



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 128

Tuesday, November 5, 2024

Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon



Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 128 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I would like to remind participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on September 19, 2024, the committee resumes its study of Russian interference and disinformation campaigns in Canada.

I would now like to welcome our witness today, Ms. Lauren Chen.

Welcome, Ms. Chen.

I will inform the committee members that the witness is accompanied today by her legal counsel, Mr. David Anber, currently online via Zoom.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice states:

Witnesses appearing before a committee may be assisted by counsel, but they must first seek the committee's permission. Counsel, when permitted [by committee members], is restricted to an advisory role and may neither ask questions nor reply on the witness's behalf.

Therefore, I would like to request the committee's permission for legal counsel to attend the meeting, without the opportunity to intervene or speak on the witness's behalf.

Is the committee in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I would also like to specify that the testimony of our witness is protected by parliamentary privilege.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice states the following:

Witnesses appearing before committees enjoy the same freedom of speech and protection from arrest and molestation as do Members of Parliament.

I now invite Ms. Chen to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please go ahead, Ms. Chen.

Ms. Lauren Chen (As an Individual): Seeing as how my lawyer will not be able to speak, we do request that this opening statement, which we have also submitted in writing, be filed as an exhibit to speak for itself.

The Chair: Is the committee in agreement with this?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Very well.

Go ahead.

Ms. Lauren Chen: I'll read it here.

Honourable members of the committee and Clerk of the Committee Larouche, I am here today as required by the summons delivered to me. My understanding is that you wish to ask me questions about a subject you are studying with a view of making recommendations as part of your legislative role. My understanding is that the subject you are studying is Russian interference and disinformation campaigns in Canada.

In principle, I have no issue testifying before your committee. However, as you know, Canada and the United States are democratic countries that value civil rights. One right that is particularly important is the presumption of innocence and its companion right to remain silent. Both Canada and the United States strongly value the right to be free from self-incrimination.

Presently, I am a target of a criminal investigation in the case of the United States v. Kalashnikov, 24 CR519, Southern District of New York 2024. As such, I am entitled to certain protections given to me under the fifth amendment of the United States Constitution, which provides that I cannot be forced to potentially incriminate myself while testifying under oath.

After consulting with counsel in both Canada and the United States, I have concluded, on their advice, that answering questions from this committee could reasonably provide a "link in the chain" toward a possible indictment against me with respect to the above-mentioned or related proceedings.

I recognize that the difficulty is that the fifth amendment of the United States Constitution does not apply in Canada. I am aware that I have no right to “plead the fifth” before this committee. I’ve been advised, and I do believe, that one policy reason behind Canada’s lack of protection similar to the American fifth amendment is that Canada has a different form of protection located within section 13 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which provides that if I testify in proceedings, I have the right not to have any incriminating evidence so given to be used to incriminate me in other proceedings subject to exceptions that would not apply here. Just as the American protection against self-incrimination is not formally recognized in Canada, however, section 13 of the charter is not formally recognized in the United States, so it would not be of assistance to me should I accede to answering any questions.

Accordingly, it is with the above considerations in mind that I must indicate that I will not answer any questions posed to me once I appear before this committee. I note in taking this position that section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects me in situations where section 13 does not apply where life, liberty or security interests are at stake. Considering the investigation taking place in respect of Kalashnikov, I verily believe that my refusal to answer questions is lawful and protected under section 7 of the charter.

I also assert respectfully that in the relatively unique circumstances in which I find myself, section 2(d) of the Canadian Bill of Rights, SC 1960, c. 44, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Canada is a signatory, protect my refusal to testify.

Please note that my refusal is contingent solely on my legitimate concerns about possible self-incrimination. Once the investigation has been completed and it is determined that there may be no future proceedings taken against me in respect of that or related matters, I wish this honourable committee to be aware that I would be willing to reattend before it and answer all questions on such a future date.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will start our first round with Ms. Dancho for six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Chen, for being with us today.

We all note that you did not necessarily come willingly. You were summoned. I appreciate your opening testimony, but you outlined to this committee that you won’t be answering any of our questions. It’s quite frustrating for us, as committee members, to have a witness here for two hours who refuses to answer any questions.

Of course, you’ve been called here, as you outlined, with respect to the Russian disinformation study we’re currently engaged in, notably because of your involvement in an indictment from the Department of Justice in the United States. I’ve gone through this indictment at length, and I’m deeply concerned about any involvement you and your company Tenet Media have had.

I have a number of questions for you. I hope that you will answer some of them and service the Canadian institutions you’re here for. I remind you that this is a committee of Parliament. We are members of Parliament at this table. You’ve been rightfully summoned, and it is your obligation—as is my belief and that of our committee—that you should answer these questions. That is the duty you have to the Canadian institutions and that is why you are here today. We all work hard to serve this committee. This is the public safety and national security committee of Canada. I’d urge you to reconsider answering our questions. This is a very serious matter you are allegedly engaged in, according to this indictment. Again, I’d ask that you respectfully engage in a dialogue with us today and answer our questions.

There are a number of issues in here that I’d like to go over with you.

Of course, first and foremost, I’d like to ask you this: Were you directly receiving payments from Russia Today to proliferate propaganda from the Russian government to your North American audience?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons outlined in my opening statement, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Ms. Chen, again, I’d ask you to reconsider. The allegations in this indictment are very serious, and your reach is quite far.

I’ll ask you about another issue.

Are you aware that Canada imposed special economic measures against Russia Today in 2022?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I will not be answering the question.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Are you aware that further sanctions were imposed on Russia Today’s parent company in 2023, for example? Are you aware that the Russian state-owned media company, its parent company and the head of the international department of Russia Today are also sanctioned by the Canadian government?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: All right.

Ms. Chen, did you ever receive payment from Russia Today for services rendered, prior to the war in Ukraine?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: The indictment outlines that you wrote 25 opinion articles for Russia Today.

Can you confirm that?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: This indictment, Ms. Chen, is quite serious, in that it alleges that you misled commentators about your company Tenet Media being paid by Russian agents, in essence.

Can you comment on that?

• (1115)

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You can understand that the public safety and national security committee of Canada is incredibly concerned if there's a Canadian citizen, such as yourself, receiving \$10 million, according to the indictment, and falsely misleading commentators on your platform about where that money is coming from, when the purpose of that commentary was to propagate Russian government positions that deliberately undermine the west.

Do you have any concerns about the moral authority of that?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, this is obviously quite frustrating. Ms. Chen has been called in front of this committee. The allegations are incredibly serious: that she took \$10 million for her company from Russian agents and withheld the source of that funding from the commentators she hired for Tenet Media, with the purpose of proliferating Russian propaganda. As we know very well on this committee, Russia is an adversary to Canada that is looking to deliberately undermine this country and to see Canada weaken and fail.

I take great personal and moral issue with the idea that a fellow Canadian, Ms. Chen, would take large amounts of money to undermine the Canadian interest. Do you?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Ms. Chen, do you have anything else you wish to say to this committee about these allegations?

Ms. Lauren Chen: As previously mentioned, for the reasons outlined in my opening statement, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Ms. Chen, I'll underline again that this is a committee of the Parliament of Canada. These institutions are incredibly old, ancient, and protect our democracy. You've been summoned here today to answer questions about an incredibly important issue, to say the least. In fact, this committee has identified, over a number of months and years, that Russian misinformation and disinformation present incredible threats to the west. The purpose of that propaganda is to sow division in this country and to undermine our own interests—to say nothing about the Ukrainian individuals who fled the war in Ukraine and came to Canada for safety. There are thousands of them in Manitoba. Spreading Russian propaganda in Canada—and withholding that it was, in fact, Russian propaganda—has had an impact on those individuals and Canada at large.

Do you have any comment about the impact of the information Tenet Media shared on Ukrainian Canadians, and on Ukrainians who have fled Ukraine and come to Canada? Do you have any thoughts about how your alleged efforts have impacted those individuals?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, I think I'm out of time.

Again, I'd just like to register that Ms. Chen, unfortunately, I feel, is making a farce of this committee, and it's deeply disappointing.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We'll go now to Ms. Damoff for six minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to echo Ms. Dancho's frustration at the lack of response to the questions thus far in the committee. There are lots of issues that parties in the House of Commons disagree on. On this one, as parliamentarians, as representatives of this country... I'm deeply disturbed that a witness would come before this committee—having been summoned, which is quite rare to have to do in order to get a witness to appear—and then would refuse to answer questions. These are questions that are extremely important to Canadians. We are the public safety and national security committee, and as you know, we're studying Russian disinformation.

I will tell you that when we had Facebook here and found out that your posts continue to live on social media platforms like Rumble, and then as a result on Facebook, so that the disinformation funded by the Russian government can continue to infiltrate Canadians, it was extremely disturbing. It's frustrating to see you sitting here today in front of us and not answering our questions.

I'm going to try this myself.

Have you been contacted by Canadian or American law enforcement about your role in the Russian-run Tenet Media operations, given the U.S. indictment?

Ms. Lauren Chen: As I explained in my opening statement, I have no comment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Did you portray Eduard Grigoriann, a fictional Brussels-born businessman, as the private investor behind the funding that would allow “Commentator-1” and “Commentator-2”, who are listed in the indictment, “to produce videos, using [their own] names and leveraging their existing audiences, for license and publication” by your company?

• (1120)

Ms. Lauren Chen: As I explained in my opening statement, I have no comment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm echoing Ms. Dancho's frustration at this lack of recognition of Parliament and of the parliamentarians sitting around this table, representing Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The indictment says, “After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, RT was sanctioned, dropped by distributors, and ultimately forced to cease formal operations in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. In response, RT created, in the words of its editor-in-chief, an 'entire empire of covert projects' designed to shape public opinion in 'Western audiences.'”

Why did you choose to be part of one of these covert projects?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Are you aware that your talking points parrot the Russian government's disinformation campaigns?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'll emphasize that these are talking points meant to undermine western democracies.

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm going to share my time with Ms. O'Connell.

I'll pass it over to you, Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Chair, given the lack of response, I move that the committee ask that the witness be compelled to respond to our questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is it the will of the committee to agree that the witness must answer the questions?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, I'm unfamiliar with this. Perhaps the clerk or others can outline in further detail what powers we have to do that.

The Chair: My understanding is that in order for this matter to be reported to the House and for the witness to be brought before the bar of the chamber, the committee must demand a response, an answer to the questions. If she fails, then we have an option to take it back to the House for further action.

If you'd like, we could suspend for a couple of minutes and have a conversation.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I just want to be clear that it's the avenue we're pursuing. That's understood.

The Chair: Yes. Okay.

Is it the will of the committee that the witness be compelled to answer the questions?

I see agreement among the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will continue with Ms. O'Connell.

You have one minute left.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'll give my time back to Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Chen, I want to ask you what advice you provided to the Russians about what content would most likely be successful in

deepening divisions and inflaming tensions in both American and Canadian society.

Ms. Lauren Chen: As I explained in my opening statement, at this time, I have no comment. However, following the closure of the American investigation into this issue, I would be willing to come back to testify before this committee.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You're still refusing to answer our questions.

Ms. Lauren Chen: As I mentioned in my opening statement, at this time, I have no comments.

Ms. Pam Damoff: How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair: You're over the time, but we also took time out for the vote, so I think you could go for another 30 seconds.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Ms. Chen, do you have concerns that the content you created, which was funded by Russia through RT, continues to be available to Canadians on social media?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: This is incredibly frustrating, Chair, especially given the motion we just passed. It's not often we get unanimity around this table, and we certainly have it right now.

I'll send it back to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

[*Translation*]

We'll now give the floor to Ms. Michaud for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, it is quite worrisome to see the state of affairs in which we find ourselves today. This is the first time I've been in a situation like this, where a witness agrees to appear before a House of Commons committee but refuses to answer questions from parliamentarians, even though we've sent an invitation several times and we've just passed a motion unanimously to compel this witness to answer questions. I saw what happened in the last few minutes with my colleagues, who were asking very good questions.

This is an extremely serious and important issue. We decided to study the issue of Russian disinformation in Canada, and Ms. Chen's name was one of the first names appearing on the motion because of what happened. I understand that Ms. Chen may be less comfortable answering questions about the case at hand. I will therefore start with a fairly simple question.

Madam, can you confirm that your name is Lauren Chen?

• (1125)

[English]

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Could you tell me your citizenship? I understand that you are Canadian, but that you live in the United States. Can you confirm your citizenship?

[English]

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I won't continue like this for several minutes, Mr. Chair, because I think it's uncomfortable for everyone. I'm going to give the witness one last chance to explain to us the sequence of events that led to the opening of this investigation against her, from the beginning.

Madam, if you can explain to us what led to this investigation by the United States against you, I would appreciate it.

[English]

Ms. Lauren Chen: As I have explained in my opening statement, at this time, I have no comment.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Chair, given the circumstances, I will give you back the time I have left. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

We'll go now to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Chen, at Tenet Media, when you and your husband were operating the company, can you describe to the committee what kind of internal processes you had to verify the information you received and published? Did you abide by any standard journalistic practices or code of ethics? Is that something you can tell this committee about? Did you have an internal document that you used to guide your operations and those of your employees?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Ms. Chen, did you have any internal processes with respect to the financial controls of your company? What kinds of measures or protections did you have in place, with a chief financial officer or with legal counsel, to verify that any funding that you did receive or contracts for services...? How did you verify that the people paying you were legitimate and did not have ulterior motives at play?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Ms. Chen, are you aware that one of Russia's overarching objectives right now, and for several years, has been to sow discontent and distrust in Canadian society?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do you have any personal feelings that your company was aiding in objectives that were planned, plotted and executed in the Kremlin?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Ms. Chen, in your opening statement, you referenced the fears that you have with respect to being liable in United States criminal proceedings. Are you aware of parliamentary privilege and the protection that extends to witnesses who appear before a committee?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Ms. Chen, are you aware that where you find yourself right now, before a parliamentary committee of the House of Commons, of the Parliament of Canada...? Are you aware of how serious this situation is for you right now?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given in my opening statement, I have no comment at this time.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Ms. Chen, are you aware that this committee can take further actions and that you could perhaps find yourself before the bar of the House of Commons, not before a committee but before the entire chamber itself? Are you aware that this could escalate for you if you remain uncooperative?

• (1130)

Ms. Lauren Chen: As I have explained in my opening statement, I have no comment at this time.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Chair, I think it's quite obvious that we have an uncooperative witness. For such important subject matter, I think Canadians can see that the witness is committed to remaining obstructive and is not going to co-operate with this committee.

I'll cede my time back to you, but I think that this committee, as a whole, has to start considering the next steps of referring this to the House of Commons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll go to Mr. Motz for five minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will echo the comments of my colleagues around this table with regard to not only the frustration but also the seriousness with which we are meeting today to discuss an issue that has impact on our democracy. The allegations that a Canadian would further foreign hostile state actors to destabilize our democracy is troubling, to say the least.

Further to some of my colleagues' questions, I have a couple for you as well, Ms. Chen.

Your title, whether it's self-titled or not, is "social media influencer". Who or what do you actually and exactly influence?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given in my opening statement concerning the ongoing investigation in the United States, where Canadian parliamentary privilege does not apply, I have no comment at this time.

Mr. Glen Motz: Ms. Chen, what factors influenced you to colude with the Russians?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Glen Motz: What was your end goal, Ms. Chen, in accepting money from Russia in exchange for your sharing disinformation with a Canadian and American audience?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment at this time.

Mr. Glen Motz: Do you believe that the goals of your handlers, Russian agents, were accomplished by the disinformation that you were able to get out? Do you believe that you reached and influenced enough to change Canadians' perceptions on Ukraine and on the conflict in general?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment at this time.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Chair, again, it's obvious that this witness, under a guise of self-protection, certainly is not concerned about the protection of Canada or Canadians.

I will cede my time back to the chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

We go now to Ms. O'Connell for five minutes, please.

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

Ms. Chen, following up on Ms. Dancho's questions, are you aware of sanction regimes in Canada and the United States?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Did you ever seek legal advice on sanction regimes and what the penalties might be for accepting money from a sanctioned entity?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: On February 16, 2022, you produced an op-ed in reference to a Russian war; however, the Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred on February 24, 2022. Did you receive speaking notes or those lines to produce that op-ed in advance of a Russian invasion in Ukraine?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: How much money did you or your company receive from Russia or Russian agents?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Were you aware that the money your company was receiving was from Russia or Russian agents?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Chair, I find it interesting. I didn't know who Ms. Chen was in advance of the U.S. indictment. These kinds of conspiracy theories-peddling accounts tend to be a dime a dozen. The really interesting factor, though, is who's paying for some of this disinformation.

The witness has actually attacked trans kids, the 2SLGBT community, women and men who stand up for women's equality. She suggested they're on their periods and should eat a tub of ice cream. She doesn't seem to care about the ramifications of comments like this posted on the Internet, or attacking Ukrainians and Ukrainian sovereignty and basically saying whatever she feels like without consideration of implications to those people she attacks.

I find it quite interesting that now, as she has an opportunity to defend some of these comments, perhaps it's the single lady's cat that's got her tongue, because she seems to be very opinionated when it comes to views that she wants to spew, but not how she's making money on spreading those views and getting those likes.

I think it is pretty interesting that those who believe in freedom until they face consequences for their own actions refuse to take responsibility for those actions and for not recognizing laws that exist in Canada and the U.S. regarding sanctions. They think it's okay if an individual wants to make money off sanctioned entities, but then, when it comes time to answer for those things, they don't seem able to find words to speak. I find it incredibly disappointing, but I'm not surprised, if I'm being completely honest.

I'll give you, Ms. Chen, one last opportunity. How much money did you or your company receive from the Russian government, a Russian entity or a Russian-sanctioned entity to promote and spread the materials that you spread online?

• (1135)

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

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

I'll cede my time back.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since the witness refuses to answer our questions, I have no further questions for her.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We go now to Mr. MacGregor.

You have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In light of the witness's continued refusal to answer questions of a House of Commons standing committee, I believe it's time for me to move a motion that would authorize you, as our chair, to refer this back to the House of Commons, clearly indicating that we have a witness who is in contempt. Being in contempt of Parliament means that she is willfully obstructing our work into a very serious matter.

We've given her multiple opportunities. She was warned of the consequences that this could be escalated. Given that committees by themselves can't take action, I do believe that this is a matter that needs to be referred back to the House. We can ask the Speaker to take the appropriate actions with Ms. Chen's continued obstruction.

The Chair: All right.

Do you have a motion to move at this time?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm coming up with it orally.

I would move that this committee authorize the chair—

The Chair: Excuse me.

The clerk is sending a sample motion to the committee that you may consider.

We'll suspend briefly to consider that. We'll be back in five minutes.

• (1135) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1145)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Mr. MacGregor, I believe you have a motion you wish to move.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes.

Before I move that motion, Mr. Chair, I want to give Mr. Erskine-Smith a quick minute, because he has a question he wants to ask the witness. Then he has agreed to send it back to me, and I will move the motion.

The Chair: That's fair enough.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, go ahead, please. You have one minute.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thanks very much.

Ms. Chen, obviously, you aren't answering questions here.

I'll start with a very easy one: In your view, is Russia a foreign adversary to Canada?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment at this time.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: You've previously said, "I don't believe in democracy."

Is that still your view?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: My last question is this. Your brand of politics tends to label pretty near everyone who opposes your views as traitors. What would you call someone who accepts \$10 million from a foreign adversary to run a covert propaganda operation on behalf of that foreign adversary? What would you call that person?

Ms. Lauren Chen: For the reasons already given, I have no comment.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I will answer it, then. You would call that person a traitor.

I cede the floor.

The Chair: Mr. MacGregor, go ahead.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In light of the fact that Ms. Chen has been uncooperative and refuses to answer questions of this standing committee of the House of Commons, I move the following motion:

That the committee instruct the clerk and analysts to prepare a report to the House, which the Chair shall table forthwith, outlining the potential breach of privilege concerning Lauren Chen's refusal to answer questions of the committee.

The Chair: Is there any debate? I see none.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That is carried unanimously.

I believe Ms. Damoff has a motion.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

I had previously given a notice of motion on this study:

That the committee summon Liam Donovan and Lauren Southern to testify on their own for no less than two hours on their participation in Russian-backed interference and far-right disinformation campaigns intended to manipulate the Canadian public, and that they appear before Friday, November 29, 2024.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just as a comment, I think we can anticipate that there may be more of the same behaviour from anyone else coming forward, named by Ms. Damoff, so I would ask that in the event that happens, perhaps we should have something that we can work on in addition. If this committee is going to do this, if we wrap this up now.... I don't know if we're going to, but again, this is the public safety and national security committee of Canada. We've wasted now quite a while with someone who refuses to answer our questions. We have a number of studies that are on the verge of being complete.

I would just ask, Mr. Chair, that if we anticipate that more of this may occur, we have a plan B so that we can get to work and we're not wasting time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very well. Thank you.

Is there any other discussion on Ms. Damoff's motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That is carried unanimously. Thank you very much.

Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

I would like to move a motion:

That the committee summon Mayor Patrick Brown to testify alone for no less than two hours on the study of Indian interference and that he appears before Tuesday, December 10, 2024.

● (1150)

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm unclear on this. Was this motion provided with adequate notice?

It's not germane to the Russia topic. It's the India one. Is that correct, or am I misunderstanding that?

The Chair: We do have an ongoing discussion.

Is it the will of the committee to entertain the motion at this time?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'll ask for a recorded vote.

The Chair: We can have a recorded vote, yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I believe it would require unanimous consent to move a motion that is...unless you declare that it's in order, Mr. Chair. This motion is not related to the study that we're studying today. I think it would require unanimous consent to do that, because that's the proper way that this committee functions.

The Chair: The clerk advises me that you're correct. We do need unanimous consent for this.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm going to request unanimous consent and a recorded vote.

The Chair: We don't have unanimous consent, so I'll take that as notice of the motion.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's fair enough. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there any further business?

Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, I have a follow-up. Am I to take it that Mr. Brown has refused to attend, and that's why he's to be summoned? It's not clear. We weren't informed of that.

The Chair: He refused to attend the given meetings. I'm not sure whether there might be others. This way, once that motion is moved and if it passes, there will be another summons.

Is there any further business before us?

Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm not sure if we're done with Ms. Chen, but we can probably release her and discuss a few other matters. It's up to you. I would like to ask about the calendar and forthcoming meetings, the scheduling of that.

The Chair: Is it the will of the committee to release Ms. Chen?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Ms. Chen, you may withdraw, if you wish. You will no doubt hear from the House in due course.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I have a question about the upcoming meetings, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The next meeting is on Thursday. We have a meeting on Russia, I believe. Beyond that, after the constituency break, we're still working on those.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

May I ask for your consideration?

A few years back, we had quite a detailed calendar because we had so many things going on. I think it was helpful for planning, getting witnesses and understanding what we could be bringing if we had an extra hour. We can do the Bernardo study or the auto theft study. We've moved a few motions. The NDP has one about opioids, and we have one about the violence experienced by women and children. Notably, of course, there was the murder in broad daylight of the mother of young children in an Ottawa park.

Again, I think there are a number of things, so I'd appreciate even a draft calendar for us to look at, as we've done in the past. If you could consider that, Mr. Chair, we would appreciate it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Given that we've exhausted committee business, I move that we adjourn.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are adjourned.

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