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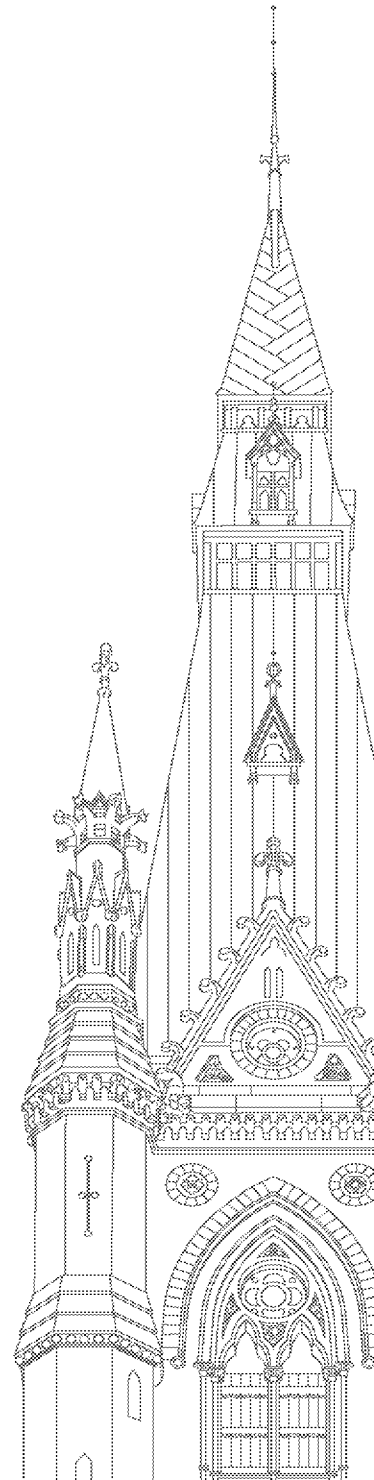
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Tuesday, April 25, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 65 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to continue its study of foreign election interference.

Throughout this morning's meeting, as we have an evening meeting as well, we would like to extend a special welcome to the Canada and international politics grade 12 class who, with their teacher, Ms. Buchanan, are visiting Ottawa today from Havergal College in Toronto. When they stop by, do say hello.

The clerk and I will maintain a consolidated speaking list of members wishing to speak.

As per the motion that was passed by this committee, we are getting through all of the names of everyone who should have been invited.

I would like to note that Mr. Walied Solomon was invited but was unable to attend. We have extended invitations to Jenni Byrne and Tausha Michaud, and we hope to have them scheduled very shortly.

With us today are Jeremy Broadhurst, senior adviser to the Prime Minister; and Azam Ishmael, national director, Liberal Party of Canada. For the second panel, we will have with us Mr. Fred DeLorey, former national campaign manager for the Conservative Party; and by video conference, we will have Mr. Hamish Marshall, partner, research, One Persuasion Inc.

Do I see a hand up, Mr. Fergus?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Chair, did you say that Mr. Soliman had not yet responded? Did he refuse the invitation?

The Chair: We asked him to come today, but it wasn't possible. We offered another date and were told it was not possible.

Hon. Greg Fergus: The committee sent an invitation to the campaign directors for every political party. I hope he'll accept our invitation. Otherwise, what are our options?

The Chair: It's up to the committee members to decide on options. We'll proceed with the invitation process. If Mr. Soliman can't come and testify before the committee, that information will be sent to you. Today, it was not possible. We asked if he could come on Thursday, and that wasn't possible either. We will try one more time. You will be informed of his answer.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Very well.

I don't want to take more of the committee's time, but I wanted to give you a heads up on that point.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. O'Connell, you have the floor.

[*English*]

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

I don't want to take up too much time either, but I do think that it should be noted that it was a motion this committee passed. The Conservatives spent an enormous amount of time demanding that Katie Telford appear. She did so, and so have all the other witnesses to date.

I would strongly recommend that this individual, if not available today or Thursday, provide dates for when he is available. I would hate to go down the line of questioning that the Conservatives had, where we have to wonder what he is hiding and why he is not making himself available.

Madam Chair, I leave it in your strong leadership hands to handle the scheduling of meetings, but I certainly would want to ensure that everyone invited appear, given the stink that the Conservatives made about making sure that all witnesses be here.

The Chair: I have Mr. Calkins on the list followed by Monsieur Berthold.

I would like to get to our panel. We can definitely have this conversation afterwards. I was providing information to keep the committee apprised of our current status.

Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

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

I'm under no illusion about what's being attempted right here. Perhaps you or the clerk could edify the committee, Madam Chair, as to when Mr. Solomon was contacted by the committee so we can provide a timeline. Maybe it's something as simple as he was just contacted yesterday, and this week didn't work for him. Could that be a possible explanation?

The Chair: Mr. Solomon was contacted, along with all other members. The contact information has since been updated. The clerk received the updated contact information on the weekend and extended the invitation on Sunday with the new information. The information we originally had was the same, so that's where we continue.

● (1105)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: All right.

Thank you.

The Chair: What I can confirm is that emails are being responded to, and we continue to ensure that we have our witnesses appear. We'll keep you apprised.

Go ahead, Monsieur Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): No, that's fine.

The Chair: That's perfect, thank you.

With that, we will start with our opening comments.

I will pass the floor to Mr. Ishmael.

Combined, Mr. Ishmael and Mr. Broadhurst, you will have 10 minutes.

Welcome to procedure and House affairs.

Mr. Azam Ishmael (National Director, Liberal Party of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

As I was introduced, I'm the national director of the Liberal Party of Canada and was the national campaign director for the 2021 general campaign.

I'm pleased to be with you today and to accept the invitation to act as a witness for your study of foreign election interference.

[*Translation*]

The integrity of Canadian democracy is of paramount importance not only for my organization, but also for me personally.

As a political professional who has worked hard for many years to build a reputation for integrity, compliance, diligence and prudence, with a track record of success, I'm pleased to be able to participate in the committee's work today and do everything in my power to shed light on the issues pertaining to your study.

[*English*]

A fair bit has been said in the press about this matter. In making my remarks today and in answering your questions, I will be subject to two limitations.

First, I would caution that some of your questions may touch on information that has been provided to me in reliance on a security

clearance granted to me under Canada's security clearance program. As a result, I'm prohibited from sharing such classified information as a matter of law. While I appreciate and respect the breadth of the committee's privilege to asking questions, I cannot violate my legal obligations of confidentiality or risk national security in answering those questions.

Second, from my review of previous transcripts of your meetings, it appears that some of the matters you are reviewing may relate to content of short meetings or interactions occurring during the midst of an incredibly intense and busy election campaign some years ago. While I will make every effort to be forthright with the committee about my recollections, the candid truth is that I do not recall the details of every discussion I had during these campaigns.

Broadly, let me assure the committee of three things, each to the very best of my knowledge, information and belief.

First, at no time during my tenure as national director has the Liberal Party of Canada knowingly accepted support from, or turned a blind eye to interference in a Canadian election by, any foreign state. We have not tacitly accepted the help of any foreign state, nor have we encouraged it.

Second, the Liberal Party of Canada has extensive compliance measures in place to ensure strict adherence to the Canada Elections Act and other applicable laws by our candidates, nomination contestants and campaign teams. That includes extensive training, detailed audit support and compliance functions, and centralized coordination of many campaign resources. We also have rules governing the conduct of nomination campaigns and party processes in order to build confidence in the public's participation in the political process at every stage.

As with all political parties, we of course cannot credibly speak to the actions of every one of the tens of thousands of volunteers, campaign workers, fundraisers and supporters across the country. However, we are confident in our compliance protocols.

[*Translation*]

Third, I want to say that I am extremely proud of the work done from coast to coast by the Liberal Party of Canada's election campaign staff and volunteers to help protect our democratic process.

We all have a role to play in preventing foreign interference in our elections. I'm proud to be working for a national party that enjoys support and participation from millions of Canadians representing all facets of society.

[English]

Madam Chair, I wish very much that I could share all of the details of this matter with this committee, because I'm very confident that such a review would clearly show that the decisions taken by me and other Liberal officials were beyond reproach. We can disagree with other parties on policy, but we have all consistently sought to do the right thing as it relates to protecting Canada's democracy against foreign interference.

Unfortunately, some of those details cannot be shared here. In that regard, you'll have to defer to the classified review processes that have been put in place to address the situation, including the review of the special rapporteur.

I appreciate the committee's attention to this matter and, subject to the foregoing cautions, I'd be happy to answer any questions you have.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst (Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Jeremy Broadhurst. I currently work in the Prime Minister's Office as a senior adviser to the Prime Minister.

In spring 2019, I took an unpaid leave of absence from my then job as chief of staff to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to act as the national campaign director for the Liberal Party of Canada in the 2019 election.

The study this committee is currently engaged on combines two subject matters that my career in politics and government have given me considerable exposure to.

The first of these matters is Canada's intelligence activity, and specifically the efforts to combat foreign interference in our country. While I have had a small role in the government's efforts to combat foreign interference, both in the PMO and from my time at Global Affairs, I have been asked today to appear specifically due to my role in the 2019 election campaign.

Allegations of attempts at interference in our political process by state actors are extremely disturbing and have been taken very seriously by the government, and, I believe, by all the political parties.

It is important to also remember that in 2019 we also saw attempts by interest groups with no obvious affiliation with any state, who worked from outside our country to deliberately pollute our political landscape with lies and ideological propaganda designed to smear the reputation of politicians and confuse and discourage Canadians, who may otherwise have been enthusiastic participants in our political system.

The Liberal Party of Canada has gone to considerable efforts, which we would be happy to discuss, to diminish the impacts of all types of foreign interference. The Liberal Party always stands ready to assist the appropriate authorities in our efforts to combat foreign interference, and the party does try to assist our candidates and volunteers to recognize potential vulnerabilities and when they are being targeted. It is worth noting that what has been lost in recent public dialogue concerning foreign interference is that politicians are most often the victim of this type of interference, but they have not always had the tools necessary to recognize it and prevent it.

The other issue I play a role on in this committee's study is the rights and privileges of parliamentarians. I have worked in the offices of backbenchers and ministers. I have worked in opposition and in government. I have a deep and profound respect for Parliament, its members, and the work they do. I have always been committed to the idea that in order to fulfill the work they are sent to Ottawa by the voters to do, members of Parliament need to have access to some extraordinary powers and privileges.

One instance from the past that I was involved with stands out to me, as I think about your work today. From 2009 to 2011, I served as the director of parliamentary affairs to the leader of the opposition as we engaged in a protracted struggle with the Conservative government of the day over Parliament's right to have access to documents pertaining to the treatment and transfer of Afghan detainees.

The struggle eventually culminated in a historic ruling by then Speaker Peter Milliken, who ruled that parliamentarians did have the right to have access to documents even if they contained sensitive national security information that would have otherwise restricted their distribution. However, throughout that struggle the opposition members from all parties never asserted that this parliamentary privilege was unfettered. They understood that privileges always come with corresponding responsibilities.

At that time, even with the power of the Speaker's ruling in hand, the opposition parties knew that it would be a breach of that responsibility to seek access to the documents in question without appropriate safeguards to protect Canada's national security interests.

To that end, all the opposition parties negotiated with the government, and eventually the Bloc Québécois and the Liberal Party arrived at an agreement with the government surrounding the controlled access to the documents in question. The parties designated select members who would obtain the appropriate security clearance, and who would then be granted access to those documents in a secured location.

The right of parliamentarians to have access to the material they needed to hold the government to account was respected without compromising national security. It's worth noting that nothing ever leaked. The privilege was exercised with responsibility.

Influenced by this experience, our current Prime Minister pledged in 2015 to establish a permanent committee of parliamentarians who would be cleared to review top secret material. From that commitment came the creation of NSICOP.

By enshrining those safeguards, in effect, codifying the responsibility, the existence of NSICOP ensures that no government, current or future, can deny a request for information or testimony on the grounds that the information can't be delivered in a safe and secure manner.

Currently, it has been announced that NSICOP is reviewing the very same matter this committee is seized with today. The government has committed to providing it with access to all of the material and personnel under its control to assist in that study. The committee will be free to produce a report to Parliament wherein they can draw conclusions from the material they have reviewed to shine the light of transparency on the matter to either reassure Canadians about what has happened or raise further concerns and suggest reasonable paths forward to address those concerns.

• (1110)

I will conclude by saying that I believe it is good that parliamentarians are engaged in that study at NSICOP, and the public can be assured they are doing so responsibly. In that setting, witnesses are not being put in the difficult position of having to choose between the oaths they have sworn to protect Canada's secrets and the privileges of parliamentarians asking the questions, as happens at this committee.

As for me today, I will do my best to answer the questions put to me with full consideration of the public forum that we are in. I will not violate the oaths I have taken to protect our nation's secrets. I will also make an effort not to participate in the perpetuation of unsubstantiated allegations that are damaging the lives and reputations of individuals who are not represented here to defend themselves.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will start our six-minute rounds with Mr. Cooper, followed by Mrs. Romanado, Madame Gaudreau and then Mrs. Blaney.

I will remind all participants that comments should be addressed through the chair. One person should be speaking at a time for ease of interpretation.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to be directing my questions, through you, to Mr. Broadhurst.

Mr. Broadhurst, Global News reported that 48 hours before the candidate nomination cut-off in the 2019 election, senior Liberal Party officials received an urgent briefing by CSIS that the Liberal candidate for Don Valley North was part of a foreign interference network.

Who were the senior Liberal Party officials who were part of this briefing?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Madam Chair, I am not in a position where I can discuss the contents of briefings that were provided to the Liberal Party. As the national security and intelligence adviser has provided information to this committee, we can confirm that a briefing did take place during that campaign. There were individuals at the party who had been sworn in as part of the protocol that

our government had put in place to be able to share the sensitive information with the parties during the campaign.

In 2019, those individuals were Azam Ishmael, Braeden Caley and Mathieu Lafrance.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

For the record, it should be noted that briefing took place on September 28, 2019, which also happened to be 48 hours before the nomination cut-off for the 2019 election.

Madam Chair, through you to Mr. Broadhurst, what is the name of the Liberal Party staffer responsible for overseeing 25 GTA ridings in the 2019 election?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Madam Chair, can I just receive clarification that this is related to the public reporting about such a staffer in the media?

Mr. Michael Cooper: It is.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: If I may, Madam Chair, it is a somewhat difficult question to answer on account of the description of the job does not match the system that we had set up during that campaign.

Taking a generous view of it, we had a network of field workers during the campaign who supported local ridings. None of them were in charge of ridings. Local ridings are in charge of their own affairs. They were there to provide support in that end. To go one step further, none of those field workers at any time had any access to any information contained in any privileged briefings. That was solely the three people I mentioned.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Through you, Madam Chair, would the witness undertake to provide the names of those organizers in the GTA, the 25 GTA ridings which would be the ridings within the city of Toronto?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: The names of all the field workers?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: If it's the will of the committee, we will do it.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much.

Going back to the September 28, 2019, briefing, when was the Prime Minister made aware of that briefing and the contents of that briefing?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I will answer part of that. I'll also turn to Mr. Ishmael to give his involvement in it, as I think he might provide some additional information, as well.

Upon receiving the briefing, Mr. Ishmael informed me as national campaign director. I had the requisite security clearance from my previous job, which continued despite the leave of absence I had taken. We had confirmed that before the campaign. That's why we did not use one of the slots provided to the party for that.

Upon hearing that, we decided it would be right to inform the Prime Minister of the content of the briefing that we had received. We needed to ensure that was done safely and securely, a difficult task sometimes during a campaign, as the leader of the party would be on the road.

As it happened, he was going to be in Ottawa the next day, so I briefed him in a safe manner on the 29th.

• (1120)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

Why was the nomination of the candidate for Don Valley North not involved?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Again, Madam Chair, I'm not in a position to confirm what the content of the briefing we received from the national security officials was. I can say there was no actionable item there. The security agencies were not seeking any kind of guidance or direction from the Prime Minister at that time. It was an information briefing.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Was there any discussion about the status of the candidacy of the now sitting member of Parliament for Don Valley North?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: With the national—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Just to be clear, I'm not asking you to reveal the contents of that briefing. I am asking you whether, on the 29th or thereabouts, there were discussions between you and the Prime Minister about the status of the candidacy of the current member for Don Valley North.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Again, given that we are not going to be discussing the content of the briefing at that time, I am not going to be able to provide information about the conversation that the Prime Minister and I had.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Who was the campaign manager for the candidate for Don Valley North? If you don't know offhand, could you undertake to provide the name of that individual?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I actually don't know the name. I do not know.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay.

Likewise—because I presume you don't know the answer—who was the chair of that candidate's nomination campaign?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I do not know. If it's the will of the committee, we will get that information.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You'll make that undertaking?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: If it's the will of the committee, I will.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Well, I am asking you.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I think there is a process for requesting information.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I am asking you. I would ask that you undertake that. I don't see why that would be problematic.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I think it's just meant to go through the process.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes, when I ask you to make an undertaking, you give an undertaking, or not.

The Chair: I think what happens is that you go back and forth a couple of times. We then hear the beeping. Mr. Nater was in the chair and we only had to hear it once, so I think we can offer me the same courtesy.

With that, we will continue.

Madame Romanado, you have six minutes.

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

Through you I'd like to welcome the two witnesses with us today.

Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us.

I have a few questions and I want to start my first question with Mr. Ishmael.

We know that cleared representatives of the Liberal Party of Canada received multiple briefings on foreign interference during both the 2019 and the 2021 elections. We received a report from PCO outlining which parties received briefings on which dates and so on.

I understand you can't reveal the details of those briefings, but I'd like to get a sense from you as to whether they were helpful in the information that was provided. Do you have any recommendations on how we can improve some of those briefings?

We also heard a little bit about some of the tools in the tool kit that is provided to election workers, candidates and so on. Could you elaborate a little bit on some training you would recommend, that this committee could perhaps suggest for candidates during campaigns, and also volunteers?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: Yes, absolutely.

We did attend a number of briefings over the course of the years. As a general matter, they were helpful to get that information. Particularly as national director of the party, I don't work for Parliament. I am not an employee of the Government of Canada. I am responsible for operating the Liberal Party of Canada, and so being brought into that sphere and made aware of some of the things to be watchful for, things that we could share with candidates coming in.... About that time the conversation was happening, I believe it was CSEC that put out a manual on cybersecurity and how to make candidates cyber-aware, which they published.

We did take the highlights of that information and shared it broadly with our campaigns to ensure that cybersecurity was everybody's responsibility, as much as it was that of the Liberals or Conservatives or NDP. The integrity of our system is primordial to the functioning of the system.

With regard to improvements that could be made to the process, I would say oftentimes they happen just prior to an election. So in a period that's already quite busy, you are forced to carve out additional time. Of course, these are important meetings and this is important information to be shared, but it would be a lot easier if this were an ongoing commitment to political parties so that there was a constant conversation. Oftentimes you are brought into the loop and, frankly, when you're not well versed in the language used by security agencies, sometimes there is a bit of feeling out.... Every job has its own dialogue, its own vernacular that goes with it, so it can be a little bit difficult to discover it, but I was fortunate enough to twice be the person cleared, so I had a bit of a better grip of it in 2021.

• (1125)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: If I could just add quickly—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Yes. Then I have a question for you, Mr. Broadhurst.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Just very quickly, I've had the honour of working at a relatively high level on six federal election campaigns. The first three were with the opposition.

We found it very frustrating at those times to not have any kind of conduit to the intelligence security universe during those campaigns. They were moments in them where we had suspicions about things like phone banks working from other countries and we had nowhere really to direct my concerns. We had nowhere to get informed about what our rights and our duties were in those moments.

When we came into government in 2015, the landscape was really bare on this. Parties were left out on an island to deal with it themselves, despite being really at the coalface of the foreign interference struggle. The government felt it was very important to start putting some supports in place for the parties—not just the government party, but the opposition parties—and to give a conduit to share concerns, to get briefed up and to understand the vulnerabilities.

The system will evolve as it should to respond to the needs of the parties. Parties are critical institutions in the way politics work and they need that kind of support. They have lots of valuable information and lots of security information that they need to keep safe on the electronic side of things. They also to protect candidates who are being exposed to some of these attempts for the very first time.

It's good that it's in place and I hope it continues to evolve and get better.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Excellent.

I'm assuming you're referring to the rapid response mechanism that was put in place in 2018.

I know that you're here in your capacity as having worked on the campaign in 2019, but also as former chief of staff to the former minister of foreign affairs. I know you were involved with the rapid response mechanism.

Could you elaborate a little bit on your thoughts on this and what you think we should be looking at in terms of improving that mechanism?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Madam Chair, I was chief of staff to the former foreign affairs minister. It was Chrystia Freeland.

At that time, Canada was hosting the G7. Several countries had just gone through electoral experiences—the United States and France amongst them—where foreign interference had played a critical role, not necessarily in the outcome, but in the conduct of those election campaigns.

As the chair of the G7, Canada was able to get everybody on board with the idea that foreign interference is not about one party being chosen over another. It's about a destabilizing effect and the undermining of democracy writ large. It didn't matter which party was in government; all countries would benefit from sharing the information, best practices and coordinating efforts to fight it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gaudreau, as always, you may speak in the language of your choice. If there are any delays due to the interpretation of what you have to say, I will take it into account.

You have the floor for six minutes, Ms. Gaudreau.

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

I also thank the witnesses and my colleagues for being with us. They have already defined the problems, but I want to know more.

Gentlemen, as you know, elections were held in the United States in 2016, France in 2017 and Europe in 2019. All those elections were targets for interference.

Knowing all that, what was the Liberal Party's state of alert in 2019 and 2021 regarding attempts at foreign interference?

• (1130)

Mr. Azam Ishmael: Thank you for the question.

Obviously, foreign interference is always on the radar for a party's national director, regardless of whether it's the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party or any other. Monitoring doesn't focus exclusively on foreign political interference. In fact, the same system would be in place to protect Canada against cyberattacks and other threats. That is always on our radar.

As we saw, especially the United States, emails were published on the internet. That's why we were in a state of alert for everything having to do with our electronic systems.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: From what I understand, you were well aware of everything that could happen.

I'd like you to give us more detail on the way in which the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Sûreté du Québec, the Communications Security Establishment or the Canadian Security Intelligence Service gives you information or alerts regarding nominees or their entourage during the election period.

Mr. Azam Ishmael: I don't understand—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'm talking about the way information is brought to you.

Mr. Azam Ishmael: During the national election campaign period, questions and information come from everywhere. Sometimes, it comes from a volunteer—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: And then? Do you receive information or do you question people to get it? That's what I'd like to know.

Mr. Azam Ishmael: We don't question our nominees about that. As for all our teams, in a certain way, that's far removed from the national campaign, but we are—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: When you say you don't question your nominees, what does that mean? Do you mean you don't question them about what they've done in the past few years or the people they're associated with, for example?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: To be accepted into the Liberal Party of Canada and be greenlighted to represent it, nominees have to go through a rather exhaustive process. They have to fill out a form that includes a lot of questions on their life, what they've done, the universities they went to and what led them to want to join the Liberal Party, among other things. Volunteers then question the candidates, along the same lines as what's in the questionnaire. That's how we collect information and select our nominees.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Explain to me the decision-making process regarding the admission, or not, of candidates. There's a hoop to jump through to see if a candidate can be accepted into the party. I am being very specific with my questions, but people are watching us and they really want to know more about the safety of our electoral system.

I would like your explanation of the way the process works within the Liberal Party.

Mr. Azam Ishmael: The process for admitting candidates to the Liberal Party of Canada is a rather long. Members on the other side of the table can confirm it. It depends, first of all, on the person's background, and the process therefore starts with the form. Once we receive correctly filled out forms, we conduct solvency and security checks. The results are sent to the party. An employee checks to see if there's anything out of order. Volunteers then receive the candidates for an interview. Once it's been determined that everything is in order and the person wants to run, there are two possible outcomes.

First of all, if the committee greenlights the candidate to join the party and there are no other candidates who want to run in the riding, obviously, they're nominated by acclamation. If other candidates follow the same process and want to run, a local election is held in the riding to determine which members of the party will become our nominee.

Later on in the process, when the campaign is getting closer, the leader or the party endorses the nomination with Elections Canada, to say—

● (1135)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Did you say, "the leader or the party"?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: Yes, that's it. The process changed in 2019 or 2021, I think. I don't remember the exact date. Elections Canada now allows parties to use its system and send the nominees they endorse electronically.

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

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Blaney.

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

I thank you both for being here to be witnesses for this important study.

I understand that you can't talk about details, so I will do my best to ask more about internal processes so that I better understand how those things work. Both of you have done two different campaigns, so I would love to hear from both of you.

When briefings come forward with any concerns about a particular candidate or campaign, what is the internal process you take to talk to your leader, talk to the candidate and to their campaign manager? I'm just trying to understand: when you have that information, what are the next steps?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I think Azam did a pretty good job of giving the overview of the process that it generally follows, but I know you were talking about what happens if you find something.

First and foremost, I think you have to remember that political parties are not law enforcement agencies. There's a moment when we have to say it is not appropriate for us to start investigating a crime, for example—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Can I interrupt? I feel like I need to clarify the question.

I understand what your role is, so I would assume, as a person in charge of a party, if something comes forward to you where there is concern shared about a particular candidate or their campaign, whatever that might be.... I'm wondering what your process would be in connecting during a campaign with the leader of your party and then with the candidate.

I'm not asking you to be judge and jury, but it's, "Oh, this concern has come forward. How are we going to address this?" and what the process is. I'm trying to understand what the internal process is of the party.

I hope that helps.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's difficult to talk about one specific process, given that there are a lot of different scenarios that it would encompass, but as a general rule, we would try to gather as much information as possible about whatever the concern is. I have seen concerns ranging from the treatment of staff to serious allegations of criminal wrongdoing. We would gather that information—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm sorry. It sounds like you need more clarity.

I'm specifically talking about the premise of the study, which is foreign interference.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Right. In that circumstance, if we had evidence of specific cases that we could point to directly, like a case where a state actor or some foreign entity was engaging inappropriately, we would act very quickly to share the information with the Prime Minister or the leader of the party. We would make sure that we're giving as full an account as possible, and if we were the ones discovering this information, we would obviously be handing that over to authorities immediately.

If something like that was being alleged, we wouldn't hesitate at all. Our duty would be to inform the appropriate authorities of what was happening, which may also include Elections Canada if, over and above national security implications, what was being alleged was an electoral act violation as well. There are several authorities that it may be appropriate to contact in that instance.

Go ahead, Azam.

Mr. Azam Ishmael: I would add that it all depends on the information you have and how you get it, and then you use your best judgment.

I'd say that internally, I think most campaign workers—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm sorry. I feel like I'm having a really hard time asking questions today.

I specifically said in my question if you were given a briefing, so I'm assuming it would come from the appropriate place. What is your internal process?

We are here, talking about what it is to be a person who puts their life out on the line to run for a party, and all of these interference realities are coming out and MPs don't always know. What I'm trying to understand is internally, if you got that information, how you talk to your leader, to your candidates and to that person's campaign manager about next steps. Obviously, you've received a briefing.

Hopefully, that clarifies the question.

• (1140)

Mr. Azam Ishmael: Assuming it is a briefing, that briefing would come in under the secret information regime, so we would probably not be at liberty to discuss it with a candidate or their campaign team, because they wouldn't have the proper clearance. We would only be able to discuss it with the people who have the appropriate clearance and the appropriate considerations, and as Jeremy discussed, we'd bring the leader up to speed as quickly as we could.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: If I could add to that, if it was a matter of an ongoing wrongdoing that was impacting the election at the

time and we were receiving that information from the intelligence agencies, those intelligence agencies have the networks—whether it's the RCMP or Elections Canada—to take the appropriate law enforcement.... It would not be our place to say, "You should take this law enforcement step." That would be their decision.

When we get briefings, the briefings can be on all manner of information. They could be about parties being targeted or candidates being targeted.

If there was a recommendation that some sort of threat mitigation, i.e. letting a candidate know that they were a target or something was happening in their campaign, we would not take unilateral steps on that. We would only take steps in conjunction with the appropriate intelligence authorities, because we're not in a position to decide the sensitivity of the information. Whether we burn a source or anything like that, they would need to guide us on that.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, do you want to ask another question? Are you okay?

Okay. We're going to go with our next rounds. We will start with Mr. Calkins.

[*Translation*]

It's now Mr. Fergus's turn.

[*English*]

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To go back to the previous round of questions, Mr. Broadhurst, I caught the names. There were two other names. You said Azam's name. I got Braedan Caley and "somebody" Lafrance. Could you verify who that is?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: It's Mathieu Lafrance.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mathieu Lafrance—okay, thank you very much.

You had a briefing with the Prime Minister on the 29th, which was a day after you had the briefing where you received the information. Who else was in that room with you? Could you tell us who was there? Obviously, the Prime Minister was there if you briefed the Prime Minister. Was Katie Telford present for that briefing?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I am sure I can confirm I spoke to the Prime Minister alone.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The Prime Minister alone....

You've already agreed to undertake to provide us with the name of your GTA organizer or organizers. My question, then, goes back to.... It was actually brought about by Mr. Ishmael, who just said that it would be inappropriate to discuss sensitive information with a candidate as a matter of law; yet Sam Cooper has tweeted out that the individual who is looking after the GTA ridings told the candidate in Don Valley North that they were a CSIS target.

Which Liberal party official or officials would have leaked the contents of this classified CSIS briefing to the Liberal staffer who was responsible for these GTA ridings? Who would have done that? If you were the only one in the briefing with the Prime Minister...^

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: In that circumstance, I would say the reporting was incorrect. I would say that is often the case.

There is no way that any staffer working as a field organizer in the 2019 election campaign would have had access to any information provided in the briefing.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Sources have actually said that is the case. You are saying that the CSIS sources and Mr. Cooper are incorrect.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Again, reacting only to the public reporting at this point, I can't speak to what sources they are relying upon on that front said. I can tell you that the information is incorrect.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: CSIS recommended, in the briefing, that the Liberal party should revoke the nomination of the candidate in Don Valley North.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I'll let them speak to this as well, but it would have been inappropriate for them to make that kind of recommendation. That is not their role; it is not the role of intelligence to dictate to parties how they conduct their affairs. It is to provide the information they deemed...at any given time. Again, I'm not going to get into the content of that, but I can say from my experience working with CSIS and intelligence officials in government that they would never have taken that step.

I would point to that being perhaps another inaccurate piece of public reporting that has happened in this case.

• (1145)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The entire of judgment of whether or not your candidate should have proceeded would have been a decision made completely internally by the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Again, I'm not going to confirm what information was provided or about whom it was provided, but the determination of candidates is the bailiwick of the parties.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Following the briefing, were there any discussions between you, the other two individuals you've identified, or with the Prime Minister on the status of the candidate. It was two days prior to nominations closing when you first learned of this. The Prime Minister had a day to make a decision about whether or not to proceed with this candidate. It looks like that decision was made, but was that actual issue discussed? Can you tell us that?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I'm not going to discuss the nature of the content of the briefings—their subject matter. Again, I can only point out what is publicly reported. I think I've pointed out that there have been inaccuracies in that public reporting.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So, you won't....

It seems odd to me that if the security intelligence service of the country came to a political party, bringing information of concern to a political party about the integrity of the nomination process prior to a nomination deadline or a candidate deadline during an election, and no decision was made....

Why wasn't that decision made? Why was the nomination of the Liberal party candidate for Don Valley North not revoked when you had time to do so?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Again, I'm not going to discuss what the content of those briefings was. I think you are making assumptions based on reporting that has not always been accurate.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

I'd also like to thank the witnesses who are with us today. What they have to say is very interesting.

Mr. Ishmael, first of all, I'd like to express my gratitude for the important work you do.

I'd like us to talk about what happened during the 2021 election.

[English]

We've heard allegations by the Conservative party that attempts at foreign interference swung ridings in the last election, particularly in the GTA and British Columbia. I'll get to that in a minute.

I think it's important first for members to recall that members of the panel who were responsible for alerting Canadians in the event of an incident that threatened the integrity of our elections confirmed to our committee that, if there had been an incident at the riding level that met the threshold, they would have alerted Canadians. As you know, that didn't happen.

We also heard from NSIRA that there were issues and concerns brought forward by the Conservative Party and that these were responded to thoroughly and that the intelligence did not support the information and the allegations that were made.

Now that I've gotten that on the record, I have my own thoughts on this matter of how all this came about, but I would like to hear your views on the information that had been brought forward to the committee that you were a part of in 2021 and how they were dealt with.

Mr. Azam Ishmael: I appreciate your appreciating our work.

Could you just clarify the question?

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'd like to know your views on the matter in terms of how, when issues were brought forward to the committee that you were on, the national security committee, how they were dealt with.

Mr. Azam Ishmael: I'm guessing that it's in regard to the briefing that we received in 2021.

The matters that were brought to the committee or to me were taken back to the campaign office, and then I discussed them with two senior campaign staff.

• (1150)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Regarding any concerns that were brought forward about foreign interference, if they had been brought forward and you were made aware of them, did you feel that the intelligence bodies had dealt with them in an appropriate manner?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: That's an interesting question. It would be hard for me to confirm or deny anything that happened in the briefing without sharing that more broadly, but I would say that my interactions with the security establishment has only led to a further appreciation of the work they do and the challenging environment they operate in, because, as you can imagine, it's not easy work for them.

I would say that generally all our interactions were quite positive.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Broadhurst, do you have anything else to add?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: It is difficult to sort of get at how I would talk without referring to the specific content of it, but I would agree largely with what Mr. Ishmael said.

Hon. Greg Fergus: For either witness, I would like to talk about the steps that parties have taken to counter foreign interference. Given that so much of the work of the parties is online nowadays, can you speak to the measures that have been taken to bolster party cybersecurity?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: Without going into what is probably very sensitive details of our cybersecurity, I would say as a general matter that it is something that's reviewed on a regular basis with cybersecurity experts. We often bring in people with experience in breaches and leaks to talk with us as to what the best practices are. We ensure that our systems are secure, but we also do simple things like two-factor authentication. That seems obvious nowadays, but not everybody does it. There are more complex technical matters that I'm not really qualified to speak about because I don't fully understand them, but there are investments in firewalls, password protection and things like that.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Let me get back to my first question that I'd asked. Look—

Oh. It's five minutes, not six. I'm sorry—my mistake.

The Chair: I'm sorry, too, but with that, our time is limited.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Broadhurst, along the same lines, I'd like to talk to you about the way intelligence agencies provide you with information.

Were you simply provided with a set of raw data that you could analyze at your leisure, from which you could draw your own conclusions? Were you presented with the conclusion that a nominee's candidacy was compromised? Did you get an explanation of how that conclusion was drawn?

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Thank you for the question, which I will answer in English.

[*English*]

It's hard to give a generalization based on such a small sample size of occurrences of what happens, but we have seen information provided that is—

[*Translation*]

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

I'm sorry to interrupt the witness, but there's no interpretation right now.

The Chair: I will stop the timer.

[*English*]

Do we have interpretation now? Is it working?

Please continue.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: Azam was present on the briefings as well, so I might turn to him to give you some concrete evidence, but you aren't looking at raw data and asked to come to your own conclusion. You're given a synopsis of information, but the conclusions—I can speak to this from the government side—are rarely concrete, right? It's often that “here's what we know and here's what we don't know”. That leaves gaps for people to decide what's the calibre of the information you have, but it's important for it to be shared so that you're not in the dark about it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: After receiving the information in the form of raw data, who has the final word on the conclusion to be drawn from it? Is it intelligence agencies, or the person who receives the information? That would be you, in this case.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: In my experience with it, rarely will intelligence agencies come with a conclusion that says, “This is concrete evidence of a fully formed plan of foreign interference.” They responsibly try to not make those types of conclusions. They just say, “here's what we know”, in terms of whether it's conversations that may have taken place or actions taken, but they don't necessarily speak to motive and conclusions if they don't know it for sure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Did you get an explanation of the credibility level of the information sent to you? For example, were you told that some information seemed credible enough and some less so?

Is there any preliminary information analysis?

[English]

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: It's a difficult question, because there are different situations. I would cite David Morrison, who came before this committee and talked about how each piece of intelligence is part of the picture, and conclusions are reached in looking at the whole piece. Necessarily, what information is being provided to parties during an election campaign isn't going to be the entire picture, but it is enough to provide the party with the information that they need to be vigilant themselves.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Blaney, you have two minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair.

I'll try again and, hopefully, do a better job of asking. I think it was clear, but there you go.

For my next question, we know the reality is that foreign interference in the elections period is changing very rapidly. Based on your testimony today, I hear the complexity of trying to gather information and to see a clear picture when things are not very clear.

I'm curious as to what internally has changed over this period of time in terms of how you talk to your campaigns. Has anything changed about how you do things in your campaigns in acknowledging that foreign interference could have an impact and in trying to find ways to address that pre-emptively?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: As the conversation has matured, which is maybe the right description of it.... The first time I thought about it, I thought about this uniquely in a cybersecurity setting, because that's what was garnering headlines around the world or the conversation that's going on around the world and how that's being changed.

I think it's how we talk to candidates about simple training, such as two-factor authentication, and also to say, "Hey, watch out for this" or "Be mindful of these types of things." If somebody raises an issue, then they'll say something like, "Oh, hey, this might have happened to us" or "This is an anomaly." Then maybe you want to dig one step deeper in the conversation as to what is driving that anomaly. So it's about being more mindful of the anomalies.

It falls more on the side of the staff, who are just dealing with it all of the time, versus the candidate. As you may know, some candidates are nominated into the campaign. During the first week of the campaign, there's a lot coming at them. The more permanent establishment of the party is more aware of the potential threats.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay.

My next question is this: Who has the power to remove a candidate, and has the method of reviewing when to remove a candidate been changed or matured through this process of learning and understanding the impacts of foreign interference on elections?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: For the Liberal Party of Canada, the way the process works is that, up until the point at which a candidate is endorsed to Elections Canada—because once you're endorsed to Elections Canada, it's only you, the candidate, who can remove yourself from the ballot, as per the rules set out in the Canada Elections Act—the green light committee has the ability to revoke somebody's approval, but it would be the campaign chair who

would have the authority to remove a candidate. However, that only goes up to the point at which Elections Canada has been informed because once Elections Canada is informed, the candidates need to remove themselves.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I would also, maybe, take from your question.... I mean, one of the things about this process has been the intelligence agencies' learning about the whole political process.

I can tell you anecdotally, from working with them through government, that they didn't have great understanding of the political processes and the timelines involved, so when they would provide information, they were not thinking about timelines. They were not thinking about anything like that. They were just providing information to parties. However, their sophistication, in terms of politics, is evolving as well.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we're going to do a quick question from the Conservatives and then a quick question from the Liberals before we do a quick suspension for the next panel.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the indulgence.

The Prime Minister has stated repeatedly that he has never received any information about candidates' receiving money from China. I'm asking whether you can confirm that the Prime Minister, in fact, does not have knowledge of any candidate, nomination, contestant, electoral district association or political party having received funding, either directly or indirectly, from Beijing.

Second, following the September 28 and September 29 briefings—with CSIS on the 28th and the Prime Minister on the 29th—can you confirm whether any further information regarding those matters was shared with any external entities, including authorities or law enforcement entities, after those two briefings?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I'll start with the first question. The Prime Minister was truthful in his statement. I have nothing to add to it.

With regard to the second matter, I just want to make sure that I'm understanding it. Are you asking whether we went to authorities different from the ones who spoke to us in the first place?

We did not, as any authority that I could have thought of at that point already has a working relationship with CSIS. There's an MOU in place, for example, with the commissioner of elections, who investigates electoral malfeasance. There's a free flow or exchange of information there. It's not our place to do that since it's not our information. It's CSIS's information. Anything that I could have thought of at that time, or that any of us would have thought of, would have already been covered by the existing relations of the intelligence agency.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ferguson.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'll be very brief.

As we discussed earlier, nothing ever came to the panel that would meet the threshold to alert Canadians and parties of foreign interference. Why then do you think the Conservatives lost those seats in the GTA and in the Lower Mainland?

Mr. Azam Ishmael: Jeremy could probably speak better to 2019.

When you think about 2021 and that election campaign, as all of you as elected members would know, each community votes on issues of concern to their own community. That said, I would say that primarily in the GTA and Vancouver areas, banning assault weapons and having responsible gun laws in the country were of primary concern to these communities. As such, in these campaigns our message spoke to them and we were successful in those elections.

Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst: I would echo that.

I think sometimes it's easy for observers of politics to fall into the fallacy of thinking, particularly with regard to ethnic communities, of there being some sort of monolithic block that have their own set of issues that are foreign to others. That of course is not the case. Canadians have this funny way of making up their own minds about what issues are important to them in any given election campaign.

What we saw repeatedly in 2019 is that a message around community safety, particularly responsible gun control, was resonating there.

There was a feeling in some of those ridings that had previously voted Conservative that the Conservative Party had lost the plot on that. We were able to identify that and get good candidates to win the election.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's excellent.

I would like, on behalf of PROC committee members, to thank you both for coming to join us.

There is some information that members have requested. If you could send that to the clerk, she will have that circulated around. If you think of something else that you wish you had said or wanted to share, please do not hesitate to send that to the clerk. Once again, the clerk will circulate that around.

With that, I am going to....

Mr. Cooper, is it about this? I need to keep us tight because we have other guests.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

I wanted to pick up from where you left off that there were three undertakings for—

The Chair: I think I made the point.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I just wanted to be clear as to what they were.

The Chair: I'm very clear that they know.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Well, just for the record, it is that the undertakings pertain to the general election campaign manager for the candidate for Don Valley North, the nomination campaign manager of the candidate for Don Valley North, as well as the field organizers and their respective roles in the GTA.

• (1205)

The Chair: The time that was taken for that is noted.

On that, I would like to thank you both for joining us.

We will suspend the committee for three minutes so that we can have Mr. Marshall sound-checked in.

Mr. DeLorey, we welcome you in person.

We will have a quick turnaround so we can get the next panel started.

Thank you. Keep well and safe.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Welcome back.

For the next panel, we have with us Mr. Fred DeLorey, former national campaign manager for the Conservative Party. Joining us by video conference we have Mr. Hamish Marshall, partner, research One Persuasion Inc.

Welcome to you both, and thank you for being here with us today. You will have up to five minutes for your opening statements, and then we'll proceed to questions from the committee members.

Mr. DeLorey, the floor is yours. Welcome.

Mr. Fred DeLorey (Former National Campaign Manager, Conservative Party of Canada, As an Individual): Madam Chair, good afternoon, and thank you for having me here.

My name is Fred DeLorey. I served as the national campaign manager for the Conservatives in the last general election.

In regard to the matter at hand, I'm going to tell you what I heard and what I know, but given the limited amount of time for my opening statement, my expert opinions will come through my answers to any of your questions later. With that, I'll jump right in.

When it comes to foreign interference during the campaign, we did hear the odd rumbling that something was going on, but it was anecdotal at best. During campaigns, the rumours of misconduct are common and usually end up going nowhere. However, after the campaign was concluded, we noticed some results that felt off. That's when internal rumblings of foreign interference became much louder. Hearing these, I had instructed our field operations teams to investigate the matter by communicating with various local campaigns and reporting back to me.

The report I received came back in memo form. I will read this memo into the record now, and I'd be happy to provide the committee with the electronic version of the memo later, as well as the attachments referenced in the memo.

This is from the memo:

"There's a strong case to be made that there was a degree of influence exerted by an outside actor in the Chinese community during the 44th general election. From speaking with campaign teams and regional organizers, we believe this influence negatively impacted our standing in these seats: Metro Vancouver: Richmond Centre, Steveston—Richmond East, Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Fleetwood—Port Kells; in the Greater Toronto area: Markham—Stouffville, Markham—Unionville, Richmond Hill, Willowdale, Don Valley North, Scarborough—Agincourt, Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Newmarket—Aurora, and to a certain extent Mississauga Centre.

"Through message groups on WeChat, text-based and news-content-style articles were circulated which directly targeted the Conservatives or expressed support for the Liberals. From what we've been hearing, these articles have been popping up on all sorts of groups, especially non-political ones. However, when one of our supporters posted some of the pro-Conservative articles, they were told that their content was too political and was removed from the groups.

"In one example there's an article that starts with 'Crisis for Chinese Canadians, we need to save ourselves', 'Stop the Conservative extremists from getting in power'. Another is, 'The Liberals want your money; the Conservatives want your life', a third is 'The Canadian version of Trump, leader of the Conservative Party wants to block WeChat and vowed to fight China to the end.' Attached you'll find additional examples of other articles that were posted and shared."

As you know, WeChat is the main messaging social media platform used by the Chinese-speaking community in Canada and is directly controlled by Chinese corporations. There were also anti-Conservative ads without authorization tags that were displayed on digital screens in a Chinese grocery store in Scarborough—Agincourt.

The concluding part of this internal memo directed to me reads:

"It's our understanding that the federal Liberals were not expected to do as well as they did with the Chinese community and that they did not coordinate this campaign directly."

Again, I am prepared to forward this memo and the attachments referenced to the committee.

After I received the memo, I forwarded it to our representatives who were sitting on the task force, as we had been instructed to take everything through that.

I was briefed later by our representatives that when they brought the evidence to the task force, they were informed that there were legislative gaps and there was nothing that could be done.

That concludes my opening statement, Madam Chair.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Hamish Marshall (Partner, Research, One Persuasion Inc., As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Hamish Marshall. I was the Conservative Party of Canada's national campaign manager in the 2019 federal election.

Obviously, the 2019 election was conducted in the shadow, or the lead-up to it was in the shadow, of allegations of foreign interference in a variety of western democracies. It was something that our party took seriously and pushed the government to take action on. It's something that I took seriously as campaign manager and with our campaign team.

Early in my time as the national campaign manager, I met with a senior academic from one of Canada's leading universities, who made clear what the operating assumption for myself and everyone in our senior campaign team should be: We should assume that all of our electronic communications were compromised by Chinese intelligence and possibly other countries as well. That's something we took seriously. We took the approach that this was something that was being monitored by foreign powers, at the very least.

The government created the protocol and a committee of senior civil servants with the mission to go public if certain thresholds of interference were broken, not if there was any interference; we've seen that there was. There were reports after the 2019 election that there were small instances of interference, but none of them at the threshold.

I was one of the Conservative Party of Canada's representatives who was security-cleared and got the secret clearance on SITE, the security and intelligence threats to elections task force. I went to briefings before and during the election. There were probably half a dozen briefings overall. I was instructed at those briefings not to speak about the specifics of what was discussed and what was shared with us as part of our secret clearance. I will not be able to give specifics from that.

I will say, though, that including political parties was a good idea. When the process first started, it was very clear that the intelligence services, and frankly many of the civil servants there, took a very sort of standoff and confused view of political parties. I think Mr. Broadhurst said earlier that he felt there wasn't a lot of understanding of what we do and our processes, and I would echo that. There was a feeling that political parties were these odd institutions that were sort of on the side of government. There was almost a level of discomfort in dealing with political parties.

I believe political parties are institutions that are fundamental to the nature of democracy in Canada, so incorporating them in the SITE process was good. My regret is that it ended at that point. I think we should be looking at a scenario where political parties are briefed on and included in these matters around election interference between elections, and not just in the immediate lead-up and during elections. I think that would build more trust and be a better way of interfacing between the intelligence services and political parties, which, frankly, will often be the first organizations to see evidence of foreign interference. The ability to have those dialogues I think is extremely valuable.

I will also say, I think to echo something Mr. DeLorey just said, that there seemed to be an extreme, I would say, or a great deal of reticence—I can only speak to 2019—around declaring anything above the threshold for public disclosure. It seemed to me that the people involved, the civil servants involved, were more concerned about being accused of interfering in the election themselves by making something public than the possibility of foreign interference. It's my belief that almost anything that came there would not have met the threshold, whatever the threshold was, for disclosure, because they were so concerned about being seen to interfere.

Perhaps that's rightfully so, but that is something that needs to be fixed going forward. We've now had the 2019 election. There was a report afterwards saying that there was interference, but it wasn't enough to mention during the campaign. Where that line is drawn I think can only help to undermine confidence in Canadian elections. We all have to be very, very, very careful about that.

I'm happy to discuss any of this further.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now enter into six-minute rounds. We still start with Mr. Cooper, followed by Mr. Turnbull, Madam Normandin and Madam Blaney.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to direct my questions to Mr. DeLorey.

Mr. DeLorey, you stated that during the campaign, the Conservative campaign had heard rumblings of interference by the Beijing regime, but there was nothing there that could fully substantiate it, if I understood you correctly. During the campaign, was the SITE task force in contact with the Conservative campaign to alert the campaign of any interference activities that they may have observed?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I was not a part of the task force, just to be clear. We had representatives that we appointed to it.

What I was informed of was that it felt like a one-way street, where we would bring information to them—concerns that we had seen—but didn't necessarily get anything back in terms of foreign interference.

Mr. Michael Cooper: When you speak of this one-way street, the campaign was bringing pieces of information through the party's representatives on the task force. Some of that was anecdotal information and other pieces of evidence.

I don't want to put words in your mouth, so you can agree or disagree. It sounds to me like it was going into a black hole.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I think that's accurate, from what I was debriefed on.

Again, we were told later that there were legislative gaps. It seemed to be that people don't know what to do with the information. This is a new process that was just created recently. It seems, to Mr. Marshall's point, that these entities don't understand political parties or campaigns.

It's similar to Elections Canada. You're all members of Parliament. You all deal with Elections Canada. No one at Elections Canada actually knows how campaigns work, which always causes major issues. That's going to be the same thing here until we get this ironed out.

● (1220)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Walied Soliman, who was one of our party's representatives and who had a security clearance, tweeted the following: "After the election and before the new government was sworn in, we spent more time providing everything we had to the Task Force and appropriate security channels. We were met with shrugged shoulders and complete ambivalence. It was truly unreal."

I know you can't speak for Mr. Soliman, but you were the campaign manager, so surely you were involved in some discussions.

Would you agree with Mr. Soliman's assessment and can you elaborate on some of the issues and challenges that were faced following the election campaign when the campaign was providing tangible information to the task force?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Well, I would of course [*Inaudible—Editor*] one who briefed me as well. He was one of our representatives on the task force, so the information flowed through him.

I would concur that's what happened.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You cited legislative gaps. What are those legislative gaps?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: It has not been made clear what those are.

I have my own opinions on what we can do, but the task force did not say what the gaps are.

We can assume there seems to be a lack of communication between authorities. There are a lot of different things that need to be ironed out here and investigated further on what the mechanism is and what these entities do when they get information.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Morris Rosenberg, in his report on the 2021 critical election incident public protocol, states the following on page 39, regarding briefings to political parties by SITE task force representatives: “The party representatives were pleased with the thoroughness of the briefings and the openness of the NSA representatives.”

Again, recognizing that you weren't there for the briefings, but from everything you know about the information that was provided, I take it that does not accurately reflect the experience of the Conservative campaign of the 2021 election.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I believe that would be an inaccurate statement that he made in that report.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Through you, Madam Chair, you said that you have certain opinions or observations regarding legislative gaps or other issues.

Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I think there is an opportunity here for this committee and NSICOP to work together on trying to find out what these actual issues are and get to the crux of it. I know we're spending a lot of time trying to find out who knew what, when and where.

I feel that a lot of effort, as legislators, should be going into putting together legislation to plug these holes. We're all under threat here. All parties could be impacted by this in the next election. It could come from different entities or different countries and I really wish we could see a more collaborative approach to really drill down on what the issues are and how we can solve them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Turnbull.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. DeLorey, I'll start with you.

In a recent interview with David Herle you had mentioned—and you've mentioned this today in your opening remarks—that there were unclaimed, anonymous ads attacking Erin O'Toole in the last election. You said “this was all passed along to the task force”, which I think implies that during the election, you or someone from your party passed along those complaints to the SITE task force at the time.

Is that right?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: That's correct.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: My understanding is that the complaints about political ads that are not identified should also be made clear to the commissioner of Elections Canada. Did you report it to the commissioner?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I don't know if that was reported to the commissioner by local campaigns. They tend to deal with those more first-hand than the national campaigns when you see different, unauthorized tags on literature, mail-outs or advertisements.

Because it appeared to be part of the foreign interference, the decision was to send it through to the task force.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It's interesting that you should say that, because when Jody Thomas was here at the committee, she said:

Again, I was not on the task force or the panel at that time. We have very clear documentation from that representative of that political party

—she was referring to the complaints that were made—

asking questions and stating concerns, along with a very detailed response back to him on or about October 22, 2021, indicating that the allegations were being taken very seriously but that we did not see evidence in the intelligence to support the claims....

Now, there have been claims since then, and we're reviewing that information to understand the full picture as broadly as possible....

I think what we heard from Jody Thomas was that there was not an ability to identify whether the ads, etc., and interference were coming from a foreign source.

Is that what your understanding is?

• (1225)

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I don't know what decisions she made or what criteria they looked at to determine that. I think part of the legislative gaps that we have is that we can't drill into this. We need to be able to ensure that we have the tools to look into this.

If we can't determine where it comes from, we have a problem.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: In a recent Toronto Star article, you definitely extolled the benefits of NSICOP's looking into these matters. Would you say that is the most appropriate forum?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Absolutely. I maintain that view.

I think NSICOP is a very legitimate committee. It has all-party representation, and I think it could really drill into this and....

I am really concerned about the next election, not the past one. I would obviously love to redo the past one and try to win it again, but that's not going to happen. Let's worry about the next one and what we could do to ensure that we—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: You also wrote this, in a Toronto Star article:

I can confirm, without a shadow of a doubt, that the outcome of the election, which resulted in the Liberals forming government, was not influenced by any external meddling.

Do you still stand by that claim? Those are your words from that article.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay. Great.

I note that you used the phrase “without a shadow of a doubt”, which sounds like you're very certain. What gives you that level of confidence?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Based on what we saw, there seems to be a concern that there may have been possible foreign interference. However, if you look at the seat difference between us and the Liberals, if you change every seat that could be up in the air, the Liberals are still the government.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have one more question, hopefully.

We know that the Conservative Party registered these complaints with the SITE task force, as you mentioned in your opening remarks.

We know that the national security and intelligence adviser testified that the registered Conservative Party of Canada liaison, who I understand was Walied Soliman—who's not here today and, unfortunately, can't confirm or deny this—was sent “a very detailed response back to him on or about October 22, 2021”, and that “he was given a very thorough response at the time.”

Can you confirm that the Conservative Party of Canada received this response that Jody Thomas referred to in her testimony?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I cannot confirm that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Would Walied Soliman be able to confirm that?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I don't know.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Was he the one who was the liaison?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: He was our representative.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: He would have been the one to receive it.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: That's likely, if that's how this—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: He is not here today, which is convenient, as we aren't able to ask him the questions that he would be able to confirm or deny.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I don't know. I obviously wasn't part of who decided who was to come to committee.

I know the motion read that he was the campaign director and was asked to come. He was not the campaign director. I was the campaign director. Our titles are national campaign manager, but that was my role, not his.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Great.

We hope he is here in the future and we can ask him that question.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us.

My questions are mostly for Mr. DeLorey, but if you want to add something, Mr. Marshall, feel free to do so.

Mr. DeLorey, I'd like to hear your comments on the type of information campaign directors could receive. You mentioned the diffi-

culty of getting information on possible interference that could, for instance, undermine your campaign. Is that correct?

From what I understand, the information provided focused more on your own candidates than on what wasn't related to them, but could undermine them.

Am I summarizing the situation relatively well?

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: We did not get anything from the task force saying what we had to be concerned about or anything to see. It didn't come that way. It was more us bringing to the task force concerns that we had seen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Based on what I understand from the answers Mr. Broadhurst gave to my questions earlier, the information that intelligence agencies provide to party directors focused on their own nominees. They gave them, in a certain way, raw information.

What about your own nominees? Did you get raw information on the entire campaign or possible interference activities in various ridings, which you then had to analyze?

[*English*]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: We didn't receive anything on any of our candidates, any information or anything like that.

Mr. Hamish Marshall: I can't speak to specifics, but we were given not so much information on any of our candidates, but very vague information they were looking into something in this group of two or three ridings. It was very, very vague and it didn't really come to anything. It certainly wouldn't be what I describe as raw data. It was, “We've done some looking. We're doing some more looking.” It was very, very deliberately vague and very, very, very high level. We were not given anything to evaluate in any sense of the word.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: That was how it went, even though in principle, everyone who received that information had the required security clearances for it.

Am I understanding correctly?

[*English*]

Mr. Hamish Marshall: I don't know about the distinction and how the intelligence services work, their distinction between the raw data, which could identify sources, and a report or a conclusion based on that. My understanding is in some cases that is classified differently. I obviously can't speak to it. All I know is that in the situation we were in, we were given very vague, very high-level indications of things that didn't really come to anything.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. DeLorey, you said you already tried to address certain problems at the local level, which your campaign directors brought to your attention. You were then told that there were legislative shortfalls. For that reason, it was not possible to address certain issues.

In your opinion, when a nomination seems compromised, solving potential interference problems is up to the party the candidate wants to join. It would not be possible for another party to solve this type of problem.

Based on your analysis, ultimately, who holds the key when a problem with interference involves a potentially compromised nomination?

[English]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I'm not quite sure I understand the question. We never received anything on any of our candidates in any way.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Generally speaking, based on your experience with the last election, when it's suspected that foreign interference activities have compromised a nominee, who has the power to manage that situation? Is it the party impacted by the interference, meaning the opposing party, or the party with the same political alignment as the candidate involved?

[English]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: The authority in our party rests with our National Council, and they have a committee, the national candidate selection committee, which approves candidates and can remove candidates. Of course, the candidate can appeal to the National Council as a whole if they disagree with that move. As Mr. Broadhurst said earlier, once you're registered as a candidate, only the candidate can withdraw.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Maybe my question wasn't very clear.

Let's use the example of a party negatively affected by a potentially compromised nomination which is impacting another party. Is it only the party with the same political alignment as the nominee who has the power to resolve a situation of interference? A member of another party would have neither the authority, the legislative tools or anything else allowing them to manage the interference impacting them.

Did I understand correctly?

[English]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I'm sorry, but I'm trying to understand the question.

When there's a situation, we can raise concerns. We can go to Elections Canada or the task force and raise a complaint, but there's very little we can do, other than maybe put out a press release and attack the adversary for whatever they were doing.

Again, it is a tricky situation. I don't think we have this solved. We don't have the legislation yet. I think we're new to this, in what

we're doing on combatting foreign interference. I think you guys have a lot of very important work to do to figure this out.

• (1235)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the people here testifying in this important study.

I'm going to come to you, Mr. DeLorey. I think some of the information you shared today is interesting, and I'm really reflecting on some of the comments you made. This is kind of new, and we need to figure out how we're going to address this issue in a meaningful way.

From my perspective it has to do a couple of things. One thing it has to do is provide some sort of connection between that information, from all the resources they get it from...to the parties. But it also has to be at least transparent enough that the public understands what the process is.

Listening to the testimony today—the previous testimony and this—it seems pretty clear to me that there isn't clarity for anyone about how any of this works, and everybody's trying to figure it out. I appreciate that you talk about addressing some of those legislative gaps.

I would like to go back. Perhaps you could explain for me the work that you do. Of course if there's anything from Mr. Marshall...during the previous election.... What is changing internally in how you address some of these issues or look for those issues? It sounds like what you're telling us is that it feels like you're not getting enough information to do anything. You're giving information, but not receiving much.

What internally have you done as a party or in a campaign role to address some of these issues?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: The day Erin O'Toole left the leadership of the party, I resigned as campaign manager as well, so I'm not involved in anything that's moving forward.

What I would of course advise the campaign.... I would be pushing caucus to work on legislation to look at these holes and to figure out what the holes are. We're saying there are gaps. I don't know what they are exactly, so I would be working hard to figure out what those are.

As Mr. Marshall mentioned before, cybersecurity is something that we are obviously very concerned about, and that's an ongoing thing—constantly updating systems and doing that.

Again, this is all very new to us. I think the parties, and obviously the legislators here in this room, should be focused very much on fixing and plugging those holes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: When you were in the role of campaign manager, though, were there any internal conversations about your getting any information that brought forward a concern about one of your candidates...? I heard very clearly that you didn't get that, but was there any discussion about how you would deal with that, or did you think, okay, if it happens we'll deal with it then?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: There are always issues with candidates in every political party, in every election, and we all deal with them in our ways. There are obviously systems and things that develop for each campaign, so that's not new. If something was to come forward on foreign interference, or anything like that, that would be dealt with just the same as anything else.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, the big thing that we were really focused on was cybersecurity, and making sure our systems were impenetrable.

Mr. Hamish Marshall: I can say that in 2019 we didn't have an explicit conversation about the idea of the committee, if SITE, the task force coming to us with information on one of our candidates. This was all very new at the time, and I don't think we had a specific, different process for it that would be different from normal issues with candidates, as Mr. DeLorey said, that all parties deal with.

It would be an interesting situation, because, based on information that I did see, as I mentioned before, it was very vague and top level. Generally, as a campaign manager—and I can't imagine that my view is any different from any other campaign managers who have spoken here today—we're loathe to fire and remove candidates. It's not something we enjoy doing. It's something difficult, and it's extraordinarily disruptive during an election.

The information that we would have to be presented with by the committee or somebody else, in order to take action would have to be very detailed. The very high-level, vague things and information that was passed on to us weren't about anything. It wasn't a situation that... I just know our procedures. In order to decide to go to the national candidate selection committee and ask them to rescind someone's nomination, we have to have something very specific and something tangible. I'm not sure if what would have been provided would have met that test.

• (1240)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm done all my questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next round will be with Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Afterwards, it will be Ms. O'Connell's turn.

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

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

I thank the witnesses, Mr. Marshall and Mr. DeLorey, for being with us.

From the beginning of our study on foreign interference in Canada's elections, I've been preoccupied by something: the process in place. Witnesses gave us details on it.

According to the process, members of the party have the required security clearance to receive information during the campaign. Since an election campaign runs for a very brief period, there's not a lot of time to react.

I'm wondering what a national campaign director can learn from security clearances. From the beginning of our study, many witnesses told us they could not talk about what they learned during security briefings.

Given your experience as a campaign director, how were those briefings useful to you?

[*English*]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: That's a very good question.

I was the national campaign manager. I think I was one of the few not to get the briefings myself. I trusted others to do that and to report back on what we could action on what we needed to. Again, it didn't seem to be that valuable to us. There wasn't anything that could come back.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: If I understand correctly, Mr. DeLorey, the briefings didn't change your approach during the campaign, because you didn't get enough information from them. Information communicated during briefings flowed in only one direction.

Is that right?

[*English*]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Again, I wasn't in particular briefings, but I got the feedback, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: That's exactly the point I wanted to raise. As the campaign director, you're the only one who doesn't have the required security clearance.

Some people within the party received information, but they couldn't share it with you.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: That's correct. They couldn't share, but, if they felt action had to be taken, they had the trust of the team to recommend that we do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: However, no measures were taken.

And yet, after the campaign, when you took stock of the situation, you were very critical of ridings affected by interference from Beijing's regime.

[*English*]

You identified a lot of ridings.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I'm sorry; I don't understand the question.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: During a debrief at a working group meeting, you reacted very critically to the fact that you lacked information during the election campaign. You then said that several ridings were victims of foreign interference, but you were unable to act before the campaign ran.

Is that right?

[English]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: That information mostly came to us after the campaign; it wasn't during the campaign. There was some anecdotal stuff, but the memo that I read out came after the campaign. We were able to get that information from the ground up, from the local campaigns, not from the task force. It didn't come to us from them.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Why do you think the public couldn't be made aware of this information before the campaign ran? It might have allowed you to get involved and take action.

[English]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Well, I don't think they knew what was happening, because we didn't get that information, didn't pull that together ourselves, and again, nothing came from them on this. It felt like a one-way street, as I mentioned earlier.

At the same time, I don't know what the thresholds are. I don't know how they determine when they alert the public. I don't think that's been very clear. At least it hasn't been to me. I think that's one of the things we need to figure out and address, because it is important. At the same time, it's risky. You have to make sure something has really been done before you alert the public to something because there could be a false flag.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: When you became aware of all the information flagging that something was going on during the campaign, shouldn't the public have been informed?

[English]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Well, the public was informed after the campaign.

Mr. Luc Berthold: But they were not during the campaign.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: They would have been during the campaign, if it had been concrete enough and real. That's why it needs to be investigated: I saw what I saw, but I'm not the one to determine how that should be shared with people.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'm done, Madam Chair.

You answered my questions, Mr. DeLorey.

• (1245)

[English]

The Chair: I'm really enjoying this. I really thank you for giving me your extra time back.

Ms. O'Connell, go ahead.

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

Thank you to both witnesses for being here today.

Mr. DeLorey, I'm going to pick up where you left off in terms of alerting the public, because when the national security adviser to the Prime Minister was here and Mr. Turnbull started down this line of questioning, she said it couldn't be determined whether or not information being shared was actually from a foreign entity and that it could have been Canadians who were upset and sharing these messages. So even with respect to this line of questioning about what should be public or not public, first isn't the critical test to determine that it's not just Canadians expressing their displeasure with a particular party, and that it actually has to be foreign influence by a foreign entity, instead of deciding that it's somehow foreign influence based on the nationality of those Canadians?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I agree that's it's sometimes a big challenge to figure out who is behind this stuff, and that's why I think we need to give Elections Canada and whoever else, whatever entity comes out of this, the tools to do that, to determine what happened and who's behind it. I think that would go a long way.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Following up on that, it was even a Conservative candidate in the 2021 election, Mark Johnson, who in the Toronto Star on February 22 was quoted as saying, "The Chinese-Canadian community were deeply offended and antagonized by the highly critical and vilainizing positions on China taken by Erin O'Toole and a few other Conservative MPs". To continue the quote, he said, "The Chinese government didn't need their agents to drive Chinese-Canadian votes away from the Tory party. Our own MPs were doing a great job of it themselves."

I want to refer again to the podcast you were on with David Herle, in which you said, "At the same time we're dealing with a pandemic where everyone was blaming China, and there's a lot of anti-Asian racism, and it was certainly never the intent of the campaign or the party or anything, but I think that may have been...they just felt we didn't have their backs in all of this because our message was very hard." You go on later to say in this, "Pierre Poilievre has been very crafty in his messaging. He never uses the word 'China'. He says, 'Beijing' or 'Beijing communist'. He's been very smart on that."

Given the perspective of the local Conservative candidate in Scarborough—Agincourt and probably some of your own reflections post election—I was the PS to health during that time, and I certainly remember some of those hard lines about the Chinese-Canadian community feeling very scared after the pandemic and there being an increase in anti-Asian hate, and perhaps the messaging and the campaign being in fact that Chinese-Canadians, as you said, felt that Conservatives didn't have their backs. Do you still feel as though that is an accurate reflection you had?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Mr. O'Toole had a very hard-line but principled approach on dealing with the Chinese government, but I think some of the language could have been better. Mr. Poilievre is using better language. He talks about "Beijing" instead of China as a whole. It certainly has an impact when people feel they're being singled out, even though they were not, and it was not intentional.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Following up on that, there were other campaign choices, and I understand that you may or may not be able to speak to this. For example, in Alice Wong's riding, I believe she had hired staff in the 2019 election and had cut those hired staff and something like a third of those staff were no longer on the 2021 election. Is it also possible that campaign resources and choices have impacts in close election races?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: I really can't comment on that.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Fair enough, but campaigns make decisions based on.... I'm sure your campaigns would be similar where you're looking at data and determining in the last run of an election where to send resources and where maybe you don't send any more resources.

Does the Conservative Party make those sorts of determinations leading into elections?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Every campaign would, of course, any sophisticated campaign.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Following up on the last comments regarding the removal or candidates during campaigns, Mr. Marshall spoke about the decision that would have to be made on that. We've all seen it happen in all parties. It's certainly not pleasant when it's your own party.

Would you agree that those decisions would have to be made based on really solid evidence?

• (1250)

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Absolutely.

As Mr. Marshall mentioned, it is very challenging to remove a candidate. You have to have a good reason to do it. The person was chosen at some level and for some reason to be the candidate for our party in that riding. We have a process, and our National Council expects true hard evidence. You can't just come up with a gut feeling.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

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

My question is very simple, and it's addressed to both witnesses.

To follow up on your statement, we want to investigate. What were the deficiencies?

Mr. DeLorey, do you want to start?

[*English*]

Mr. Fred DeLorey: In terms of dealing with the task force and all that, this is my fourth national campaign team that I've been a part of. It was the first time we had any kind of structure like this. I think that's something to remember, that this is new.

Again it felt like the big shortcoming was it feeling like a one-way street and this whole shrug at the end that we weren't able to

get anything done and we were told that there are legislative gaps. Whatever those gaps are, if CSIS is aware of what those gaps are, I think they should be telling you, and you folks should be working with Elections Canada and other entities and creating something. It could be an act. It could be an amended Elections Act, but whatever it is, it should be something that would give us real teeth so we could dig into things. It feels right now that it's a good start, but it's not solid enough.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: There's obviously legislative gaps.

What do you think, Mr. Marshall?

Mr. Hamish Marshall: Thank you very much for the question.

[*English*]

For me, there are two aspects that I think need to be improved. One is, as I mentioned earlier, the co-operation of political parties. I was in those briefings. I was one of the representatives on the task force. I very much felt, certainly at the beginning, that these people were being asked to meet with us and it was almost like we were a burden to them, that we were these weird outsiders who weren't part of government in the way things really worked, and therefore, our views would be solicited in sort of the briefest, most vague form.

Perhaps now that we've been through two elections that has improved. This was very new in 2019, so I hope that has improved. I think that a regular relationship will help with that. If parties, between elections, are given briefings maybe three or four times a year, and there's a back and forth and trust can develop, that will be helpful. As the intelligence services learn more about how we operate campaigns, that would be very helpful.

The other thing that we really need to do is understand what that threshold for public notification is, because it was very vague to me and it was clear to me that nobody else really knew what that was. Is it one riding being influenced? If three ridings were influenced for whatever party, party A or party B, it doesn't matter, but it does impact the outcome of who is the national government, and in a minority Parliament, three seats could obviously make a difference.

They say, "Well, it was only three seats and it didn't meet the criteria of the threshold." To the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who live in those three seats who are now represented by a party that may have been the result of foreign interference, that's fundamentally problematic. I don't know what that threshold is. We need to have a discussion on it, and it needs to be crystal clear to everybody involved, because my overwhelming sense was unless.... You know, the threshold was so high it would never actually be met. Because the committee was so concerned, to try to have the Clerk of the Privy Council go out and say this election is under threat is such a high bar it would be such a disruptive event in and of itself that they weren't willing to do it.

The Chair: Mr. Marshall, I was quite lenient—

[Translation]

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

[English]

The Chair: If you see the tape later, you'll see that I provided as much flexibility for the answer I could, but I was enjoying it, and I hope one day we get to have a political discourse, because I think the back rooms are very different, and it's nice to see the different things that are being considered.

Mrs. Blaney, you have three minutes.

• (12:55)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I'm going to come to Mr. Marshall this time.

It was interesting to me that you talked about the information you received as being very high level, very vague. It didn't really provide any structure for you to be able to make a decision moving forward. I guess I'm just trying to understand. From your perspective, do you think any other party received anything different?

Throughout this study, it seems like there's an assumption that one party received information that other parties didn't, so I'm just trying to figure out if that is something you were concerned about and if you brought forward that concern at any point.

Mr. Hamish Marshall: At the time, I certainly wasn't concerned about that. I got the feeling they were dealing with us all on an equal basis. As we've now seen some leaks in the press, that may or may not have been true, but at the time I didn't feel we were getting more or less than anybody else.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have a last question for both of you, and I'll start with Mr. Marshall.

I've heard a couple of times that intelligence does not understand how politics works. What do we need to do to educate the system, the process, to understand how it works a little more effectively? I think the answer is legislative, but I'm wondering about it. What are the things that you feel intelligence needs to understand?

Mr. Hamish Marshall: I think the nomination process and the process of firing candidates is a perfect example. We've seen the report that CSIS told the Prime Minister to remove the candidate in Don Valley North, and since I've read that report, I've often thought what I would have done in that situation if CSIS had come to us.

Our parties are not set up in a way that we can sort of just take it as read that something came from the security services and, therefore, we should change the candidates. Candidates are nominated by the membership. I know that's true in the NDP as well. The process to remove them.... As campaign manager, I didn't have a magic wand to remove or appoint candidates. Everything has to go through the national candidate selection committee. In another life many years ago, I was our party's chair of our national candidate selection committee. It's a volunteer position, and it's something that our party members take seriously.

Understanding that, it's going to be very, very important for the intelligence services to work co-operatively. I think the solution is to be working with each other on an ongoing basis, not just sudden-

ly two or three months before an election, and their turning up and saying, "Here's a variety of information."

I think that by working co-operatively, they will have a better education of how we work and we will get a better education of how they work, and that hopefully can be better for the democracy in our whole country.

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Just to follow up with what Mr. Marshall said, I would take it a step further.

Other countries have political partisans as part of their election commissions appointed by parties who have real input on legislation and what's going on and give real experience on how this all works. If you want intelligence officials to know how campaigns work, then put political people around them who do campaigns. These are the experts. This is an expert profession. We have so many different experts in different fields who we bring in for different things, but in politics, for some reason, we don't.

Again, at Elections Canada, no one who works at Elections Canada has ever run a campaign, so they don't have the same.... Until you're in it, you don't know what it looks like.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. DeLorey, do you have about five extra minutes for us today to go past the hour?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Marshall, are you okay with a couple of extra minutes for us?

Mr. Hamish Marshall: That's no problem.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll go for about three minutes to Mr. Calkins followed by Mr. Ferguson before we close.

Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to ask Mr. DeLorey a question through you.

Earlier on, it was intimated that the Conservatives had somehow alleged that the overall outcome of the last election was somehow influenced by foreign interference, yet Mr. O'Toole only claimed there were about eight or nine ridings, I believe, that he thought might have been impacted by foreign interference. Is that not true?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: That's correct. There was never an inference that we ever heard anything different.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: On the number of seats that the Liberal Party won, if you subtract eight or nine and add those seats elsewhere, that's really difficult math, or is it fairly simple math?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: It seems pretty simple.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes, it seems pretty simple to me.

I'll go back to a quote. You talked about actual versus expected results. I'm not sure if you had a chance to review previous testimony by people at the committee, but our former ambassador to China, David Mulroney, said, "I think the bar is way too low when you say that it has to affect the outcome of the election. Affecting one constituency disenfranchises Canadians and is a big win for China. Interfering in 11 is a major, major aggressive step by China."

Would you agree with Mr. Mulroney, both you and Mr. Marshall?

• (1300)

Mr. Fred DeLorey: Any foreign interference needs to be combatted and needs to be taken very, very seriously. That's why I think Parliament should take this seriously and push forward for strong legislation so that you can combat this, because such legislation doesn't exist right now.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Marshall, would you agree with that?

Mr. Hamish Marshall: Absolutely. As I said before, even if one riding's result is changed and that doesn't change the government, we can't just shrug our shoulders and say, well, it didn't change the government. Those people don't have the representative they otherwise would have.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. DeLorey, you did mention that there was a difference between the expected results and the actual results in some ridings. I know that we have windows, and I don't want you to divulge anything you don't want to, but I have asked specifically the officials who were here if a foreign government was able to move the needle. Your opening remarks suggested to me that the needle wasn't where you expected it to be. Can you give this committee any indication of how far that needle was able to be moved by a foreign government?

Mr. Fred DeLorey: That's very difficult to answer, because we don't know what moved the needle. I was reading the memo before, but it's....

Obviously, we didn't do as well with Chinese Canadians as we had hoped to do in certain ridings. The numbers dipped in 10 or 11 ridings that were historically different. Was it interference or was it our headline approach? It's a challenge to say what did this or not. It's something that can never be answered. We don't know, and we will never know at this stage, but again, if we put in the right legislative steps, maybe we can determine that better next time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

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

Thank you, Mr. Marshall and Mr. DeLorey. I really do appreciate the roles you played in the campaign. Having played a similar role before I was elected, I'm very sympathetic to what you do. I have some quick questions for you.

Mr. Marshall, regarding some of the ridings that are under review here, were those ridings, as we would say in French, *des châteaux forts* Conservative ridings? Were they Conservative fiefdoms or were they tight, tight ridings?

Mr. Hamish Marshall: I can't speak to the details of the 2021 campaign, but I would say that the Chinese Canadian vote was a

very strong vote for us in 2019. We picked up the Richmond seat. Of the six most heavily Chinese Canadian seats in Canada, Conservatives won three in 2019 and the Liberals won three. There were about 90,000 votes cast for both parties in those six ridings combined, and we did well elsewhere—

Hon. Greg Fergus: That's exactly the point I was trying to make, Mr. Marshall. In 2015 those ridings had flipped the other way. They were very competitive ridings that toggled between Liberals and the Conservatives through elections. As a matter of fact, if my numbers are correct, going from the 2019 to the 2021 election, you're seeing a net 1.6% in favour of the Liberals over the Conservatives, which allowed those ridings to flip. These are not 10% or 12% gaps.

Mr. Hamish Marshall: Well, no; I mean, in Markham-Unionville we got over 50% of the vote in both 2015 and 2019. In Richmond Centre we got well over 50% of the vote in 2019. They were strong Conservative seats. The size of the drop in those seats was definitely noticeable when the party dropped only half a point in the national popular vote.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Again, looking at Ontario, we're seeing that the Conservatives were down 3% and the Liberals up 4.6%, for a net 1.6%. In B.C. ridings, Conservatives were down 4% and Liberals up 5.6%, again for a net 1.6%.

If you go back to 2011 and 2015, these ridings had played in both parties' hands. These were good, tight ridings. It's not surprising that they were on your list of targeted ridings, and it shouldn't be any surprise that they were on the list of Liberal ridings to be targeted, I would imagine.

Mr. Hamish Marshall: Look, I'm not going to sit here and say that Erin O'Toole did a better job of winning votes in 2021 than we did in 2019. They lost votes and seats. But the fact of the matter is that in a place like Richmond Centre, we won that by 21% in 2019. That's a pretty safe seat with a 21% margin. To end up losing it by a couple of points is a big, big shift, well out from where the national shift was or where the shift was in the province of British Columbia or even in the Lower Mainland as a whole.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank you for giving us a little bit extra of your time and for agreeing to join us.

If there's anything else that you perhaps want to add or share, please do not hesitate to send it to the clerk. The clerk will have it distributed to members.

With that, I really want to thank you for your time, attention and service. I hope you keep well and safe.

I have to remind members of the committee that we're meeting tonight from 6:30 to 8:30 back in this room. We have two really exciting panels.

On Thursday, we will begin at 10 a.m. with a steering committee meeting from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Then we will have Minister Mendicino on foreign election interference. For the third hour, we will proceed with the first panel of our colleagues concerning the report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario.

Also, beginning this Thursday, next Tuesday and next Thursday, so for three days, we will be meeting in room 225 of West Block—upstairs. So it's room 225 in West Block for Thursday, next Tuesday and Thursday, but tonight come back here.

We'll see you at 6:30. Have a good night.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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