members on this committee. We know where there is availability for extra time. Between the clerk and I, we have been making those deviation requests. Even when we don't receive them, we respond right away and ask for a second look to see if we can get it.

What will usually happen is that it's the week prior. That's the way the House of Commons works. They don't give us approvals too far in advance. It's the week before that we get the confirmations. We're just finalizing the extra hours we will have for next week. I will share that with committee members as I receive that.

We would have our two-hour slot on June 6 for sure. We have put in a meeting deviation request, asking for an additional hour. We've also asked for the evening slots, as you know, but we would

wait for the week prior to get those answers. We will have more insights next week as to the additional resources.

I hope that answers your question.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Ms. Gaudreau.

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

Good afternoon to my fellow members.

I'd like to provide a recap. The arguments I heard actually support all the reasons why we are here today.

It was said that the safety of our citizens is important and that action is needed. That's what we are doing today: we are taking action.

It was said that we need to make sure we do things democratically. I'd say that's where it all starts, and this is not the first time I've talked about it. On November 7, the door was opened, and we had the opportunity to get to the bottom of all of this. Everything the committee has seen since then illustrates the government's efforts to close the door and not face what could be going on. With every attempt the committee has made, the government has responded by giving every possible reason to avoid shining a light on the issue.

I'm relieved to hear that we have a date for Mr. Johnston's appearance, June 6. Bear in mind, however, the reason we are here today: at the outset, most of the opposition members made clear the importance of choosing an impartial person to examine the issue. Since the government members are as committed to democracy as they claim, they should look at their actions in recent weeks.

It's too bad that we are forced to meet like this today. Less than two hours ago, I was at a soup kitchen with constituents, and they asked me when we were going to meet with Mr. Johnston. I told them that I had to leave to deal with that very thing given the uncertainty around his appearance. They were surprised that the matter still had not been settled. In their eyes, it's clear what happened. People have been hearing about an independent public inquiry for weeks, and that's what they want. They want to know what it's going to take to get one. Well, it takes this—what we're doing here today.

Once bitten, twice shy. Hence, we need some assurances so that certain things don't happen again. Although the special rapporteur has signalled his willingness to co-operate and accepted our invitation to appear, tentatively on June 6, as parliamentarians, we need assurances of that.

We have obviously been speaking to people since the report came out. They were expecting a rigorous report that would restore their confidence in the system. They were expecting to be told that the government had a duty to hold an independent public inquiry while ensuring the necessary confidentiality. It wouldn't have been the first inquiry, as you well know, but it would have been independent.

It's as though the government wanted to make it look like it was doing something when it decided to put the matter in the hands of a special rapporteur. What it looked like to us was that the government was trying to move things along and find a way to avoid getting to the truth. We will nevertheless persist, because our constituents are telling us they're concerned and asking us to keep pushing.

My sense is that today's meeting is going to end well, since we'll be able to seal the deal on Mr. Johnston's appearance and set some terms.

This is my first comment today, but I want to stress something. If the government truly cares about doing things democratically, it has to listen to the voice of the people and of parliamentarians, and do the right thing.

● (1435)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

[*English*]

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

Thanks to all the previous speakers for their comments here.

I'm struggling with this, I have to say. We're in a constituency week. Of course, I'm happy to meet. However, in this particular circumstance, it seems to me....

I have read the Right Honourable David Johnston's report, which I think is very measured and impartial. It has done a thorough analysis and looked at detailed intelligence and documentation. He has interviewed all of the appropriate people. He has built in, I think, a double-check and verification of his conclusions through NSICOP and NSIRA.

There's this feeling I have that there's this attempt to suggest that Mr. Johnston has not been forthcoming or willing to appear before our committee.

The very fact that the wording of this motion calls for a summons when Mr. Johnston has already expressed a willingness to come to our committee is not a good-faith attempt at getting to the bottom of this. It actually demonstrates, to the contrary, an attempt to politicize a person who, again, is in good standing and has an impeccable reputation, and I say this with no partisan interest at all. He's a person who has been an upstanding Canadian citizen, who has served this country, who is well educated and who has served at the highest level as the Governor General appointed by Stephen Harper.

It just seems to me there's no length to which the opposition will not go to tarnish an individual's reputation who, to me, does not de-

serve it in any way. I think it's appalling that this is what we're here to discuss.

On one hand, we have an individual who has done independent work and done it well. I think the opposition doesn't like the conclusions in the report. Therefore, they're trying to create the misperception that somehow he isn't forthcoming and willing to come to our committee, which is quite the opposite of the truth. It seems strange to me that we're here debating a motion that wants to summons somebody who's willing to come to this committee.

On top of it, you have individuals here saying they want to get to the truth, yet their party leaders will not even get briefed, from a national security perspective, on the intelligence that underpins all of the conclusions Mr. Johnston has come to.

To me, it's hard to take the debate here in good faith. Quite frankly, it makes me angry. When I hear people say, "Well, we had to change our schedules and cancel meetings in our riding, etc.," I say, "Yes, but you are the ones who called this meeting."

I believe that if we were here for a good reason and for a good-faith attempt at getting to the truth, we're all up to that work. We've all expressed an interest in doing that. However, this is not that, in my view. This is not that. If that were the case, I think the party leaders—certainly the Bloc leader and the Conservative leader—would both be willing to get the top secret security clearance they need to review the appropriate documents and see for themselves exactly what the facts are in this particular matter, and within context.

I think what David Johnston wrote in his report was very clear in his conclusion that much of the intelligence, the largely false allegations or "misconstrued" information that's circulated in the media—"misconstrued" was his word, by the way—has been taken out of context. That's a serious problem. I think we run that risk any time we think we're going to air bits of information that are gained through our intelligence agencies in public, and do so in a limited manner.

● (1440)

I think opposition parties want a public inquiry. When you look at what Mr. Johnston has reported back, I think even he, in his report, suggested that he came into the position of the special rapporteur thinking that's exactly where he would land, calling for a public inquiry. However, through his various reviews of documents and interviews, he came to a very rational conclusion—which I would say has been supported by almost every national security and intelligence expert that we've heard from in this committee—which was that you can't air all of this stuff in public. You just can't. Doing so would compromise human lives and national security.

I don't know why the opposition parties keep pushing for that. I suppose it's only to create another misperception out there that somehow the government has something to hide, which again is quite contrary to the truth. In fact, our government from day one has expressed a willingness and very active involvement in combating foreign election interference. I've traced that in our committee debates over and over again, and I feel as though maybe I can continue to do that if I need to.

However, it's unfortunate that there's no acknowledgement of the actual facts and the actions that our government has taken. No one is saying they couldn't be improved upon. I think the public hearings that Mr. Johnston has proposed are focused on the greatest policy areas and directions and that there can be lively debate and efforts to improve the government's response to foreign election interference. I think there's acknowledgement that there are communications challenges within the machinery of government and that there can be lots of improvement made there.

That again seems to coincide with all of the other things we've heard time and time again. It coincides with the very real and evolving threat and the complexity of combatting it, which is ever-increasing. I think that communication and coordination and how intelligence becomes evidence and how it becomes actionable is really part and parcel of what we're up against here. Mr. Johnston has done a good job of outlining why an open and democratic society like Canada is more vulnerable to these different threats. I think we all take that very seriously here. I just think there's an attempt to say essentially that multiple parties here aren't forthcoming in terms of the truth, which is not the case.

First of all, I really don't think a summons is necessary at all. I don't know why this special rapporteur, who is doing this work, would need to be summoned to our committee when he has already expressed a willingness to come. Let's just be honest. Let's get to the heart of this. Why would we need to summon him? I would love someone to tell me. I'll evoke the "Simms protocol" if someone tells me why, in good faith, someone who is already willing to come to our committee needs to be summoned.

Can anyone tell me that?

Why don't we amend this motion? I'll propose an amendment. Let me read it into the record.

I move:

That, in relation to its study of foreign election—

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, I am just going to ask, just for process matters, whether you have shared this amendment.

• (1445)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: No, I have not. I'm reading it into the record off the floor.

The Chair: Is it available in both official languages, or do you need it translated?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I may need it translated, but I certainly will send it along.

The Chair: Could you just do that for me before you read it into the record, if that's suitable?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure. Yes, I can do that.

The Chair: I'm just going to pause for a quick moment as it gets sent, and then we can just have it circulated around and people will be able to see it. That way, it just functions a little bit better.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's no problem.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

• (1445)

(Pause)

• (1445)

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, I thank you for letting me know when you shared the amendment with me and the clerk. I understand that it has been distributed to interpreters as well as to members.

The floor is now yours again, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I hope everyone received that okay. I'm just going to read into the record the motion with the amendment. I move:

That, in relation to its studies of foreign election interference, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a), and of the intimidation campaign orchestrated by Wei Zhao against the Member for Wellington—Halton Hills and other Members, pursuant to its order of reference of Wednesday, May 10, 2023, the Committee

(a) re-invite the Special Rapporteur, the Right Honourable David Johnston, to appear before the Committee, by himself, for two hours, no later than fourteen days following the adoption of this motion; and

(b) report to the House forthwith that it re-affirms its support for a national public inquiry...

Maybe I can just say, "and so on and so forth" here, because the rest does not change.

• (1450)

The Chair: Do you want to speak to it, or was your preamble your speaking to it?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I've already spoken to it. Essentially, the difference is that we're taking out the summons, which is completely unnecessary. When someone is willing to come, it creates the false perception that he isn't already willing to come, which he is. I think we're amending the amount of time from three hours to two hours, which I think is more than enough time for the witness to appear. I'm not overly concerned about the amount of time, but I think that two hours is sort of a standard amount of time.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Mr. Fergus, followed by Ms. Gaudreau, Ms. Blaney and Mr. Barrett.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank my fellow member Mr. Turnbull for his amendment. I think he's just proposed something very responsible.

First, it does away with the false perception that the Right Honourable David Johnston was not willing to appear before the committee. That is simply not true.

Second, it sets out the same process the committee would use for any other witness it wanted to hear from, that is, politely invite the person to appear and wait for their response. We have a date now, so there's no issue.

I also appreciate the rest of his amendment because it gives us the opportunity to do our jobs as members and better understand the reasoning behind Mr. Johnston's recommendation to the Prime Minister, the committee and Canadians. It's an excellent amendment. Other amendments may make the motion even better, but overall, I think what Mr. Turnbull is proposing puts us on the right track.

I wasn't planning to comment on the amendment when I raised my hand earlier. I just wanted to voice my frustration with Ms. Gaudreau's claim that the Prime Minister was trying to make it look like he was doing something and didn't want to face the facts. I find that frustrating.

Rather, what we are seeing today is that her leader, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, and the leader of the official opposition, Mr. Poilievre, are refusing to get the security clearance required to receive an intelligence briefing and find out everything there is to know. If they had that information, they could come to a reasoned judgment. We might come to different conclusions, they and I, but at least they would have the information they needed to make an informed decision. Despite what they've said this week, I hope they will take advantage of the opportunity. Then, they would know everything there was to know about the matter. That could help steer the work of the committee and other parliamentary committees, which could have access to reasoned information and findings, taking into account what is confidential and what can be shared publicly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Go ahead, Ms. Gaudreau.

● (1455)

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

I can understand the frustration, really. A number of government members are well aware of what's going on and have seen it all before. I can certainly understand that it's hard to show that everything you do is in good faith and legitimate, to shine a light on what democracy could be. That must be very hard to do, I agree.

However, the reality is that things weren't done the usual way. We can judge all we want, but in a democracy, we must consult with others, and then we make a choice. There will be some discontent, but at least we will have voted. The House of Commons didn't vote on who the special rapporteur would be. It might have voted for Mr. Johnston, but the fact remains that the Prime Minister deliberately chose him himself.

That was my first comment.

Second, why would an individual, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, for example, want access to classified documents to understand what happened if they can't talk to anyone about it afterwards and they have to keep the information secret so that it doesn't get out? It makes no sense.

That's why we want a public inquiry that would keep the integrity and privacy of those involved intact.

I won't name them all, but a number of cases come to mind, like Maher Arar, the Air India bombing and the Rouleau Commission. I

could even cite cases going back to the 1960s. We don't want to go there.

I can totally understand that the leader of the Bloc Québécois really doesn't want access to information that he won't be able to use in any way.

Having said that, I'd now like to speak to the amendment.

I understand that Mr. Johnston was scheduled long ago to appear before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. You know what I'm talking about, Madam Chair, because I shared my thoughts with you earlier. People are watching and listening. The situation is dire for our democracy, so we have to show that we can follow through. Why do we need to wait another two weeks? How many days do we have until the House adjourns? In my experience, people tend to drag things out when they fear certain things, even if they say they can't talk about them. If the motion explicitly guarantees no prorogation, I'm prepared to support it. Otherwise, I'll vote against it.

Mr. Johnston is scheduled to appear on June 6. However, this is a very serious situation. In my opinion, he should appear in the next few days, perhaps even next Tuesday. Once again, I need to hear a very strong argument to convince me that we need to wait another two weeks. The special rapporteur has done his job, the documents are here and we want to know the details. I look forward to having my questions answered. I don't want what we're afraid will happen to come about, and by that I mean Parliament ending early, all of this being stifled until the House resumes and us moving on to other matters in the coming weeks.

That's my reaction off the cuff.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for providing an amendment. I will always talk about how important this is to me with my constituents, even if that upsets my Liberal colleagues. I take my job really seriously. Seeing this report and what came out of it was very concerning to me. That's why I agreed that we should have this meeting. I think it's unfortunate that it has to be made political, but I guess that's your choice.

I have a couple of recommendations for my friend who provided this. The first one is that I can't support two hours. I think we need three hours to get to the details of this issue. I certainly hope they will consider changing that.

I'm fine with removing the summons. I don't understand the 14 days in the context I've just heard from the chair, which is that the plan is for the 6th. If I could get clarity on that, it would certainly help me decide what I'm going to do next.

● (1500)

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, can you confirm what you'd like clarity on?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would like clarity on why it is 14 days. When I look at the motion it says “re-invite”, and I don't understand what that means. Does that mean that we want the special rapporteur to come in on the 6th and then come again in 14 days? Maybe that would make sense. Maybe we'd like to have him for three hours and then have him again in two weeks. I'm just asking for clarity. If, as the chair has said, we seem to be having a meeting on the 6th, why are we putting in the 14 days?

I'm fine with removing the summons because it makes sense if we already have a commitment from the special rapporteur. If we don't, then maybe we need to discuss that again. I'm just asking for clarity from Mr. Turnbull on this.

The Chair: I have Mr. Barrett on the list next, but, Mr. Turnbull, I'm going to ask you to quickly answer Ms. Blaney's question.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It says “re-invite” because we're acknowledging that the special rapporteur was already invited and was willing to come. Your comment about three hours is fine. I'm not really stuck on the amount of time.

I think the 14 days gives us until about, if I'm not mistaken, June 8 to June 12-ish, depending on.... Maybe the chair can clarify that. I think that gives us time to have him scheduled in.

That was the rationale. I hope that helps.

The Chair: I'm just going to chime in. Fourteen days would be June 8, so we would then have confirmed whether he was coming on the 6th or not. Then we would know what next steps...and it would provide us some ability, between the clerk and me, to know how we're moving forward. I do see some sense in that, so I hope that clarifies Ms. Blaney's question.

I'm going to go to Mr. Barrett, followed by Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

Then we'll go to Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Madam Chair.

As I said before, the committee invited Mr. Johnston. We passed that motion two months ago. The report has been issued. Canadians have questions. Having Mr. Johnston appear is what needs to happen.

The summons guarantees that he appears for three hours. It also removes some of the variables, as speakers previously mentioned, that, should there be prorogation or other interruptions to sittings of the House, if the can is kicked down the road weeks and weeks, then we could find ourselves in a position where we don't have the opportunity to ask these vital questions.

The motion in its original form, looking for Mr. Johnston to appear for three hours in a week's time, provides the opportunity for accountability that we're looking for.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I'm just also trying to manage the schedule as to having witnesses come. As we know, a motion was passed. There was a series of

witnesses who were on that list. This being a constituency week, the clerk has been inviting the people within that motion. I understand that perhaps additional names are being provided as well, so we're just trying to figure that out.

In moving these pieces around, we end up rescheduling people who have been confirmed. I was just asking if any of the ministers on the list have confirmed their attendance, and I have just been told that there have been some confirmations. I'm just going to look at those details to share them with the committee. That's where the dates all fill in really quickly—because we have so many moving pieces—and that's where the challenge always is.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I forgot that I was on the list again. That's great. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do have just a couple of things to add here. One is that I seem to recall a conversation we had as a committee about when we preferred Mr. Johnston to appear in this study. I recall recommending that he come before his report. Other members seemed to be more interested in his appearing after the report was released. It's interesting that the committee will was there previously to have him come after the report was issued, which I think was the committee's overall preference.

He's actually expressed the willingness to come, in accordance with what we desire or prefer as a committee, yet we still have the Conservative members implying somehow at the outset of our meeting—a little less forcefully now—that there was an unwillingness to come on his part, which is contrary to the truth.

I would ask they retract that and that we get down to moving forward as a committee.

Thanks.

• (1505)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, I listened to Mr. Barrett, Ms. Blaney and Mr. Turnbull, so I'm trying to seek out some clarification between Mr. Turnbull and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Turnbull, did I understand that you're willing to amend the motion to address Ms. Blaney's concerns about moving from two to three hours?

Second, Ms. Blaney, I'm trying to figure out if it's clear on the 14 days as opposed to 12 days, and on that question of the reinvite.

I'm trying to figure this out, Madam Chair, because I'm trying to figure out how I should vote on the amendment.

The Chair: Is that a question you would like Ms. Blaney to answer right now, or are you okay? Was that more just...?

Hon. Greg Fergus: It could be you or Ms. Blaney.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, did you want to answer that?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I haven't had my question answered from Mr. Turnbull, unless I completely missed it, and I apologize.

I do think it should be three hours. I don't think it should be lowered down to two hours.

The Chair: I think Mr. Turnbull responded in saying he's receptive to that.

Would you like to subamend that, or do we all want to agree that we want three hours instead of two hours?

I see heads nodding.

Ms. Blaney, do you have a preference? Do you want to subamend it, or can we—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm fine as long as it says three hours. If everybody agrees, then that's great.

The Chair: Would you like to subamend it, Mr. Turnbull, or would you like to make your—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I can't subamend my own amendment.

The Chair: I know you can't, but do you want to make it three hours again?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure, Madam Chair. I would be happy to.

The Chair: For the record, where Mr. Turnbull mentioned the Right Honourable David Johnston for “two hours”, it actually is “three hours”, just to make sure we're all in the same conversation. The number of hours is not changing. What is changing is that we reinvoke the Right Honourable David Johnston to appear. If that is not received, then we look at the next step of summoning the Right Honourable David Johnston.

I will be honest with you. I don't think it will come to that. Based on the email chain that I just reviewed, he is very receptive to appearing. It seems like we have a date and we can make this work. We'll have to work on making sure the hours are available. I'm sure there are many people watching this meeting, so know that committee members are making their points as to why that would be relevant.

It's Mr. Berthold, and then I have Mr. Barrett.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to make another argument for hearing from Mr. Johnston as early as next week.

Madam Chair, you told us that you were preparing the appearances of several witnesses and ministers mentioned in Mr. Johnston's report. Before we hear from people who are going to testify about the Johnston report, I feel we need to talk to Mr. Johnston first. It just makes sense. Mr. Johnston's report is new this week. I don't see how we can continue our study on foreign interference when an important part of this has just been released, namely the special rapporteur's report. We can't wait 14 days. We can't have a full week of testimony on foreign interference by the Beijing regime without first hearing from Mr. Johnston.

You said that you had read an email exchange. I believe you could ask Mr. Johnston to appear as early as next week and he can assure you that he'll be with us for three hours. We don't need to summon him to appear, but we can't continue our work and hear

from other witnesses without first hearing Mr. Johnston's version. That's fundamental as we continue our study.

Since we began the study, that is to say since November, the news has been coming in dribs and drabs. It feels like the special rapporteur pulled out a garden hose to share information with us. Before we ask questions of the other witnesses who will be appearing, first we must hear what Mr. Johnston has to say about the information and have him answer the questions we'll surely ask him about the information he says he can't disclose. I humbly urge my colleagues to think about that. Mr. Johnston must be one of the first witnesses we hear from if we want to do our job properly and ask questions of the other witnesses who will be called later on.

My message is for all parliamentarians. I understand that Mr. Johnston has already responded to the request to appear, but that was before he knew we wanted him to appear next week. If he is truly acting in good faith, he will tell us he's prepared to appear next week to talk about his report. I don't see why we would wait 14 days before we hear from him, when a number of witnesses are set to appear next week, based on available resources. If we need to invite them back because Mr. Johnston will have given us other relevant information about these witnesses, we will have done a week of work for nothing.

The next step is to hear from the special rapporteur, because his report raises a lot of questions for members of Parliament and the public. I want to emphasize that we can't afford to wait until June 6 or 9 to hear from Mr. Johnston. We absolutely need to hear from him next week.

● (1510)

The Chair: First of all, it's not June 6 or 9; it's June 6. I've already sent that date.

[*English*]

Respectfully, as a person who is trying to chair this committee to get us to the work that we're trying to do, one day it's “let's get this done” and we have a great plan. One day it's that a question of privilege has been referred to this committee, and then we have to make that the priority. One day it isn't this and then this.

Next week, as per the motion that was moved by our colleague in this committee, which was supported, we asked for certain witnesses to come for a prescribed amount of time. That is very difficult when you are in these seats and when you are trying to make that work. Respectfully, I will say to you that, unless you're suggesting that we not meet until the Right Honourable David Johnston is coming to a meeting, the work we are doing is important and we need to take into consideration what we need to do to function as a committee and to make sure witnesses are present.

As I said, we had asked for Jody Thomas to appear for a prescribed number of hours. We're receiving confirmation. Now you're suggesting, based on that commentary, that we ask her to reschedule her appearance because we can't do anything until David Johnston appears. It is almost like suggesting that the question of privilege is no longer the priority, and now it's the Right Honourable David Johnston's report that is the priority.

I'm just trying to add this up in my head as to how I, as the chair of a committee that I think is very important and that is doing very important work, can keep the train on the tracks so that we can actually get some work done, but we keep going in circles with the comments I'm hearing as to who needs to go first.

We agreed to a list. We wanted witnesses to come. Now we're having a conversation that almost feels like "who's the most important person to come first", and whatever else. I feel like I have done whatever I can to get us witnesses, but their schedules.... These are people, at the end of the day, and they have schedules. They are doing really important work, and it's almost like we want them to have full-time seats at the procedure and House affairs committee.

I'm just going to share my little comments on that, because we're doing a lot of confirming witnesses and then changing them around, which is not necessarily moving us forward.

I guess that gives Mr. Barrett some additional comments for when he speaks now.

Mr. Barrett, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Chair. I appreciate your comments, so I won't expand on what's been offered. I just want to move us forward.

I have just shared a subamendment with the clerk, and it is that the amendment be amended by replacing "fourteen days" with "seven days".

• (1515)

The Chair: I'm going to ask the clerk to circulate the subamendment that Mr. Barrett has just shared and make sure it's available.

Do you want to comment on it or just move the subamendment? You'll just move the subamendment and keep it there.

I am going to go to Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am certainly going to cut my colleague and friend a little slack, because while you were speaking to us, he was probably writing that subamendment, getting it in both languages and sending it to the clerk, so he might not have had time to incorporate what you just said to us: to try to treat people like people.

I am hoping he might see this as a friendly amendment and would consider this wording. Why doesn't he just change the wording to "that we invite the Right Honourable David Johnston at the earliest opportunity and no later than June 6"?

That way, Madam Chair, if we can get him here next week, that would be fabulous for the reason that it is important for us to be able to have him for those three hours and then to move on with our other witnesses. That would make sense, but it also treats people

like people who are doing important work for our country, and it makes sure they can look at their schedules to try to find the best possible time that conveniences us as well as conveniences them.

I am hoping that might be some wording that my colleague would consider. I think that would probably be the best thing to take into account what I think you had just so rightly pointed out to us.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, I see that you wish to speak, but I must first give the floor to Mr. Barrett. Then it will be your turn. Thank you.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: I appreciate the spirit of Mr. Fergus's suggestion, but I would like to leave it as is and would note for him, and for you, Madam Chair, that the subamendment doesn't relitigate the question of a summons versus an invitation. I think the invitation speaks to the proposed witness's availability.

I think this satisfies the concerns raised by Mr. Fergus and some of his colleagues with respect to the nature of a summons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Madam Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I know it's not easy to juggle all the witness appearance dates, but the witnesses must certainly follow the news like we do. It's important to remember that we're acting in good faith. If we weren't so far along in the parliamentary calendar, we probably wouldn't be pushing so hard. Unfortunately, it's not February. We're really ready to get the information.

I'd like to ask the people watching us how they feel about us being able to ask questions on the 65-page report tabled, so that we can ensure we have a healthy democracy and we're safe. As parliamentarians, we all want to keep the worst from happening. Given that parliamentary business is drawing to a close and we have only a few meetings left before the summer, I wonder why we would wait 14 days. I know it's complicated in terms of logistics, but at some point, we have no choice but to deal with urgent matters. I'm sure people understand that, and I'm sure they too would prefer that the witnesses appear after Mr. Johnston's three-hour appearance, because we'll be able to get some answers based on the questions we will have asked him.

I'm ready to vote. I still haven't been told why we absolutely need to wait 14 days just because June 6 has already been chosen. We know very well that, once the work has been done, it's time to disclose the results. So now that Mr. Johnston has completed his task and released his report, he should expect to receive a call fairly quickly. If I'm given a good argument that proves we're acting in good faith and that explains the basic reason why we have to extend this deadline until June 6 at the latest, I may accept it.

I would remind the House that we've reached the culmination of everything we've experienced these past few weeks. I truly don't feel uncomfortable calling someone who has worked for weeks on a report with a May 23 deadline. In my opinion, Mr. Johnston was expecting to be called very quickly to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I feel this is a very important committee, and I hope all of my colleagues feel the same way.

I will close by saying that I'm convinced that the witnesses, who may be watching us, clearly understand that we might need to juggle the appearance dates again.

I'm ready to vote, but I see that others still want to speak.

• (1520)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Blaney still wants to speak, so we will hear what she has to say.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have one question, and then I'm more than happy to vote. You talked quite at length, Chair, about the schedule that was already outlined.

Would you be sharing that with the committee, so I can better understand the concern?

The Chair: Yes. Actually, the clerk and I were scheduled to have a conversation about this today, but we are all together at PROC, so I can have it with the clerk in person rather than virtually. We are going to be laying out a calendar as to where we see things falling, so that members can be prepared.

As you all know, I have asked for extra resources for next week and the following week, so there will be extra meetings also taking place to satisfy as many appearances as possible. That's where we are, just trying to juggle several different things, because, as I mentioned earlier, it would be today that we would get the schedule for next week. We will have a better understanding as to which deviation requests were approved versus not approved today. That will provide us with the insights we need.

Please stay tuned. It will be coming to a computer screen near you very soon. Does that help?

Perfect. Thank you.

With that, my list has been exhausted. I'm calling the question on Mr. Barrett's subamendment.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We are back to Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Are there any other comments on the amendment as not amended?

Ms. Blaney.

• (1525)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Could we get that read out one more time? That would be helpful.

The Chair: The clerk would love to do that.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): In English, the amendment would basically be replacing section (a) of the motion. It would read:

(a) re-invite the Special Rapporteur, the Right Honourable David Johnston, to appear before the Committee, by himself, for three hours, no later than fourteen days following the adoption of this motion; and

The Chair: I'm just going to make a quick comment once again.

I'm sorry about all the commentary today, but I do believe this committee is very important. I know we've had this conversation about "appearing by themselves". Sometimes people do bring people with them based on the information they need, so I would just be mindful that even watching some of the press conferences with the Right Honourable David Johnston, he does refer to some of his team members. If we actually want the information, it might be relevant to make sure this person has the ability to have those people.

Mr. Clerk says we have an answer for this already, so we're good to go.

Mr. Fergus, please go ahead.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, trying to be respectful to my colleagues, I wonder if my colleague Mr. Turnbull would entertain a small change so that we would say that the Right Honourable David Johnston is invited "as soon as possible and no later than June 6".

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, do you consider that a friendly amendment?

Do you want it?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, I do. I think that's a very good suggestion. I think it shows a bit of room to move in the direction of where the consensus is building in this conversation. I appreciate that attempt by my colleague.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, did the clerk clearly understand what I intended, or shall I provide a French translation?

[*English*]

The Chair: I think we have some agreement, even though it does not follow procedure. The clerk does not appreciate it so much, but we as a committee are masters of our own domain and we can make things work when we want to.

We appreciate the leniency provided by the procedure people.

With that, my list is exhausted. I'm going to call the question on the motion as amended.

• (1530)

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's on the amendment, not on the main motion.

The Chair: That's right. It's just on the amendment. The amendment didn't get amended, because the subamendment failed. It's the amendment as "friendly amended".

We're going to call the question on the Right Honourable David Johnston's appearing no later than June 6, for three hours. That is the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We are now back on to the debate of the main motion as amended.

Is there debate?

Go ahead, Mr. Ferguson.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Ferguson: I just want to make sure that everyone understands the motion as amended. Can the clerk read it to us? In fact, has it already been sent out? I didn't check my inbox during the votes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Basically, what is on the floor right now is the motion that was moved by Mr. Barrett. Part (a) of that motion has changed. The rest has stayed the same.

Does that answer your question, Mr. Ferguson?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Turnbull, followed by Mr. Ferguson.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Just reading the motion as amended, I think there are still some issues with part (b).

Part (b) says:

report to the House forthwith that it re-affirms its supports for a national public inquiry, expressed in its Twenty-fifth Report, which was concurred in by the House on Thursday, March 23, 2023, and calls upon the government to begin consultations, among the recognized parties, on the appointment of that inquiry within 24 hours with a view to launching it within two weeks.

I have a bit of an issue with this part (b) of the motion. It seems to me we've had an independent special rapporteur go through a thorough process. Even though, as I said earlier, there was an assumption that the Right Honourable David Johnston, when he came into his appointment and was doing that work, would likely land on a public inquiry, he has, for, I think, very good reason, landed on not having one and instead on having public hearings. I think he said in his report why a national public inquiry would not be able to navigate around the very real tensions that exist when dealing with

matters of national security and highly classified information and how those just cannot be aired in public. We've all heard that time and time again. We seem to see opposition parties not wanting to admit that it's counterproductive to the overall objective that I think we share. When we get down to the root of it, we all share a very common concern for our democracy and our democratic institutions. I think we're all very committed to protecting those and ensuring we have processes in place that can successfully combat and counter attempts at foreign election interference—and all forms of foreign interference for that matter, not merely those within the election period.

This part of the motion calls for a public inquiry, which is consistent with what we've heard before from opposition members. I think the very real concerns around airing that information in public are being taken seriously by individuals who would call for a public inquiry after reading the 55-page report the Right Honourable David Johnston has done. I can't really understand why that would need to be in there. I think it was a helpful move to appoint someone who was independent and impartial to look at all the facts and to make a recommendation on this.

Obviously having the Right Honourable David Johnston come to this committee...and I'm sure opposition members will dig into his rationale for not recommending a public inquiry at the end of the day. To me part (b) really tries to circumvent this whole process, which I think has been a fair, rational and impartial process that has landed in a place that makes sense given all of the national intelligence and security experts and the things they've recommended and the very real concerns that I think we all have around having intelligence revealed in public and disclosed in public and just how harmful that would be to methods and human assets and how it would compromise national security in many other ways.

• (1535)

Not all of us fully understand. I think that's part of the issue at times. Perhaps we're not all aware of just how harmful this information may be. We saw with Han Dong, for example, just how harmful false allegations can be. I feel for Han, the victim of a lot of allegations that have circulated—which are clearly false, if Mr. Johnston, in his report, did a thorough analysis of.... He landed very firmly on the fact that the allegations circulated and reported on by the media were only giving a very small slice of information, and that they were very harmful indeed to Mr. Dong's reputation.

I don't know how you get that back, as a member of Parliament. I think that should be something we're all concerned about. It's an example of how, when you take intelligence out of context and air it in public, you're not treating it with the gravity and care it deserves. You're liable to create harm. Maybe it's unintended harm. I know the intention here is to have the public gain greater awareness of the issues and, certainly, of how the government is addressing them. I think that's important. However, I also don't think the opposition parties are operating in a way that fully acknowledges the facts. I've pointed to that many times over.

Maybe I'll leave it there. I just wanted to express my concerns about part (b) in Mr. Barrett's motion. I think we have to make an amendment there. Maybe I'll leave room for my colleagues to contribute more to that discussion.

Thank you.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus.

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

As Mr. Turnbull said so well, it was terrible that Mr. Dong's reputation was damaged. I was very surprised but very pleased to see the Right Honourable David Johnston's conclusion in his report after he was able to look at a broader range of secret documents. He set the record straight by simply stating that the allegations against Mr. Dong reported in the media were false and that people had drawn hasty conclusions. I feel that's a good thing.

As members of Parliament, we represent constituencies and we represent Canadians. We're always vulnerable to false allegations and incomplete information circulating about us that could lead to hasty conclusions. I commend Mr. Johnston for looking at the big picture before coming to this conclusion and making it public. None of us in the House are immune to such allegations. I'm very pleased that he chose to make those comments.

I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague. For that reason, in addition to the others he has already mentioned, I'm very much in favour of the amendment that Mr. Turnbull is proposing to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

You mentioned an amendment, but you have not yet sent it out, is that right?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, Madam Chair, I'd like to move an amendment. I'm sorry, I'm just looking for it in my documents.

The Chair: It's not necessary, if you have nothing further to say.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I do have an amendment, Madam Chair. It's very simple. I thought Mr. Turnbull had mentioned that. It's simply removing item (b) from Mr. Barrett's motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: My understanding is that Mr. Fergus is subamending the main motion as amended by deleting paragraph (b).

Is that correct, Mr. Fergus?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: That's correct.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent.

Seeing no massive reaction, may I call the question on removing paragraph (b) of the main motion as amended?

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We will go back to the main motion as amended.

Mr. Fergus.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, I'd like to move an amendment. I'll send it to the clerk in a second. I just want to make sure we have the right document. The amendment proposes that—

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, do you intend to send us the amendment?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes.

The Chair: We will wait for you to send it to the clerk and for it to be distributed to everyone. Is that okay?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, that's fine.

The Chair: Okay.

I'm told the document has now been received.

Mr. Fergus.

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

I thank my colleagues for allowing me to present this amendment. It's pretty straightforward.

First, I move that we insert “(i)” after the words “March 23, 2023, and”. Then, after the words “within two weeks”, I move to insert “(ii) calls upon the opposition leaders to accept the recommendation in 4 (d) from section VIII of the First Report - The Right Honourable David Johnston Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference, to obtain the requisite security clearance so they can read and review the full report, including the confidential annex”.

So the wording would be as follows—

• (1550)

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Chair, I have a point of order.

I'm just letting the chair know that the interpreters have not received the information. They're doing their best to respond to this, but they have noted that they have not received it, which makes it harder for them to do their work.

Just out of respect, I'm wondering if the chair could work with us to make sure the interpreters have the correct information.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, we're going to suspend real quick because we've just had a switchover of interpreters.

We'll get this rectified, and then we're coming right back.

• (1550)

(Pause)

• (1610)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I apologize for that quick suspension. We have contact with the interpreters now. It turns out that computers don't like water, but there are other computers to replace the watered computers.

I'm going to give the floor back to Monsieur Fergus, and then I see—

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

I seek a ruling from you. I would submit that the amendment is out of order since it goes beyond the scope of the original motion. Namely, it doesn't link in any way to the 25th report of this committee and it does not relate to a national public inquiry.

I would submit to you that it's out of order and ask for your ruling.

• (1615)

The Chair: We were having a bit of this conversation, Mr. Nater, and you know I always appreciate your interest in these things. Based on how this committee has functioned and the leniency, the clerk and I do not feel that it is out of order.

Mr. John Nater: I would challenge the chair.

The Chair: I'll take that in writing, but I think publicly stated feels pretty good.... Oh wait, you are challenging the chair.

We go to a vote then.

[*Translation*]

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

We have no interpretation. In addition, some people in the room have no sound. We're experiencing problems right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Can you hear me now?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Yes, I can hear you, but you're speaking to me in French.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can you hear me in English?

Madam Gaudreau and I are speaking really quickly to make sure that people online can hear me in their language of choice.

Madam Gaudreau, can you hear me in French? Yes. Very good.

[*Translation*]

Can the people listening to the English interpretation hear me?

It seems they can.

Can the people attending the meeting remotely hear me?

Mr. Nater, can you hear me?

It looks like everyone can hear me.

Ms. O'Connell, are you there?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): I am. I'm sorry. I wasn't getting sound, but I am now.

The Chair: Perfect. Stay tuned until the clerk calls your name.

Let's start that vote again.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: We will continue.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Fergus, followed by Mr. Turnbull.

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

Let me read out the motion again as it would be amended. I support it, and I hope my colleagues do as well.

I propose that “(i)” be inserted after the words “March 23, 2023, and”, In addition, after the words “within two weeks”, I propose that the following be inserted: “(ii) calls upon the opposition to accept the recommendation in 4(d) from section VIII of the first report of the Right Honourable David Johnston, Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference, to obtain the requisite security clearance so they can read and review the full report, including the confidential annex”.

Part b) of the motion would therefore read as follows:

b) report to the House forthwith that it re-affirms its support for a national public inquiry, expressed in its Twenty-fifth Report, which was concurred in by the House on Thursday, March 23, 2023, and

(i) calls upon the government to begin consultations, among the recognized parties, on the appointment of that inquiry within 24 hours with a view to launching it within two weeks;

(ii) calls upon the opposition leaders to accept the recommendation in 4(d) from section VIII of the first report of the Right Honourable David Johnston, Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference, to obtain the requisite security clearance so they can read and review the full report, including the confidential annex.

As I said at the outset, only one opposition leader has lived up to his responsibilities, in my opinion, and that is Mr. Singh. He has said that he will certainly seek to obtain the necessary security clearance to read the confidential annex to the report. I think that is responsible. The two other party leaders have publicly stated that they would not do so, since they consider it a trap that they could not get out of. That is ridiculous.

Except for the leader of the Bloc Québécois, I know the party leaders aspire to become prime minister of this great and beautiful country. If they held that position, they would have to receive national security and intelligence information. I cannot imagine that they are not ready to assume all the responsibilities that come with the role of prime minister. If they are not prepared to do so in opposition, how can we expect them to do so as prime minister? It doesn't make any sense and it is ridiculous.

They need to behave as adults and assume their responsibilities. They must try to obtain all the information possible in order to make an informed decision. Without that information, how can they reach any conclusion? As I said, they must assume all the responsibilities of being a party leader, and it is so important that they at least continue.

• (1625)

[English]

I think it's really important for us to be able to ask these leaders to take their responsibilities seriously before they render judgment, and they can do it. You can take a look at confidential and security information, knowing that you might not be able to reveal the deepest details, but you can certainly come to the conclusion, just like David Johnston did in his almost 60-page report. He had read confidential stuff, but he still came to some conclusions that he shared in a transparent manner with Canadians.

That is what these leaders should do before they decide to go on and make all of these judgmental statements. I think this is irresponsible. It is below what is required for them to assume the office that they expect to do.

Madam Chair, that's the reason I think it's important for us to add this amendment, and I hope that members will support this amendment. If there are some things that we could do to adjust it to make it even better, I'm open to that.

[Translation]

The key is to ensure that these leaders rise to the challenge before them, that they assume their responsibilities as responsible leaders in a democratic country, read the documents and then be able to tell Canadians what they think, without disclosing national secrets. It is not an all or nothing situation. There is a wide margin between the two. The Right Honourable David Johnston found the right way of doing this, and I hope the others will as well. That is certainly what the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians has done, which publishes a unanimous annual report, and which finds a way to present its conclusions on the basis of the information it has obtained.

Madam Chair, I do not want to speak for too long, because I would really like to hear what my colleagues from all of the parties suggest, whether to improve the amendment or to explain why they are completely opposed to it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I am pleased to be here today to discuss this matter, which is so important and is a source of concern to many Quebecers and Canadians. We must be able to move forward together.

I would like to continue along the same lines as Mr. Fergus. I will present my subamendment on behalf of the NDP to improve the principal amendment already tabled by our Liberal colleagues. I will read it out, if I may. In paragraph b), after the words “including the confidential annex”, which are the last words of the Liberal

amendment, we would like to add the following: “provided those leaders are able to speak...”

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Boulerice. Is your subamendment in both official languages?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Yes, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Can you send it to the clerk?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Yes, of course.

The Chair: We will wait for the clerk and the interpreters to receive it, and then you will have the floor again.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Perfect, thank you.

The Chair: I understand that the interpreters and the committee members have received it.

Go ahead, Mr. Boulerice.

• (1630)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This subamendment preserves the spirit of the amendment, which is designed to give the opposition party leaders access to those documents. We in the NDP would always rather know than not know. We think knowledge is better than ignorance, unless people are trying to hide and evade their responsibilities. We would however like to add something extremely reasonable to the Liberal amendment. At the end of paragraph b), after the words “and examine the full report, including the confidential annex”, we would add the following: “provided those leaders are able to speak as freely about conclusions based on this intelligence as Mr. Johnston, the Prime Minister, and other members of privy council.”

The logic is simple. I think everyone would agree that it is better for the leaders of all the political parties to be on the same footing and to understand exactly what is at issue, for them not be muzzled and for them to be able to speak as freely as the Prime Minister and the special rapporteur, Mr. Johnston. Mr. Johnston has tabled a report and given interviews, some short, others longer and more detailed, while preserving the confidentiality of some of the more sensitive information. It is sensitive information for our police services and secret services, and its disclosure could have an impact on national security.

We all agree that the federal party leaders should be able to see the information, but that they also have the responsibility not to jeopardize anything, including employees of the government, of public services, secret services and police services, for purely partisan reasons.

I may on occasion have criticized Mr. Johnston and his decision, which I do not necessarily agree with, but we must have access to the documents and be able to speak publicly in a responsible manner. The leaders must have access to the information and be able to speak about it, subject to the same restrictions as the Prime Minister, the special rapporteur, Mr. Johnston, and other members of the privy council.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to Mr. Boulerice for his subamendment.

I had my hand up to speak to the original amendment that Mr. Fergus put forward, but I can now adapt and speak to the merits of Mr. Boulerice's subamendment as well.

The reason I think this is important is that throughout our discussions on foreign interference, which started quite some time ago, we've heard a lot of talk from the Conservative Party in particular. They have spoken about bathing in sunlight and transparency almost as if it were like their seeking salvation on a Sunday morning.

It was seen as the Holy Grail of what we were all trying to achieve here, and certainly they expounded on that with great passion all throughout the process, but then, when given an opportunity to participate in the Right Honourable David Johnston's work, we saw that all the parties, including the previous Conservative Party leader, Mr. O'Toole, participated. I will quote from page 8 in the English version: "Each of Mr. Singh, Mr. Blanchet and Mr. O'Toole gave their thoughtful perspectives on the threat of foreign interference."

Mr. Poilievre, the current leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, refused to participate at all and, when asked multiple times, it looks as though he didn't even have the dignity to respond to the Right Honourable David Johnston's request, except on Twitter on April 12. This is all documented on page 8 in the Right Honourable David Johnston's report. This says back to me that throughout the process the Conservative Party and its members have been saying that they want sunlight and transparency, yet their leader will not participate in the process to get to the bottom of the issues and allegations that have circulated in the media and the very real concerns that have risen out of those. I find that highly suspicious, as Mr. Cooper would say.

Now what we're seeing on top of it is that not only did they refuse to participate in the process, but they're also.... I think it has happened multiple times now that the Conservative Party leader.... Unfortunately, the Bloc leader has joined the Conservative Party leader in making public statements about not being willing and stressing their unwillingness to have a briefing and to pull back the veil, which they've wanted all this time, to see the intelligence in its whole context and to understand why the Right Honourable David Johnston came to the very rational conclusions that he's come to, based on all of the facts and information.

What they're saying now is that truth is a trap. It's a trap, everybody. We're all trying to trap them by offering the information they've wanted all this time. Now, all of a sudden, it's a trap. We're setting a trap for them because then they won't be able to speak about it publicly. I would say that if you're actually committed to getting to the truth, I mean, how could you possibly claim that the truth is a trap? Truth isn't a trap. It's the thing that you've been seeking all along in this process, and at the very moment that you're able to get access to that, you're saying that you're unwilling to do it.

For me, I call into question the motives behind the Conservative Party members—and now, unfortunately, the Bloc, in joining them—in not really wanting to get to the bottom of this, not being willing to see the truth, not willing to face the truth, and all the while telling us that this is what they desire.

• (1635)

I think that when Mr. Fergus put his amendment forward—which I think is a really strong amendment—it really responds to the section in the Right Honourable David Johnston's report where he talks about the role of opposition leaders. It says:

I recommend the government start immediately the process of working with the Opposition Leaders to obtain the requisite security clearance so they can read and review my full report, including the confidential annex.

The confidential annex provides all of the information that the Right Honourable David Johnston saw and gathered to make the conclusions he made in his first report. I can't imagine actually claiming that you care about these issues, and then not being willing to look at that information and verify whether or not the Right Honourable David Johnston's conclusions are accurate. I don't understand how anyone could legitimately stand up in public and say they care about the truth of these matters but not be willing to actually read and review those intelligence documents in their full context, so that they can formulate their own conclusions and see whether the Right Honourable David Johnston's claims and conclusions are accurate.

The amendment is good. I believe Mr. Boulerice's subamendment makes a lot of sense in that, for individuals who were able to speak about the Right Honourable David Johnston's conclusions....The same conclusions that he's been able to disclose to me should be fair game for anybody else who is reviewing those documents. It does make sense to me.

I would ask for a friendly subamendment, though, just to stay consistent, Mr. Boulerice. It's important to refer to Mr. Johnston as the Right Honourable David Johnston. He's earned that title. He served as our Governor General, and we owe him the respect and honour that title comes with. We should just amend your subamendment, if you would consider it friendly, to ensure we're referring to him properly.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

• (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, are you okay with adding the Right Honourable David Johnston's title to your amendment?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It's a really friendly subamendment to a subamendment.

The Chair: I'm not going to consider it a subamendment. I'm just going to consider adding those two words "Right Honourable" to your subamendment.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I agree.

The Chair: Perfect.

I will now go to Madam Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

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

You know, I knew this was going to happen; it was predictable. Right now, they are finding every possible way to disregard the majority of members of the House of Commons and all the witnesses who have appeared. They all said they were in favour of a foreign agent registry, and the list will be long. Everyone said they were in favour of an independent, public inquiry. We are not saying this because we want to. We have the proof, here and now, that things are being mixed up, as though a leader has to comply with a requirement issued by a committee. There is talk of impartiality, but we clearly need to review that concept, from a political point of view. We want to protect our democracy, and to do that we must use impartial methods.

I hope people recognize that the respectable and honourable Mr. Johnston, who was not chosen by all parliamentarians, has already been deemed to be impartial. He was chosen by the Prime Minister. That was the first request we wanted to make. They did not listen to us. Nothing was done. They wanted to retain control over the whole process. Now we are being told that all the leaders should read the classified information, but they will feel muzzled. They will only have the right to say whether they agree or not, nothing more.

We will give them the right to speak. Are they experts on the subject? I think asking the question is the same as answering it. What we need is expertise, a judge, someone with all the expertise and, above all, real impartiality. We cannot set aside all the factors before us in view of the close ties of the special rapporteur, appointed by none other than the Prime Minister. Actually, I understand once again. I did not understand enough in the *WE Charity* saga, which is similar to what is happening, that is, getting to the bottom of it without actually shedding any light. Moreover, the witnesses who appeared said the same thing.

I was not here in March for the 24-hour filibuster. We even heard about the sensitivity of providing information during an independent and public inquiry. The *Globe and Mail* reported that even a lawyer heading up the commission of inquiry into the Maher Arar affair stated that the Johnston report raises serious questions about intelligence services, interaction, communications. In his opinion, an independent and public inquiry is needed.

• (1645)

I know we have staff until 8 p.m. tonight. I know how it works now. I can no longer say that I am the new kid on the block. Honestly, I think this game we are witnessing is unacceptable, all in the name of democracy. Perhaps there are other tools in your tool box, but we will get there in the end. This subamendment that imposes a requirement on the party leaders, but is written as a recommendation, is utter nonsense.

I am very disappointed by what is happening at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs right now. It seems that partisan politics and parliamentary games are ultimately more important than integrity, real integrity, and democracy. It does not bother me to say so, because I say it all the time: we do not aspire

to be in power; we want to get some clarity in order to correct the situation. To do that, we will need experts and an independent, public inquiry.

The Leader of the Bloc Québécois has shown good will. He received an invitation from Mr. Johnston and he accepted it. Now it is up to him to decide whether he wants to consult a classified document without expertise or impartiality, but with concrete action, because this is a trap that will muzzle people, as many of my colleagues have said.

I am keen to hear from the other parties. I did not really think it would come to this. Those are my initial thoughts in the heat of the moment.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Chair.

We've all had the opportunity to read the report from Mr. Johnston, and it's certainly not a complete review of what we've seen to date. There are notable omissions from it, including, of course, that the foundation that Mr. Johnston was a part of, the Trudeau Foundation, was the target of a foreign influence operation that saw \$140,000 from Beijing-backed donors go to the foundation and then those cutouts, acting on behalf of Beijing, then get access to the Prime Minister. That orchestrated campaign of influence involved another individual from the Trudeau Foundation that the Prime Minister tapped to investigate foreign interference, Morris Rosenberg.

While Mr. Johnston did comment on some of the public reporting about reports from our spy agencies, he must have missed those. Maybe his subscription wasn't up to date with *The Globe and Mail* when those reports were published.

I heard lots of comments about people's fitness to hold the office of Prime Minister, but we currently have a Prime Minister who, in the face of a majority vote of the House of Commons to hold a public inquiry, instead picked his neighbour, ski buddy and member of the Trudeau Foundation board, which is mired in the foreign interference controversy, to issue a report.

I will say one thing that should be a cautionary tale to anyone who would take the bait on these briefings, and that's that the folks in our bureaucracy who are preparing these reports are delivering them to people in the public safety minister's office or the Prime Minister's Office. They drop binders on the table in front of those who are receiving these reports without context and without technical support, and the matter is considered closed. That's one of the items listed in Mr. Johnston's report. I imagine that this issue of transparency and context has not been remedied since Mr. Johnston issued his report on Tuesday.

We have ministers who were told.... Some of them received information. It was a failure of the bureaucracy to provide them with information. We saw an awful lot of that. We saw in this report from Mr. Johnston that it was the public service's fault. Where there was fault, it was the fault of the public service and not the fault of government. Well, the government has had their hands on the controls of the machinery of government for eight years and are presiding over its brokenness, as it's been described by Mr. Johnston.

We don't know what the ministers aren't able to tell us and what the Prime Minister isn't able to or won't tell us on this. That's why we need to have a public inquiry. That's why the majority of members elected to the House of Commons called for a public inquiry. We already have an issue where we were just told we were going to have a couple of people who the Prime Minister picks take a look at something, and then we're to believe that everything is okay.

His challenge so far is that the people he picks are all connected to the Trudeau Foundation. They're all Liberal insiders. It was the Trudeau Foundation to investigate foreign interference with Mr. Rosenberg, the Trudeau Foundation to act as a special rapporteur with Mr. Johnston, and the Trudeau Foundation to provide Mr. Johnston with advice of whether he's in a conflict of interest. You'd be shocked to learn that his colleague from the Trudeau Foundation said that he wasn't, and a lifetime Liberal donor hired as one of Mr. Johnston's staff advised him in this process.

• (1655)

We need a public inquiry. We don't need a situation where it's just the opposition leaders.... Our party has members appointed to the committee of parliamentarians that the Prime Minister has set up. It's not a committee of Parliament. They're going to take a look at the documents and not be able to talk about them. We don't believe that any of the opposition leaders should tie both or one of their hands behind their back in this process.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

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

Once again, I want to go over what has happened.

Since November, we have learned from national security sources that the communist regime in Beijing interfered several times in the electoral process in Canada in 2019 and 2020. Global News reported that some candidate networks were supported by Beijing and even received funding. From all those reports, we learned that an MP was allegedly very close to the regime in Beijing, going so far as to interfere in a dangerous matter involving two Canadians being held prisoner in China. We have been hearing these things since November, week after week, day after day.

The House of Commons adopted a motion calling for a public inquiry that is independent of the government, which is one of the entities named in many of the allegations reported by the media. Many allegations and events were reported from national security sources. As the special rapporteur indicated in his report, some people have said that the information from those sources was incomplete and taken out of context. And yet one of the first decisions the government made following these revelations was to expel the Chi-

nese consul in Toronto, on the basis of the very information it claimed was incomplete and taken out of context.

So, forgive me if I have some doubts, not only about Mr. Johnston, but in particular about the Prime Minister. As I said at the outset, when the House called for an independent, national inquiry with a commissioner appointed unanimously by all the main parties in the House of Commons, what did Mr. Trudeau say? He chose a path that would allow him to control the events and the information, namely, by appointing a special rapporteur. To my knowledge, it has not happened very often in Canada that a special rapporteur has been appointed to investigate the government. Who chose that process? Of course it was the Prime Minister, who is one of the parties identified by national security sources as having made mistakes with regard to Chinese interference in our elections.

He then chose the special rapporteur, unilaterally, without the support or involvement of the opposition parties. We then learned a number of things. We learned that the special rapporteur was a long-standing friend of the Trudeau family. Anyone who, like me, watched Mr. Johnston deliver the findings of his report on live television this week might have been surprised to see him take his distance in no uncertain terms. He said it was just a few ski outings and a few dinners. A few years ago, however, that same Mr. Johnston was on television boasting about his ties to Trudeau's family and his father. He said his children were great friends with the children of Pierre Elliot Trudeau and that they skied together. It was a completely different tone and a completely different approach. At the time, he boasted about being very close to the Prime Minister and his family; this week we saw him take his distance because he had to give the appearance of neutrality.

• (1700)

I would like people, especially Quebeckers, to be able to see the two interviews: Mr. Johnston's interview when he boasted about being close to the Trudeau family and the testimony he gave when he released his report this week. It is troubling to see how much of a difference there is between these two interviews.

We have also learned that Mr. Johnston was a member of the Trudeau Foundation, a foundation that was targeted by the communist regime in Beijing as a vehicle that could be used to influence the current Prime Minister. That has been quite clearly established. We even talked about the refund cheque that was sent to an address in China, and we are not discussing that fact.

Is it any wonder then that the special rapporteur's conclusions are exactly the same as the Prime Minister's assumptions when the issue of the public inquiry first came up? He said that we do not need a public inquiry, as we have the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians that will get to the bottom of this. That raises some questions, and those are questions we would like to ask Mr. Johnston next week.

Since the report was released, I have had the opportunity to speak with media representatives and to give interviews. I was asked how we could have more confidence in an independent public inquiry than in Mr. Johnston's findings. It is simple: If all the parties agree on the appointment of a judge and we have confidence in the person appointed to conduct this public inquiry, it will be very difficult for us to then say that we do not have confidence in their recommendations.

This has been done in the past. There have already been independent national inquiries into matters of national security. There have been reports that have dealt with very specific issues. There have been reports of in camera portions of a national public inquiry. That was in the Maher Arar case. I invite you to check the facts of this inquiry. There was a report, there were discussions in camera, and the recommendations were followed by the government at the time. That was done, and it dealt with very important national security issues. It was done because a trust framework was established in connection with this public inquiry. It has not been criticized by the parties. They agreed with the recommendations. That is what we want. It is as simple as that. We want to shed some light for Canadians. We want to restore Canadians' confidence, but we cannot do that when only one party decides on the process, the judge, the achievements and the recommendations. It is impossible.

From the beginning, the Prime Minister has been saying that this inquiry will be referred to the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, that the members of that committee will look at all of this and report back to us. The problem, again, is that we're not talking about a parliamentary committee. We have to be very careful to clarify that. It is a committee of parliamentarians that does not report to Parliament, but that reports to the Prime Minister's Office, which will ultimately decide what this committee will recommend and what will be public or not. That is the reality.

Now the Prime Minister wants us to move in that direction. I understand very well that the Conservative leader does not want to get on board and play the Prime Minister's game. All the Prime Minister wants to do is muzzle the Leader of the Opposition by asking him to do what Mr. Johnston is recommending, which is to read the report, even though he will not be able to talk about everything he learns from the report afterwards. That is the reality. That is what the government wants us to do. That is why we need to stand up right now. We are not here to protect the government. If the NDP wants to do so by amending an amendment that is not good, we understand that it is because it is part of the coalition agreement between the Liberals and the NDP.

We are opposed to it for a reason. We want to keep our right to speak, and Canadians have a right to know. If we are not here, if we are not opposed, if we are not standing up, unfortunately, everything will happen behind closed doors, and Canadians will not learn more about all the foreign interference by the Beijing regime in our elections.

• (1705)

I think that this amendment and this subamendment have only one objective, which is to muzzle parliamentarians, the majority of whom decided and voted in favour of holding a public and independent inquiry. That is why the committee needs to hear from Mr.

Johnston, so that he can explain to us why he came up with these recommendations that muzzle party leaders, and explain to us on what basis he could say that he was in a better position than the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to hold public hearings and to continue studying the issue of foreign influence in elections.

The committee has important questions to ask. Before trying to force the implementation of the special rapporteur's recommendations, the committee should listen to his explanations of the how and the why. Then we can make decisions. This amendment and this subamendment were moved far too soon. Let Mr. Johnston explain to the committee why he came to this decision. For now, it is urgent to hear from Mr. Johnston and to reiterate to the House that an independent public inquiry is the only option that will restore Canadians' confidence in the system.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[English]

As my list is exhausted, I'm going to call the question on the subamendment by Mr. Boulgerice.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: I have Mr. Barrett on the amendment as amended.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I would like to propose a subamendment.

The Chair: Give me 30 seconds to confirm the rules, because I don't want Mr. Nater calling me out and challenging the chair.

To confirm, you are subamending Mr. Fergus's amendment as subamended. Is that correct?

• (1710)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes, if you say so, Madam Chair. There's no challenge there.

The subamendment would be adding after "opposition leaders" the following: "after the Prime Minister has launched a national public inquiry".

The Chair: You want to expand on that. You want to speak to it. Is that right?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes, briefly.

The Chair: I'll come back to you. Give us a couple of seconds.

We're all following this. Basically, it's what Mr. Boulgerice suggested to Mr. Fergus's amendment and then adding after "a national public inquiry".

Mr. Barrett, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Madam Chair.

We've covered the ground already. The House has voted on the question of whether there should be a public inquiry. The House didn't direct or ask the Prime Minister to subcontract out the question. We, as a majority, on behalf of Canadians, called for a public inquiry. The work done thus far, though incomplete, does not satisfy the real concerns Canadians have about confidence in our democratic institutions. It's critical that whatever steps are taken, going forward, are done with the reflection of the will of Parliament to have that public inquiry.

Having the opposition leaders unable to speak to some of the elements is certainly a regrettable amendment to this motion, but ensuring there's a process in place that has Canadians' confidence and one they're comfortable with.... There's been public opinion polling completed that shows that three-quarters of Canadians want a public inquiry. It's something they understand. My colleague Mr. Berthold quite rightly pointed out that we have, as a country, done this in the past. We've had public inquiries that dealt with issues related directly to questions of national security. They are, of course, always carried out in a way that protects methods and sources, as well as our relationships with our intelligence-sharing allies, such as our Five Eyes partners. You can believe, by what's gone on in the last several years—the last couple of months—and by what's been revealed in Mr. Johnston's assessment, that the machinery of government, with respect to the national security apparatus, is failing Canadians. A public inquiry is an understandable and a transparent way for Canadians to have some resolution to that, one that's outside of the hands of the PMO and the Trudeau Foundation affiliates, and that is truly independent.

The outcomes we will get from a public inquiry, and the report out of that, are not always ones the government is comfortable with, but Canadians have confidence in that process. There are guardrails used in the past that ensure the process is carried out with integrity and that the selection of the individual charged with executing that inquiry.... That's one of paramount importance, and it's why we've called for the government to consult with opposition parties on that.

I'll leave it there, Madam Chair.

• (1715)

It might be helpful for us to get you, or perhaps the clerk, to read back the placing of my subamendment. I appreciate that I offered it verbally without having cobbled it onto the amendment that was there. If it has been circulated for everyone's understanding, that's great. I don't have anything further to add on it. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

It has been received and it has been circulated. The addition of the words are after the words “opposition leaders”, for anyone who hasn't seen it.

Check your inboxes. You should have it with you.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have nothing to say, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

In that case, Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: We are at that point, Madam Chair. At the end of the day, we will ask what we want, with all the points that have been made, and I will not list them because we have been here for months. It makes perfect sense to hear from Mr. Johnston, since he has just tabled his report and we have questions, and a public inquiry needs to be launched, as it has been voted. Obviously, as long as there is an independent public inquiry, what more can we do?

The noose has been tightened to the maximum, and that has to stop. As some might say, enough is enough. We have to vote and be consistent with everything in our possession. Otherwise, what would be the argument against our experts, our constituents and the House of Commons? I would like to hear what my colleagues have to say. I think we can do a quick round and vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*English*]

Seeing no hands, I will call the question on the subamendment by Mr. Barrett.

(Subamendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We will go back to the amendment of Mr. Fergus as amended.

Mrs. Roberts, I see that your hand is up.

• (1720)

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you.

I didn't get a chance to vote. My name wasn't called.

The Chair: The members who are signed in currently were the four members who were called.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Fergus's amendment as amended.

Seeing no hands, I am going to call the question.

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

The Chair: Now we will move to the main motion as amended.

I have next Mr. Fergus and then Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I no longer want to speak, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

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

I have a brief amendment. I move:

[*English*]

that paragraph (b) be deleted.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Mr. Berthold, do you want to clarify that?

Mr. Luc Berthold: It will be simple, Madam Chair. I am a little tired of the NDP's attempt to help the Liberals get through this in such a disgraceful way. We saw Mr. Johnston defending the Prime Minister, and now we see the NDP defending the Liberals. The motion is clear and asks that a position be reiterated to the House that the NDP has already taken on a number of occasions. The NDP has reiterated several times today in the media that the opposition parties need to come together to call for an independent public inquiry within a specific time frame. I do not know for how many minutes the Liberals and the NDP have been trying to water down the motion and reduce its impact. I think this is at the expense of transparency and Canadian democracy.

As we mentioned, we would prefer to hear from Mr. Johnston first for three hours, as soon as possible. That way, we will be able to get answers about what led him to recommend that the leaders of each party keep this information private, secret, and the reasons that would justify this secrecy to Canadians. I think the intent is clear. The committee must first hear from Mr. Johnston. Then, in the coming weeks, we will have other opportunities to reiterate our support or not before the House, depending on the NDP's desire to have an independent public inquiry into the Beijing regime's interference in our elections.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to comment because I felt a little concerned by my Conservative colleague's last comments. While my colleague is saying that we do not want an independent public inquiry, he is proposing to delete paragraph (b) of the motion, in which we reiterate our call for an independent public inquiry. That is a square circle, a contradiction within a contradiction. It is quite funny.

On the contrary, the NDP has added something important to the debate, namely the fact that, after this important meeting, the party leaders will have had access to confidential documents and will be able to express themselves, just as Mr. Johnston and the Prime Minister were able to do. This puts the leader of the Conservative Party, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the NDP on an equal footing with the Prime Minister and the special rapporteur, enabling them to have access to really important sensitive documents. Then they will be able to speak up and take action, in the same way as the special rapporteur and the Prime Minister. This is a step forward and a step in the right direction.

The NDP believes that this golden opportunity should not be blocked by a prerequisite that, in our opinion, was abusive, whereas, in the first sentence of paragraph (b), we reiterate that the committee wants to tell the House that we still want an independent public inquiry. It would be rather contradictory for the Conservative Party to want to delete a paragraph that reiterates our desire for an independent public inquiry.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

Seeing no further debate, we will move to a vote on Mr. Berthold's amendment.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

[*English*]

The Chair: We're now on the main motion as amended.

Is there any debate?

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, four hours into the meeting, I am a little tired and I am getting a little lost in all this.

Could the clerk read the main motion as amended or distribute it to all members?

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to need a few minutes to get that all together, so we're going to suspend for a few minutes to get that to everybody.

Thanks.

• (1730)

(Pause)

• (1743)

• (1740)

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, you had asked us for the status of where we're at. Did you want the floor back or are you good with that?

He's good.

Seeing no other hands, I'm going to ask the clerk to call the vote.

Monsieur Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I just want to make sure that I have the floor back for a few minutes after the vote.

The Chair: You are not the only person who asked to have the floor back; someone asked before you.

Mr. Luc Berthold: That's perfect.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado, you're letting Mr. Berthold know that you told me that.... I will honour the conversation, but I need to call the question. That's how I can get to you after the question.

The clerk will call the question on Mr. Barrett's motion as amended a couple of times over.

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

The Chair: I have Mrs. Romanado, followed by Mr. Berthold.

• (1745)

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6, nays 5)

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

I move that this meeting now adjourn.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. See you Tuesday.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

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

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

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

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

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