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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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● (1505)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 54 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) and at the request of six members of the committee to discuss expanding the scope of the current study on foreign election interference.

The clerk and I will maintain consolidated speaking lists of members wishing to address the committee.

Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Chair, I would like to bring forward a motion, and so at this time I will have it distributed in both official languages.

The Chair: That's excellent. Then we'll also get it online for members who are participating virtually. What I am going to do is suspend for a couple of minutes until it is passed around. Once I get signals that it is there, I'll pass the floor back to you, Mr. Cooper.

● (1500)

(Pause)

● (1510)

The Chair: My understanding is that we'll continue with our meeting, since everyone has received electronically the motion that Mr. Cooper is presenting. Can I just get a signal from our colleagues online?

That's perfect. Thank you so much.

Mr. Cooper, it's back to you.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, I will first read the motion into the record:

That, given the recent Globe and Mail reports written by Steven Chase and Robert Fife, which brought forward shocking revelations regarding Beijing's strategy to interfere and influence Canada's democratic institutions, the committee, for the purpose of addressing this significant threat to our democracy,

(a) extend its study of foreign election interference by as many meetings as required to investigate these reports and, to that end, schedule at least one meeting on February 23, 2023, and at least two meetings during the week of February 27, 2023;

(b) invite senior officials from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service; the Communications Security Establishment; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Elections Canada, including the commissioner of Canada Elections; the security and intelligence threats to elections, or SITE, task force; the critical election in-

cident public protocol, or CEIPP, panel; and the Privy Council Office, to testify on these reports;

(c) invite Katie Telford, chief of staff to the Prime Minister, to appear alone for a two-hour meeting;

(d) invite the Honourable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to return to testify on these reports;

(e) invite the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety;

(f) invite the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, to return to testify on these reports;

(g) invite Jody Thomas, national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister;

(h) invite the Honourable Marc Garneau, former minister of foreign affairs;

(i) invite the Honourable Bill Blair, former minister of public safety and emergency preparedness;

(j) invite Vincent Rigby, former national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister;

(k) invite David Morrison, former foreign and defence policy adviser to the Prime Minister;

(l) hear each of the foregoing witnesses in public; and

(m) order the production of all memoranda, briefing notes, emails, records of conversations, and any other relevant documents, including any drafts, which are in the possession of any government department or agency, including SITE, CEIPP, any minister's office, and the Prime Minister's office, containing information concerning efforts by or on behalf of foreign governments or other foreign state actors to interfere in the 2019 and 2021 general elections, including the documents which were quoted in the Globe and Mail reports, provided that

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

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

(iii) the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall make as few redactions to the documents as are necessary to protect the identities of employees or sources of Canadian or allied intelligence agencies and, as soon as reasonably possible, provide the redacted documents to the clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee.

Madam Chair, that is the motion.

I bring it forward to expand the scope of the study that this committee is undertaking with respect to foreign election interference in light of the shocking Globe and Mail report last week by Steven Chase and Robert Fife, which is reportedly based upon their review of CSIS documents that reveals a sophisticated strategy on the part of the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party, to interfere in the 2021 election.

• (1515)

The Globe and Mail report characterized the Chinese Communist Party's interference campaign in the 2021 election as "an orchestrated machine". The report from The Globe and Mail indicates that this sophisticated strategy, this "orchestrated machine" on the part of Beijing to interfere in the 2021 election, had two overriding objectives. The first was to see that the Liberal Party was re-elected with a minority government, and the second was to see that certain Conservative candidates deemed unfriendly to Beijing were defeated.

According to the Globe and Mail report, a CSIS report quoted an unnamed Chinese Communist Party consulate official as saying, "The Liberal Party...is becoming the only party that the PRC can support."

This campaign of interference reportedly involved the active participation and coordination of Chinese Communist Party diplomats in Canada, including Beijing's then consul general to Vancouver, Ms. Tong, along with another former consul general to Vancouver, Wang Jin.

According to The Globe and Mail, CSIS characterized the activities of Ms. Tong and Mr. Wang as being involved in efforts to discredit, to rally support for the Liberals and to target Conservative candidates and work to see those candidates defeated. It was also reported that Ms. Tong and Mr. Wang, among other methods, used CCP "proxies" to achieve those objectives. Ms. Tong reportedly even boasted in 2021 about how she helped defeat two Conservative members of Parliament, including an MP whom she described as "a vocal distracter" of the Chinese Communist Party.

The scope and sophistication of this reported campaign of interference is troubling in terms of the multi-dimensional approach that Beijing took, which involved such tactics as funnelling money to candidates through illegal "undeclared cash donations"; "having business owners hire international...students" on the basis that they were being hired to work for those businesses when in fact they were being illegally paid to work for election campaigns "on a full-time basis" for certain Liberal candidates; active "disinformation campaigns" specifically targeting Conservative candidates; and collusion between political campaigns and this Chinese Communist Party "foreign interference" network.

• (1520)

Let me repeat what is being reported and what happened: illegal cash donations, disinformation targeted against Conservative candidates, collusion with Liberal candidates, the widespread use of proxies to advance the Chinese Communist Party's objective of helping the Liberal Party, and working to defeat certain Conservative candidates—all coordinated and directed by Chinese Communist diplomats on Canadian soil.

If these reports are true—and there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of these reports from The Globe and Mail, which were reported by two well-known and widely respected journalists, Robert Fife and Steven Chase—this campaign of interference is not trivial. It is not a case of one or two bad actors—not that one or two bad actors is something to turn a blind eye to. If established, what this amounts to is an all-out assault on Canadian democracy by the Chi-

nese Communist regime in an effort that raises questions about the integrity of the election in 2021 in certain ridings targeted by Beijing.

This should alarm every Canadian, and it most certainly should alarm those who are entrusted with and have the responsibility to protect Canada's democratic institutions, including the Prime Minister and his ministers. More than alarm, it should have prompted immediate action on the part of the government, but that did not happen. More than 18 months after the 2021 election, there is no evidence that any action has been taken by the Liberal government. There have been no charges laid and no diplomats expelled.

The Conservative Party and Conservative candidates who were targeted by the Chinese Communist Party were not informed about this campaign of interference and that they were targets. Instead, they were kept in the dark, including by the government's election panel, the very panel that this government pats itself on the back for establishing. They were kept in the dark.

The government's election panel kept the Canadian public in the dark about this interference. Indeed, we would not have known about interference in the 2021 election but for the Canadian press, through access to information, having obtained reports that showed that the rapid response mechanism at Global Affairs had identified interference activities and a disinformation campaign, through proxies and through the use of social media platforms, targeting Conservative candidates, including then member of Parliament and now defeated member of Parliament, Kenny Chiu.

When it comes to the Prime Minister, I have to say that it's worse than inaction. Since Global News first reported back in November about a vast campaign of interference by Beijing in the 2019 election, involving at least 11 candidates, the Prime Minister has consistently failed to heed the advice that CSIS has provided him with respect to countering for interference, advice that the Prime Minister received, for example, in a CSIS memo dated January 21, 2021, which, according to the CBC, advised the Prime Minister as follows: "Canada can make use of a policy that is grounded in transparency and sunlight in order to highlight the point that foreign interference should be exposed to the public and clandestine practices are not equivalent to public diplomacy."

• (1525)

The Prime Minister has been anything but transparent. He has refused to answer basic questions about what he knows about Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections and when he first learned of that interference. He has deflected and engaged in political spin, using, among other things, carefully crafted language, such as saying that he was not briefed about candidates "receiving money from China", even though, based upon the briefing document that Global News reported on back in November, no one was alleging that candidates received money from China, as if Beijing just writes a big fat cheque to individual candidates. Rather, what was at issue—and what is at issue—is a reported vast campaign of interference in the 2019 election campaign and, now, a vast campaign of interference in the 2021 election campaign.

The Prime Minister, again using carefully crafted words, talked about how the last two elections were “not compromised”, as if to say that anyone is alleging that those elections were compromised. That's a very different question from what appears to have happened, which was interference targeting certain ridings and certain candidates. The fact that the overall result of an election was not compromised does not negate the fact that there are serious issues of interference that may have had an impact on the outcome of the election in certain ridings.

Canadians deserve to know why, in the face of this reported vast campaign of interference by Beijing, the Prime Minister and ministers in his government continue to obfuscate and downplay the seriousness of this interference and have failed to take any meaningful action to protect our democracy against this serious threat. It seems as if the Prime Minister is content to turn a blind eye to this interference because this interference benefited the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party.

In the face of the obstruction, the non-answers and the lack of transparency on the part of the Prime Minister, and in light of the very shocking new facts that have been reported about what happened in the 2021 election, it's important that this committee, in order to get to the bottom of election interference, expand the scope of its study. It's important that we call in responsible ministers so that they can be asked questions and be held accountable, and so Canadians can learn what Canadians deserve to know, which is about the scale and scope of Beijing's interference in the 2021 election campaign. It's also important to work to ensure that interference of the kind that has been reported—or any interference, for that matter—is not repeated in future elections.

• (1530)

I hope this committee will move forward to pass this motion so that we can, as expeditiously as possible, expand the scope of the study and hold hearings.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Just so we're all on the same page, I have Mr. Berthold, followed by Ms. O'Connell, who will be followed by Mr. Fergus. If there is anyone who wants to be added, just give me a signal.

Monsieur Berthold is next.

[Translation]

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

Esteemed colleagues, thank you for coming, even if, normally, on a week like this, we'd be working from our riding offices. I'm convinced that, like me, you already had a lot on your plate. Nonetheless, you agreed to allow the committee to hold an emergency meeting to discuss how to extend the scope of our current study on foreign election interference, specifically with regard to the 2021 general election.

Over the past few months, there have been some alarming reports in the media. In November 2022, Global News reported that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had been informed by Canadian in-

telligence services that the Chinese communist regime had led a vast campaign to influence the 2019 federal election.

That article stated that the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office had been informed that the regime in Beijing had targeted the election campaigns of 11 federal candidates. When the Prime Minister was questioned on this, as usual, he first tried to shift the focus to all the dictatorial regimes spreading misinformation in Canada. Next, he quoted sources who said that the integrity of our elections hadn't been compromised in 2019 or 2021. Then, he accused the Conservatives, denied having been informed, and went on to blame his ignorance on the non-partisan committee of senior officials responsible for deciding when information on foreign interference must be released.

That's been the Prime Minister's MO since November 2022, meaning since revelations on foreign interference were first made public by Global News and the red flags started to go up. In fact, those weren't the first red flags; just the first ones to clearly show that the Prime Minister had been made aware of the situation.

Despite mounting evidence, such as reports and documents from the Canadian Security Intelligence Agency confirming attempts by the Chinese communist regime to interfere in the Canadian democratic process, the Prime Minister of Canada said he knew nothing, except for trivial, unclassified things.

It's important to remember that the Prime Minister is accountable to voters for ensuring national security and, above all, the integrity of our democratic system. As he indicated, he regularly attends security briefings. However, there was no mention of digging deeper and getting more information. What worries us is that the Prime Minister doesn't seem to want to ask more questions. It's as if the Prime Minister didn't have access to sensitive information or, even worse, as if he wilfully turned a blind eye.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs did its job. We asked for documents, and we received hundreds of heavily redacted pages, such as those on the desks of my employees and the staff at this meeting. Despite the redaction, those documents unequivocally demonstrated that the allegations of interference were not only founded, but that transparency alone could've stopped the repeated attacks on our democracy. My colleague, Mr. Cooper, read an excerpt from those documents, which demonstrated that only light, openness and transparency would allow us to deal with foreign interference.

Ministers who testified before this committee said the same thing over and over: The integrity of the election wasn't compromised. However, when we asked how to tell whether an election had been compromised or not, it was more difficult for us to get an answer.

If a foreign regime, such as the Chinese communist regime, manages to change how even one Canadian votes, is that enough? In how many ridings must that interference change the outcome: one, two, three, 10, 20 or 30? We didn't get an answer to that very important question.

All the intelligence agencies told us that they investigated and submitted their reports to the appropriate officials, meaning to the committee of senior officials responsible for determining whether information on foreign interference should be made public or not.

We heard from a number of witnesses and talked to a number of candidates, but it seems that neither the public nor the candidates involved were told that they were the targets of a vast campaign of interference by the Chinese communist regime.

Despite all those red flags, all those clues, nothing was done to give a clear signal to the regime in Beijing that Canada wouldn't tolerate any interference in its democratic process. The ambassador wasn't summoned, no diplomats were expelled, no one was arrested and no legislation on identifying foreign agents was introduced. Absolutely nothing was done, despite all the reports and all the red flags.

● (1535)

It's as if Canada had sent the following message to foreign powers looking to interfere in our democracy: Come in, have no fear, because our eyes are shut tight. At least, that's the clear message being sent by Liberal politicians, and it seems to have been welcomed by the Chinese communist regime, which employed the same strategy with a vengeance in the 2021 federal election.

Which leads me to today's meeting. According to some troubling, shocking, and even worrisome revelations published in *The Globe and Mail*, not only did the Chinese communist regime persist in its attempts to interfere, but it refined those methods.

The article in question, published on February 17, 2023, stated that China employed a sophisticated strategy to disrupt Canada's democracy in the 2021 federal election campaign, as Chinese diplomats and their proxies backed the re-election of Justin Trudeau's Liberals, but only to another minority government, and worked to defeat Conservative politicians considered to be unfriendly to Beijing.

The full extent of Chinese interference operation is laid bare in both secret and top-secret CSIS documents viewed by *The Globe and Mail* that cover the period before and after the September 2021 election that returned the Liberals to power. The CSIS reports were shared among senior government officials and Canada's Five Eyes intelligence allies, namely the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Some of this intelligence was also shared with French and German spy services.

So we're meant to believe that information about this foreign interference operation was then shared with senior government officials, Five Eyes allies and other like-minded nations, but wasn't provided to the Prime Minister or cabinet? Canadians aren't fools. These are serious allegations.

The *Globe and Mail* article stated that the documents illustrate how an orchestrated machine was operating in Canada with two primary aims: to ensure that a minority Liberal government was returned in 2021, and that certain Conservative candidates identified by China were defeated. The documents say that the Chinese Communist Party leadership in Beijing was pressuring its consulates to create strategies to leverage politically active Chinese community members and associations within Canadian society. Beijing uses Canadian organizations to advocate on their behalf while obfuscating links to the People's Republic of China. The classified reports viewed by *The Globe and Mail* reveal that China's former consul general in Vancouver, Tong Xiaoling, boasted in 2021 about how

she personally helped defeat two Conservative MPs. The word "personally" doesn't appear in the article; I added it.

I'm going to focus on two or three very important points in the article. It stated that CSIS also explained how Chinese diplomats conduct foreign interference operations in support of political candidates and elected officials. Tactics include undeclared cash donations to political campaigns or having business owners hire international Chinese students and assign them to volunteer in electoral campaigns on a full-time basis. Sympathetic donors are also encouraged to provide campaign contributions to candidates favoured by China, donations for which they receive a tax credit from the federal government. A key part of their interference operation is to influence vulnerable Chinese immigrants in Canada. The intelligence reports quote an unnamed Chinese consulate official as saying it's easy to influence Chinese immigrants to agree with the PRC's stance.

Not only is it interference in our elections, but this is intimidation of residents and of Canadian citizens by a foreign communist regime. There's so much information in these revelations that the committee can't just sit idly by. We must extend our study to the 2021 federal election and, above all, go back, with a number of witnesses, to the start of the operation to understand why the lessons learned in 2019 didn't safeguard the 2021 election whatsoever.

● (1540)

Once again, this government did nothing and let a foreign regime try to influence election results in specific ridings because it didn't like certain candidates and their positions.

My colleague's motion contains some key points. In order to address this significant threat to our democracy, what we're asking and what the committee should ask is to extend our study on foreign election interference by as many meetings as required to investigate these reports, and to hold at least one meeting this week and two the following week, for starters.

We also want to invite senior officials from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Communications Security Establishment, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Elections Canada, including the Commissioner of Canada Elections, the security and intelligence threats to elections task force, the critical election incident public protocol panel and, of course, the Privy Council Office.

The critical election incident public protocol panel is the committee that I mentioned earlier. As this committee is well aware, it's the committee to which CSIS and RCMP experts report when they discover foreign interference. So those experts report to the critical incident public protocol panel, which must then determine whether it's in the public interest to advise targeted candidates or the public of a significant threat of foreign interference during an election.

It seems that none of the candidates were made aware of those quite troubling facts, reported in various newspaper articles since last November. However, it's important that the aforementioned individuals come tell us how high the bar is and when a candidate or a political party should be informed that a foreign country is disrupting an election to make them win or lose. Either way, it's not acceptable.

We're also asking that Katie Telford, Justin Trudeau's chief of staff, appear as a witness for two hours, because the Prime Minister has been claiming all along that he hadn't been informed or made aware. We learned, however, that the Prime Minister's Office did receive several reports. So we need to know who intercepted those reports, who didn't want the Prime Minister to know. We need to know whether it's true or not. We need to know what the Prime Minister knew and what he didn't know.

As I said earlier, ultimately, responsibility for our democracy in Canada rests on our Prime Minister, who was elected by all Canadians. It's our right to expect the Prime Minister to be responsible for ensuring the integrity of our democratic process. Consequently, we need to know what he knew and what he didn't know. If he didn't know, we need to know why. If he knew, we need to know why he wilfully turned a blind eye to the situation.

We also want Mélanie Joly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to return to testify before this committee. For obvious reasons, we want to invite Marco Mendicino, the Minister of Public Safety. We also want the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities to return to testify on these reports. For obvious reasons, we also want to invite Ms. Jody Thomas, national security and intelligence advisor to the Prime Minister.

We want the Hon. Marc Garneau, former minister of foreign affairs, to come tell us what happened when he was in office. He needs to tell us if he was informed, if he knew anything, if he told anyone, and whether he intended to do something or just planned to turn a blind eye. We want to invite the Hon. Bill Blair, former minister of public safety and emergency preparedness; Vincent Rigby, former national security and intelligence advisor to the Prime Minister; and David Morrison, former foreign and defence policy advisor to the Prime Minister. We want to hear from each of these individuals in public.

I won't read this part of the motion, but we want the committee to order the production of all the documents mentioned by my colleague in reaction to last Friday's revelations. This time, we want the documents to be deposited without redaction by the government, by the very institutions who drafted those documents. We want them to be deposited without exception with the parliamentary counsel, who shall determine what information can be made public or not.

I think that this is important. It makes no sense when people are asked to provide documents, but they're told that they're free to redact anything they want so they don't incriminate themselves.

● (1545)

We deserve transparency to ensure the future of our democracy. The Conservatives aren't the only ones saying that. We heard almost all the witnesses and all the intelligence agencies who testified here say so. They were all in agreement as to what we need to do: first and foremost, transparency is essential. We need all the facts, and we need to know what happened. We also need to send a message that we won't tolerate interference.

That's why these documents are crucial. The fate of our democratic system is at stake. If Canada can't send a clear message to the regime in Beijing that such interference is unacceptable, it'll happen again.

The lack of transparency by the Prime Minister and his apparent indifference to this scandal are helping to undermine Canadians' faith in democracy. As a result of his secrecy or his wilful blindness, the Prime Minister is lending credence to allegations that he turned a blind eye because the Liberals were the flavour of the day for the regime in Beijing. That's truly deplorable.

No matter which political party or candidate is targeted, not only must foreign interference be publicly denounced, but those responsible must also be prosecuted and even expelled from the country.

It's essential to understand what happened in order to find solutions. That is why we're here today, to determine how to get to the bottom of this situation and how to prevent it from happening again.

For those reasons, it's important to hear from all witnesses on the list we provided. I hope that all the parties will support this motion, so that we can get to the bottom of this situation and, above all, as I indicated, to prevent it from happening again in Canada.

It's particularly important to do so now, because I note that this is a minority government, and it's being propped up by a coalition. As with any minority government, the best-before date is not the date set out in the Canada Elections Act. Indeed, a general election can be called at any time, so it's important for us to do this as quickly as possible.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Berthold.

On my list are Ms. O'Connell, Mr. Fergus, Madame Gaudreau and Mr. Julian.

I'm just going to note the sound of this room and how nice it's been to be able to hear these important comments. I would expect the sound level to stay the same as I pass the floor to Ms. O'Connell.

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

Thanks for the opportunity to speak on this.

I want to cover a few areas mentioned by some of the previous speakers. First, I want to read something into the record:

Canada's system of government allows Canadians to elect their representatives and for all members of Canadian society to engage in free and open debate about the direction of the country. However, this system and the sovereignty of Canadian decision-making is under direct threat from interference activities of foreign states and their proxies.

The threat faced by Canada's governance and decision-making institutions is not only a federal problem. Elected and public officials across all orders of government are targeted.... Foreign interference operations target the electoral process at all stages.... Once holding public office, elected and appointed officials, their staff, and employees of the legislative assemblies can also be targeted by foreign states. At the federal level, this includes all three major political parties.

Foreign states will seek to influence deliberations and decision-making, and to curb initiatives deemed contrary to their interests.... In other cases, foreign states may seek to interfere with policy actions by attempting to discredit or attack senior public officials.

Madam Chair, do you want to know what I'm reading from? This is the NSICOP 2019 annual report, tabled in the House in March 2020.

I can go on and read other excerpts. They talk about foreign interference targeting elections, targeting officials and targeting staff, the seriousness of it and the way foreign state actors use this as a way to discredit democratic institutions.

Why I raise this and what's so interesting about this is that this was tabled, as I said, in March 2020, yet the Conservatives sit here today and say they're just waking up to the issue of foreign interference. This was tabled nearly three years ago, and the Conservatives are saying that it's only since recent media reports that they feel that any of this information has come to light.

Foreign interference is persistent. It's serious. It did not just start in 2015. It did not just start after the 2021 election, as Conservatives would like you to believe. That NSICOP report I was reading from.... Interestingly enough, Mr. Chiu won the 2019 election, when foreign interference by the PRC was very active as well. Mr. Chiu also lost in 2015. The Conservatives seem to be very selective about when they care about foreign interference, and that is after they felt an election was lost.

They talk about transparency. Meanwhile, there are the facts of foreign interference hiding in plain sight of the Conservatives. The information that has been reported in the media is extremely serious, but it's something that has never been denied by the fact that these reports have been tabled in the House of Commons.

This is, sadly, not new information. The only thing that's new is that the Conservatives I guess are not happy with the other business that PROC is doing and they simply want to talk only about this because they have one candidate in particular who they feel has been affected by this. However, foreign interference isn't about one candidate or 11 candidates. It's about Canadian institutions, and this is

the same Trump-type tactic, to question election results moving forward.

• (1550)

What I'm curious about is where the Conservatives were after 2019. Where were they in 2020 and 2021? They are raising it only now, in 2023.

This information has been tabled time and time again. Making sure our institutions are strong is something that all Canadians should be united about and non-partisan about, but it seems to be topical only when the Conservatives feel it is to their political benefit.

I can't remember now which Conservative asked why, during the election, the Prime Minister didn't say this was happening. This is precisely why the critical election task force was created. Do you really want the issue of foreign interference to be a decision of a partisan member? I know that, as a candidate in 2015, I would not have trusted Mr. Harper to come forward to talk about foreign interference. Oh, wait, he didn't talk about foreign interference, even though this is not a new phenomenon.

This is a phenomenon that we're seeing in several countries. In fact, if you continue to read the NSICOP 2019 annual report, you'll read excerpts from New Zealand about the issue of foreign interference, so while the Conservatives want to blame everything on Justin Trudeau, the fact remains that we have an opportunity to uphold our democracy, uphold our democratic institutions, but it's not going to be done because the Conservatives want to look at documents in a non-secure manner, which is, frankly, absolutely reckless. While the Conservatives want to look at these documents, I'm sure the People's Republic of China would also love to get their hands on secret or top-secret CSIS documents, but the Conservatives just want to continue this in a way that's unhelpful, in a way that doesn't actually strengthen our institutions.

I've spoken before about several of the things that we as a government have done to strengthen democratic institutions, things like having election security, creating the critical election incident public protocol, tightening fundraising loopholes, cracking down on advertising that had been really unchecked and on the integrity of the voters list to make sure those registering to be on the voters list are actually Canadians.

What is interesting is that the Conservatives continuously voted against all of those measures. The Conservatives then say, "If foreign interference is so serious, how come no one is doing anything about it? How come the Liberals aren't doing anything about it?" Meanwhile, I just outlined several different measures we have taken.

In addition to that, the Prime Minister, in the December 2021 mandate letter to the minister of democratic institutions, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, specifically asked that he:

Continue to lead an integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions, including the federal electoral process, against foreign interference and disinformation, working with domestic and international partners. You will also lead efforts to consider the interplay between technology and democracy.

Once again, it's the Conservatives who are just waking up to this issue.

Now, are there ways that we can improve? As has clearly been noted in the minister's mandate letter, there are things we still need to do on this file. That is important work for PROC. It is important work for all parliamentarians. In fact, I would welcome some of those recommendations. I'm sure the minister would as well. We started to talk with some witnesses about a foreign registry. What are the other ideas? The suggestion that nothing has been done, that we've never spoken about foreign interference, that we deny it exists for some partisan benefit is ludicrous.

You don't even have to believe me. All you have to do is look at the record. Look at what was tabled in the House before the 2021 election. Look at the minister's mandate letter. We have been talking about foreign interference and the fact that it's a very real threat, and we put in place measures, as I said.

● (1555)

Some can say that it's not enough, or the threat has changed, or it's more pervasive in one way or another. I think that anybody in this space realistically will recognize that foreign interference—even the threat from media disinformation—will continuously change, so I think no government will be able to say, “We did everything we needed to do and everything is secure and we never have to look at it again.” I think that would be naive.

I've sat through this study, and I think many members on this committee have been genuinely trying to get information on the record from witnesses about how we can make improvements in securing our electoral institutions and making sure they remain free and fair, but that's not what this motion talks about. This motion is, once again, a fishing expedition by Conservatives. They weren't successful previously, and that's the irony. They said that we need these people to come and appear.

Well, you had Minister LeBlanc and Minister Joly. You've had CSIS. You've had SITE committee reps. You've even had Mr. Judd, who actually oversees and reviews the critical election process to say whether it is working or not.

Again, some could say there need to be improvements. These are relatively new measures being put in place to monitor foreign interference and how best to handle it in a non-partisan way, so I get that there could be suggestions to make improvements to those mechanisms or those policies. We've heard in terms of the election that the parties have had access to that critical election committee or the SITE committee with top security clearance to allow them this information. Maybe we can make improvements to that, I don't know, but that's not what the Conservatives have been pulling out of witnesses.

By recalling witnesses, we can.... If that's what this committee is going to do, I would love to have a report at the end of all this that says, “Here are some key areas to continue to strengthen democratic institutions. Here is what you need to do. Here are some things the government should seriously consider.” But that's not what we hear.

Time and time again, it's this partisan hack-type stuff being thrown around, that the Prime Minister has closed his eyes. No, he has not. If he had closed his eyes to foreign interference, it wouldn't be in mandate letters. If he had closed his eyes to foreign interference, he wouldn't have spoken about it in the House. If there had been some way to hide this and shove it under the table, you wouldn't see reports tabled in the House.

It's just an issue of the Conservatives actually not really paying much attention to it until they felt that maybe it would benefit them in some way. I think it's dangerous for Canadians to go down this road because, as I said, we've seen our neighbours to the south and what happens when you start demonizing democratic institutions and when you start undermining their legitimacy.

I think what we should also talk about is that if you want to refer to Mr. Fife's recent article, one of the areas that I noticed Mr. Cooper didn't read out was that in his article he also said this:

CSIS Director David Vigneault told Mr. Trudeau that there was no indication that China's interference efforts had helped elect any of them, despite the consulate's attempts to promote the campaigns on social media and in Chinese-language media outlets.

The question that is concerning for me is this: Do the Conservatives trust the boasting of a PRC representative, or do they trust the CSIS director? I know whom I trust. I don't think representatives from PRC have Canadians' interests in mind. I don't think they sit around and talk about election outcomes because they believe in holding up Canadians' democratic institutions. They want to rip our institutions apart.

● (1600)

Whom I believe and whom I trust is the non-partisan national security community, who sat before this committee time and time again saying that Canadians determined the 2021 election and Canadians determined the 2019 election. That doesn't mean there isn't a pervasive threat. It means we'd better get to work and deal with how we strengthen democracy.

If we want to hold more meetings to discuss that, I'm all ears, but if we're holding meetings to take partisan jabs at the Prime Minister, I think all we're doing is undermining our democratic institutions. We're doing China's bidding by saying we believe the PRC representatives and their bragging over our CSIS director and over our national security community when they said that although foreign interference exists and is persistent, Canadians decided the election.

I can go on and on, but I know there are other speakers and I don't want to take up all the time. However, the point remains. I hope we get to a place where we can continue this study but do so with a mindset that we all agree that foreign interference happens, that it has been happening continuously, that it's not new to our government, that it's not new to Canada and is around the world, and that if we're going to come together, as Canadians would expect, we are doing so moving forward on recommendations on how to strengthen some of these institutions. How can we make some of the measures we put in place stronger? How do we add additional measures?

What I noticed in the Conservative motion was that there wasn't a request for how other governments around the world are handling this. There wasn't a request for democratic institution experts on how to strengthen our institutions. There wasn't a request for electoral lessons learned from France, which had serious issues. We all remember Russia's foreign interference in the U.S. How come we're not hearing from experts on how they strengthened and moved forward with recommendations?

Why? It's because Conservatives don't care about strengthening democratic institutions. They see this as a partisan issue. They are reckless with national security. You can see it in black and white in their motion, asking for unredacted top-secret documents in a public forum.

If we want to talk—and, as I said, call in some of those witnesses—about how other places are handling this and how Canadians can build strength and build trust in our institutions, I am all for it. However, if this is just going to be some political hatchet job of personal attacks and not actually doing the work that Canadians expect, I think Canadians are going to see through that.

I agree with the Conservatives on one thing. Canadians are not idiots, and they are going to see who is working to uphold institutions and who is looking to work like the American-style politics of building mistrust in our democratic institutions for their own political reasons.

I'll leave it there, Madam Chair. I look forward to finding a way we can continue this study, but a way that delivers some concrete recommendations on how to strengthen and how the government can move forward on strengthening.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Monsieur Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

Since I see that all my colleagues from each of the political parties would like to speak to this matter, at this point I will cede the floor to Ms. Gaudreau.

However, Madam Chair, I would ask you to add my name to the bottom of the speakers' list.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Good day, everyone.

We are accountable to the public, among others. In fact, that's one of the reasons why I'm here. I cancelled a number of meetings because I was told that it was important for me to be here.

We're concerned. We need transparency. We're convinced that this committee will get to the bottom of this situation or, at least, that's our hope. That way, in the future, we'll have the necessary means to prevent an attack on our democracy.

Public confidence has been eroding for years. I started in politics in 2019; it's now 2023.

Until proven otherwise, we can rely on various experts and professionals. Other countries, including Australia, have also followed suit. My colleagues will know why I named that country.

We've been told that there are numerous solutions. I won't repeat all the comments or everything we've all read, but, today, it's important for us to come to an agreement. We can't stop now. We heard the answers from senior officials and from the various ministers who've appeared before this committee. The media also sent us information that we weren't even able to understand. We need to go further and to find solutions.

Today, we're discussing an important motion proposing many things, namely, to search for evidence that could help us. The goal isn't necessarily to identify who's at fault.

If anyone here is non-partisan, except when it comes to defending the interests of Quebecers, it's me; that's my trademark.

The government and the official opposition are only doubling down on each other's comments. It's not a contest.

We're not looking for power, but rather for solutions. Ultimately, power means being independent. Now, we can talk about sovereignty, but, personally, I consider this to be democratic sovereignty.

Are we able to tell the public that we can guarantee the integrity of our democracy? I can't answer that question right now. I have my doubts. Obviously, it's my duty to agree to examine this situation and dig a little deeper.

I believe that this motion may constitute a strategy to find someone to blame. Obviously, when it's my turn to ask questions, the main focus is on finding solutions. We heard from experts who touched on those solutions, but we ran out of time. Perhaps they're already preparing documents for us on what is out there and their recommendations. I even think that some countries will call us to tell us what to do or not do.

I see this happening in the near future. In fact, since this is a minority government, we can't take our time, because things can change quickly. That's why this was urgent.

• (1610)

I came across an interesting motion. I thought of it because I'm hearing some people say that the Conservatives aren't focusing enough on the issue of interference. Others are saying that they're transparent and that they really want to move forward.

I'm going to read the motion, and then I'm going to stop so that you can judge for yourselves. This motion was adopted not too long ago, on November 18, 2020, two and a half years ago.

That, given that (i) the People's Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, is threatening Canada's national interest and its values, including Canadians of Chinese origin within Canada's borders, (ii) it is essential that Canada have a strong and principled foreign policy backed by action in concert with its allies, the House call upon the government to: (a) make a decision on Huawei's involvement in Canada's 5G network within 30 days of the adoption of this motion; and (b) develop a robust plan, as Australia has done, to combat China's growing foreign operations here in Canada and its increasing intimidation of Canadians living in Canada, and table it within 30 days of the adoption of this motion.

This motion passed by a vote of 178 to 146. I checked; I did my homework.

That's why I think that, perhaps, we may reach agreement today in the spirit of doing better, because even our colleague Ms. O'Connell voted in favour of that motion.

I'm eager to hear what my colleague opposite will say about the desire for few subamendments, because I think that we're all prepared to stay here late tonight. We need to remember that the goal, other than the pursuit of power—because it's nice to have power—is to think about our democracy. Let us think about the people we represent, let us think about our constituents.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Go ahead, please, Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

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

I'm pleased to be here with you today.

Ms. Blaney is with her constituents. As you know, her riding covers half of Vancouver Island. She often has no access to Internet or wireless service when working with some constituents.

I'll start by saying that all the parties want to prevent foreign interference in our elections. In addition to the revelations in *The Globe and Mail*, we need only think of Moscow's interference in the 2016 U.S. election, with the involvement of the Internet Research Agency or foreign interference in the Brexit referendum. Without a doubt, the committee needs to study this matter.

The motion put forward today is quite detailed and wasn't provided in advance, contrary to our usual practice, which generally gives us a few days to reflect and comment before we propose amendments. The motion is quite broad and touches on many aspects. In my opinion, it doesn't help the committee understand what it needs to do.

Even if I really enjoy listening to Mr. Berthold and Mr. Cooper, they spent nearly half the time available for this meeting just proposing this motion. In my opinion, that's not an attempt to find a solution or put in place the fundamentals to extend the study. To that end, I must start by saying that I'm in favour of extending the study.

This approach leaves much to be desired. In my opinion, it's critical to propose a motion that seeks to identify possible solutions, rather than starting a debate.

[English]

I believe very strongly, as does Rachel Blaney, who is currently with her constituents in the north part of Vancouver Island, out of Internet range, that we have to crack down on the kind of foreign interference involved in Trump's election in 2016, or in Brexit, which was pushed by Conservatives. These are all cases that I think illustrate the importance of the issue. Given the fact that this motion, which is so detailed, was tabled at committee rather than a couple of days in advance, which is our normal way of proceeding, and that almost half of the time for speaking was taken up by Mr. Berthold and Mr. Cooper—I don't object to their taking that time—obviously the intent was more to speak than to find a resolution.

I will have some proposals to put on the table in a moment. It is something that this committee has tackled with the seriousness that it entails, that it demands. This is extremely important. I was disappointed by Mr. Cooper because, despite the fact that he spoke very eloquently, he neglected to point out something that I think is vitally important. It comes from the *Globe and Mail* article that said that Liberal and Conservative candidates were favoured by Beijing, according to a national security source.

This issue is not limited to one party. This involves a number of parties, a couple of parties, both Liberals and Conservatives, whose candidates have been targeted, apparently, by foreign interference. Now, Mr. Cooper didn't comment about how the Conservative Party has reacted to this. Were those Conservative candidates who were allegedly supported, according to the news article, elected? We don't know this. We know nothing regarding the extent to which the Conservative Party headquarters has followed up to find out who those candidates were.

● (1620)

This is something that is of equal importance. When you have two parties that have had candidates supported, it is something that we all must take seriously. It shouldn't be partisan finger pointing, because ultimately we all have a responsibility in making sure that our electoral system functions, and that it functions free from foreign interference. In this very long motion that was tabled at the beginning of the meeting, there are a number of elements that I support.

First is extending the study. I think that is something we can all agree on.

For additional meetings, there's no difficulty there. The size and scope of the Globe article demands that this committee, though I know it's a very hard-working committee, schedule those additional meetings.... Whether that's next week or in subsequent weeks, I think that's a matter of discussion, but it is something that we favour.

As far as having the ministers who testified previously back to testify on the new revelations is concerned, that is something I support as well. Having foreign ministers is something I support.

Now, the extensive aspect touching on staff and documents.... I don't feel that the motion deals with the document issue in the serious way in which it needs to be treated, and I find that unfortunate. Because of the length of the initial two speeches, I don't know if we'll have time to work through that today.

I caution on the issue of inviting staff. I wanted to cite a number of people for the record, Madam Chair, if you'll permit me. Around the issue of political staff, as opposed to having ministers being brought forward to testify, I support having ministers come forward to explain what they did and what they knew, and what actions they've taken to ensure that this never happens again.

First, I will read a quotation from a former House leader, who said:

There is a clear case to be made that the accountability of political staff ought to be satisfied through ministers. Ministers ran for office and accepted the role and responsibility of being a minister. Staff did not.

I'm quoting from Jay Hill, a former Conservative government House leader.

Secondly, another member said:

Mr. Speaker, we believe that cabinet ministers are responsible for what happens in their names and responsible to Parliament. This is called ministerial responsibility and it is one of the oldest traditions here in our country.

The Liberal leader wants to do away with this tradition. Instead, he wants to import a foreign U.S. committee system that is used as a political weapon to bully, to intimidate, and to humiliate opponents, something that I believe should never happen.

Ministerial accountability is the reason why cabinet ministers answer questions in question period and it is why they appear before committees to answer for their offices.

We hope that all opposition committee chairs will follow the rules and procedures....

This is the member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie and the current Conservative deputy whip, speaking about the importance of not involving staff but ensuring ministerial responsibility.

This third quote, I think, is very germane, as well, to this conversation. It is, "The hon. member knows very well that for hundreds of years, the principle of ministerial accountability has been paramount here in the House and in its committees." This member was speaking, again, about the idea of inviting political staff, rather than ministers.

That final quote is from the member for Carleton, who is currently the leader of the official opposition in the House of Commons, so Conservatives have said very eloquently in the past that we should not have political staff brought forward, and that the issue of ministerial accountability is fundamental.... I agree with them. I agree with them on that.

Therefore, with this very extensive motion that was dumped on this committee with no notice, I would certainly say that for the first four elements I'm in support. For the treatment of documents, I find it is not up to the degree to which we need to treat documents of high sensibility that are related to national security. As far as staff are concerned, I will go with numerous Conservatives who have said very eloquently in the past that it is to the importance of keeping ministers accountable, not staff, that parliamentarians should be directed.

● (1625)

I hope the Conservatives will be willing to work with other members around the table to find a workable solution.

I find it unfortunate that the meeting has gone by and that the first half of the meeting involved the two Conservative movers speaking to the motion rather than working to find that common ground. However, we in this corner of the committee room take very seriously the issue of foreign interference, and we fully support an accounting by those ministers, given this new information, ensuring that we as a committee extend the study to make sure that, ultimately, all of the recommendations lead to a resolution that we will have no suspected, alleged or real interference in any future Canadian elections.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Calkins, followed by Mr. Fergus, followed by Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Calkins, go ahead, please.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I listened intently to the interventions that have been made by my colleagues here at the table. I'll kindly remind my friend in the NDP, Mr. Julian, who was here when some of the quotes that he just read into the record were put forward, that his former colleague Mr. Siksay moved numerous motions to invite staff to appear before various parliamentary committees. Some of those staff remain here on the Hill today.

I'm not going to get into the hypocrisy of the notion that's before us, but there is one staff member in this motion, Katie Telford, who is the chief of staff to the Prime Minister. There is no minister to whom she is accountable, other than the Prime Minister, who we have not asked to come before this committee in terms of ministerial accountability.

We did not invite any of the other ministers' staff. We invited the ministers directly, Madam Chair.

To compare inviting staff like Dimitri Soudas and others, who were not chiefs of staff to Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the previous administration, to inviting Katie Telford is comparing apples to oranges. It's simply not relevant. It's not a relevant comparison to make.

As a matter of fact, the NDP members were so insistent on calling certain staff members forward during the Harper administration that they brought it to Speaker Milliken for a ruling in the House of Commons. They argued that not being able to call staff before a committee was an infringement upon the privileges of parliamentarians.

How convenient for the NDP, now that it is in an agreement-supplying confidence motion literally supporting the government of the day, when the government's under question and under scrutiny from members of the media, when there are leaked documents calling in to question the credibility of the government and today, when it comes to handling the foreign interference.

This committee's job, however, is to find out just how in depth the involvement of foreign state actors, and all foreign actors for that matter, is in the electoral process. This is something that's becoming, obviously, a relatively new phenomenon. We didn't hear much about this in the previous administration. I'm not saying it wasn't there. We certainly didn't hear about it the way we're hearing about it now.

The media interest that is generated in this, the fact that there are leaked documents and the fact that there's a Prime Minister who is seemingly more concerned about the fact that these documents are being leaked than what they actually contain.... I think that a Prime Minister who had the best interests of Canada at heart instead of his own best interests at heart would be taking these leaked documents at face value.

For us, as Conservatives, we simply want to know where things went wrong. Yes, we know some of our colleagues were affected. We know that money has flowed from the Communist Party in China through operatives here in Canada to various political actors. These are disturbing things.

These are things that all Canadians ought to be concerned about, because moving the needle in even just a few ridings—as has been mentioned by witnesses who have appeared before this committee before—undermines the integrity and the validity of the institutions that oversee our electoral process.

I'm not calling into question the general results of the last two elections. I don't think anybody here is making that assumption. However, it is certainly evident that a few ridings have been affected. It is completely reasonable for members of this committee to

find out just how much a foreign state actor can move a needle, particularly in ridings that have large diasporas, wherever those foreign state actors might be coming from that those diasporas could influence an electoral outcome in a particular riding.

I will remind my colleagues around this table that sometimes elections are very close. Sometimes the difference between a majority government and a minority government is fewer than 10 ridings. There are already 11 that were called into question in the Toronto area alone in one of the past two elections.

● (1630)

The article by Chase and Fife and the leaked memo that Sam Cooper put out a little while ago make it very clear that somewhere along the line, although the Prime Minister and the ministers who have testified before this committee have said that they didn't know anything about these kinds of details.... The leaked memo appears to have gone all the way to Michael Wernick, and it would have gotten there only by going through.... As a matter of fact, the article itself says that Katie Telford personally asked for these documents, asked for these reviews, which means it is only reasonable that we would hear from her to ask her some very pointed questions, and she could point this committee to what could possibly be wrong with the state of the laws in this country.

The professionals from our security establishments who have testified here have said that there are insufficiencies in the current legislative framework. Why wouldn't we have that conversation? Why wouldn't we ask questions of the people and the actors who are directly involved? What advice could they possibly give us so that we could actually do our job as members of Parliament and make meaningful recommendations at this committee, so that we could protect our institutions? If we don't get this right, a problem that seems to be growing and getting worse as it goes along will only continue to get worse and will embolden foreign state actors to continue to interfere in our democratic process. This is very alarming, Madam Chair.

I will just go to the last line in the Global News story. It states:

One official who was not authorized to speak publicly called it "inexcusable" that Trudeau's office has yet to move forward with new laws despite years of "interactive" dialogue with senior intelligence officials regarding China's incursions into Canadian elections.

"The floodgates have been opened in the last five years. There has been ample evidence placed in front of the Liberal Party of Canada, and they have done essentially nothing."

If the government is not going to do anything, then why doesn't this committee do its job? Why doesn't this committee have a full-on, open debate to the extent it can and make reasonable recommendations to the government of the day? If it continues to ignore this issue, as is being alleged not by Conservatives but by Global News, Fife and Chase, and Sam Cooper.... These are the people who are making these observations. Just because Conservatives bring them to committee and take these matters seriously, that is not a reason to castigate or chastise or assume political motivation. I would assume that everybody who sits around this table is a patriotic Canadian and wants to see the best thing done for our country, so let's get to the bottom of it and let's invite the people.

Our motion, which my colleague Mr. Cooper has put forward, is reasonable. It brings back to the table people we haven't heard from or people we have heard from previously but haven't heard from since new revelations have been made public, which is a justifiable reason to invite back ministers who have already been here. It's also a justifiable reason to invite people who are former ministers with the same responsibility, to invite national security advisers, both past and present, and to invite the chief of staff for the Prime Minister, who has been here supporting and advising the Prime Minister since he became the Prime Minister.

Canadians deserve to know what their government did or didn't do or is or isn't doing. Members of Parliament certainly should have the right to know whether or not the government is holding up its end of the bargain and whether its actions actually match its words, because, from where I'm sitting, Madam Chair, there are only two possible rationales: the government knows—even though it won't expressly admit what it knows—the level of severity of the interference in our democratic systems, and has chosen not to do anything, or, even worse, Madam Chair, the government knows and has made a calculated decision that it is in its net best interests to ignore the problem for political gain.

• (1635)

That is a very serious thing, Madam Chair, and it's something that Canadians ought to know. The only way we'll find that out is if we do not amend this motion and if we actually summon the people who are there so that we can get to the bottom of why, for the last two elections in Canada, foreign interference has continued to grow.

If we don't do the right thing, if we don't make the recommendations to the government before the next federal election, then one can only assume that these foreign state actors will be even more emboldened and will continue to expand their network of influence and undermine our democratic institutions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

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

I've been listening with great interest to all the comments from the different political parties. My spouse, who's a theologian, repeatedly told me during her studies that a text without context is a pretext. I thought of that while I was listening to the comments being made by my colleagues, particularly Mr. Julian and Ms. Gaudreau.

I think it's very important to establish a broader context to assess all the documents and all the newspaper allegations about foreign interference. This would ensure that Canadians will be well served by our study. I hope that it'll be a serious and non-partisan study, for all the reasons my colleagues mentioned. I think that all members are concerned about the integrity of our elections, with the exception, perhaps, of some members of the official opposition, based on what we heard.

• (1640)

[English]

Madam Chair, if it were truly up to me, I think the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians would be the best place to get full access to unredacted documents, but I sense that there is perhaps a consensus developing around this table, so I'm going to try to be helpful.

I've sent to the clerk for distribution an amendment to Mr. Cooper's motion, as follows:

That the motion be amended by deleting subparagraphs (c), (h) and (i), amending subparagraph (l) to add after the word "public" the words "and any other witnesses the committee members wish to hear from", and by replacing the words—

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, forgive me for interrupting you.

[English]

The amendment has been shared with the clerk and has just been shared around here. You have it in both official languages so that you can follow it however you prefer. Sophia has hit "Send", so it should be in your inboxes.

I see thumbs up and heads nodding. That's excellent.

[Translation]

Forgive me for interrupting you, Mr. Fergus. You may now continue.

Hon. Greg Fergus: That's fine, Madam Chair. Thank you very much.

I'll continue reading the amendment:

[English]

—in subparagraph (m) with the following, "the committee order the production of all memoranda, briefing notes and any other relevant documents which are in the possession of government departments or agencies containing information concerning efforts by, or on behalf of, foreign governments or other foreign state actors to interfere in the 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2021 general elections, provided that: (i) the department and agencies tasked with gathering these documents apply redactions according to the Access to Information and Privacy Act; (ii) these redacted documents be deposited as soon as possible with the clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee in both official languages.

[Translation]

I'll—

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Fergus.

Is there a problem?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: There's no translation.

The Chair: Right. We'll provide it to you in a moment.

[English]

Sophia just said that it's been circulated.

[Translation]

Did you get the email?

[English]

Many members do have it, because I'm getting the thumbs-up.

Mr. Cooper does not have it.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Do you want me to read the amendment in French, Madam Chair?

The Chair: I think that our colleagues were just asking for a copy of the French version of the amendment, rather than for the amendment to be read in French.

[English]

I have it in my inbox. If I have it, we all have it. That's perfect.

[Translation]

We can continue.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'm going to read the amendment in French, so that it's clear. As a Quebec MP, bilingualism is extremely important to me. It needs to be respected here, in Parliament.

First, I move that the motion be amended by deleting subparagraphs (c), (h) and (i).

Then, I propose amending subparagraph (l) to add after the word "public" the words "and any other witness the committee members wish to hear from".

And finally, I propose replacing the words in subparagraph (m) with the following:

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

(i) the department and agencies tasked with gathering these documents apply redactions according to the Access to Information and Privacy Act;

(ii) these redacted documents be deposited as soon as possible with the clerk of the committee to be distributed to all the members of the committee in both official languages.

I'm open to any friendly amendment that Ms. Gaudreau would like to suggest.

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: We have an amendment on the floor.

I'm going to continue with the same list, if that's suitable.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

Let me say that this amendment put forward by Mr. Fergus is an effort to gut the motion that I put forward. It would shield the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's office and ministers in the government who were in relevant portfolios at the time of the 2021 election from accountability and from having to come here to tell this committee—and, through this committee, tell Canadians—what they know about Beijing's interference in the 2021 election campaign.

What we have is a gutting when it comes to the production of documents. I trust the law clerk to make redactions to protect national security. The parliamentary law clerk is someone who has full national security clearance. He is independent. That, for Mr. Fergus, is a problem, because a production process in which the law clerk is left in charge to independently assess issues of national security gets in the way of what Mr. Fergus, I believe, would like to do. That is to cover up the inaction that the Liberals have taken in response to serious interference by Beijing.

They would like to whitewash and hide from this committee material evidence and provide a production that leads to redactions like this or this. How about this, or this? Here's Liberal transparency. Here's another page. Here's some more Liberal transparency for you. It's another blank page. There's another blank page here. There's another blanked-out page there.

• (1650)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I wanted a point of clarification. Mr. Cooper is holding up some pages. I believe that's a prop. I'm not sure.

Maybe you could clarify for us whether members are allowed to hold up props in committee proceedings.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, it's interesting that you would ask that. I hear some commentary—perhaps from people who would like to be chair in the future—but the rules that run the House actually do help govern committees as well. We don't do props here.

Mr. Cooper, I believe we've had a somewhat productive meeting. I believe there is some agreement as to where this committee can go with the study, which you state is important. If we genuinely want to find that spot, then we should try to land that spot.

I will provide the floor back to you, but I would really like to avoid having points of order called. We are people who are helping to govern a country. This is really serious stuff.

I will pass you back the floor. I know that you know the rules better than most.

With that, go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Page after page after page of blank pages in the way of production, that's the kind of production Mr. Fergus envisions with what he has put forward in his amendment. That's completely unacceptable. It doesn't do justice to getting to the bottom of what happened.

It's par for the course with the Liberals. We have ministers who come before this committee and claim that they know nothing, that there is nothing to see here, that everything was more or less above board. Oh, there was a little bit of interference, maybe. The Prime Minister, when he was asked about the latest allegations based upon The Globe and Mail's review of CSIS documents, said there should be a hunting down of people at CSIS. That was what his reaction was. He was more concerned that this story was coming to light than expressing any concern about what happened.

What happened was a sophisticated campaign involving illegal cash donations, involving disinformation, involving collusion with political campaigns, and involving officials and diplomats in Canada—

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, Madam Chair, Mr. Cooper is filibustering when we should be voting. We have a motion before us. We have an amendment before us. We have seven minutes left. I call the question.

If the Conservatives are legitimately concerned, as we are, about the issue of foreign interference, they shouldn't be filibustering out this meeting. They should be allowing the vote so that we can get going on extending the study and calling the witnesses.

The Chair: I think we can all function, guys. We're all here, as elected officials, on a Tuesday of a constituency week. Opposition members chose to bring us here, so let's get this done.

Mr. Cooper, the floor goes back to you.

Mr. Michael Cooper: With the greatest of respect to Mr. Julian, I'm speaking to an amendment to my motion that guts my motion. I am explaining the problems with that. I think that's entirely necessary.

I would just ask, given that we are coming up close to five o'clock, if we could suspend briefly for two or three minutes. We just want to review a few issues with respect to the amendment.

The Chair: I have somebody else on the speaking list.

I appreciate your suggestion. It's a question, so I will get a sense of where the room is at.

With that, I will go to Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair. This will help me reflect on the amendment.

I have a question about the proposed amendment.

The original motion, in subparagraph (m), point (i), asks that the documents be deposited with the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. The amendment before us asks instead that they be deposited with the clerk of the committee.

What is the difference between a clerk and a law clerk? Legally, which one is officially non-partisan and can give us the facts?

• (1655)

[English]

The Chair: I've had a quick conversation with the clerk, and the clerk has confirmed that if the clerk needed to consult with the law clerk, the clerk would do that. It's not necessarily one or the other; it's kind of all in the same entity, to get the information.

Is that an accurate reflection? Thank you.

[Translation]

I hope that answers your question.

[English]

I'm not getting an overwhelming desire to see a suspension, but I have come to the end of my list, so I am calling the question on the amendment. I'm going to call the question on the amendment, and then we'll vote on the main motion.

Mr. Luc Berthold: No, you didn't ask for it.

The Chair: I just called the question, and the clerk will now do the roll call. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Cooper never ceded his time.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: He asked to suspend; you said no, and then you gave his time away. It's unacceptable.

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

You can't call the question when a member is seeking the floor.

The Chair: My list is exhausted.

Mr. Michael Barrett: No. You asked us in good faith if you could take a question before there would be a suspension. Mr. Cooper hadn't ceded the floor, but on your urging us to all be adults and to get through this, Mr. Cooper was looking to suspend to consult with other parties to seek a resolution.

If we're going to play dirty tricks.... You need to follow the rules, Madam Chair, and you are not following the rules.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, first of all, I will not be spoken at. Second of all, you can watch public meetings of this committee on multiple different occasions, and when I have a list and somebody is on the list, they will always get the floor in this committee. When there is agreement to suspend, I will get agreement amongst members to suspend. I did not find that agreement today—

Mr. Michael Barrett: You didn't canvass the room.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You didn't ask.

The Chair: I said I would see if there is agreement.

I will do you the favour, Mr. Barrett, because you feel that you can do this today.

Ms. Sahota, would you like to suspend?

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): No.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There's no vote being called. He's seeking the floor.

The Chair: I'm not doing this. If you have a concern with the chair, you can deal with it.

I know that I don't have agreement to suspend. My list has come to an end, therefore I have called the question.

I have entertained what you would like to do for long enough. I am calling the question.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On a point of order, that's not how this works.

The Chair: I'm suspending for a minute. Done.

• (1655) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1715)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome back to the committee.

I will pass the floor to Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To our colleagues who are participating online, we had a discussion around this table. On members' good honour and good word, we came to an agreement that would end up removing (m) from my amendment and the main motion.

The way to do this procedurally would be for me to make a friendly amendment to what I had proposed. What I will propose again is that everything stands in my amendment, with the exception that subparagraph (m) is deleted.

The Chair: Since it is an amendment to your own amendment, I'm going to call the question on this amendment with its friendly amendment.

The question is on Mr. Fergus's amendment with his friendly amendment.

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

The Chair: Now we'll call the question on the main motion by Mr. Cooper as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

• (1720)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you to all of you for finding a way forward. I appreciate this.

I will just note that within the motion as now passed with the support of all, there are meetings to be scheduled on February 23 and the week of February 27. As long as we can make witnesses happen and make stuff happen, we will do our best. The clerk is confident and we will try, but we will keep in touch with all members as to what is in the state of the possible or not. I think we always provide that leniency and leeway. We'll make sure there's ample notice provided.

With that, keep well and safe. Thank you so much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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