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Chair: Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer



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• (1555)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

I will request the media to please stop recording. Thank you.

Welcome to meeting number 134 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I'd 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 hands 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.

The committee is resuming its study of electoral interference and criminal activities in Canada by agents of the Government of India, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on October 22, 2024.

I'd like to welcome our witness today. As an individual, we have Patrick Brown, mayor of Brampton, by video conference.

I will now invite Mr. Patrick Brown to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Mayor of Brampton, As an Individual): Thank you, Iqwinder.

I want to say, first of all, that I was invited previously to come before this committee, and I declined previously because my focus is not on revisiting the 2022 Conservative leadership race, but on my job as mayor of Brampton. It's a very busy job. I don't have an interest in revisiting partisan debates. My focus is on the progress of the city that I lead. Even today, we had a region of Peel budget meeting, so it is difficult to add new work to the schedule, but I respect the committee process. I respect the summons that was issued, and I'm here today to answer any questions you may have.

I don't believe I have a lot to add to this discussion, and frankly, part of my concern about participating was that.... I know how the committee process works in Ottawa. I was an MP for three terms and spent almost nine years in Ottawa. I know that at committee, every party has their own agenda. The Liberal Party will have an agenda. The Conservative Party will have an agenda. The NDP will have an agenda. The Bloc will have an agenda.

There is a commission on foreign intervention, the Hogue commission, and if I had been asked to testify there, I would have. My concern about being brought into a partisan environment is that it is not something I'm interested in engaging in. Municipal politics, municipal public service, is non-partisan. Right now, we have a productive working relationship with the Government of Canada, which is Liberal, and with the Government of Ontario, which is Conservative, and we have a lot of exciting projects that we're embarking upon, so I don't really want to get drawn into partisan debate.

At the same time, I understand that it's important to guard our democracy against foreign intervention, and if there is something that I can add today that would be helpful, I would be happy to answer questions. I've already made some comments in the media about why I felt there wasn't much I could add, but I'm here to answer your questions if needed.

• (1600)

The Chair: That's great. Thank you.

I note that you were an MP for several terms and you're very familiar with the rules of committee and Parliament. I would like to remind you that, while we did start a bit late because of votes, you are to remain in attendance until duly discharged, which is what the Notice Paper said as well.

We'll start with the first round of questions.

Ms. Dancho, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Mayor Brown, for being with us today.

As I'm sure you've seen, and certainly as your statement would confirm, there have been some wild allegations about the Conservative Party leadership race concerning your campaign and other things. I'd like to ask you, right off the top, whether you believe foreign interference influenced the final outcome of the 2022 Conservative leadership race.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I don't believe foreign intervention affected the final outcome of the Conservative leadership race. I believe that Pierre Poilievre was successful in that race because he signed 300,000-plus memberships. I don't believe acts of foreign intervention affected that result.

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

You alluded in your remarks here today, but also in your statement, to feeling that there's a bit of politicization going on at this committee concerning foreign interference and India. I would agree with that. This is quite a serious issue, of course. There are allegations, as you well know, that a foreign government allegedly conspired to murder Canadian citizens on Canadian soil. It's a very serious and devastating matter for those communities, and a serious affront to our sovereignty.

Now we have a situation where you have been called—and I would agree—for political reasons. Can you comment on them?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'd say first of all that I had many residents who were aghast, alarmed and scared when the RCMP had their press conference and released details about the extrajudicial killing in Surrey. It certainly is reason to investigate foreign intervention.

I think my commentary about Justice Hogue's commission and a parliamentary committee, to distinguish between one, which is in a non-partisan setting.... Committees, by their nature, as I remember from my time in Ottawa, very much have a partisan agenda about them. It's why when I was given the choice to attend, I said no, that I was going to focus on my job as mayor of Brampton.

Because a summons was issued, I'm aware of my legal obligations and I'm here to answer questions, but that was my apprehension. I don't want to be brought into a partisan debate on Parliament Hill.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Conservatives supported going forward with the study and supported your invitation, but what we did not support was politicizing this accountability tool at committee. I agree with a lot of what you've said, though I am quite concerned that this has politicized a very serious issue.

I know, Mayor Brown, that you represent a community that has many Sikh Canadians. You must have a good sense of the mood on the ground there. Can you enlighten the committee on what impact the past few months have had on them? We'd like to hear for the record—I think it would be useful for our committee—the impact that this has had.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think there is a concern in Brampton—and I'm sure that's the case in other big, diverse cities—about foreign intervention and their safety. Obviously I'm concerned about that. I want everyone to feel safe and secure in Canada. We've seen a level of genuine fear. It really was heightened with the incidents that happened in Surrey.

I would note that when that incident happened, that extrajudicial killing, members of the Sikh community came to our council and stated rather unequivocally that they felt it was an act of foreign intervention and that they had received a duty to warn—some of them—which was about their own safety. For that reason, we wrote a letter to Public Safety Canada at the time, asking for an investigation into whether there was foreign intervention. I think the suspicion confirmed by the public safety minister and by the RCMP many months later was one that our community was feeling very early on.

• (1605)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: We've heard that from witnesses in testimony as well. They've been sounding the alarm in the community

for many years. They have had duties to warn and have had no other supports, unfortunately. Again, I'm quite concerned about the impact that this has had on the community. I think we all are, frankly.

Regarding your presence here today, are you under the impression that...? You outlined it really well. The Justice Hogue commission is a very serious affair. The committee is now looking into this and it's supposed to be a serious matter, yet it seems the Liberals have politicized it. Do you feel that the Liberal government has perhaps failed to protect the Sikh community and others from foreign interference?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'm not going to wade into a partisan assessment. My goal in the public service municipally is to be non-partisan so that I can work with everyone in the best interests of Brampton.

What I would say is that I think governments at all levels of all partisan stripes could do more to address foreign intervention. I don't think it is a failure of one party or one level of government. I believe we can all do more to guard against foreign intervention and protect our residents.

I include the municipal government in that. We've had to take some steps recently to protect places of worship from conflict. I think we all need to learn from the news, from the incidents and from the revelations that have been presented before us, and we need to see what we can do to protect our residents.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Brown, I know that you're taking this matter very seriously, as well as the impact it has had on your community and Sikh Canadians across the country. The Conservatives are deeply concerned about the impact it has had and about the gross affront it has been to our national sovereignty. We feel that the federal government, the Liberal Party, has failed to prevent it, and that's on them.

Thank you, Mr. Brown.

I believe my time is up, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Damoff is next for six minutes.

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

Mayor Brown, thank you so much for joining us today. As a former municipal councillor, I hear you on municipal politics being non-partisan.

I want to start off by making clear that you were invited and summoned to the committee not because we think there was any wrongdoing whatsoever on your part, as was implied by the Conservative Party. We actually heard that you may have been a victim of foreign interference. That's why we felt it was important for you to be here today to share your testimony.

You may also be under an NDA with the Conservative Party. As you know from your many years as an MP, when you come to committee, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and are expected to tell the truth. I know I don't have to remind you of that, but I sincerely want to thank you for being with us here today.

In the statement you put out, you talked about the inquiry that's going on. You noted that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians cited India's alleged interference in a Conservative Party of Canada leadership race. I'm just wondering if you can speak to your understanding of that interference. Do you believe it was your campaign that was targeted?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'll share a few comments.

First of all, I'm not under any NDA that prohibits me from speaking. I certainly understand my obligations here today.

I believe a level of foreign intervention has been around for a long time. I don't believe that foreign intervention altered the outcome of the 2022 Conservative leadership race. If you look at past leadership races and the number of memberships sold to be successful, with this leadership race, the level of memberships sold was incomprehensible compared to any other time in modern history. I think that's what dictated the results, not foreign intervention.

● (1610)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm sorry. Mr. Brown, I hear you on it not impacting the outcome, but I think all of us would agree that if there was any kind of interference in the campaign whatsoever, we would all be troubled by it.

Do you think it was your campaign that was targeted?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think there's always going to be a level of foreign intervention in every political party, and I think it's fair to say that the Government of India states its opinions. There are a number of issues that I took a position on that the Government of India certainly wasn't a fan of, from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act to the farmers' protest to the vigil for Deep Sidhu, but I don't think any commentary offered by the Indian government affected the result.

Ms. Pam Damoff: How do you know, Mayor Brown, that they weren't fans of your activity?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I don't think India or its representatives are ever shy about making their positions clear. Not just during the Conservative leadership race but also in my time in public service, they have always been more than blunt in expressing their displeasure when positions are taken that are inconsistent with their national agenda. I don't think 2022 was different from the past instances. Just to illustrate that, I remember—

Ms. Pam Damoff: You were quite close to Prime Minister Modi at one time. Did the Indian government reach out to you during your leadership campaign with concerns about the positions you were taking?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I actually think it predates that.

Yes, I have visited India many times. I knew Prime Minister Modi when he was the chief minister of Gujarat. I was a fan of the economic agenda that he undertook in Gujarat.

I had challenges with India starting when the provincial legislature in Ontario recognized the 1984 genocide. As leader of the Conservative Party at that time provincially, I supported that motion. The consulate general and the Canada India Foundation expressed displeasure with that support, that recognition, of 1984. I would hear directly from the consulate general and the Canada India Foundation. They were upset with the position I took. For them to express a position was not new. There have been many other instances like that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: During the time of your leadership campaign, did anybody from the Indian government reach out to you?

Mr. Patrick Brown: No, not during the leadership campaign. I think the relationship by that point was already very strained.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you have a sense that any of your campaign workers were contacted or were being targeted by representatives of India in Canada?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I don't believe my campaign workers were contacted by agents of the Government of India.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have 15 seconds left. I think I'll leave it for my colleagues to finish up.

I thank you for being here and for sharing your testimony with us.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Brown. Welcome to the committee.

Ms. Damoff asked some questions I was curious about as well, so I'm going to continue with that line of questioning, if you don't mind.

When exactly did your leadership campaign start and end? Do you recall the dates or how long it was?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: The leadership race was in 2022. I think it formally began in March. Obviously, it concluded for me in early July.

I would note that Erin O'Toole losing his confidence vote within caucus is when you really saw some of the campaigning begin. I believe it was early in the year when he lost that confidence vote.

● (1615)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: You announced that you were going to run for the leadership in March 2022, if I understand correctly. You withdrew from the race in July 2022.

Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I believe my announcement was in March, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: If I understood your remarks correctly, you weren't in contact with representatives of the Indian government during your campaign.

Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I did not have any conversations with representatives of the Indian government during the leadership campaign.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I imagine you still had meetings and discussions with members of the Indian community in Brampton or elsewhere in Canada.

Would I be right about that?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: Absolutely. We had a robust membership campaign across the country, and those who have ancestry and heritage in India were very much a part of that membership drive.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: At no time did any of them talk to you about the Indian government's interests or wishes?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: On a campaign, you hear a lot that is hearsay. I am not going to repeat hearsay before a parliamentary committee, but you have thousands of conversations and I would say you hear a lot from the community.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Did you encounter situations where members of the Indian community criticized your position on policy issues concerning Canada?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: Certainly, I heard criticism about some of the positions I had taken.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Were those criticisms in support of the Indian government's position? Was it more trivial?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I would say the criticism I was hearing from members of the community related to positions I had taken. At the time, it was on the heels of a very large farmers' protest in India, and Brampton city council was one of the first voices in Canada to support it. We had a widely publicized vigil for Deep Sidhu, who was one of the heroes of the farmers' protests I attended that caused—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you.

I don't want to cut you off, but you know how committees work. We don't get a lot of time.

Do you know what percentage of Brampton's population is of Indian heritage?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think the community that has its ancestry in India is quite large in Brampton. It would be the largest segment of our population, as it is a growing segment of the population in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: If I were to say 25%, would I be wrong or close to the right number?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I would say the assessments are probably underestimated. I don't think we have an accurate gauge on the population of the city of Brampton in any recent census. I hear the public census numbers are 700,000, but we have some estimates over 900,000, and that's largely due to immigration from India. The numbers could be much larger than you suggested.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Do you have an idea of the percentage of the population that is from the Sikh community?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: There are large populations from India in Brampton, but the largest community in Brampton from India would be those of Sikh background.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I would think the problem or division between the Sikh community and the Indian community in India is something you encounter on a daily basis. You must hear about it a lot in Brampton. Don't you?

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I don't like to hear about it. I try to bring harmony to those issues and bridge those divisions. Certainly, last month, I heard a lot about it. We had some tensions. They emerge from time to time in Brampton. We have to deal with tensions between communities.

I would say that by and large, the vast majority of the Sikh and Hindu communities get along, but there are incidents that damage the sense of unity.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I'm out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Brown.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. MacGregor, go ahead for six minutes.

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

Mayor Brown, I'd like to echo the comments of my colleagues and thank you for being here with us today.

I appreciate your comment that you sincerely believe the results of the leadership race were not affected by foreign interference. I think our committee's main concern is the inference that the attempt was even made in the first place.

As you know, there was a reference in the NSICOP report. We also know CBC/Radio-Canada spoke to five anonymous sources from your campaign who individually and separately provided specific examples of how the Indian government was pressuring members of your campaign to not sell memberships, to make sure you weren't invited to specific events. Now, I've never been in a leadership campaign myself, but I have been through three elections. Generally, staff try to insulate the candidate from the inner workings of a campaign office, but if something is going wrong, as a candidate you can always kind of sense it.

We have allegations from five anonymous sources who were part of your leadership campaign, and they have provided specific examples. As a candidate, could you ever corroborate them? Were you ever aware there was an undercurrent of inappropriate pressure being applied by agents of the Indian government?

Mr. Patrick Brown: If you want to ask me about any aspects of that article, I could do my best to answer honestly.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay.

What about the pressure to not sell memberships? Can you comment on that?

Mr. Patrick Brown: A lot of what I heard was indirect, and I don't think it's fair to repeat hearsay, but in some limited examples I would hear directly that it was.... I'm not sure you would use the words "foreign intervention"; it would be more.... Right now, as to the whole discussion of what is appropriate and inappropriate for a consul general, I think that assessment is still being determined. One example would be the consul general saying, "Did you see what your friend did? He was at Deep Sidhu's vigil. How can you explain that?" It would be more about posing questions to highlight why they did not support the positions I had taken.

I will note, given the case of the Deep Sidhu vigil, that I attend every vigil in my city that occurs at city hall. When there is grief and grieving in the community, I try to share in that sorrow.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Your campaign was ultimately disqualified before you had the ability to get to a vote to be on the ballot as a candidate. Would you have any reason to believe the Indian government was in any way involved with the disqualification?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I have no evidence to that effect.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Michelle Rempel Garner, who is a current serving member of Parliament, was the co-chair of your campaign. Is that correct?

Mr. Patrick Brown: That's correct.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do you know, or are you able to inform this committee, why she suddenly departed?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I read in a CBC article that she departed because of foreign intervention. I don't believe that was the case. When I spoke to Michelle directly, she was very clear with me that

she was departing to run for the provincial leadership to replace Jason Kenney. At no time when we talked about her departing the campaign did she ever say it was because of pressure from the consul general.

I think this is rooted from much earlier, not when she left, but it would have been.... This is a long time ago. This is 2022. I'm swamped with work and events, so I don't remember the exact dates correctly, but we had a conference call that would have been four, five or six weeks prior to that. There was concern from MP Rempel Garner about some of the language I was using at the doors and in the membership drives. There was concern from, I believe, the consulate general directly to the MP that I used the words "Sikh nation", so we had a conference call on how to deal with that concern instead of using—

• (1625)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm sorry to cut you off, but time is short, as you are very well aware.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I understand.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mayor Brown, you're a leader in your community, obviously. If the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the representatives of the federal government were to offer you the clearance necessary to receive a briefing, as a leader in your community would you take it to better serve your community and be better aware of the potential threats that might be posed there?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Well, I do get an annual briefing from CSIS. They offer that to big city mayors. I have taken those briefings.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Above and beyond that, I mean the clearance necessary to take a deep dive.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I would accept that clearance and would welcome any additional information.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will move on to the second round.

Mr. Lloyd, you have five minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mayor Brown, for being here today.

I think the statement you gave before this committee and again today really speaks for itself, but I want confirmation. Given the partisan nature of this committee, do you believe the Justice Hogue commission, which has access to all the confidential information available, is really the appropriate forum to be dealing with the kinds of questions we might have here today?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I would certainly agree with that.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You stated in your written statement that was sent out that you have not been contacted by Justice Hogue or the commission. Does that continue to be the case to this day?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Yes. I have not been contacted by the commission.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Given that Justice Hogue and the commission have access to all of these top secret confidential documents, they know what the NSICOP report said and they didn't deem it necessary to invite you to the commission, seek your feedback or even summon you, as in the case of your committee, do you think you have any evidence that you feel will advance our study?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think that's a question you would have to ask the commissioner—why they didn't ask for my testimony—but as I said, I don't believe I have any personal evidence to add and nothing new that's not already in the public domain.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'll give you an open-ended question, Mayor Brown. You understand the purpose of this. You were a parliamentarian for many years in the past. You know what committees are here to do if they're putting together a study and recommendations. Given your experience, is there anything you would like to provide this committee, any feedback?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think that looking at ways to safeguard our democracy is important. There is foreign interference that occurs. I would say that it's not limited to India, but India is obviously a very high topic because of the extrajudicial killing in Surrey. For a lot of countries, the ability to have a working relationship with a consular office is important. If you want to go back home and you need a visa, having a productive relationship is important.

I look at other instances, such as Sri Lanka. We're building a Tamil genocide memorial in Brampton, and we've been recipients of active intervention, opposition, obstruction and protests coordinated by the Sri Lanka High Commission. There's an example where we believe that our democratic efforts, adopted by the entire council, were being challenged and subverted by a foreign government.

I don't think it's limited to India, but I do think diasporic communities are struggling with some of the activity of foreign consular offices. I was reading a newspaper article recently that said an educational session was done in Ottawa recently with foreign diplomats on what is appropriate, what is inappropriate and what crosses the line. I think that's healthy. Maybe some of those standards can be set by this committee to help clarify what veers into the political and what veers into intimidation of the community in Canada.

• (1630)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I really appreciate that good feedback, Mayor Brown.

I think I only have a little time left, so I'll note you mentioned that there have been significant tensions in your community in the wake of the allegations of the extrajudicial killing. We know that these tensions are in diverse communities across Canada. What do you think the federal government can do to try to reduce those tensions and bring harmony to our communities?

Mr. Patrick Brown: What the Government of Canada can do is make sure that every community knows they're safe in Canada and

that if there is intimidation or violence against any faith group, we're not going to stand for it in this country. If there's any intelligence that says the safety of any individuals or any leaders of any community is at threat, they need to be protected.

The fact that we saw the killing in Surrey is a failure of public safety in Canada. He was not protected. I know individuals in Peel who have also been given a duty to warn. That's alarming. I hope steps are being taken by the RCMP, Public Safety and CSIS to make sure that individuals are protected in this country.

The reminder is to double down on those efforts to make sure that those in Canada are safe from foreign intimidation, harassment or violence.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: In my last second or two, Mayor Brown, can you tell me if you believe that foreign intervention actors have felt emboldened over the past few years under the Liberal government to take actions in Canada?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I would hope that in the last year, it's the opposite. I would hope that because the activities were exposed, they're not emboldened.

I don't get intelligence shared by the Government of Canada, but I know that on a local level with the Peel police, given that it's been brought into the open, there's a level of relief by some that it's no longer done behind the curtain. For some of the people who had real fears, it's more in the public now.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. O'Connell for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mayor Brown, for attending.

I want to follow up on something you said that I found quite interesting. You said that you were involved in a conference call where MP Rempel Garner—and this was in answer to Mr. MacGregor's question—raised the concern, which also came from the consul general, that they were not comfortable with you using the term “Sikh nation”.

Are you suggesting, or is it your understanding from that call, that someone spoke to MP Rempel Garner and raised the consul general's concern about the language you used during the campaign?

Mr. Patrick Brown: First of all, I don't believe that's the reason she left the campaign, but I believe that's what the article—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm sorry. I didn't ask that. I asked about the details of the conference call and your answer to Mr. MacGregor about being informed by your campaign team that there were concerns from the consul general, raised by MP Rempel Garner, about not using the term “Sikh nation”.

Can you please confirm that this is what was discussed on your conference call?

Mr. Patrick Brown: That is correct. Do you want me to expand further?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Sure. Can you tell me the details of who asked MP Rempel Garner to raise the subject of the language you were using?

Mr. Patrick Brown: The concern raised was that I had used the term “Sikh nation” on a number of occasions. The consul general had expressed directly to MP Rempel Garner that it was something they didn't agree with and that it could be viewed in nationalistic terms towards the Sikh community.

On the conference call, I had a deputy national campaign manager, Jaskaran Sandhu, whom we assigned to talk to Michelle about it after the conference call. What was agreed upon was that I wouldn't use the words “Sikh nation”; I'd use the words “Sikh *kaum*”—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm sorry. I have limited time.

Do you think it's appropriate for a foreign government to send a message to a sitting MP that you should be changing language because it's not welcomed by that foreign nation? Do you think that's an appropriate election activity by a foreign government?

Do you regret accepting the advice to change your language not based on your campaign or constituent feedback, but because the consul general asked MP Rempel Garner to tell you they did not appreciate that language? Do you think that's acceptable in a Canadian election race?

• (1635)

Mr. Patrick Brown: I didn't get the chance to finish what I was saying before.

What we changed it to was “Sikh *kaum*”, which is the Punjabi word for nation. It was—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, but my question was whether you think it's appropriate for a foreign government to ask a sitting MP to speak as a co-chair on a leadership race and raise objections to your campaign not based on constituents' opinions, but on a foreign government's opinion.

I think that pretty clearly constitutes foreign interference. The outcome of foreign interference doesn't matter; it's about the intention of a foreign government influencing actions in Canadian elections.

Do you think that was an appropriate action for a foreign government to take in a Canadian election?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I certainly think that consuls general in India have been more robust in their opinions than some of us would be comfortable with.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you. I'm glad you acknowledge that it's not something you're comfortable with.

You mentioned earlier that the Indian government, through the consul general, expressed displeasure previously with your positions on things. How specifically did they express displeasure? Did they, as articles are reporting, suggest that they were going to speak to volunteers about not signing up voters for you? Did they uninvite

you from attending events? Did they suggest that they would provide funds and campaign support to other campaigns? How exactly did they show displeasure?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I've never had a direct threat like that from the Indian government. It's never been something as direct as saying they're going to raise funds for someone else or tell people to not sign up memberships.

On previous occasions when there were positions I took that the Government of India didn't support, I heard directly from the consul general that—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Don't you think, as an elected member, the only feedback you should be hearing is from the people who actually elected you?

Mr. Patrick Brown: The greatest determination for me is what is in the best interests of my residents. I do what is in their best interests and fight for what is in their best interests.

It is not unusual in Canada to have consuls general from multiple nations who are very vocal in their advocacy.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell. We'll come back to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you may go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to continue along the same lines, Mr. Brown.

Did anyone else on your team relay messages to you that came from the Indian government or consul general?

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: That would probably be the only example of when we had a discussion about a concern directly from the consul general. Concerns that were raised with me were more policy-based and on positions that I had taken.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: What other interactions did you have? Do you have any examples in mind?

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I have a long history with India, as I chaired the parliamentary association for nine years. In terms of more recent examples, when they passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in India, which I thought was discriminatory toward Muslims, I responded to a press inquiry and said I didn't support it. That obviously left organizations that represented India in Canada upset. They relayed that to me directly. The consul general at the time relayed to me directly that they believed my position on the CAA was wrong.

Other instances that I gave recently were the farmers' protests and, of course, the glorification of Deep Sidhu in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: You're saying it was more recent. Do you know the date, month or time period when it happened?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: The Citizenship (Amendment) Act was, I believe, from 2019 or 2020. I think the farmers' protest was probably in 2020 or 2021. I don't have the exact dates in front of me. The Deep Sidhu vigil, when his memory was celebrated, was, I believe, in January 2022.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: On your end, you never felt uncomfortable with those interactions.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: Having dealt with the Indian government on a number of issues for a long time, I'm used to them being aggressive in stating their position. That doesn't mean you change your own position.

Certainly, when it came to the recognition of 1984, I did not change my position. I didn't change my position in regard to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or the farmers' protest. However, I'm used to the Government of India and their organizations in Canada being very clear about what they think of those issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

I'm already out of time.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

Mayor Brown, in our last exchange, I asked you—because of the leadership position you hold in your community—whether you were ever offered a specialized briefing on foreign interference by the federal government or CSIS officials, and if you would take that.

If you had won the leadership race and found yourself in the House of Commons as the leader of the Conservative Party, would you still hold the same view that, given the grave nature and threat of foreign interference in Canada, it is incumbent upon you to receive briefings so you can be best equipped to help out in any way you can?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Well, I don't think it's helpful to get into hypotheticals. One of my concerns about coming before a parliamentary committee is that every question has a partisan tinge. I know there have been concerns expressed about Mr. Poilievre not accepting the security briefing or clearance you are speaking about. I don't want to be part of any contrast. I will just say that I think everyone benefits from as much information as possible.

As you can tell, I'm trying not to be drawn into partisan debates, because my focus is 100% on the people of Brampton.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I understand that. I think we'll just leave your answer as it is. I respect that.

I'll end with this, since I only have a minute left. You are very well aware of the threats posed currently in Canada, specifically by the Government of India. We certainly have other foreign adversaries doing their utmost to foment dissension and unrest in Canada and to interfere in any way they can.

Maybe I will give you another opportunity.

As the mayor of a very large urban centre with a high population of racialized Canadians, what is your hope regarding recommendations you'd like to see this committee make to the federal government? We want to look for more opportunities to collaborate at all political levels to make sure we have a united front in confronting this very real threat to Canada.

• (1640)

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think it's fair to say that diaspora communities in Canada are concerned. What is the consequence of foreign intervention? What is the consequence if a consul general crosses the line or goes into the grey? In the examples of extrajudicial killings and of disputes, in an extreme case, you see a diplomat removed from Canada, but what safeguards are there for instances that may be less definitive?

I think there needs to be clarity in what is appropriate conduct in Canada and what isn't. There's a lot of foreign intervention in the grey. It would be helpful for my residents and many Canadians if what is not tolerated in Canada were made clearer.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Motz, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mayor Brown, for being here.

I just want to follow up on the line of questioning that my colleague Mr. Lloyd asked you about Commissioner Hogue.

As you are aware, the commission was set up—and all parties agreed to this—to investigate foreign interference in our democracy. You indicated in that line of questioning that, in your opinion, the commission is the appropriate forum to deal with this issue. You also stated that you have not been contacted by Justice Hogue.

As Mr. Lloyd was asking his questions, I wanted clarification. Justice Hogue has access to all unredacted documents from CSIS with regard to this matter of foreign interference. Do you believe that the commission would have made contact with you if there had been any evidence from any source, any intelligence whatsoever, that your campaign or the campaign of any Conservative 2022 leadership candidate was involved with or was being impacted by foreign interference?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think that's a question best posed to Justice Hogue, but if I had been asked to attend, that would have been the appropriate forum to attend and I would have attended.

However, as I've said publicly before, I don't believe that I have any new information to add to this discussion and investigation that isn't already in the public domain.

Mr. Glen Motz: I want to get into, the political end for you civically.

As has been indicated, Brampton has grown dramatically over the last decade or more, and what I've been struck by is that you are not immune to violence there. On November 3, some demonstrations occurred at both a Hindu temple and a Sikh temple, and the City of Brampton was forced, in my opinion, to approve a bylaw prohibiting these nuisance demonstrations anywhere near places of worship. Now, I appreciate that this is not the first occurrence that happened there, but what precipitated the City of Brampton to pursue this sort of approach?

Mr. Patrick Brown: The goal of this bylaw was to make sure there was a right and wrong place to protest. My goal in introducing that bylaw was to say that places of worship should be safe spaces and that whether you go to a gurdwara, a mandir, a church, a synagogue or a mosque, everyone should be able to pray free of violence, intimidation and harassment. I know we have a constitutionally protected right to protest in this country, but we also have a charter-protected right to religious freedom, and I think too often that right is trampled on.

There's legitimate protest, and if you want to protest the Government of India, you can protest the Government of India. If you want to protest the Government of Russia and want to protest the Government of China, you have that right. I just don't want to see anyone on their way to prayer circumvented in their efforts to do so.

In our bylaw, I thought we took the right balance; we protected the right to prayer, but if a place of worship has a banquet hall and there's a foreign government rally in that banquet hall, that would not be protected. It wouldn't restrict the right to protest. It is the basic religious freedom that is protected.

• (1645)

Mr. Glen Motz: That's fair enough.

I know you don't want to become political or partisan in your responses, but I find it troubling when a city has to provide its own civic ordinances to try to deal with something that should be handled through federal legislation.

I appreciate that the City of Brampton felt that it was necessary to protect the residents of Brampton. Do you believe these protests have anything to do with and link back to Indian foreign interference?

Mr. Patrick Brown: The tensions have been heightened ever since the RCMP revelations about the nature of the extrajudicial killing, so a lot of the protests are linked to.... Often you'll hear organizers of the protests say that in their opposition, they're not protesting the Hindu community; they're protesting the Indian government, and there have been responsive protests where they've protested at a gurdwara. What I found is that it simply got out of control and we needed better guidelines. Protesting a foreign government is a legitimate protest, but these counterprotests and protests against each other in front of places of worship created an

environment, an ecosystem, that was ripe for ugly behaviour. Unfortunately, that's what we saw.

I'll go back to what I said before on the incidents where there was violence. There were very few examples, and they had bad actors who have since been charged. Hopefully they face the full consequences of the law. Ninety-nine per cent of those in each community are kind and respectful of our laws.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Mayor.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gerretsen, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here today, Mr. Brown.

I don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to be precise, and I would request that you do the same in your responses.

Before coming to this meeting today, did you receive any contact from Pierre Poilievre's office, or any of his staff or anybody who might be associated with him in regard to your appearance?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I did not speak to Pierre Poilievre or any of his staff.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's in preparation for today's meeting.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Yes, in preparation for today's meeting.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: My second question gets to the CBC. Five individuals who were high up in your campaign specifically said that Ms. Rempel Garner was contacted by foreign diplomats and encouraged not to participate in your campaign. Are you telling this committee that you're unaware of that?

Mr. Patrick Brown: The nature of the conversation—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Give just a yes or no, Mr. Brown. Were you aware that any of them contacted her, asking her to withdraw from your campaign?

Mr. Patrick Brown: No, not to withdraw from my campaign.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Then you are claiming the allegation made by these five individuals is false. That's a yes or no.

Mr. Patrick Brown: You're asking me to assume that those five people made that allegation. I'm not sure they did.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Well, if you don't trust the CBC—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: The CBC says that they did.

My question is very direct. Five individuals came forward who were part of your campaign—in senior positions in your campaign—and said that Michelle Rempel Garner, who was one of your co-chairs, was asked by a foreign diplomat to withdraw her support from your campaign. You're saying that you're unaware of that.

Mr. Patrick Brown: No, I don't believe she was asked to withdraw her support. I think it was about the language I used.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We have established by what you've said here today that MP Rempel Garner was in contact with a foreign consulate, the Indian consulate, and that she did relay that information to you. Do you believe personally—your own belief—that she was contacted by the consul and asked not to participate in your campaign?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I don't believe she was asked not to participate in my campaign. I think she was the recipient of an angry phone call over the language I was using.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You don't believe what those five individuals in your campaign said.

• (1650)

Mr. Patrick Brown: Well, I think you would have to speak to those individuals yourself, because that's not something I have heard. I—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We've established that she was in contact with the consul general. You've already said that. You said that she even relayed information to you from them, yet we're to assume that it's unlikely she was also contacted and asked not to participate in your campaign, even to the extent that there was a conference call she participated in where she said the same thing. Is that correct?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Yes, it was never brought to my attention that she was asked to leave the campaign.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: What about your 2017 Ontario campaign? Why was Vikram Singh, in your opinion, disqualified?

Mr. Patrick Brown: He was a nomination contestant in Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas and was someone the Indian government obviously was not supportive of. He wasn't disqualified, though.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: In that nomination, I understand there was a settlement. You probably signed an NDA there as well. I would remind you that you're not subject to that NDA while here at committee and you are protected by privilege.

In your opinion, was there any reason to believe that Vikram Singh was disqualified based on a foreign diplomat or entity encouraging him to be disqualified?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I believe the Indian government is very vocal on candidates they believe are worthy of support and those who are not. Vikram Singh was not someone they supported.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: When you say “worthy of support”, do you believe they're worthy of support on Canadian soil?

Mr. Patrick Brown: That's correct. I don't—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay, and by your own admission, you already said that often these consuls general often act in an aggressive manner and they do not make you comfortable. I mean, if that's not foreign interference, then what is, Mr. Brown?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Well, I think you're paraphrasing.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm not. I'm actually quoting exactly what you said. You said they did not make you feel “comfortable”. You referred to their engagement with you as “aggressive”.

How is that not foreign interference?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think certainly some of their actions are in the grey.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

We will move on now to the third round. It will be Ms. Dancho, then the Liberals and then Monsieur Fortin.

Ms. Dancho, you have five minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Mr. Brown, thank you for your testimony so far today.

I know you represent quite a diverse community. To put into my own words what you've said today, you've expressed that there have been anxieties and concerns in that community.

If I'm thinking about foreign interference, I'm thinking about foreign governments intimidating Canadians. We seem to be seeing this from perhaps the Indian government. We're seeing this from the Chinese Communist government. Frankly, many governments seem to be intimidating various Canadians and various diaspora communities. Do you feel the federal government bears any responsibility for the level of interference we're seeing in various communities, including many in Brampton?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think that question has been posed in a similar manner already. My response is that I think we can all do more—locally, provincially and federally—to guard against foreign intervention and make sure Canadians feel safe in Canada and are not victims of intimidation or influence.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: What do you think the federal government could be doing, if anything?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Part of the starting point is a clear education for those who are serving as diplomatic representatives in Canada on behaviour that is appropriate and on behaviour that is inappropriate with the laws we have in Canada. Clearly, there are diplomats who need that education.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: As you well know, we've had a pretty serious situation with allegations that individuals in Canada were murdered in connection with a foreign government, notably India, and among the purposes of why you're here today is the conversation on India. Of course, we had the Prime Minister get up in the House of Commons in quite an unprecedented manner, call out the Indian government and make these allegations. A few months later, the situation seemed to escalate quite considerably when the RCMP provided duties to warn to various individuals. I believe almost a dozen individuals were told their lives were under threat from alleged connections to the Indian government, which was out to get them. We saw this happening in the United States as well.

Objectively, I think the federal government's actions failed to prevent a lot of this, given that it escalated after the Prime Minister took action in the House of Commons. Are you getting the sense that your community is feeling safer over the last few years or less safe?

• (1655)

Mr. Patrick Brown: Once again, I'm trying not to be drawn into the partisan debates that occur in Ottawa, but I would say there is a sentiment that residents are concerned. Diaspora communities are concerned.

I think it was helpful, though, that the information was put into the public domain. Sometimes you hear diaspora communities say they were targets of foreign intervention and felt helpless. They felt they were being treated as if their allegations were crazy. The fact that it's been brought into the mainstream is helpful. It's helpful that allegations were made public and legitimized.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: What are you hoping to see out of the Justice Hogue commission? Is there anything you think may be helpful for your community or others that are experiencing foreign interference and threats in Canada?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I know that a lot of the Justice Hogue commission work is done in camera. If there are examples of foreign intervention where foreign actors have subverted our democracy, intimidated Canadians or harassed Canadians, hopefully they're held accountable and we have safeguards put in place to prevent that type of action.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those are all the questions I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

I have Ms. O'Connell for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mayor Brown. I'll follow up on some of your testimony already.

You mentioned that MP Rempel Garner talked to you and relayed a message. In fact, it changed your campaign language. Your explanation, it's my understanding.... My Punjabi is not great, but I know that the change didn't mean Sikh "nation"; it meant Sikh "community", so the concerns raised did change the outcome of the messaging from your campaign.

You mentioned the "angry phone call" that Michelle Rempel Garner received. Did she express anything about that phone call other than just changing the language from Sikh "nation"?

Mr. Patrick Brown: When you're a candidate for leadership, being busy is an understatement. When incidents are brought up, you try to deal with them as swiftly as you can.

In that case, Harkirat Dada, a lawyer, and Jaskaran Sandhu were assigned to speak to—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm sorry. I'm limited on time.

I'm curious about the phone call. Was there anything else expressed in that angry phone call to MP Rempel Garner?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I was going to say that you should speak to Jaskaran or Harkirat about that. They were the ones who had to spend 45 minutes on the phone going over it.

Like you, I don't speak Punjabi, but it was explained to me by Jaskaran that both terms meant the same thing. We were not diminishing the sentiment of allyship that we were trying to share.

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

Earlier this week in the House, I asked the former caucus chair for your campaign, MP Seebach, about why in March he announced his support for your campaign, then—I believe it was in June—decided to support Pierre Poilievre. That's fine; that's his right, but I asked him why. He said he has been friends with you for over 20 years but that he didn't share your vision for Canada.

Did he ever tell you what part of your vision for Canada he didn't support?

Mr. Patrick Brown: That's a question you'd have to ask Kyle.

• (1700)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I did, but did he ever tell you that he no longer...? At one point, he shared your vision for this country. A few short months later, he said that he did not share your vision for the country.

I'm wondering if he ever told you why. In particular, was it anything about your position on things like going to some of these memorials, or other things that, as you said, were upsetting the Indian government? I'm curious as to what he told you.

Mr. Patrick Brown: He never shared that with me. That would be the quick answer.

One thing Kyle and I talked about a fair bit was my opposition to Bill 21. Being a former Brampton MP, Kyle was also close to some of the communities I work with.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: He never told you why he was leaving.

Mr. Patrick Brown: He never said it was because of any disagreement on vision, or any foreign lobbying.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: What he said to me in the House the other day about not sharing your vision is, I guess, unfortunately news to you after a 20-year friendship. That's sad, I think, but politics is challenging for friendships like that.

I want to get back to some of the other things that have been stated.

My colleague Mr. Gerretsen brought up the five anonymous individuals. It's fair enough that you may not know who they are, but there was a suggestion that you were on a specific conference call where issues were raised about India's displeasure with your campaign and about concerns over encouraging people to not sell memberships. Are you saying that you were never part of a conference call where these issues were discussed?

Mr. Patrick Brown: The conference call I was part of related to the use of the term "Sikh nation", not about selling memberships.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: You mentioned earlier to Mr. Gerretsen regarding the Ontario leadership campaign that the Indian government makes it very known when they don't feel a candidate is worthy. Did you become an unworthy candidate to the Indian government?

Mr. Patrick Brown: It wasn't the Ontario leadership in 2017. The Ontario leadership was in 2014 to 2015. I think what Mr. Gerretsen was referring to was a nomination campaign.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's fair enough. Did you become an unworthy candidate in the eyes of the Indian government in your federal leadership campaign?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think that's a question you'd have to ask the Indian government. I can't analyze their sentiments.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: In your opinion, though, as you said, your relationship was quite strained. How did you know this unless they expressed it to you?

Mr. Patrick Brown: They certainly didn't express it to me during the leadership campaign. From 2016 to 2022, there were a number of issues that caused friction. I've mentioned those issues already in my responses.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

In preparation—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell, but you're a bit over time.

[Translation]

As promised, I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Fortin for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Listening to you, Mr. Brown, I can tell that you have a pretty clear idea of what constitutes foreign interference. You drew a distinction between the right people across the country have to express their support or opposition in relation to issues. We are talking about freedom of expression. However, you said that hindering the activities of a temple was not acceptable. Ultimately, it's a form of interference.

At a certain point, you, as the mayor of Brampton, decided to provide funding for the challenge of Quebec's state secularism law, Bill 21. The bill stipulates that the state is secular, that it does not interfere in religious matters, and that all citizens are free to practise the religion of their choice as they see fit. You object to the law. That is your right, as you said, and I agree with you. You are entirely free to do that. However, you decided to wade into the debate and use City of Brampton money to help fund the challenge of a Quebec law.

Wouldn't you say that is a form of interference?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: The city of Brampton in the province of Ontario is not a foreign entity. This is a legal challenge occurring in Canada. The legal challenge that will go to the Supreme Court will set a precedent for all Canadians.

I still maintain my opposition to Bill 21.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: You maintain your opposition to the bill, and you say it's not foreign interference. With all due respect, Mr. Brown, I would point out that the City of Brampton is not in Quebec. I don't see how the City of Brampton is affected by what goes on in Quebec.

Am I wrong?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: It is very much a concern for the city of Brampton and all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: By the same token, the Indian government would be justified in intervening in the Conservative leadership race.

It's the same rationale, is it not?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think the comparison is preposterous. The notion that foreign intervention is the same as a legal challenge in Canada over the interpretation of the charter on religious freedom—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: To engage in foreign interference is to meddle in something that does not concern you. Therefore, if the Indian government tries to get you to change your position while you're a candidate in a federal leadership race, I would say the Indian government is meddling in something that does not concern it. It shouldn't be allowed to do that. Similarly, if a Quebec municipality wants to participate in a court challenge in Quebec, that's fine.

Conversely, if an Ontario municipality participates in a court challenge in Quebec, I see it as interference. If you can't see the difference, it makes me wonder whether you're able to do so when Indian authorities are involved. That worries me, but you tell me.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: A legal precedent in Canada affects us all. I don't ever want to have a case in Ontario where individuals lose their jobs based on wearing an article of faith. The fact that you can see—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: It applied only to Quebec, not to Ontario, Mr. Brown.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: It could set a legal precedent in Canada. If the Supreme Court decides to side with Quebec, that precedent affects all of us.

I think it was an atrocious decision that circumvents religious freedom in this country.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. MacGregor, you have five minutes.

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

Mayor Brown, just to recap, we have a reference to a Conservative leadership race in the NSICOP report. Are those five anonymous sources who claim to have been part of your leadership campaign talking about foreign interference?

After your involvement in the leadership campaign was over, did you ever receive a post-mortem briefing from CSIS officials in the months or years following your involvement in the leadership race?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I have not been briefed by CSIS on the 2022 Conservative leadership race.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: That's good to know. We have taken some legislative steps in the Parliament of Canada with Bill C-70, which will hopefully fix that problem for CSIS in the future.

That leads me to my next question.

I referenced the legislative changes we've put into place that bring the CSIS Act and the Foreign Interference and Security of Information Act up to speed to counter the threat. Looking back, is there anything you wish could have been done differently with these allegations? What kinds of safeguards would you like to see put in place to make sure that political parties and their internal mechanisms are not being affected by foreign interference?

Mr. Patrick Brown: You're asking me a question about how I think you could better safeguard our institutions. I think a starting point would be nominations—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I mean just political parties, specifically. Yes, institutions, but...

Mr. Patrick Brown: Yes, political parties and nominations. Nominations in many ridings in this country are where the MP is elected. I think there are a lot of ridings where the general election is not the real campaign; it's the nomination. Increasingly, in nominations, there are fewer candidates approved to run. Sometimes there's only one candidate approved to run.

If Elections Canada ran nominations, that would be an additional safeguard against foreign intervention.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you. I believe that's my time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Motz, you have five minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you very much, Chair.

I appreciate your testimony so far, Mayor Brown.

I have some commentary first. I find it really interesting watching the Liberals make themselves dizzy by chasing their own tails. They're trying to find something that doesn't exist, with no evidence to support whatever they're trying to find. Given the serious nature of foreign interference, it's perplexing that the Liberals would politicize this issue and single you out based purely on your political affiliation. I know you don't want to be partisan. You don't have to answer that unless you wish to do so.

There is something I have seen in the media, which you deal with every single day, and that is the crime going on in your city. I can't imagine the pressure and frustration you feel as a city council and as the mayor of that city.

Can you explain to us what you deal with with the gun violence happening there, as well as the auto thefts and the affordability crisis? You're sitting here being sidelined in the political game, it appears.

• (1710)

Mr. Patrick Brown: I was very critical of the response to auto thefts in this country, but I'm a fan of not just criticizing, but providing solutions. In terms of auto thefts, I was asking for scanners for shipping containers. We've now received the first two scanners, so I'm hopeful about that.

I'm going to try to work with any party and any government to get results for my residents. Auto thefts are finally going down and we've made some progress by working collaboratively there.

We still need to work on the bail system, which lets too many offenders out after committing auto theft, but we are making progress, and I'm hopeful for more progress.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you very much. That's all I have.

The Chair: Mr. Motz, you still have three minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz: Can I pass them on?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I could take them.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Mayor Brown, I want to give you the opportunity to highlight some of the primary issues of the Sikh diaspora community in Brampton. Can you outline some of those for this committee?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Today, we've spoken about one issue, which is the concern about foreign intervention and intimidation, but I think the concerns of Sikh Canadians are similar to the concerns of all Canadians. There are concerns about public safety, affordability and the cost of living.

I think the concerns that Canadians have in common are much more similar. Sometimes we can get lost in silos. What I find in Brampton is that there may be many different communities, but when it comes down to my job as mayor, they're probably all concerned with making sure we have enough police officers and that property taxes don't go up beyond the pace at which they can afford them.

Usually, their concerns, frustrations, hopes and aspirations are much more similar.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I also have the pleasure of representing many Sikh Canadians. They're some of the hardest-working, most generous people.

I have heard from them—maybe you've heard this as well—that they came to Canada for freedom and opportunity, and they figured that Canada would be safe and secure. I'm getting the sense in that community, from what they've told me, that they no longer feel that way because of the issue we're talking about, but also because of the public safety issues broadly.

Are you getting that sense as well?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Public safety is a big issue right now. It's why in Peel we're adding the most police officers we've ever added. There are many tools in the tool kit that need to be used to address this.

One issue that I think has alarmed Canadians of Indian ancestry is extortion. That's something we've struggled with. Since we set up our extortion task force, we've had in the Peel Region 70 extortion attempts. We've made 23 arrests. There is a concern that some of the extortion is linked to foreign criminal entities as well. I think that issue has alarmed and scared the communities in Vancouver, Surrey, Edmonton and Peel Region.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We'll move on to Mr. Gerretsen for five minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Brown, for being here today and talking with us and being candid.

One thing that's developed out of Parliament, perhaps since you were here, is that it seems a precedent has been set to invite people or summon people before the bar of the House of Commons for not telling the truth. It's always nice to have somebody here who's candid and who's willing to be honest and forthright.

The question I asked you when I started last time was about Pierre Poilievre or his office having any contact with you prior to today's meeting. What about the Conservative Party of Canada, anybody representing them or anybody relaying any messages to you? Was there any contact from anybody in preparation for today's meeting?

Mr. Patrick Brown: There were only two MPs I spoke to. I spoke to MP Doug Shipley, who is a personal friend, about a family matter. I also spoke to MP Iqwindar Gaheer, who is your chair, someone I have great respect for and a local Peel Region MP. In the case of both of them, it was more that—

• (1715)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes, and I'm super surprised that Mr. Shipley is not here today. He's a member of this committee, yet he didn't even want to be here present with us.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I don't believe that's in order.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: No, that's only in the House.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I don't believe that's in order.

The Chair: I corroborate what Ms. O'Connell just said. Having read the rules recently, I can say that it's a rule on the House floor, not in committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You stopped my time, I imagine.

Mr. Brown, let's go back to some of the comments that were made by senior officials in your campaign. One individual said, "Supporters from the Hindu community were being told that they were not allowed to sign up members for Patrick Brown by officials of the Indian consulates."

I know, as you've already told us, that you're unaware of that comment, but out of curiosity, would you consider that foreign interference if that had been the case? If that were proven, would you be concerned that your campaign was interfered with by a foreign government?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think that would certainly meet the threshold of being foreign interference.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You think it would meet the threshold. Is that right?

Mr. Patrick Brown: That's correct.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Would you say that the people you brought into your campaign were trustworthy people? Obviously, if they were in senior positions of your campaign, you would trust them.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think we had, yes, some great people involved in the campaign.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If it is true that these individuals were from your campaign, then there's no reason not to believe them.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Well, I think you'd have to speak to them directly. What I was trying to—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, that's not what I'm asking, Mr. Brown. I'm not asking you about speaking to them. I'm saying that you trust the people in your campaign. You think they're honourable people and if they say something, it should be believed. I think you've already made that clear. Is that correct?

Mr. Patrick Brown: It's fair to say that I think they're good, trustworthy people.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Something else that one of them said was, "It was also made clear to organizers of events that Indian consulates had told them you can't invite Patrick Brown to these diaspora kind of events where the consulate is going to be involved." Were you aware that you were not allowed to go to events when the consulate was involved?

Mr. Patrick Brown: There was one event mentioned in the CBC article, and I can share that I was disinvited to that event.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Let's pick up on that for a second, Mr. Brown. You are aware of this event, just as whoever this anonymous source was aware of the event. That must mean that these people were actually part of your campaign. I mean, how else could they have known about the event that you just said you knew about? I think it's reasonable to assume that the sources were close to and high up in your campaign. Would you not agree?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think in the case of that event, it was—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm sorry. Let me rephrase that.

You've made it very clear that you trusted the people in your campaign. They're aware of this issue, these anonymous sources. You're aware of the issue because you just admitted it to us here. Therefore, the individuals that are being cited as sources by the CBC must have been close to your campaign. Would you not agree with that? What other conclusion could you possibly draw?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think you'd have to ask those sources—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No. I'm asking you if you draw the same conclusion as me.

Mr. Patrick Brown: What I'd say is that I can answer any question about the incidents that were raised—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Think about it for a second. I'm drawing the conclusion that since you knew that you were disinvited and they knew that you were disinvited, obviously they had to be very close to your campaign. Therefore, I think it's safe to say that we can treat these anonymous sources as legitimate. I think this is a fairly easy assessment to conclude on. You must agree with that.

Mr. Patrick Brown: You're asking me to agree with the assumptions you're making.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes, I am.

Would you agree?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think in the case of that event, there is a level of accuracy there.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Ms. Dancho for five minutes. We're in the fourth round now.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mayor Brown, for being here and sitting through that last round of questions. I'm not going to apologize on behalf of the Liberals, but that was quite embarrassing.

I would say, Mr. Brown, that there are some serious allegations being lobbed at you here. Do you have any comments on how you feel about the seriousness of some of the questions that are coming? I feel they're kind of silly at this point, but it's over to you for your thoughts.

• (1720)

Mr. Patrick Brown: Well, I think sometimes it's difficult to answer a long preamble with a yes or no. Sometimes, with the nature of these questions, they're not a simple yes or no.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I want to go back again to some of the concerns you're hearing from your community. This is, as you know, a study on the alleged interference in Canada from India.

You have outlined quite a bit about how your community is feeling and the anxieties they're having over this. I'm hearing that as well.

You mentioned Peel Region in your last round with me. We know that the stats from police say that one woman is strangled every single day in Peel. Do you have any concerns—I'm sure you do, obviously—about the violence against women that you're seeing? How has your community reacted to this quite revolting statistic in Canada? In 2024, it's just unbelievable.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Yes, it's horrifying. We've declared a gender-based violence epidemic in Peel Region. The city of Brampton has as well. Councillor Rowena Santos and Councillor Navjit Brar have been quite outspoken in raising concerns about this epidemic we're struggling with.

I sit on the Peel Police Service Board and look at all the statistics. The one that I find most harrowing is that, as a society, we have not effectively dealt with the rise of this and it continues. When I started six years ago as mayor, I looked at the numbers for IPV—intimate partner violence—and I believe there were 7,000 calls a year. I think we're up to close to 20,000 now.

I don't think that's unique to Peel Region. We're seeing that across the country. There is an alarming rise in intimate partner violence, and we need to, as a society, find out how we can deal with this because the current approach isn't working.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Did you say 20,000 cases of intimate partner violence?

Mr. Patrick Brown: It's 20,000 calls.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Wow. I'm very sorry that's happening in your community.

I had heard some of the statistics of what we're seeing. As you may know, according to the data, Canada has seen a 75% increase in sexual assaults against women over the last nine years, a 120% increase in sexual violations against children, a 50% increase in violent crime and a 116% increase in gun crime. It sounds, unfortunately, that your community is not safe from this either.

This is the public safety and national security committee. Do you think the issue of intimate partner violence and the violence we're seeing against women and children generally would be worth studying?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Absolutely. We have some leaders in the Peel police who I believe would have a lot to offer if you had that study.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: We would very much like the opportunity to bring them here. In fact, I have made many efforts to bring forward that issue at the public safety committee. Of course I feel, as do my Conservative colleagues, that this epidemic is one of the most pressing issues that Canada is facing. Many municipalities—in fact, 94, including yours, and the entire province of Nova Scotia—have called intimate partner violence an epidemic. We are making every effort to bring forward that study here. Unfortunately, I think the Liberals would rather talk about the questions we saw in the last round with you, so I believe there are some misplaced priorities in that regard, but they can talk about whatever they wish. That is up to them.

Mr. Brown, just to conclude, I know you said you're a man of action. You want to take action and not play politics. Can you just outline in our last minute a few things for the committee that you think could be done to address intimate partner violence in addition to the things you've already said?

Mr. Patrick Brown: We need a greater capacity to respond in Canada. I think one thing that's not necessarily appreciated is that in many big cities, there are more 911 calls than there are officers able to respond. One thing I found alarming, from the Peel police union, is that intimate partner violence calls go unresponded to simply because there's no manpower—no human resources—to keep up with the volume of priority one calls. Each year, more priority one calls get pushed to the back burner and I find that alarming.

Knowing how stressed police resources are, what can we do to better equip police forces to deal with this growing volume? There are things the federal government can do. I look at the amount of work we deal with in terms of repeat offenders. That's an area where I think the Government of Canada could certainly help.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. O'Connell, you have five minutes.

• (1725)

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

Thank you, Mayor Brown.

It's not surprising that the Conservatives can't seem to come up with questions about foreign interference when it involves India. I have sat through many studies on foreign interference where they thought it was the most important issue. Now, however, when it involves India, they can't even fill speaking spots for it.

You confirmed today that a sitting MP, Michelle Rempel Garner, was contacted by the consul general of India about terminology around the Sikh nation. It was described as a 45-minute debrief during an angry phone call. That was expressed to you. Your campaign ultimately changed that language.

You mentioned that some of these interactions have been aggressive and have not made you comfortable. If, in fact, some of the allegations in the media reporting are true, you acknowledged they would have constituted foreign interference. Conservatives don't seem to be worried about that one bit. I think that's pretty telling in itself.

I'll get to a question for you, Mayor Brown, about something my colleague Mr. Gerretsen asked you. What specific event in your community were you invited to and then disinvited to, which you acknowledged was accurate?

Mr. Patrick Brown: It was for the Republic Day event they have in January each year.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: When were you informed that you were no longer welcome at that event?

Mr. Patrick Brown: It was probably a few days or a week before. It was in regard to, I think, disappointment over my attendance at the Deep Sidhu vigil.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Who told you that you were no longer invited as a result of you going to the vigil?

Mr. Patrick Brown: It was one of the members of the organization that ran the event.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Did they mention to you whether anyone had contacted them from the Indian consul general because of their displeasure over you attending that vigil?

Mr. Patrick Brown: No.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: It was the organization itself that uninvited you over attending a vigil in the community.

Mr. Patrick Brown: They never mentioned to me whether or not they received correspondence from the consul general's office.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Then it's not to say they didn't. They just never mentioned that to you.

Mr. Patrick Brown: That's correct.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Were there other events that you were uninvited to as a result of your positions that, also correlated to what you said, the Indian government did not appreciate?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'm sure there were some other events I wasn't invited to by organizations that do advocacy on behalf of the Indian government in Canada. I'm sure there are a few Canada India Foundation events that I—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Being disinvited is a big issue. You're a leadership candidate in a federal party. To be disinvited to something is quite significant.

Mr. Patrick Brown: No, there isn't another example of one, that I'm aware of, that I was disinvited from.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: In regard to your campaign structure, I would assume that, for most leadership campaigns and even nominations, the selling of memberships is a priority. You would have captains, I assume.

Did you have captains based in different community groups, diaspora communities and neighbourhoods? This is usually how it's done. Did you have any captains specifically selling memberships in diaspora communities? If so, what were they?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Absolutely. That's the nature of leadership and nomination campaigns, as you referenced. You have membership captains in different professions, cultural groups and faith groups, and in every province and city, so it's absolutely—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you. I'm running out of time.

Did it ever reach you, through your team, that any diaspora community captains said they were no longer comfortable.... It's just like the event you were uninvited to. Did anyone relay to you that there were captains who would no longer continue selling memberships for you?

Mr. Patrick Brown: A lot of what you hear would be hearsay, so I don't want to.... Unless I hear it directly, I don't want to—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's the nature of campaigns. I hear, “This volunteer wants our government or party to go this way.” That's the nature of how we work in this business and develop policy.

Did it ever come to you that a captain was no longer going to sell memberships for you?

• (1730)

Mr. Patrick Brown: It was only communicated to me directly when someone would say, “The consul general was upset over your position on this”, not that they weren't going to sell memberships. Anything additional would have been through hearsay.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Why did you connect the two—the consul general being upset when I asked about the selling of memberships?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I guess if the consul general is upset, it might diminish someone's enthusiasm if they have a good relationship with the consul general.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I see, so I misunderstood. Someone came to you and said that they were selling memberships and that the consul general was upset.

Mr. Patrick Brown: It was never in the context of selling memberships, but it would come back to me that I had taken positions the consul general was not happy with.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Was that with members of your campaign team?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Yes. It was with people who were supporting me.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Right. The consul general reached out to members supporting you and members of your campaign team and said they were upset. Don't you think that makes their position pretty clear? You don't have to say to someone, “I don't want you to support this candidate because of X, Y, and Z.” The implied threat is there when it's a person in a position of power like a consul general.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think you just made a statement. Was there a question there too?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Do you agree?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think relationships with consuls general are important for diaspora communities because of the ability to quickly access visas to visit their home countries.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Would the importance be the implied threat that, if a consul general is unhappy and upset, supporting a candidate who has made the Indian government upset could implicate or affect a visa application?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think that's something that some members of the community would be concerned about.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brown, Radio-Canada revealed that the Indian government asked people to stop supporting you, to not sell membership cards for you and to not invite you to certain events. Basically, it was trying to undermine your campaign.

Let's say all of that were true. Let's say Indian officials made sure that members of the Indian community or its supporters would not donate to your campaign, meaning you had less funding for your leadership bid. Would you call it foreign interference?

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: If that were the case, then certainly that would be foreign interference.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: All right.

Let's say there was some sort of agreement between foreign states—whether it's the Indian government, the Russian government or the U.S. government, whoever—to get them to ask their citizens in Canada to not donate to Patrick Brown's campaign. Would that also constitute foreign interference in your campaign?

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: If a foreign government is telling people not to donate to or support a campaign, that would meet the level of foreign intervention, but you're getting into hypotheticals.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Okay.

Conversely, let's say they encouraged everyone to donate to Patrick Brown's campaign so he could beat Mr. Poilievre in the leadership race. Would that constitute foreign interference?

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: A foreign government asking to donate to a campaign in Canada would be foreign interference.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: When you ask other mayors to contribute funding to the court challenge of Bill 21 in Quebec, which is not Ontario, by your own admission, aren't you interfering in a matter that doesn't concern you?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: It does concern me because we're in the same country. We're in the same legal system. Our precedents affect each other.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: What would you say if cities in Quebec decided to fund a Brampton citizen's challenge of your municipal bylaws?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: They could. We're in the same country, and if there's a precedent that we set in Brampton that you're concerned about—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: All right. Since we're in the same country, then, you are telling me that you would support Vancouver, Montreal, Quebec City, Trois-Rivières, Toronto or Winnipeg funding a group of Brampton residents so they could mount a court challenge of your bylaws.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I do hope that Bill 21 is overturned at the Supreme Court because I don't believe—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Sorry, Mr. Brown, I don't mean to be rude, but I've got only a few seconds left.

Would you agree with that, yes or no?

• (1735)

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: If you mean that Canadian laws affect us, then yes, the precedents set in Canada affect us, absolutely.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: That means you are inviting other mayors to fund challenges of bylaws in your city they think are bad. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: I just think everyone in Canada should support religious freedom and support our charter. There are parts of our charter that you don't support that—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I'm not talking about supporting the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but I think my time is up, anyways.

I have to tell you, your idea of foreign interference worries me a little.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: That's great. Thank you.

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

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

Mayor Brown, as someone who has had close relations with the South Asian community for quite a number of years now, you would be intimately familiar with the fact that none of this foreign interference is new for that community, specifically from the Government of India. It has been going on for decades. Would you agree?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You also have a unique experience, I think, which is pretty helpful to this committee. Not only have you had a long relationship with the South Asian community, but also, in your elected life specifically as a member of Parliament, as you mentioned, you've had involvement with the Canada-India group and have had relations with members of the Indian government.

With the knowledge you have, why do you think we've seen this recent escalation in the violent criminal acts happening on Canadian soil? Do you have any inkling as to what has happened on the ground in India that is lending itself to increased violence here on Canadian soil? Is there more extortion, more threats, more blackmail, etc.?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I would agree.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I wish we had an answer to that. It's alarming and has obviously damaged the relationship between Canada and India.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I know you're having important conversations with members of your community in Brampton about how we find ourselves out of this peacefully and how we repair relationships and make sure we build a solid foundation of trust, mutual respect and so on.

What do members of your community say to you about what the path forward is for the Government of Canada in its relations with India?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think there is a diversity of advice. The feedback I get is probably similar to the feedback you're getting in Ottawa. I would just say that if there are criminal actions taken on Canadian soil, they need to be taken seriously, and there need to be accountability and justice for those actions.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'll end by thanking you for your appearance at the committee today.

The Chair: That's great. Thank you.

Mr. Lloyd, you have five minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mayor Brown, picking up from a previous discussion, you said that you believe one of the ways we can counter foreign interference is by exposing it. You said that in the wake of this alleged extrajudicial killing, exposing it was an important way of deterring foreign interference. I think we all want to see that foreign interference doesn't happen in the first place in our country.

Do you have any recommendations for ways that Canada can project strength and build our respect in the world to the point that countries will be deterred from trying to interfere in our democracy and interfere through criminal acts in our country?

Mr. Patrick Brown: This is your domain in the Government of Canada, but I believe and would suggest that if there are criminal activities taking place at the behest of foreign entities, they need to be made an example of and prosecuted to the full extent of our laws. We can't allow Canadians to be victims of foreign interference, and in the case of what happened in Surrey, the fact that it happened on Canadian soil is unbelievable.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Does it shock you that the suspects in the Nijjar killing were out on bail for previous possession of weapons?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I've been a public and long-time critic of the bail system in Canada. I believe there are far too many loopholes and that it's a broken system. I'm not saying that today to be partisan; I've been saying that for a very long time. We started a campaign, "bail reform now", in Brampton based on the tragedy of the Henderson-Bellman incident, where someone lost her life after someone was released on bail on a fifth occasion.

• (1740)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I agree. It's absolutely a disgrace what we're seeing, with repeat violent offenders being given bail routinely to go out and recommit crimes.

Would you agree—and I think you did in your statement—that tied into this study on foreign interference is the need for a robust criminal justice system that not only captures violent repeat offenders and prevents them from committing crimes, but also keeps them behind bars, where they belong, while they await trial if they are deemed a serious threat to the community? These individuals, I believe, were a serious threat to the community. Would that be a form of deterrence for foreign governments seeking to use international gangs to commit extortion activities and commit murder in our country? If we had a stronger criminal justice system in this country, that would be a form of deterrence. Would you agree?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I would agree with that.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Specifically in terms of how we can strengthen our democracy, you made some very good recommendations. As Conservatives, we're here because we want to actually find solutions to foreign interference. I hear the Liberals, when asking questions, trying to score some points. I don't know exactly what they're trying to get at.

Mr. Brown, you said in your statement that you think you've been brought here for political reasons. I don't suspect you want to elaborate on what those reasons are, but I'll give you an opportunity.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'll go back to the original comment I made that the nature of parliamentary committees is partisan. You have a Liberal side; you have a Conservative side. You all prep for these meetings. You have, of course, the NDP and the Bloc. I thought a better forum for this was the Hogue commission. It's a non-partisan commission looking at foreign intervention.

My worry about being asked to come here was that I didn't want to answer questions that were partisan in nature, because my role as

mayor of Brampton is non-partisan. We have a good relationship with all of our federal MPs in Brampton and all of our MPPs. They come from different parties, and we pride ourselves on having good relationships.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mayor Brown, I really appreciate your professionalism in coming here. I know you didn't feel like you could bring any additional evidence to this committee, but being here today, even though you were summoned, has given me some reassurance that.... Your recommendations have been very spot on: strengthening our country's defences against foreign interference and cracking down on crime in our communities.

I know you're fighting for that in Brampton. I appreciated your advocacy on the auto theft file, an issue that is very close to my heart, and on things we've been talking about at this committee.

I want to thank you for your advocacy and your recommendations. I appreciate the feedback that I've heard from you at this committee meeting.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to our final questioner, Mr. Gerretsen, for five minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I want to extend the same gratitude. Mr. Brown, thank you for coming to this committee. I know from my time as mayor of Kingston—I was labelled a Liberal because of my connections to the Liberal Party—that you certainly have to do your best to be as non-partisan as possible. However, I never received in my time as mayor the accolades that you just did from a political party in a non-partisan fashion. In any event, thank you for being here.

I take issue with the comments made by Mr. Lloyd moments ago. The reality is that foreign interference is known to be in existence in Canada. Serious implications took place in your campaign, Mr. Brown. I think you and Canadians deserve to know exactly what happened.

Mr. Lloyd, Ms. Dancho and others suggest this is a big nothing-burger despite the fact that five individuals have come forward, essentially whistle-blowers. Now, suddenly, the Conservatives are saying, "There's nothing to see here. No need to pay attention to this. It was just a story by the CBC; don't worry about it." I think that's extremely disingenuous. This issue deserves attention. Mr. Brown, you deserve to know exactly what happened in your leadership campaign. I also believe that if individuals in your campaign were willing to come forward to share this information, it is extremely credible. We need to get to the bottom of exactly what happened in this case.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'm going to turn the remainder of my time over to Ms. O'Connell.

• (1745)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

With everything we've heard here today, I'm going to move the following motion:

That, in relation to its study of Indian interference, the committee invite the following witnesses:

1. The Honourable Michelle Rempel Garner, P.C., M.P., Calgary Nose Hill;
2. Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu;
3. Mr. Harkirat Singh.

I have it in both official languages if needed.

The Chair: The motion is moved. Do I see any hands?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Can I speak to it?

The Chair: You can speak to it, yes, and then I see Ms. Dancho.

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

Very quickly, the rationale behind it is that we heard very clearly here today Michelle Rempel Garner was, in fact, contacted by the Indian consulate, which was quite upset. According to testimony here today, the word “angry” was used about Mr. Brown's campaign and speeches with regard to using “Sikh nation” in some of his language, which was asked to be changed. In fact, they had a conference call. They discussed that. He mentioned a discussion about the displeasure of the Indian consulate and its expressing that to Michelle Rempel Garner.

I think it's important, since the allegation has been made that she received that phone call and then relayed that information, that she be given a chance to appear before this committee to explain her side of the phone call. As Mayor Brown rightly pointed out, he can't possibly know what was on the other end of that phone call, so we should go directly to the source who received it.

In addition to that, Mayor Brown mentioned two people, Mr. Sandhu and Mr. Singh, and one was at least his campaign co-chair. After MP Rempel Garner received this phone call, there was a 45-minute debrief on that “angry phone call” with those two individuals. Since Mayor Brown was not part of that 45-minute debrief, I think it's important that we bring these two individuals here as well.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I have a point of order. I mean no disrespect to Ms. O'Connell, but perhaps Mayor Brown could leave if he wishes.

The Chair: I think that's fair.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm fine with that.

The Chair: Mayor Brown, thank you for your testimony. You testified for almost two hours. We thank you.

You are formally discharged from the committee.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Thank you.

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

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

To summarize, Michelle Rempel Garner received a phone call. On that phone call were members of the Indian consulate or the consul general, who were displeased with Mr. Brown's leadership campaign. They were displeased with the language of “Sikh nation” being used. She relayed that message in a conference call, and there was a discussion about changing the language in his campaign. After the phone call received by MP Rempel Garner, there was a 45-minute debrief with Mr. Sandhu and Mr. Singh about the content of that call from the consul general to MP Rempel Garner.

Since Mayor Brown acknowledged that he was not part of that 45-minute debrief, I think it's entirely appropriate to find out from MP Rempel Garner what she recalls of that phone call, and then what Mr. Sandhu and Mr. Singh recall of that 45-minute debrief.

That's the rationale for this motion. I will ask for a recorded vote at the appropriate time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, I'd ask for a few minutes for us to review the motion. I just received it. I'd ask for a brief suspension.

The Chair: Yes, we can suspend.

• (1745) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1755)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Ms. Dancho, you have the floor.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I move to adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: There is a motion to adjourn the meeting. This is a dilatory motion, so we have to proceed to the vote immediately.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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