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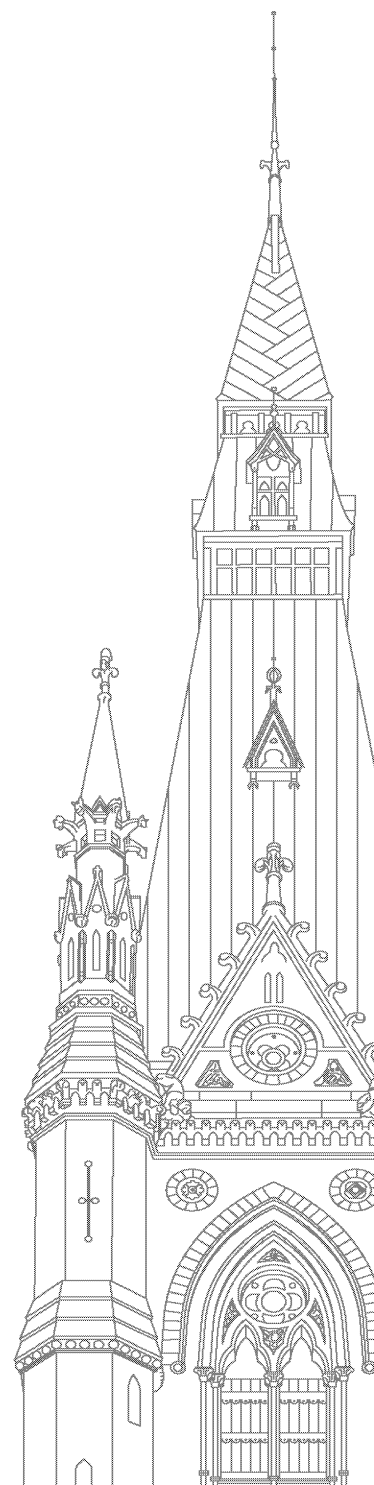
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Chair: Mr. Ben Carr



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): Colleagues, good morning.

[Translation]

I am pleased to be here with you.

[English]

We are here today for meeting number 122 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Today we are joined by Minister LeBlanc, as well as Ms. Drouin, to begin our study on documents requested by the commissioner of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions.

Colleagues, we will begin as we normally do, with just a reminder that the official headsets have been provided for the health, safety and well-being of our interpreters. Please make sure that you place them on the stickers to the right or left of you when not in use.

We are joined today, as I mentioned, by the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs. As well, from the Privy Council Office, we have Ms. Nathalie Drouin, the deputy clerk of the Privy Council and national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister.

Mr. LeBlanc, we will turn the floor over to you, sir. You have up to 10 minutes for opening remarks, following which we will go into our line of questioning.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs): Chair and colleagues, thank you for inviting me and my colleague, Ms. Drouin, to speak to you about the important work of the Hogue commission.

Mr. Chair, I give a particular thank you to you. I had a real moment of panic yesterday that you might cancel this meeting this morning. Nathalie and I would have been devastated had you chosen to do so. We really appreciate the efforts you made, Mr. Chair and colleagues, to not go home after five weeks of sitting but to stay here to have this opportunity. It means the world to Nathalie and me, and I just wanted all of you to know that. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, the government recently introduced Bill C-65, which will strengthen the Canada Elections Act, and Bill C-70. I actually just spoke with our colleagues about the importance of this bill, and I thank the House of Commons and our colleagues in the Senate for passing it. Bill C-70, as you well know, will strengthen the ability of the government and our intelligence and security services to detect and disrupt foreign interference threats, as well as protect Canadians.

As these measures show, the government is constantly improving safeguards to protect Canada's democracy and democratic institutions. It is also with this in mind that the government has taken significant steps to support the Commission on Foreign Interference, chaired by the Honourable Marie-Josée Hogue. This is a testament to the seriousness of our commitment to combatting foreign interference.

Last year, I worked with my colleagues from all recognized parties in the House of Commons to develop the mandate of the Commission on Foreign Interference. At that time, Ms. Drouin was the deputy clerk. She also worked with me when she was deputy minister of justice, as you also know very well. We were able to benefit from her advice and support as a senior official at the Privy Council Office. It has helped us a great deal, as well as our colleagues, the House leaders of the other political parties. I want to acknowledge her role in this process last summer.

We also worked together to secure the appointment of Ms. Hogue as commissioner. I'm proud of the work we've done together on a non-partisan basis.

[English]

What we agreed to in the terms of reference that set up the Hogue commission was that a special exemption would be made to release certain cabinet confidences, specifically the same set of documents that was provided to the independent special rapporteur on foreign interference. These cabinet documents were provided early on to the commission as part of its initial phase of work. These documents, of course, were also shared with the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, as well as the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency.

In addition to those documents outlined in the terms of reference specifically, the Government of Canada has provided over 46,000 documents to the commission and is processing thousands more documents as we speak. The majority of these documents, as you can imagine, are highly classified; to be clear, they are some of the most sensitive and top secret documents in the Government of Canada's possession.

The Government of Canada committed to ensuring the commission has access to all the material it requires to fulfill its mandate, and we continue to work with the commission collaboratively to this effect. Between the tens of thousands of documents and the dozens of government witnesses who have appeared before the commission, both in private, in camera hearings and in public sessions, I am confident that this remains the case.

[Translation]

I look forward to the commission's final report and recommendations. That report, as you know, will be tabled before December 31, 2024. I want to note that Commissioner Hogue has agreed to review the allegations regarding the parliamentarians named in the recent report of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians.

I am confident that the commissioner's report will help strengthen Canada's democracy, democratic institutions and electoral processes. As you know very well, the recommendations—I hope—will also provide food for thought for our colleagues in the provinces, territories and, possibly, municipalities.

[English]

The Government of Canada, Mr. Chair, will continue to support the important work of Justice Hogue and her team. They are beginning a series of interviews with senior government witnesses. I'll have the privilege of being back in Ottawa in the coming weeks to meet with the lawyers of the Hogue commission. Their work is very much on track and continuing. We'll continue, as I said, in a collaborative way.

Madame Drouin spoke to me a few minutes ago about the ongoing dialogue that exists between senior officials of the Privy Council Office, who would be responsible for the management of cabinet documents and such. There is an ongoing active conversation between the commission, the commission's lawyers and the Privy Council Office. This work will continue. We very much believe it will result in the commission having exactly the information it needs to do this work.

I look forward to the discussion, Mr. Chair, and the questions from colleagues.

Once again, let me thank you profoundly for scheduling this morning's meeting. It means the world to me and Madame Drouin that we're able to be here with you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Minister, it's my pleasure to have you here. Thank you for making the time in your schedule.

Mr. Cooper, the floor will be yours for six minutes, sir.

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

Minister LeBlanc, The Globe and Mail reported on May 23 that the Prime Minister and the cabinet are withholding “an undisclosed number” of documents from Madam Justice Hogue, the commissioner of the inquiry on foreign interference. The Prime Minister's department, the PCO, has confirmed that of the documents turned over to her, nearly 10% have been redacted. I underscore that the documents being withheld are documents that Madam Justice Hogue has requested in order to fulfill her mandate.

What is the Prime Minister hiding from Madam Justice Hogue?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The Prime Minister and the government are hiding nothing from the Hogue commission. The redactions you referred to....

Again, if colleagues want technical explanations, I'm sure Madame Drouin can provide them.

My understanding is that those redactions relate to solicitor-client privilege or cabinet confidence. That is a fundamental principle of our Westminster parliamentary system. In no way is the government working at counter purposes to the commission.

As I said, there is an active, ongoing conversation on exactly those documents that Mr. Cooper referred to.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Minister, with respect to that active, ongoing conversation, the reason there's a conversation is that the government is obstructing the work of Madame Justice Hogue. The government is not turning over documents that she sees as relevant to fulfilling her mandate.

I would note that this committee received a letter from the counsel to the commissioner, which indicated that with regard to the turning over of the documents Madam Justice Hogue has requested, “the interest of the Commission and the interest of the Committee would appear to align”.

Again, I repeat, what is the Prime Minister hiding?

I'll further ask if you would provide assurances that at the end of these discussions, Madam Justice Hogue will receive every document she has requested on an unredacted basis.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, our colleague repeated his question. I'll repeat the answer. The government and the Prime Minister are, obviously, hiding absolutely nothing. We happily set up the commission with the work and the support of the recognized political parties. Mr. Cooper's House leader—Andrew Scheer, who's a friend of mine—and I worked....

In fact, the terms of reference that were accepted by every party represented at this table contemplated the release of the cabinet documents the commission has, and also contemplated the protection of cabinet confidence and solicitor-client privilege, so none of this is a surprise.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Minister, I would submit that it is unacceptable for the Prime Minister to pick and choose which documents Madam Justice Hogue can see. Part of Madam Justice Hogue's mandate is to examine decisions made by the Prime Minister and the cabinet with respect to foreign interference, and what the Prime Minister did or failed to do. In that regard, I would submit that the Prime Minister is in a conflict.

Again, if he has nothing to hide, then he should turn over the documents.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, our colleague repeats the same question for his—

Mr. Michael Cooper: I pointed out a clear conflict, a clear conflict on the part of the Prime Minister, insofar as a major part of the mandate of Madam Justice Hogue is to examine what the Prime Minister did or failed to do.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: It won't surprise you that characterizing that as a clear conflict is not a submission that I would respect.

I think it's interesting that there have been 44 federal commissions of inquiry since 1977, and only five of them have had access to cabinet confidence. Four of them were under Liberal governments actually headed by prime ministers called Trudeau, and the fifth one involved a decision—

• (1115)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Minister, since you're now deviating.... Minister, I'll remind you—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I was answering the question—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, I'm going to stop the clock so as to allow you an opportunity to have one more question. However, we have invited the minister here to answer questions, and I'm going to provide him the opportunity to finish.

I'd ask that you let him finish that answer with respect to your question, and then I'll start the clock again. However, let's let him finish the answer.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, thank you.

As I said, four commissions were under Liberal governments where the prime minister was called Trudeau. The fifth one.... Of 44, these are the five that have had access to cabinet confidence. That tells you that it's a very unusual process. The fifth was a decision made by the late Brian Mulroney with respect to cabinet confidence in the Oliphant inquiry.

Again, Mr. Chair, what's important is that the opposition parties agreed to those terms of reference, and of course, now they're manufacturing a lot of indignation with respect to this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Cooper, just so I'm clear: I'm going to restart the clock now, okay? Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Cooper: In fact, the Prime Minister isn't just hiding documents from Madam Justice Hogue. The annual report of NSICOP, released on June 5, states that the Prime Minister and the government “withheld...over a thousand documents” from NSICOP

and that they are “inappropriately using claims of Cabinet confidences to avoid disclosing information”.

Isn't that exactly what is happening here? I will repeat it, and it's a very simple yes-or-no question: Will the Prime Minister turn over every document that Madam Justice Hogue has requested, whenever these discussions come to an end?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, our colleague—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes or no?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, our colleague raised NSICOP and the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency. It's Parliament itself, in the legislation, that protected cabinet confidence when those bodies were created. Neither of the acts that created those bodies created exceptions in terms of access to cabinet confidence. Exceptionally, the Prime Minister has authorized the disclosure of cabinet documents—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes or no?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: —to those bodies, so, Mr. Chair, I can tell our colleague that, at the end of the process that is ongoing and collaborative.... I hope that somebody will ask Madame Drouin, who has insight into those ongoing conversations with the commission. It would be inappropriate for me, and it's not politicians who decide what documents—

Mr. Michael Cooper: The answer appears to be “no”, since the minister has refused, I think at least three times, to answer that question. It's clear that the Prime Minister is conveniently withholding documents from Madam Justice Hogue because he does not want her to be able to fully scrutinize his failures to protect our sovereignty and democracy from Beijing's interference.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Just because Mr. Cooper keeps ascertaining the same thing does not make it true.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor for six minutes.

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I also want to greet Ms. Nathalie Drouin, who is accompanying you.

I'm happy to see you here today.

I think Canadians are asking themselves a lot of questions right now. It might be a good idea to provide them with some explanations, which would also be of interest to the people here around the table.

When we're talking about a confidential or secret document, how do you determine what information will or won't be made public? How was it determined, with Commissioner Hogue, which documents would be made public?

Can you elaborate on that?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question. However, I'm going to ask Ms. Drouin to answer it, because she has a great deal of expertise in this area and will be in the best position to do so.

That said, I'd like to make a comment, if I may. I think it's important to make it clear that the government has never invoked cabinet secrecy to withhold commission documents relating to incidents of foreign interference. It's important to say that. This is a clarification that Ms. Drouin gave me.

We are having discussions with the commission, and these are going well. It's very important that people understand that if cabinet had been informed of incidents of foreign interference or proposals to counter foreign interference, the cabinet documents would indeed have been forwarded to the commission.

I will now turn the floor over to Ms. Drouin to answer your question, Ms. Fortier.

• (1120)

Ms. Nathalie Drouin (Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, Privy Council Office): Thank you very much.

The first frame of reference is really the mandate that was given to the commission. The criteria are evaluated according to their relevance to the mandate. More specifically, the commission itself sends us requests for information. Unfortunately, there have been leaks to the media, and the commission has decided to request specific documents.

I'd like to clarify what Minister LeBlanc was saying about the discussions held with the commission.

When it comes to cabinet, the commission understands the importance to our legal system of protecting cabinet secrecy, particularly for reasons of solidarity among ministers. Ministers must be allowed to express their opinions freely during cabinet deliberations.

In addition, the commission wants to be sure that it has all the necessary elements, particularly on the political level, before making any recommendations. It wants to ensure that it will not make a recommendation on something that, for example, would have already been considered by cabinet, but for one reason or another was not put forward.

When we work with the commission, we never deny them access to a document out of hand. We discuss different elements with the commission, and provide context.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, if I may, I'd like to add something. Ms. Drouin can correct me if I'm wrong.

These discussions are led by senior Privy Council officials. It's not political assistants or elected officials who lead the discussions. That's the responsibility of the Privy Council. They are the ones who hold these discussions with the commission and their representatives.

Hon. Mona Fortier: In your opening remarks and in one of your responses, you said that it's not often that so many documents are forwarded to public commissions of inquiry.

Could you elaborate on that? Why is there more information than usual in this case, compared to other inquiries? Why is there more participation in the investigation?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you for the question.

As I said, there have been 44 commissions of inquiry at the federal level since 1977. Only five commissions of inquiry have had access to cabinet confidences. Of these five, four were created when the prime minister's name was Trudeau. As for the other, it was the late Brian Mulroney, prime minister at the time, who authorized the transmission of certain cabinet documents to the Oliphant Commission. So this is something exceptional.

If my memory serves me correctly, in the past, certain commissions of inquiry that touched on matters of national security did not have access to documents subject to cabinet secrecy.

It's also important to note that this was part of the mandate. It should come as no surprise that the government, as it should, protects cabinet or legal counsel documents. This was understood and accepted by the House Leaders of all recognized parties in the House of Commons.

We are now coming to the end of the parliamentary session, and there is a desperate desire to exaggerate things before the end. However, I don't think it will come as a surprise to anyone.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fortier. You only have 15 seconds left. We can come back to you later.

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

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Hello. Thank you very much.

Today, we could have gone about our business elsewhere than here, but unfortunately, there was a golden opportunity to demonstrate good will and a desire for things to change. I'd venture to say that after 70 meetings and 150 witnesses, we've given birth to a commission of inquiry. The commission of inquiry wants to do its job and asks for precise documents, because it knows what it's looking for, and now it's in the papers. How does it feel to be a minister and have this happen to you?

• (1125)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Ms. Gaudreau, I feel very good to have been able to work with your House leader, Alain Therrien, whom I hold in high esteem. Together, we drew up the very specific terms of reference for the commission of inquiry, which targeted four Privy Council and cabinet documents that would be given to it. Parliamentary leaders from all parties agreed to this mandate.

When the commission members began their work, as Ms. Drouin explained, they had questions about other cabinet documents. It's an active, collaborative discussion between senior Privy Council Office officials and the commission team. So I'm feeling very good at the end of this parliamentary session.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: What I see is that when you have the good will that a commission of inquiry can do its job well....

As everyone around the table knows, if there's one MP who isn't partisan, it's a Bloc Québécois MP. Now, we in the Bloc Québécois want the commission of inquiry to succeed in doing what it has to do by December 31, but it needs to have the tools to do it, and we call that an inquiry.

We're here today to say enough is enough, the nonsense. There's work to be done. There's just one more mandate. People are worried and have lost confidence in our democracy. Can we put things right quickly?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Ms. Gaudreau, we will continue to work with the commission. I agree that Bloc Québécois members, in many of the discussions on interference, avoided the extreme partisanship that other political parties were unable to avoid. I thank and congratulate the Bloc members for the motion tabled last week. I was pleased that the committee accepted the very clear will of the House of Commons.

With all due respect and friendship, I don't think there's any nonsense here. On the contrary, we are very committed to ensuring that the commission has access to all the documents and witnesses it needs. We focus on cabinet documents, as we should and as the commission wants us to do, and we're happy to do that, but the commission has tremendous access to witnesses who can speak to issues of intelligence and foreign interference.

It's important to know that we have released all highly confidential documents concerning incidents of foreign interference, because these are, in our view and that of the government lawyers, precisely the examples of cases that the commission can study well.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Minister, I understand, but how is it that once again, this has to come out in the media? We do a press review, we find that there isn't enough information and that the commission of inquiry can't do its job, and then it comes out in the media. If everything had gone well, and there had really been a steady improvement, it wouldn't have come out in the media.

Will this be the last time? Will it be business as usual between now and December 31? I just want to get that confirmation, because a little bird tells me we'll be seeing each other again in a couple of months because other things will have been published in the Globe and Mail or elsewhere. What do we do?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I totally agree that everything will go smoothly until December 31. In fact, that's what I'm hoping for too, and I'm confident we'll succeed.

You're a politician, you're a very effective person when it comes to understanding public policy issues. So you'll understand that I'm not responsible for what certain colleagues are going to say to the Globe and Mail, and I'm not talking about the Bloc Québécois. Unfortunately, if that's the assessment we wish to make of the situation, I'm afraid that colleagues may go overboard and say things to other media, perhaps even to the Globe and Mail.

As Ms. Drouin reminded us just a few moments ago, it's important that cabinet, the council of ministers, not discuss any particular incident of foreign interference. If there are further questions on this subject, Ms. Drouin will be able to elaborate later. It's important for people to understand that, when the council of ministers meets, it doesn't go into the details of an incident involving coun-

try X trying to interfere in some particular way somewhere. That's a matter for the individual ministers. These matters are dealt with by the various ministers involved, under their authority, but there are no cabinet documents that deal with incidents or that mention specific information on actual or alleged incidents of foreign interference.

If we're lucky, Ms. Drouin will be able to give us some extraordinary explanations on this subject, I'm sure.

• (1130)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'll look forward to hearing that soon.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, welcome to PROC. The floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister for coming to the committee today.

Minister LeBlanc, central to the mandate of the foreign interference inquiry and Commissioner Hogue is to find out who knew what and when, and what the government did about it. After much deliberation and push from the NDP, we finally do have this inquiry, which is a good thing. When it was announced, you said in the media, "Justice Hogue will have full access to all relevant cabinet documents, as well as all other information she deems relevant for the purposes of her inquiry".

The commission is now asking for the unredacted cabinet documents in order to assist them with their work. With regard to the commissioner's asking for this, if they didn't feel it was important for them to fulfill their mandate, they wouldn't ask for it. Would the minister agree with that assessment?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Through the chair, thank you, Ms. Kwan, for the question, and thank you for your participation in this important issue over the last number of months. I think Canadians have seen your personal implication in this. I think certainly it speaks to your strength as a parliamentarian. I just wanted to say that.

Ms. Kwan, I am comfortable with what I said in that particular media interview, that the commission will have access to all the relevant cabinet documents. As I indicated, when I worked over the summer with your House leader, Peter Julian, whom I've known for a long time, we agreed on a specific list of cabinet documents that the Hogue commission received very early in their mandate.

As I said, there is now an ongoing conversation between the lawyers of the Hogue commission and senior officials of the Privy Council Office. They have come to us, as you noted, Ms. Kwan, with requests for additional documents. Madame Drouin would have specific examples. It's not only with respect to cabinet confidence. My understanding is that the Hogue commission would come to the Privy Council Office with respect to national security documents that might be in the possession of CSIS or other government agencies.

That is an ongoing conversation that not only is focused, obviously, on cabinet documents, per se, but that is, as you noted, part of that conversation.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I take that to mean, yes, those are important documents that the commission would require, whether it's cabinet documents or national security documents or all documents, really, for her to fulfill her mandate. I appreciate that House leaders prior to this work came to some sort of agreement, but we have to note that those House leaders, of course, are not doing this work. We have to trust and enable the commission to fully investigate this matter and restore trust and faith in the hearts and minds of Canadians. In order for the commission to properly do this work, the government needs to facilitate that and ensure that they can actually access the documents they require.

There's ongoing discussion with respect to what other documents will or will not be released. We know that about 10% of them are not being released at the moment. With regard to the documents that the government is withholding, whether cabinet documents or otherwise, can the minister confirm that those documents would not assist or provide any insight to Commissioner Hogue in fulfilling her mandate of the inquiry?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, it's a very good question, a precise question, and perhaps Madame Drouin, who has a better line of sight on the process of which of these documents are...can provide a precise answer to Ms. Kwan, if it's acceptable.

• (1135)

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: As Minister LeBlanc said, we already shared four MCs with the commission, and those—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madame Drouin, I don't mean to correct, but “MC” is—

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: It's a memorandum to cabinet. I'm sorry.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I tease these deputy ministers, Mr. Chair. Often they use acronyms. “MC” is a “memorandum to cabinet”.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I'm sorry. Thank you for this precision, Minister.

Those cabinet documents are the most relevant to the point, really addressing foreign interference, or FI—for example, the memorandum to cabinet regarding hostile actors—so we shared with the commission, in a very transparent way, things that are relevant to the point with them. Then the conversation is, are there other accessory conversations at cabinet that may have been in the policy sphere? I again need to be precise that it's not about specific FI incidents. No specific FI incidents have been withheld from the commission. I need to reassure parliamentarians of that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that, but what's also important are not just specific incidents—of course, they are important—but to the whole question around what the government did about foreign interference issues and concerns, it does go to the question of policy and is not necessarily tied to a specific incident. If those documents are withheld, how will the commissioner be able to determine what the government did about it? Those are precisely related to policy discussions. Shouldn't it be up to the commissioner to determine whether or not that information is relevant and important to enable her to fulfill her mandate, and not the government? If it were up to the government, we wouldn't actually be sitting here at the moment. We probably wouldn't even need the inquiry.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, we're over time, but I'm going to permit an answer to your question.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I agree with Ms. Kwan in the sense that the cabinet documents that considered policy choices, legislative options and so on around foreign interference were the four documents that were given to the commission. Those were the times when I and my predecessors went to cabinet with specific proposals around strengthening our democracy, so those documents were shared.

I don't want to be technical with Ms. Kwan, but no government—and it's a fundamental principle of a Westminster parliamentary system—since Confederation will evacuate cabinet confidence to somebody other than the sitting head of the government. In this case it's the Prime Minister personally, as it was when Mr. Mulroney waived cabinet confidence, when Pierre Elliott Trudeau did so with respect to the McDonald commission in the 1970s, and when the current Prime Minister did with respect to the Hogue commission. That is well known. It is very clear in the terms of reference, Mr. Chair, that protecting solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence was well understood.

Now, the back-and-forth process will obviously allow the Hogue commission to do the important work that I agree with Ms. Kwan they need to do.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Ms. Kwan.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, now that you've confirmed that a mere four cabinet documents have been turned over to Madam Justice Hogue, how many cabinet documents are being withheld from her?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, again, I don't have the specific number. Those are decisions that perhaps Madame Drouin can elaborate on, but I also think that it's a fundamental principle in this—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Well, Mr. Chair, it was just a simple question: How many documents have been withheld? You can't answer that. I find it astounding that a mere four documents were turned over to Madam Justice Hogue, which Madame Drouin said were deemed to be the most relevant. Who determined those documents to be the most relevant, the Prime Minister, the PCO or Madam Justice Hogue? Who determined that?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I did, with your House leader, Mr. Cooper, last summer.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I don't think that is accurate, and since that time Madam Justice Hogue requested additional documents, documents that are being withheld by your government and that go to the heart, potentially, of what the Prime Minister did or didn't do about foreign interference.

I'm going to ask you a different question, because we know that you confirmed, by refusing to answer when I asked you, that the Prime Minister will not turn over all of the documents requested by Madam Justice Hogue.

However, on another matter of concern, when you appeared at the public safety committee I asked you twice if you could provide the assurance that no one serving in Justin Trudeau's cabinet is among the MPs named in the NSICOP report who wittingly collaborated with a hostile foreign state. Twice you refused to answer that question, so I'm going to ask you a third time: Can you provide that assurance?

• (1140)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, Mr. Cooper has asked that question a number of times in committee and in the House of Commons. My answer remains the same.

I took note of what Deputy Commissioner Flynn of the RCMP said when he testified yesterday before a committee as well. Getting into precisions with respect to specific intelligence information, including the numbers of people who may be a source of comments in various intelligence documents, is not something that we're permitted to do.

Again, Mr. Cooper can ask the same question, but he's going to get the same answer.

Mr. Michael Cooper: In fact, the Prime Minister saw the NSICOP report. The Prime Minister made the final determination with respect to the redactions. The Prime Minister blacklisted the names of those MPs.

I'll ask you this: Can you provide the assurance that once Madam Justice Hogue completes her work, the names of the MPs who wittingly collaborated with hostile foreign states will be made public?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, just to correct, again, another falsehood that Mr. Cooper asserted—that the Prime Minister made those redactions in the NSICOP report—I would draw him to comments of Alex Ruff, who made it very clear before the committee that none of the redactions of the NSICOP report were made by any political person—by a political staffer or by a minister.

The idea that the Prime Minister has a black marker and spends his time redacting the NSICOP—

Mr. Michael Cooper: But the Prime Minister has the final authority, Minister, and you know it. I asked a simple question.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Cooper knows—

Mr. Michael Cooper: I asked a simple question.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, Mr. Cooper knows—

The Chair: Hey, hey. Just a minute here.

First of all, the interpreters have a job to do. Second of all, no quality answer and no quality question can be given or asked when we can't make out what's being said.

I've stopped the clock.

Minister, I'll give you the floor. You have about 15 seconds to finish that response.

Mr. Cooper, there's a minute and 21 seconds remaining. You'll have the opportunity to resume your line of questioning.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just think it's important not to assert something in a preamble to a question that's completely inaccurate and that his colleague clarified, and to then move on to another question. It doesn't do a service for the public understanding of this issue.

The Chair: Thanks, Minister.

I'll restart the clock, Mr. Cooper. You have a minute and 21 seconds.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Minister, answer the question. Can you provide the assurance that once Madam Justice Hogue completes her work, the names of the MPs who wittingly and knowingly collaborated with hostile foreign states, or any foreign state for that matter, will be made public?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I don't think it would be appropriate for me to offer legal advice to a court of appeal justice on what would be her obligations in terms of a public report with respect to national security information.

Again, if you assert a falsehood in the question and ask for an answer, it doesn't make the premise accurate.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You can't provide that assurance, then. Can you at least provide the assurance, given that the Prime Minister knows the names of the MPs who wittingly collaborated with hostile foreign states, including, potentially, MPs in the Liberal caucus, that none of those MPs will have their nomination papers signed by the Prime Minister to run in the next election?

Can you provide at least that assurance, if you're not going to be transparent in any other respect?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds to answer that, Minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I think it might be more constructive for Mr. Cooper's leader to accept the government's offer to receive the security clearance and see the unredacted report that Mr. Cooper seems to be happy to talk about, not having seen it. It might be more useful if his leader saw the report. Then he might be able to make those very judgments that Mr. Cooper referred to a second ago.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper, and thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you.

Minister, thank you for being here.

On June 10, Alex Ruff, who is a member of NSICOP, said, "To build on what Mr. McGuinty said, I'm 100% in agreement. The Prime Minister is not redacting anything."

Mr. Ruff is a member of NSICOP. Mr. Cooper is just throwing out wild allegations based on, at best, speculation. Who do you think the public should believe, Mr. Ruff or Mr. Cooper? Mr. Ruff is a Conservative member of Parliament who sits on NSICOP.

• (1145)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I think you highlight exactly one of the challenges in this space. When colleagues, often benefiting from parliamentary privilege and the immunity that comes with that, assert a series of falsehoods and then purport to ask a question, it leads to a considerable disservice in the public understanding. Something as important as who gets to decide what portions of a report done by representatives of all political parties, Mr. Ruff being one of them, and including senators from the other place, who would have been in those rooms while that report was being prepared.... For him to confirm that the redactions of that report are done by officials, with zero input from any political staff person or from an elected person....

Just to lay bare the falsehood of Mr. Cooper—the idea that the Prime Minister redacted that report—I think Mr. Ruff answered that very compellingly and confirmed that this is absolutely bogus.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Duguid.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Duguid, you have about three minutes and 15 seconds for your time.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Ms. Drouin and Minister LeBlanc for appearing before us.

Mr. Chair, this is a public meeting, as I think everyone knows, and I'm sure the public has noted the enthusiasm with which Mr. LeBlanc is here today to speak to us, but I think I'll direct my question to Ms. Drouin.

Again, because this is a public meeting, on some of these terms that we're throwing around—from cabinet confidence to solicitor-client privilege—I wonder if you could reflect a bit for us on why cabinet confidence is important. This is a practice, as Mr. LeBlanc

has noted, in Commonwealth parliaments around the world, and it has been practised for a century and a half in our country. Why it is important? What are the risks associated to national security in providing unfettered access to classified documents and waiving of cabinet confidence?

Maybe a reflection, as well, on solicitor-client privilege, just so the public can really understand this and this can perhaps be a learning moment....

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Perfect.

Let me start with the easiest one: solicitor-client privilege.

This is really enshrined into our Constitution: making sure that you have access to legal advice and that the legal advice will remain protected. That privilege also applies to the Crown.

When it comes to cabinet confidence, as the minister said previously, this is really at the core of our Westminster system. This is to allow ministers to give options, opinions and advice to the cabinet and then, after a decision has been taken, to have solidarity behind the decision. We don't want to fetter that in any shape or form, in order to respect and to have a strong democracy.

Let me make a link with FI, or foreign interference—I'm sorry; I will learn not to use acronyms. The first goal of foreign actors is to attack our democracy. This is really the first goal. We need to protect the tools that are there in order to protect our democracy. This is why I think that cabinet confidence...this is not a partisan conversation. This is something that we should be proud of and that is absolutely essential to enabling any government to govern. That's about...in terms of intelligence, I'm sure you have heard about the challenge between using—

The Chair: Madame Drouin, I'm sorry to interrupt. I will let you finish, but if you could, try to keep it to about 30 to 45 seconds in your final segment.

Thank you.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I'm sorry about that.

You've heard about "intel to evidence". I'm sure you have heard about that. The reason is that when we collect intelligence, we are doing espionage, in a way. We are doing that covertly. We are not giving the targets the opportunity to be heard, so throwing information into the public domain would not be responsible. On top of that, it can burn the essential sources that we have. This is why we really need to be very careful.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Drouin.

You may appreciate that my father used to joke tongue-in-cheek that this was an "AFZ", meaning an acronym-free zone. I appreciate that there are many acronyms, of course, that we use.

[Translation]

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

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

I don't have much time, but we're going to talk about solutions. We all agree on one thing here: Obviously, far too many documents are considered confidential when they shouldn't be. It's the culture of secrecy that has been fostered with regard to information. It's obvious when you compare our way of doing things with that of our neighbours and that of the other Group of Five countries.

Now, we can't do a 180-degree turn. However, for the sake of the commission of inquiry, can our minister at least commit to making summaries of the documents, instead of redacting most of their content, so that the commission has enough information to do its job? Can we have that commitment? That would save us from having to meet again in three months' time because the commissioner has too many obstacles in her way to do her job.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I will make the following commitment without hesitation: As a government, we will continue, as we have done, to develop the commission's mandate. Since the commission was created and began its work, we have wanted to ensure that it had access to all the documents it needs.

I'll come back to what Ms. Drouin and I mentioned. I too was an opposition MP, so I understand. On the other hand, you can't be too specific in certain statements. I'm not saying that Ms. Gaudreau made that kind of statement, but what we're talking about here is the idea that a government would eliminate the principle of cabinet secrecy. Whatever may have happened under Stephen Harper, Brian Mulroney or Pierre Elliott Trudeau, this principle has existed for a very long time. In any case, as a government, we have demonstrated our openness and willingness to co-operate with the commission. We lifted cabinet secrecy to ensure that the commission had the documents it needed to do its job.

As I said in my comments at the beginning, this is an active discussion. I have every confidence in the senior Privy Council officials who are taking part in these discussions. I'm convinced, Ms. Gaudreau, that we won't have to come back here in three months to discuss certain matters that may have been mentioned in the media, but that don't give a completely accurate picture of the work that's being done between the government and the commission.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I hope so very much.

Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I appreciate what the minister just said, with the exception, though, that the commissioner is not getting access to all the documents. She's made the request, and there are documents being withheld.

I'm going to ask Madame Drouin this question: How many cabinet documents are being withheld?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I find this question interesting—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry. I'm going to interrupt you very quickly. I have only two and a half minutes. Can you just give me a short answer?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I don't have the numbers. You're going to like that. Many documents have been withheld. Of course, we haven't shared memoranda about dental. Of course, we haven't shared memoranda about pharmacare.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, if I may—

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: It's impossible to respond with how many we have withheld.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan. I won't redact that from your time.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Obviously, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

Madame Drouin, I'm not talking about documents that are not relevant to the inquiry and its mandate. I'm talking about how many documents are being withheld that are relevant to the mandate of the inquiry.

• (1155)

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I think I told you that all relevant documents that were to the point, talking about foreign interference, protecting our democracy.... This is why those four big memoranda to cabinet, in order to be transparent, have been shared with them. Those are the ones that are to the point and really helping the commission.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

Can Madame Drouin confirm for this committee that there are no documents being withheld that would assist or provide any insight to Commissioner Hogue in fulfilling her mandate? Can she just answer yes or no to that question?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, I cannot say yes or no. Maybe there are other memoranda to cabinet—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: —talking about economic security, for example, that talk about the impacts of FI on our economy. Maybe there are some things that can be accessory to the main and relevant things. Those are the conversations we can continue to have, but nothing to this point has been withheld from the commission.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Even documents on just the issue of foreign interference related to the economy would be critical documents, because that could be a reason the government took certain actions or didn't take certain actions, Mr. Chair, and that's precisely the point. It should not be for the government to make that determination; rather, it should be for an independent commissioner to make that determination.

Ultimately, what we all want coming out of this inquiry is to have faith in the process, the inquiry and its outcome. If documents are withheld, you are going to undermine and undercut the work of the commissioner. I feel very strongly about that.

Canadians cannot afford it. The government cannot afford it. None of us can. That's why it's so important for the government to release all the documents the commissioner is requesting.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We're quite a bit over, but I am going to permit the minister just for a moment.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Chair, just very briefly, I want to correct something Ms. Kwan said. The commission was set up to look at foreign interference in democratic institutions and democratic processes. We specifically did not set up a commission to look at economic interference.

To be very precise, that was a discussion we had with House leaders. The terms of reference are clear. To use the example that Madame Drouin properly used.... Then Ms. Kwan ran with the idea that documents around the Investment Canada Act.... Decisions that Mr. Champagne and I might make are specifically excluded by the terms of reference, because Madam Justice Hogue is focusing on democratic institutions and foreign interference. I just think we need to be very precise about that.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Ms. Kwan.

Thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

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

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

Mr. LeBlanc, the burden of proof is on the Prime Minister and your government. Why is that? Because you have been nonchalant on at least three occasions. The Prime Minister refused to listen to recommendations to release documents or provide information to parliamentarians. Then there were all sorts of attempts to refuse to answer questions. There was the appointment of a special rapporteur, whose mandate came to a fruitless end because nobody trusted him. Moreover, Judge Hogue's preliminary report shows us today that we were right not to have confidence in the special rapporteur.

We realize today that only the most appropriate documents will be given to Judge Hogue, according to the very words of the Prime Minister's national security advisor. As luck would have it, the documents in question have already been leaked to the media. Journalist Robert Fife had reported them. These four memoranda presented to cabinet were reported in the media.

Minister, do documents have to be leaked to the media in order to become appropriate for the Hogue commission?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: First of all, I would respond to my friend Mr. Berthold that this is not the case.

In fact, I want to correct something on this and Ms. Drouin will be able to give you more information. The leaks we saw were not related to the four cabinet documents we gave to the commission. So what has just been said is plain wrong.

Mr. Luc Berthold: No, it's not wrong.

There are four other documents. Other documents should have been delivered and were not delivered to Judge Hogue. How many

documents were given to Judge Hogue and how many were not? You've been avoiding answering this question from the start.

I remind you that Ms. Drouin said earlier that, unfortunately, the leaks had enabled the commission of inquiry to be very specific in its requests for documents. So, on the one hand, Judge Hogue is making very specific requests for documents. On the other hand, we learn that Judge Hogue does not have access to all the documents.

Mr. LeBlanc, why is your government so opaque? Why does it refuse to be transparent, which would allow Canadians to regain confidence in the system?

• (1200)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Ha, ha!

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I see our colleagues are bursting out laughing after that comment by Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'd like to point out that it was a Liberal colleague who laughed.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: He knows that we acted in good faith and showed a great deal of transparency with the Hogue commission.

Do you see the confusion, Mr. Chair? Mr. Berthold claimed that cabinet documents were leaked to the media. However, they were actually intelligence documents. Furthermore, 46,000 documents of this nature have already been sent to the Hogue commission.

There's a great deal of confusion between highly confidential intelligence documents and the few documents that, as Mr. Harper always maintained under his government—

Mr. Luc Berthold: This isn't the time to talk about Mr. Harper, Mr. LeBlanc.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: —are subject to cabinet confidence.

The Chair: Just a moment, Minister.

I'll give the floor back to Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. LeBlanc, this isn't the time to talk about Mr. Harper. We're talking about you right now. We're talking about the government that, from the start, has done everything to avoid shedding light on foreign interference. It hides names, conceals reports and avoids taking action.

You said that these documents weren't intended for cabinet. Unfortunately, the national security agencies wanted these documents read by cabinet, Mr. LeBlanc. Therein lies the confusion. How can we trust the Liberals these days?

We want to have faith in Justice Hogue's report. Why are you refusing to provide access to all the requested documents?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, here's another example of confusion. Our colleague, Mr. Berthold, says that we're hiding names. However, complying with Canada's criminal legislation isn't exactly the same thing as hiding names.

He also referred to the report of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. The Conservatives voted against the creation of this committee. The previous government didn't implement any measures to ensure transparency, as we can see right away in this conversation.

In closing, I have every confidence in Justice Hogue's work. I'm sure that her report will enlighten and reassure Canadians, and give the government—and hopefully Parliament—solutions to further strengthen our measures against foreign interference, which have been in place since our government was formed.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, you have 10 seconds left.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I just want to make a clarification. The annual report of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, released on June 5, clearly states that the Prime Minister and the government improperly cited cabinet confidence in order to withhold 1,000 documents, avoid handing them over to the committee of parliamentarians and thereby avoid making this information public. That's exactly what the committee said.

Mr. LeBlanc, the confusion is more on your end. Given all the foreign interference issues over the past two or three years, I think that it's time to get your own house in order and fully co-operate with Justice Hogue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Ms. Drouin, you can respond briefly, if you wish.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Yes. Thank you.

This certainly doesn't concern 1,000 memoranda to cabinet. Keep in mind that, when we public servants prepare a memorandum to cabinet, the process will involve a number of emails, multiple versions of the memorandum and speaking notes for our respective ministers for their cabinet deliberations. A cabinet file can generate an astonishing array of documents. I can tell you with the utmost confidence this doesn't concern 1,000 cabinet files per se.

I also want to repeat, to maintain your trust—

The Chair: Can you wrap up quickly, Ms. Drouin?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: —in the commission of inquiry, that no documents from our intelligence agencies have been withheld. The commission has access to all the relevant documents concerning the work of our two main intelligence agencies.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Thank you to both Minister LeBlanc and Madame Drouin for being here today.

In answering these questions, the frustration that you're seeing from my Conservative colleagues across the table comes from the fact that they're not able to get you to help feed their narrative of secrecy. They're extremely frustrated by that, and I think it's evi-

dent, because you've answered the questions very clearly and directly today.

The reality is that if you were somebody who walked into this room, sat at the back of the room and just listened to what we listened to today, I think you would have heard very clearly Minister LeBlanc saying that the terms of reference for the Hogue commission and the documents we turned over were set up in collaboration with the House leaders, including Andrew Scheer, the House leader of the Conservative Party, last summer. The documents that were requested have been turned over, and the Privy Council Office continues to work with the Hogue commission to ensure that the documents Madam Justice Hogue needs and wants are provided.

My question actually goes to a topic that we haven't talked about today, which is the various party leaders and their willingness to get security clearance so that they can read the unredacted version of the Hogue commission's report.

Obviously, the Prime Minister has seen that, and we know that the leader of the NDP has. We now know that the leader of the Bloc Québécois is receiving his security clearance to do that. However, we also know that the leader of the Conservative Party, Mr. Poilievre, has chosen willingly to not receive the security clearance in order to see an unredacted version of the report.

Minister, can you provide some insight as to why that might be? If not, perhaps you can provide context as to why it's incredibly important for a leader of a political party to take the opportunity to look at that information.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, through you to our colleague Mr. Gerretsen, I think his question is an important one, because it goes to the very nature of what some people in the House of Commons continue to do: to create deliberately an exaggerated or misleading narrative while at the same time not benefiting from a government offer that stands again this morning—or I guess in early afternoon—for the Leader of the Opposition to receive the appropriate security clearance and then see the unredacted version.

The fact that Ms. May and the leader of the NDP took up the government offer, we think, is very constructive. You'll note that, having read the document, they seem to have a different view, one from the other. That perhaps tells us that it's important for people, having seen the unredacted report of the committee, to come to their own conclusions. Those redactions, as we noted earlier, were done by officials responsible for the protection of national security information, not done politically.

Why the Leader of the Opposition would refuse to, I can't speculate. I wondered the same thing myself, Mr. Gerretsen, but I do think it would be important for the credibility of his caucus colleagues, who continue to make outlandish and absurd allegations and assertions. They might have *un petit moment de gêne*, a little hesitation, about doing that if their boss said, “You know what, guys? Like, you're really making this stuff up.”

I don't know how their caucus would work. Neither would you, I assume, Mr. Gerretsen, but certainly I think there might be a little hesitancy about continuing to make stuff up all the time if your boss knew that what you were saying day after day may not be—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Ignorance is bliss.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That might be one of the strategies there, but it's an interesting thing. Perhaps we could talk about that over the summer.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gerretsen.

Colleagues, that concludes the first panel for the day.

Minister LeBlanc, thank you very much for making yourself available and joining us here this morning.

Madame Drouin, thank you as well.

Colleagues, Madame Drouin will be staying with us for the next hour and—a friendly reminder—the next hour is not a continuation of this study. The next hour is a continuation of our study on the cyber-attacks, which we have been talking about previously.

We are going to suspend very briefly in order to turn over. We'll be back momentarily.

• (1210) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1215)

The Chair: All right, everyone. If I could, I'll ask you to please take your seats.

Colleagues, we are going to continue with the second half of our meeting.

The second half of the meeting is a continuation of our study in relation to the question of privilege related to cyber-attacks targeting members of Parliament. Of course, we've been undertaking a conversation around this in recent weeks.

Carried over from the previous session, Madame Drouin, welcome back. Thank you for being here with us.

Madame Drouin, of course, is the deputy clerk of the Privy Council and the national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister.

Madame Xavier, welcome back. It's nice to see you again. Thank you for joining us.

Madame Xavier is the chief of the Communications Security Establishment.

Between the two of you, witnesses, you will have just up to 10 minutes. You certainly don't have to take all that time if you don't feel it's necessary. We will then enter our usual rounds of questioning.

With that, Madame Drouin and Madame Xavier, I'll turn the floor over to you for upwards of 10 minutes combined.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I'll make a few opening remarks on my own behalf and on behalf of the chief of the Communications Security Establishment, whom I want to thank for joining me this morning. I know that she has testified a number of times. Her expertise is vital to the topic at hand.

I've been the deputy clerk of the Privy Council and the national security advisor to the Prime Minister since January 27. Recently, in the course of your committee's work, you heard from my colleague, as I said earlier. You spoke about cyber-threats from foreign actors.

Cyber-espionage programs sponsored by China, Russia, Iran and North Korea pose a real threat to Canada. These actors exploit our weaknesses in a number of ways. In doing so, they seek to undermine our democracy, as I said earlier this morning, in order to pursue their geopolitical objectives at Canada's expense.

[English]

While the PRC is not the only state that directs cyber-threat activity toward Canada, I must emphasize the far-reaching and sustained nature of the PRC's cyber-activities. PRC cyber-actors have targeted and continue to target the systems and networks of a wide spectrum of Canadian society, including all levels of government, private sector organizations and individuals. All of these aspects of Canadian society have information that could be considered valuable to the PRC. The scope of this threat is significant.

The more we discuss them, the more we understand how best to respond to these threats from a whole-of-society perspective. The Government of Canada has warned Canadians of the cyber-threat caused by state actors. Most recently, on June 3, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, National Defence and Public Safety issued a public statement warning Canadians of the threat caused by foreign states targeting Canada. The statement and the CSE's cyber-threat bulletin that were released highlighted the interference in our democratic system that has resulted from these efforts.

The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security has joined international partners in issuing public advisories to inform on techniques used by PRC state actors and, most importantly, how to mitigate those threats.

The use of cyber means by the PRC and other states to interfere in our political system will not stop. To address that threat, we must continue to take steps to reinforce Canada's overall resiliency to hostile cyber-activity. The government is in the process of renewing Canada's national cybersecurity strategy, which we anticipate will bring a wide range of initiatives over the course of its implementation.

• (1220)

[Translation]

When it comes to cybersecurity for parliamentarians, a number of changes have taken place in recent years.

The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security works closely with various partners, including House of Commons and Senate staff, to protect parliamentarians from cyber-threats.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service also plays an important role in identifying and responding to threats to the security of Parliament.

[English]

In March 2023, the then minister of public safety issued a direction to CSIS on threats to the security of Canada directed at Parliament and parliamentarians. CSIS, the CSE and other departments and agencies have also undertaken a significant number of briefings to parliamentarians on a wide range of threats, including cyber-threats. Security clearances have been offered to party leaders to enable a more direct understanding of the threats facing parliamentarians and all Canadians.

As a result, the level of information sharing and transparency regarding threats to parliamentarians is much higher now than it was a few years ago, and we continue to learn and improve our system. I would be remiss if I did not underline the important work of NSI-COP and NSIRA—Chair, allow me to use those acronyms, because I think you know them well.

As illustrated in their recent reports on foreign interference in Canada's elections, those two organizations enrich the public understanding and debate regarding national security and intelligence in Canada. These reports highlight the use of cyber tools by threat actors to interfere in democratic institutions and to undertake espionage campaigns against political parties and parliamentarians.

[Translation]

In its special report, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians said that a cyber-actor led by the People's Republic of China unsuccessfully targeted members of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China.

[English]

In conclusion, I cannot change how the incident in question was handled in 2021. However, I can say that the Government of Canada is very focused on how to best inform parliamentarians of national security threats.

[Translation]

In a democratic society, addressing the threat to national security requires informed and non-partisan public debate involving the government, the public and parliamentarians, a process that we're engaged in here today. This type of debate is vital. It helps us to better understand the threats that we face as a country. It also helps us to strengthen our ability to respond to these threats as part of a whole-of-society approach.

My colleague and I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Drouin.

[English]

With that, we go to our first line of questioning.

Mr. Genuis, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Xavier, we had three rounds of questioning previously. I'm going to follow up on some of those questions, because I reread our exchange, and there are some things I noticed that I want to probe a bit more.

First off, in my third round, I asked about caveats in terms of information that was shared with the House of Commons. I think you said you had to get back to us. I assume you have that information now. Were there any caveats in the information shared with the House of Commons, in terms of limitations on who they could then share that information with, etc.?

• (1225)

Ms. Caroline Xavier (Chief, Communications Security Establishment): When we share information with anybody, especially when it's pieces of intelligence, it is—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's just a very specific question. Were there caveats in this case?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: It is very possible that there were caveats. In terms of the briefings, because we held many briefings with the House of Commons, it is very possible that some of the documentation that we shared with them—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ma'am, I asked you this question previously. I wasn't asking if it was possible. I asked if there were caveats.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Because I wasn't in the meetings myself, I don't know exactly which documents were shared with the House of Commons, but I expect that some of the documents that we did share with the House of Commons would have had caveats, especially based on classification. Having said that—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Would those have limited their ability to share information with others?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Mr. Chair, it is possible that, had there been caveats on the documentation provided, those caveats would only be able to be shared with people with similar opportunities and classification to receive that documentation.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, thank you.

You're saying it's possible, but you're not willing or ready to confirm.

[Translation]

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

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, just one moment....

[Translation]

Go ahead, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I can follow the discussion in French only. However, the person interpreting into French often says that it's inaudible. I think that my colleague is talking too fast.

The Chair: Okay. I understand.

[English]

Mr. Genuis, just in terms of allowing the witness the opportunity to respond, I will be generous with the time. We gained a bit of time throughout the course of the meeting, so if the concern is about rushing, don't worry: The quality of the question and answer is more important.

Madame Xavier, if you can, do your best to speak more slowly.

Mr. Genuis, if you can, do your best to speak more slowly and also try to ensure that we're not speaking over one another.

[Translation]

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

What was Mr. Genuis' question? I'm missing that information, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, can you please repeat the question? It seems that Madame Gaudreau did not hear it, so I stopped the clock.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, if there are any other issues, please let me know.

[English]

Mr. Genuis, we go back to you, to continue. Can you just repeat the question, though? There seems to have been a translation issue.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sure, but let me know when you're starting the time.

To summarize the round—if there were translation problems so far—I asked if there were caveats that limited the House of Commons from sharing information with parliamentarians. The response we're getting is it's possible that there could have been, without confirmation that there was.

The Chair: Okay, so I am now going to start the clock.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

We can make this easier for ourselves and for interpreters just with clear questions and answers. Are you prepared to tell us whether or not there were caveats—not whether it was possible that there were caveats, but whether there were? If you're not prepared

to tell us, is it because you don't know or because you don't wish to share that information?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I can assure you that it's not because I don't wish to share the information. It is because I wasn't personally present at the time when we were having some of these exchanges with the House of Commons IT security team—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay—that's good enough. I did ask this question previously, and I was told you could get back to us. You're back and you still aren't able to answer. Would you undertake to provide a response to this committee in writing, specifically regarding caveats, within two weeks?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: We'd be happy to be able to answer the question in writing. We are waiting for the official taskings out of the last time I was present at PROC to be able to answer all of the other questions that were also asked of us.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you do it within two weeks?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I suspect that we should be able to do that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I asked you a series of questions in my first round about what you communicated with the House of Commons. I noticed something afterwards when I was reviewing this. I asked if you informed House administration about the source of the attack. You said you had informed them about “what we believed at that time to be the originating source of the threat”.

I asked you in follow-up, “You shared, with House of Commons administration, the source of the attack—this being APT31”. Then your response changed. You suggested that we go in camera. You variously dodged the follow-ups. At no point did you confirm that APT31 was identified to House of Commons administration as the threat.

I want to press that point, because I noticed that you didn't answer about APT31 specifically. Did you at any point inform House of Commons administration that APT31 specifically was the source of the attack?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Mr. Chair, when we started the conversation with the House of Commons, it was in 2021. It's very possible that at that time we were not calling this actor APT31. What we were sharing with the House of Commons was what we were, at that time, understanding to be the originating actions and the threat actor, which we now have come to know as APT31. What I cannot confirm and guarantee is that at that time we were calling it APT31.

• (1230)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: At what point in time did you mention APT31 specifically to House of Commons administration? It was not in 2021, it sounds like. Was it at some point in the future, or never?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: What I'm understanding is that we did eventually come to confirm to the House of Commons that this actor was APT31. What I'm saying is that originally, when we started to understand the actor, we may not have called it APT31.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: When did you identify the actor to the House?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: My understanding, based on the exchanges we've had with the House of Commons and the presentations we made collectively with CSIS, is that it might have been around February 2021 that we then may have alluded to that being the possible actor, by that name.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You named or you think you might have named APT31 in February 2021.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: In the presentations that were done by us and CSIS and the House of Commons—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm almost out of time. I'd just like a yes or no.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: —there was a series of documents shared with the IT team, and one of those documents outlines that the actor could be APT31.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It could have been. Okay.

This is the problem we have with the government's narrative. They said House of Commons IT was told and they were supposed to tell MPs, but you said there may have been caveats. You can't confirm whether there were, but there may have been caveats. You also can't confirm whether the House of Commons was even told that APT31 was the source of the threat. How in the world could House of Commons IT have informed members of Parliament if there were caveats and if they weren't informed who the source or the actor was?

We've had you here twice. We've asked you specific questions about that information being passed along. You haven't been able to answer. You've told us that there might have been caveats; the information might have been shared, or it might not have been shared; it might have been in a document, but you're not sure which document; and you're not precisely sure of the timeline.

Do you see how this—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, you're out of time.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —completely blows up the government's claim—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —that the House of Commons IT was properly informed?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, if there is a question, I will afford Ms. Xavier a moment to answer it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think the point is clear, but I would welcome a response, if there is one.

The Chair: Ms. Xavier, if you'd like to respond, please be very quick.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Mr. Chair, what I've made clear and what I'm trying to emphasize is that when you're dealing with cyber-incidents, at the beginning you may not know all the details. Eventual-

ly, as you continue to have the back-and-forth conversation with the service provider, more clarity comes to be, especially when there are exchanges of the logs.

At the time, we may not have originally known it was APT31, but in the exchange of information we had with the House of Commons, there was sufficient information provided for them to know what the issue was that was at risk and what actions they needed to take to mitigate—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The FBI told you, though.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, you're—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The FBI said who it was.

The Chair: No. Mr. Genuis—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You had this information because the FBI gave it to you, and you didn't pass it along.

The Chair: Colleagues, I would very much appreciate it if the chair's role in facilitating a meeting was respected. I have done my best throughout the course of the last hour and the beginning of this hour to be very generous in affording members the opportunity to ask questions and witnesses the opportunity to respond to those question.

I'm going to be less generous if I feel as though that's being taken advantage of. I appreciate your co-operation in that matter.

I'm going to turn the floor over now to Mrs. Romanado for six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us.

My first question is for Madame Drouin.

First of all, welcome to the role of NSIA. I don't think you've been to PROC since you started in this role.

Can you confirm something for us? In your role as the national security and intelligence adviser, do you have a mandate that would include informing members of Parliament or parliamentarians of an active threat?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: One thing that we all kind of looked at is how the ways in which we are dealing with threats in 2024 are quite different from the ways in which we were dealing with that in the past, and that is good. It is good that we continue to evolve and enhance our processes, and we need to continue to do that.

With the new directive that was adopted last year in terms of sharing with parliamentarians the threats we are facing, it is much clearer now that handling a situation like the one we are talking about will trigger a conversation with implicated MPs.

I'm not an expert when it comes to CSE's work, but one thing I would like to say is that when they see a cyber-threat, the first thing they need to do is to stop the bleeding. That's the first thing. We want to make sure that the actor doesn't have access to data, and that if information has been infiltrated, we can recoup that information.

The first focus, then, is really to stop the threat. After that—

• (1235)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madame Drouin, I don't want to cut you off. It's just that I do have quite a few questions.

I understand that when there is an immediate threat vis-à-vis our systems, the goal is to stop the bleeding, as you said.

However, in the case that we're studying right now with respect to parliamentarians who were targeted, I understand that this was in 2021. You were not in the role at that time. However, you mentioned that once the bleeding has been stopped, there is a new ministerial directive to CSIS to advise members of Parliament. You also mentioned in your opening statement that on June 3, Global Affairs, National Defence and Public Safety issued a cyber-threat bulletin warning Canadians. Is that correct?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Yes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm just going to ask you this: Were parliamentarians provided that cyber-threat bulletin?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I will turn to my colleague for that.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: All bulletins that are issued are issued in a public manner, and they're put on websites. We amplify any publication with other means: through social media, circulating it to service providers and various ways. The publication itself wasn't directed only at a certain number of people. On the contrary: We want to make sure that these bulletins are as public as possible so that they can be useful to whoever can find them useful.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: On that, Madame Xavier, I never received it.

I understand that you're saying you put it out on social media and on the website, but you understand that we ourselves have said to you and to various people that we are targets. You've mentioned that we are targets, given the work that we do. However, parliamentarians did not receive that cyber-threat bulletin. The threat may or may not have had us as a specific target, but we were not made aware of it either.

What I'm trying to get to is that we are trying to improve the communications to parliamentarians whenever there is an active threat, whether it be directly to them or whether they should be on the lookout. It seems to be that there's still a gap. I still don't.... It's not clear to me who is responsible for letting members of Parliament and senators know about a cyber-threat. When CSIS were here, they said it wasn't them. When IT were here, they said it wasn't them. When you were here last, it wasn't you. Whose job is it to notify members of Parliament?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Let me say one thing. Not all cyber-attacks are personal attacks on MPs. We should not come to a conclusion that all cyber-attacks mean that a specific MP was targeted. Sometimes it's completely random, and then it is more for the administrator of the system and the network to make sure they have the appropriate mechanisms to stop the threat.

When it comes to threats against specific MPs, as I said, the directive that was adopted last year will come into play and will trigger specific briefings to MPs. We also coordinate with the House and the Senate when it comes to briefings to parliamentarians. You may be aware that such briefings in terms of the threats that MPs may face have begun, and some of them happened last week.

Maybe my colleague Caroline can talk about the several briefings that she has given over the past years to parliamentarians.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Actually, I have only five seconds. I'm very well aware of the report that was tabled in the House on the number of parliamentarians who have been briefed, but thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Romanado.

[Translation]

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

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

Good afternoon, Ms. Xavier and Ms. Drouin. Ms. Xavier, we're seeing you here again after two weeks. Ms. Drouin, this is your first time appearing before our committee.

I didn't see the difference between what happened in public and what happened in camera. We asked specific questions, and I personally expected specific answers. If necessary, this committee could have become an investigative committee.

You must have seen the testimony of our parliamentary colleagues who came here. When they thanked the FBI because, without the organization's help, they wouldn't have been informed of the situation, I couldn't believe it. How do you determine that? I don't know. I'm a bit speechless.

I came across a document released on December 15 by the French cybersecurity agency. I shared it with all my colleagues. The document talks publicly about the APT31 group. What's that? It talks about the chain of infection, intrusion vectors and techniques and tactics.

Speaking of tactics, I was expecting to feel reassured that the situation would be resolved and that we would receive information and guidance. However, when I came across this, I wondered whether there was a willingness to withhold information, or whether some type of protocol tells us to wait until the situation gets even worse. I want to understand. This worries me.

• (1240)

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Thank you for your question and comments.

You're referring to a document that we distributed more broadly, in keeping with our role as a partner of this organization. We recognize that the APT31 group can be quite a persistent actor, and that Canada isn't immune to these types of threats. That's also why we released a document—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I want to make it clear that this document comes from France. It doesn't come from the CSE. Is that right?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: That's right. It doesn't come from us. You're absolutely right.

That said, we work closely with our partners to keep up to date on other documents released, to ensure a broader distribution. We work closely with a number of partners. We all recognize that it isn't enough to do things on our own. When a document of this nature is released, we want to ensure a broader distribution.

I want to assure you that we take this committee's comments and study extremely seriously. We'll be looking closely at the recommendations for improvement. In addition, since our conversations at my last appearance, we've had a number of meetings with people from the House of Commons. We want to keep improving our collaborative efforts, especially with a view to serving you better.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: First, we could do the opposite. We could also tell you about things that we as members of Parliament experience on a daily basis. Sometimes, we may be told that, in a certain case, it comes from a private email address. However, we no longer have a private life. People who implement strategies should perhaps listen to what we have to say, just as when I raise my hand because I want to be your customer. Otherwise, I feel left out in the cold. Everyone says that it isn't them, so ultimately it isn't anyone's fault.

I can see that a protocol will be implemented. However, I would like to hear your thoughts as well. CSIS said that there would be a multipartisan committee involving every agency concerned—including CSE and CSIS—to provide oversight, similar to the process in Australia, I believe.

I would like to hear your opinion. Things are moving too fast, and we aren't moving fast enough to deal with everything.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Sorry. I'm not sure that I understood the question.

You said—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'll repeat my question. I'll keep it short, but I hope that the timer will be adjusted accordingly.

What do you think about setting up a committee similar to the one established by the Australian government to ensure constant monitoring with collaborative partners, including parliamentarians and representatives of the Five Eyes member countries? Right now, we don't have this type of committee. Do you support this?

• (1245)

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I strongly support any useful measure that helps strengthen our cyber-resilience, including an oversight committee such as the one brought up by the member. The Parliament of Australia has also been affected by this actor and has learned from the experience. Depending on the recommendations from our Australian colleagues and our subsequent follow-up, we can certainly consider implementing these types of measures.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Good.

Another thing that really surprised me was that—

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, sorry to interrupt, but you have only about 15 seconds left.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'll make good use of my next two and a half minutes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I'll give you an extra 20 seconds for your next turn.

Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I thank the witnesses for being here today as well.

What has been clear through this whole situation is that there have been major gaps in government action in informing members of Parliament, whether it be in the case of MP Michael Chong, who was targeted—a leak was required to provide that information—or this instance of the cyber-attack on parliamentarians, when it took another source, the FBI, to inform them.

What's clear is that this is not a one-off in terms of miscommunication or poor communication, but rather a systemic issue. That's the way I see it. Over and over again, we are learning important information that members of Parliament should be informed of, and we're not.

In this instance, with the cyber-attacks, as it was indicated, we have had different agencies come before this committee, and everyone was pointing a finger at someone else to say, "They're responsible," and that is not acceptable. I hope the government will accept that.

My first question is whether the government accepts responsibility. What's happened in this pattern of behaviour is simply not acceptable.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I think together, we need to take foreign interference and cyber-threats very seriously. We are all learning together. I said in my opening remarks that if something like that happened today, it would be handled differently, based on our collective experience and based on the ministerial directives.

We shouldn't forget that the traitor here is not us and is not you; it's the foreign actors. Together, we need to be stronger in order to respond appropriately to foreign actors.

Yes, we are taking those lessons. Yes, we can improve the system. Yes, we can handle things differently. We all need to do that in order to be stronger against those hostile state actors.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The question then is, how will things be done differently? The truth of the matter is that I don't believe the government has taken foreign interference activities very seriously, or at least not until this moment. In fact, we heard through the commissioner in the inquiry that Canada is actually way behind the eight ball. Through the witnesses at the inquiry, Canada is way behind the eight ball in comparison with our ally countries. Everyone else is miles ahead of us. We're only just starting to wake up to it.

I guess the question is this: When can parliamentarians receive documentation on how the government intends to proceed, if lessons are indeed learned going forward? Will there be adjustments, for example, with intelligence that's come through? There are instances where I think there is an overreach in the protection of information because of the notion of national security. When will that be adjusted?

There's a third question related to this. Even within the government's very many departments and different set-ups and agencies looking into this matter, there is actually not a coherent process coming out of that. We learned, for example, that the SITE task force did not inform Elections Canada in real time of information they had that a particular candidate may be subject to foreign interference activities. They were not informed of that in real time. Even when a complaint was made, that information was still not shared with Elections Canada.

How is this possible? What will be done to address this litany of mistakes? When will the government undertake an approach that actually connects the dots with all these activities to create a coherent picture?

• (1250)

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Let me start with something that you as parliamentarians have just done. You have just adopted Bill C-70. Bill C-70 will give us new tools to address new realities—for example, being able to talk about foreign interference with other levels of government, the private sector and academics. That alone is a new tool that is very important.

Through the commission, we have also worked very hard in terms of trying to sanitize and do summaries when it comes to foreign intelligence documents. This is a new reality for us. We haven't done that before. This is in order to make those documents more accessible and transparent.

Other countries, yes, it's true, are doing declassification. We've heard many times the U.S. talking about the fact that they declassified information before the invasion of Russia in Ukraine. We can also learn from that and do that differently in a more regular manner.

The Chair: Take a few last seconds to wrap up, please.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: We've talked about the flow of information, which you've seen. It is something that the system has started to address. My predecessor has done tremendous work regarding that. I'm continuing it, because it's true that trying to find out who saw what and when is something that's very important for all of us.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just before we go back to the Conservatives for the next question, I would like to say something.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, I gather that you'll need to leave us in a few minutes to take part in a celebration. I want to thank you for your contribution to this committee over the past few months. I hope that you have a wonderful summer. I would like to extend my congratulations to your family.

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

I look forward to seeing you again, colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you.

Welcome, Ms. Gill. You'll have the floor in a few minutes.

[English]

Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madame Drouin, I want to follow up on some of the statements you've made today that, frankly, have not been true at all.

You said on the inquiry that “nothing...has been withheld”, and then you later said in an exchange that the commission has “everything” they've asked for. That's not true. If that were the case, why did the legal counsel for Madam Justice Hogue say to our committee, only within the last couple of weeks, that discussions between the commission and the government on the issue of disclosure of cabinet confidences are ongoing?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm just kind of confused. I don't know if Mr. Duncan knows that we're not on the same study. We're on the study about the cyber-attacks.

The Chair: It is a fair reminder.

Mr. Duncan, let's finish the line of questioning. However, it is a fair reminder that we are here more specifically on the cyber-attacks. Finish the line of questioning. Let's see where it goes.

Madame Drouin, you'll have a moment to answer that question.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Where I'm going with this is to the pattern of cover-ups that are happening time and again on this issue. My question is.... I've mentioned the letter from the legal counsel. If they have everything they've asked for, why are they still going through a legal process with you to get the documents that they deem relevant and that they want to have?

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I can answer that question. I'll try to be brief.

[English]

I'd like us to be clear. We are putting everything in the same basket, talking about information. There are different types of information. What I have said is that all intelligence information, relevant heavily classified information, relevant information to the mandate of the commission—everything—has been shared with the commission without exercising any kind of privilege.

The other part of your question is more related to, potentially, memoranda to cabinet. This is why I also shared with you that the most to-the-point documents, the four most relevant documents, were shared with the commission, and the ongoing conversation is about, potentially, supplementary memoranda to cabinet that may have been talked about.

• (1255)

Mr. Eric Duncan: Here's the problem, Madame Drouin. It's the most relevant deemed by you, deemed by the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, making that determination of what is relevant. The terms of reference that were set say that it "authorize[s] the Commissioner to...receive and review any relevant classified or unclassified documents".

Here's the thing for Canadians watching this and what is happening: This is like a courtroom trial where the accused who is on the stand gets to choose what evidence the judge gets to see. The reason this inquiry is going on and the reason there's been so much scrutiny is the action or, frankly, lack of action from the Prime Minister, the PMO and the PCO on combatting foreign interference. Will you explain to Canadians why the very groups I just mentioned, including yourself, under scrutiny get to select what evidence the justice gets to see? Why don't you provide everything, not that you deem relevant but that she deems relevant?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I like the comparison with the litigation. As you know, I've managed a lot of litigations and a lot of e-discoveries in my life, and this is how it works. We do proceed in terms of collecting, based on the questions we are receiving, all the materials. Then we disclose this assessment to the court, and this is based on good faith. There are consequences if we are not acting in good faith and are trying to hide things. This is at the core of the process.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I will just argue that there are consequences when Canadians look at this and see that documents are not being provided as requested by the justice leading this. We talk about consequences. It's the integrity of this commission and having the justice, Madam Justice Hogue, feeling like she has everything she needs to be able to do a proper investigation. When lawyers and legal counsel are meeting back and forth, they're clearly not happy.

I'm going to pass the remainder of my time over to Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much—

The Chair: Wait just one moment, Mr. Cooper. I will stop the clock.

Madame Drouin, I will offer you a brief opportunity to respond.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I just want to say that we will all benefit from the work of the commission and from its recommendations. It's not to the advantage of any of us to withhold information in order for her to be relevant in her conclusions.

Then, of course, we do have a responsibility as civil servants to strike the right balance in protecting...which is really important for you in terms of the cabinet confidence and making sure that she can do her job. However, we all want her to succeed, because we want Canada to succeed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Drouin.

Mr. Cooper, I'm going to restart the clock. There are 45 seconds remaining.

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

I will move a motion that I had on notice. I'll read it.

I move:

That, given the large workload the committee is managing, the committee instruct the chair to schedule five meetings between July 8, 2024, and September 13, 2024, to address the report of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, entitled "Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions", tabled in Parliament on June 3, 2024, and to continue the committee's ongoing work on foreign election interference.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will make very brief remarks.

This committee has a lot of work outstanding. That includes Bill C-65, which has passed second reading and is going to be referred to our committee. It's government legislation that takes priority. We have Scott Reid's motion, as well as Alex Ruff's private member's bill. We're continuing our work on this study with respect to the question of privilege arising from the cyber-attack directed against 18 parliamentarians; we are continuing work with respect to the broader issue of foreign interference, and there are a number of issues that have arisen out of the NSICOP report, the NSIRA report and the Hogue report.

Having regard for all of that, I think it is necessary that this committee meet over the summer for five meetings. I think that's a very reasonable compromise to try to get some of the work around foreign interference done so that we can move on in the fall to deal with government legislation, as well as the private member's motion and private member's bill that we must review.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cooper.

The speaking order to begin debate on Mr. Cooper's motion is as follows. Should you want your name added to the list, simply let me know. I have Mr. Gerretsen, Ms. Mathysen and Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: First, to our witnesses, I want to thank you for being here today. I can only imagine the frustration of repeating the same thing over and over and over, only to be met by a complete stonewall from my four Conservative colleagues, who are just unwilling to accept or listen to what the witnesses have been telling us today repeatedly. There is so much desire from my Conservative colleagues to make this as hyperpartisan as possible. They're not interested in actually dealing with the issue of foreign interference, despite the fact that it is an extremely serious issue that needs to be dealt with seriously. They're interested in political gain.

I'll tell you what's going on here.

Mr. Cooper wants us to vote against this so that he can walk out and film a video and put it out there on social media. Mr. Genuis will help him do that. I'm sure they'll film videos of each other so that they can then go and try to fundraise off this by saying "cover-up" and all this stuff.

Meanwhile, if the average layperson had just walked into this room, Mr. Chair, if they didn't know where they were going but just happened to sit in the back of this room and listen to the exchanges that are going on here today, completely unbiased to any of this and completely uninformed, they would probably leave here completely bewildered by the fact that the Conservatives are just unwilling to listen to a single word the witnesses they called before the committee have offered.

Madame Drouin made an extremely good observation early on in the second half of this discussion today. She talked about how this is not partisan; this is about Canadian democracy. This is about upholding the institutions we have.

Mr. Cooper just wants to take more and more potshots at the Prime Minister over this because he sees political opportunity coming out of it.

Mr. Cooper, just moments ago, when talking about this, talked about a private member's bill—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Oh, am I getting under your skin a bit there, Garnett?

The Chair: Colleagues, we had a really good 95 minutes or so, or whatever it was—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I know. I sat through it all.

The Chair: Guys, I have a point of order from Mr. Genuis. I'm going to give him the floor to speak to that point of order. Following that, I'll go back to Mr. Gerretsen.

Colleagues, I hope we can be productive in the next number of minutes.

Mr. Genuis, the floor is yours.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: At the risk of violating Napoleon's most famous advice, I will just point out that my colleague is far afield of the topic of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis, for your observation.

Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Cooper, in his comments, which I found to be wildly ironic, just moments ago started to talk about a private member's bill introduced by Mr. Ruff. Mr. Ruff is a Conservative colleague of ours who sits in the House of Commons and, actually, is only one of a small handful of parliamentarians who sit on the NSICOP committee. Mr. Ruff is Mr. Cooper, Mr. Genius, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Berthold's connection to security—

• (1305)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I just want to make sure—

[English]

The Chair: Madame Gill, one moment.

Mr. Gerretsen, we have a point of order.

[Translation]

Ms. Gill, go ahead.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I just joined the committee to replace Ms. Gaudreau. I want to make sure, Mr. Chair, that you saw that I raised my hand before Mr. Genuis raised a point of order. I would also like to speak after Mr. Gerretsen. Of course, as a matter of courtesy, I'll let him finish. I just wanted to make sure that you saw that I wanted to speak briefly, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for your comments. I'll add your name to the list.

[English]

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor remains yours.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying—and I'm speaking directly to the comments of the Conservative member who introduced this motion and referenced his private member's bill—Mr. Ruff is one of only a small handful of parliamentarians who sit on NSICOP, and for those who might just randomly be tuning into this, NSICOP is the secret committee of parliamentarians that reviews sensitive information and has all the security clearances to do that. Mr. Ruff does not support the narrative of these Conservative colleagues sitting here, despite the fact that Mr. Cooper invoked his name moments ago. As a matter of fact, this is what Mr. Ruff said just a few days ago, on June 10. He said, “Every single parliamentarian, in fact, I would encourage every single Canadian, read this report from start to finish...the fact is, this is an issue that needs to be resolved”—referring to foreign interference, and this is the important part, Mr. Chair—“and you want to tone down the partisanship and up our game on national security intelligence. We all need to do a better job of educating ourselves on what the threats are, what the vulnerabilities are and how to deal with it going forward.” Mr. Ruff also said, “To build on what Mr. McGuinty said—and I'm 100% in agreement.”

I notice my Conservative colleagues are chatting with each other, which doesn't surprise me, because that's what they did during the time that the witnesses were speaking, because they have no interest in hearing this, but at least to have it on the record, I just want to reiterate this point. He said, “and I'm 100% in agreement. The Prime Minister is not redacting anything. It's the process that we go through that allows those redactions to occur to protect national security, national defence and mainly international relationships....” Mr. Ruff, who is on NSICOP, who is a Conservative member of Parliament, is chastising these four individuals for the way they're acting today.

Mr. Chair, I move that we adjourn the debate.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Unfortunately—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is this member trying to shut down debate when others haven't been able to reply, because he doesn't want to have to work this summer? Is that what's happening, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, we have a motion that has been put forward, and we have—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Did Mr. Gerretsen just say, “Boo hoo, get over it,” again?

The Chair: Guys, do I have to suspend, or can I just get to the order of business here?

I'm not tending to the point of order, because we have had a motion to adjourn. You know very well that is what we call a dilatory motion. We're going to go to a vote.

Mr. Clerk, I'm going to ask you to call the vote on whether to adjourn debate on the motion that was moved what seems like ages ago now by Mr. Cooper.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: Okay, colleagues, you've heard the results. We have adjourned debate on the motion.

We are now going to resume the line of questioning that we were engaged in prior to the moving of Mr. Cooper's motion.

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor is yours for five minutes, should you want your time.

• (1310)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

[Translation]

Ms. Gill, there were 30 seconds left in Ms. Gaudreau's previous turn. If you want, I can add that time to your two and a half minutes, giving you a total of three minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you for your offer, Mr. Chair. I would just like to ask one question.

I want to apologize to the witnesses for the fact that we had to discuss committee business earlier. This business could have been discussed at another time.

My question is for Ms. Xavier and it concerns the victims of the APT31 group.

Last week, we were told that that neither CSE, nor CSIS nor the RCMP contacted members of Parliament following the incidents or disclosures made to the media. We were told that only the FBI briefed members of Parliament. Of course, this is quite a statement. When we hear that, we think that something isn't right.

I want to know whether you consider this unusual.

Is this lack of communication with members of Parliament part of your protocols, or does it conflict with them?

I would like you to clarify these two points.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: It's a shame that parliamentarians weren't contacted. When the information was provided to the House of Commons in 2021, we certainly expected that the necessary steps would be taken to inform the members of Parliament.

That said, we're taking steps to work with our colleagues at CSIS and the House of Commons to improve the processes. As I said, we've already had a number of conversations with our colleagues to ensure that the members of Parliament receive better service.

I would like to add—

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Sorry to interrupt, Ms. Xavier, but I don't have much time and I would like to ask you another question. If you want to tell us more, I encourage you to send us your additional thoughts in writing.

My question is for you, Ms. Xavier, but it could also be for Ms. Drouin.

Personally, I've been a member of Parliament since 2015. We were told that a centre would be set up to deal with cyber-attacks. This centre would support parliamentarians in the event of a cyber-attack. However, it's now 2024, so almost 10 years later. I've never heard of any such centre.

Can you explain why we aren't told about the help or support that we could receive in these situations?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: We do have services available. They were implemented before the 2019 election. At the time, given the lessons learned from situations in other parts of the world, we wanted to ensure that candidates in the 2019 election, who might be future members of Parliament—

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I wanted to know why we weren't informed. That was my question. It's great that these services exist. However, if we don't know that they exist, how are they supposed to help us?

Why weren't we informed? Who should have informed us? How should this have been done?

I've been here for 10 years and have only recently learned about these services.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gill.

I already gave you the extra 30 seconds that I said I would give Ms. Gaudreau. However, I'll let Ms. Xavier give you a brief response.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: At the time, we sent this information to all the caucuses and election agencies to pass on to their members. That said, we can always improve our way of communicating with everyone to ensure that the available services are provided.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gill.

[English]

Ms. Mathysen, you have two minutes and 30 seconds. The floor is yours.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To the witnesses, thank you for appearing. I will apologize in advance. While your time is very valuable, I do want to make sure that I'm able to move a motion I've had on notice for quite some time.

With my time that's left standing, I would like to move the following motion. I gave notice of it previously. It may require a bit of a change due to timing. However, it reads as follows:

Given the recent findings of the NSICOP “Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada’s Democratic Processes and Institutions”, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs order the production of all relevant memoranda, briefing notes, emails, records of conversations, and any other relevant documents from departments and agencies, including the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and Communications Security Establishment Canada, concerning interactions with Conservative Party of Canada officials and representatives on the topic of foreign interference and its impact on the outcomes of the 2020 and 2022 leadership races, provided that:

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

(ii) these redacted documents be deposited as soon as possible, but not later than Sunday, June 23, with the clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee in both official languages.

May I speak to my motion? Okay.

I recognize that I had put forward this motion earlier, on June 11, so there may be a willingness to change (ii) in terms of the date to provide authorities with more time on the provision of the documents requested. I think it's extremely important, considering that we've all sat around this table and we've all talked about how incredibly important foreign interference is in terms of how it impacts not only this institution but also those of us who come into this institution and those who are the leaders we work with in all the given parties. I think it's important as part of that discovery and that investigation.

I'm sure my Conservative colleagues will agree, considering their passion on this issue of foreign interference and their wanting to get to the bottom of it. I'm sure they too, despite their leader's unwillingness to get the briefing and the security clearance—I think it's a mistake, but what have you—would want to get to the bottom of this. In all the conversations we've had, they've been very clear about how intent they are on getting to the bottom of this, so I think it's fair, considering my concerns around the NSICOP report, that we move forward.

I would also like to note that we were very clear that we abide by privacy legislation and that we ensure that the appropriate redactions are applied to respect that privacy, but I think it's important to go through this and pass this motion as I've put it forward.

● (1315)

The Chair: Colleagues, I have a couple of things.

First, I'll let the witnesses go, if I have the blessing of the committee. We've exhausted the amount of time we have set forward for that. They have provided their services. I'm not sure we need them here for the business that we're about to undertake.

I'm looking around. I think I have consent.

Madame Xavier and Madame Drouin, thank you very much for being with us. We wish you a good summer. We'll look forward to reconnecting at some point in the future.

Colleagues, just give me a moment. I need to check something with the clerk.

Okay, colleagues, here's where we are. Ms. Mathysen has moved her motion. We have to deal with that motion. I've asked for additional resources in order for us to be able to deal with that motion. However, the current resources that were provided to us have

now run out. I need to suspend briefly in order for the clerk and the staff here to turn over the resources, at which point we will resume.

On the speaking list to address Ms. Mathysen's motion, as it currently stands, I have Mr. Cooper. If there are other members, of course, let me know.

I'll now suspend and let the resources turn over. We will resume debate on the motion, with Mr. Cooper being the first speaker.

● (1315)

(Pause)

● (1325)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Colleagues, just given the time of year and the challenges that exist in finding additional resources, I'm going to suspend the meeting. That will alleviate the challenges we're facing right now.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you just clarify? You're suspending until when and on what basis?

The Chair: I'm suspending on the basis that—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No. I'm sorry. For how long?

The Chair: That has to be worked out.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, so we're not talking about an hour. We're talking....

The Chair: We're going to see where that's going to go, but that's where we are.

Colleagues, the meeting is suspended.

[The meeting was suspended at 1:25 p.m., Thursday, June 20]

[The meeting resumed at 11:00 a.m., Thursday, September 19]

● (219500)

The Chair: Good morning, everybody. It is very nice to see you all.

[Translation]

It's great to be back.

[English]

I hope that everybody had a wonderful summer at home with friends, family and constituents. We have a lot ahead of us in terms of what's to come, but we have some business to tend to right off the bat.

I'm calling to order meeting 122 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

This is a friendly reminder, as we've been away for a little bit, to please, for the benefit of our interpreters who are working hard on our behalf, make sure that your headsets are on the sticker that's been provided in front of you in order to avoid harmful feedback and other obstructions.

I'm going to just give a very brief explanation of where we are, why we are where we are and what we need to do to move forward.

Ms. Mathysen put forward at the end of our last meeting, as you may recall, a motion that we did not deal with in terms of what the next steps would be. We were suspended at the end of that meeting. We have to get back into the conversation on Ms. Mathysen's motion. However, there's a small technicality we have to deal with. Due to a date, which is now in the past, that was inserted into Ms. Mathysen's motion, there's an admissibility issue. I have spoken with all parties and members in relation to this.

I believe I'm seeing that Ms. Mathysen would like to speak to it. We'll see what you have to say, Ms. Mathysen. That may very well get us moving this morning. I turn the floor over to you.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

Welcome back, everybody. I hope everyone had a good summer.

What I would like to do to clear things up in terms of this motion is to ask for unanimous consent to change the wording around that date. In part (ii), it will read, "these redacted documents be deposited as soon as possible or 30 days after the passing of the motion". Then it would continue on so that, whenever we pass this motion, we won't have to continually change it.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Mathysen.

To explain to everybody what this means, Ms. Mathysen has asked for unanimous consent to change the wording in relation to the date. Should that be accepted, we will then resume debate on her motion as amended.

I am looking around the room for unanimous consent. Are there any objections?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We have amended the motion to read as it did with the changes that Ms. Mathysen just presented.

With that, Ms. Mathysen, the floor remains yours if you'd like it, but I do see that Mr. Calkins would like to speak.

Just one moment, Mr. Calkins.

Ms. Mathysen, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: No, I think that we should go back to our discussion.

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, you have the floor.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I believe Ms. Mathysen offered the committee two options for the edit. Which one did the committee accept?

The Chair: I believe it was the one that said 30 days, but for clarity....

A voice: Yes.

The Chair: That's how I interpreted it.

Mr. Calkins, I appreciate the clarification.

Does that work for everybody?

• (219505)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's what I assumed, but I just wanted to make sure.

The Chair: Okay. That's good.

With that, the floor is open, colleagues, to continue the discussion on Ms. Mathysen's motion.

Okay. I think what I'm going to do, colleagues, is that I'm just going to very briefly suspend so that we can have an opportunity to speak to each other about where we would like this to go. We do have a motion that is live in front of us.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Why don't we just vote on it?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Let's just vote.

A voice: The debate has collapsed.

The Chair: There are no speakers. The debate has collapsed. I'm just looking....

In the future, colleagues, verbalize your intentions for me, please. It helps for me to know—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: That's fair.

Madam Clerk, I'll ask you to call the question, please.

Colleagues, for clarity here, we are voting on the motion as amended.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

A voice: There's no point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen—

A voice: The vote has started. Let's vote and get it done.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You have the authority to suspend the meeting. I'm just—

An hon. member: I have a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I would ask for a couple of minutes. There seems to be some confusion, so I wouldn't mind talking to my colleagues about that, if that's okay.

An hon. member: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Michael Cooper: How's the lawsuit going, Mark?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Cooper, it's our first meeting. I would appreciate it if we could try to keep things collegial.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, would you like to speak?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask you to consult the clerk. You asked the question, so we should get straight to the vote. I think that the clerk should do her job and proceed with the vote.

The Chair: One second.

[English]

Colleagues, I called the question, so we're going to have to proceed to a vote. Please take your seats.

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

Mr. Michael Cooper: That's unbelievable.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

I'd like to move a motion that is on notice. I'll read it into the record so all members are familiar with it.

It reads:

That the committee invite the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs to appear before the committee for no less than two hours, within 14 days of the adoption of this motion, in relation to his priorities for the return of Parliament and his mandate.

I will make some comments, but I recognize you might want to allow members some time to pull up the motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cooper.

You had put said notice on motion. Therefore, it is admissible and can be debated now.

Colleagues, we begin a debate on the motion Mr. Cooper has put forward. Mr. Cooper has asked to retain the floor to provide some commentary. I'm going to allow him the opportunity to do that now.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

● (219510)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be very brief.

I think it is important that, at the start of this fall sitting, we hear from the minister. There are a number of matters before this committee that we are dealing with, so hearing from the minister would be important, including with respect to questions or issues around the elections bill, foreign interference and the implementation of the foreign influence registry, as well as the disclosure of documents to Madam Justice Hogue's inquiry and other matters.

With that, I hope members would be supportive of inviting the minister to come before our committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Welcome back, everyone.

I hope the weather stays nice for a while yet, because I think we're going to have a pretty busy fall.

I'll tell you my position on this right now. I'm certainly in favour of hearing from the minister to find out where he stands, whether it be on elections, democratic vitality, the question of privilege or other topics.

However, we also have to be constructive. I won't give up. Today, I expect us to be able to deliberate like adults, vote again and

plan for the weeks ahead. I'm a hard worker. If all my colleagues want to speak, they can all take two minutes to do so, but I would like us to get on with our work and plan what comes next.

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome our new clerk. I'm thinking very much of her and the work that lies ahead. I hope she won't hesitate to interrupt if necessary, because things are really moving here. I'd like her to have some predictability for the work to come.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Mr. Calkins, the floor is yours.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to echo the comments that were made by my colleague, Mr. Cooper.

We've all been back in our ridings. I only know what I've heard from talking with my constituents. There is some significant concern with the matter of foreign interference and the NSICOP report. I think this committee tried to wash its hands of the notion of having a conversation about whether or not this Parliament is compromised, and we shuffled that off to Madam Justice Hogue's commission. She has since come out very publicly suggesting it's not within her mandate to discuss this. I'm concerned. I'm not suggesting we're going to pursue this, but I think the Canadian public is going to pursue it whether we want to or not.

I would be very much interested in hearing what the minister has planned for reassuring the Canadian public about not only the integrity of this Parliament but also the integrity of our elections going forward to make sure we don't have these kinds of shadows rising over top of the next Parliament, whenever that happens to be. There are some important discussions we need to have in that vein.

That's what I've heard from my constituents, so I'll be supporting Mr. Cooper's motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Calkins.

I have Mrs. Romanado, followed by Madame Fortier and by Mr. Cooper.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's great to be back in PROC.

When we last met, the minister was actually here at PROC. I know that coming up, we also have some legislation that we have to study: Bill C-65 and MP Ruff's Bill C-377, I believe. I would assume the minister will be invited to speak to those pieces of legislation. I know we're going to have to see him when we're doing that, so I'm wondering if, in addition, when he's here, we can have him speak to this motion. We have a lot on the schedule to do this fall, so I wonder if we can kill two birds with one stone when he appears for these pieces of legislation.

● (219515)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

[Translation]

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I don't want to repeat what my colleague said, but I really think that, given our busy schedule and all the work we have before us, it would probably be better to hear from the minister in other circumstances than to try to do it through this motion.

I'm already seeing that time is running out. We're probably going to have some hiccups along the way. I would prefer that we look at the committee's agenda, to make sure we do everything we need to do. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

That's how I would see the committee's work.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fortier.

[English]

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

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

Look, we have a lot to get done. This motion simply provides for the minister to appear for one meeting of two hours. That hardly pushes back our schedule. In fact, I would submit that it might help move our schedule forward by probing the minister on certain matters that the committee is seized with.

Yes, the minister will appear on Bill C-65, otherwise known as the “loser Liberal pension protection act”, but that might not be for several weeks from now. In the meantime, we have a minister who has a lot to answer for on matters relating to the government's continued obstruction of Madam Justice Hogue's inquiry by refusing to turn over documents. We have the steps the government has taken to counter foreign interference with the passage of Bill C-70, which we fully supported and called on the government long ago to pass in order to create a foreign influence registry. We have the failure or refusal of the minister to name the compromised members of Parliament, as well as his refusal to provide the assurance, when I put it to him at the public safety committee in June, that not one of those 11 sits on Justin Trudeau's cabinet. He refused to answer that straightforward question, which is very telling.

All of these issues are pressing and fall within the broader study we have been undertaking on foreign interference. This ties in as well to the question of privilege before this committee, which takes precedent over all other matters.

For all of those reasons, it is important that we have the opportunity as a committee to probe the minister, not just on the loser Liberal pension protection act, but on many of these other issues relating to foreign interference: the government's continued obstruction and efforts to cover up what the Prime Minister knew, and who is compromised in his caucus and in his cabinet.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): It's really great to be back on PROC, Chair. I am very much enjoying the start to this fall session, and I am very grateful to my House leader and whip's office for inviting me back to my favourite committee in Parliament. It's good to see all my colleagues again.

I was here when we studied foreign interference for quite a number of months. I think it was about eight or nine months, if I'm not

mistaken. I'm very interested in the topic and very concerned for our democracy, so I share some of the intentions and the commitment that other colleagues on this committee probably have in wanting to protect our democracy from any electoral interference.

That's specifically what Bill C-65 was written for. There are multiple purposes within the intentions of the bill, which is called electoral participation act, despite the sloganeering from the Conservatives. It is quite amusing sometimes. It's also a bit misleading to call it whatever term they used, which I don't care to repeat.

There's this whole section in the bill on electoral integrity—

● (219520)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. The interpreter's button wasn't turned on.

You do such a good job, dear colleague, that I don't want to miss a single sentence. Can you start again?

The Chair: Do you want him to start from the beginning, Ms. Gaudreau, or do you want him to summarize?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would like him to repeat what he said in the last 10 seconds of his remarks.

[English]

The Chair: Can you go back about 10 seconds or so, so that Madame Gaudreau and others listening in French can get an accurate review of what you said? Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'll rewind and replay.

Electoral integrity and combatting foreign interference are part of Bill C-65. Assuming that, as is standard practice, ministers and their department officials come to committee at the outset of a study of a piece of government legislation, I'm making the argument that I don't see the need to have Minister LeBlanc. He's one of my favourite ministers, by the way. I think he's fantastic at committee. There's no attempt here for us to suggest that he wouldn't want to be here or wouldn't want to come to committee to answer questions. He's been here many times, as you know, and is more than capable of answering the tough questions from opposition members, which I fully expect will always be the case when a minister comes before a committee.

However, let's just be honest here. Bill C-65 deals with the very issues that the members have expressed interest in questioning the minister. Why don't we just focus on the fact that the minister will be appearing already at least once, if not twice, with the two pieces of legislation that relate to his portfolio. Let's be satisfied that all of us will have a chance to ask Minister LeBlanc the tough questions on electoral integrity and foreign interference that the opposition parties have expressed that they have.

That's more than fair. It makes sense, so I see no need for this particular motion, given what we know is likely the schedule for this fall.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

We will go to Madame Gaudreau, followed by Mr. Duncan and Mr. Gerretsen.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, we're already talking about planning our work. Can we be constructive? We can smile all we want, but I won't let it go.

Let's find a way to get what the motion is asking for, which is a meeting of at least two hours and to incorporate Bill C-65. We're going to have a big conversation, and the Chief Electoral Officer is going to have to be part of that conversation. Let's be efficient.

Personally, I have no problem voting in favour of the motion, as long as we're going to look at the agenda. We can propose an amendment to say that it can be included in our future study of Bill C-65, regardless. I'm very open. However, I won't let it go. I think we should leave here today with a timeline.

The Chair: Thank you for your comments, Ms. Gaudreau.

Mr. Duncan, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll build on what's been said about Mr. Cooper's motion and refute some of the brushing off—frankly, the obstruction—of having the minister come back to committee urgently, as the motion states, not when we get to Bill C-65 and get into rounds about the bill. It is asking the minister to appear within the next two weeks.

This meeting is actually continuing, as you mentioned at the beginning, a suspension of the last meeting we had in June, when the minister was here. The minister was brought here to discuss document production for the commission and the work that Justice Hogue is doing. This is timely, this is urgent and this is necessary, because the very conversation we had on that topic about.... Don't take my word or our word for it, but the justice's words and those of her team on the inquiry—and this is just from last week—"Discussions with the Government on document production remain ongoing".

The last part of the hearing just started again. We're in the midst of this. We can't sit and wait for some theoretical "let's get a full calendar and the minister will appear at some point".

No. The minister must come to this committee within the next two weeks. It is urgent, because on this issue specifically, among others that have been already raised, time is of the essence. There should be no reason, when we have this inquiry going on, when we have Justice Hogue and her team saying that the document production is still not resolved and the latest round of hearings is ongoing.... This is not acceptable, what the Liberals are trying to do: "Oh, we'll have the minister at some point down the road, and we can ask him all different types of questions about Bill C-65." I will note that Canadians know what Bill C-65 is, and that is a deliberate attempt to move back the election date a week so NDP and Liberal MPs who are going to lose their seats in the election can guarantee to get their pension vested.

Millions of Canadians were disgusted at that attempt to again go and say that this was going to be some wonderful legislation supported by Canadians. They're disgusted at the games that the NDP and Liberals tried to play by putting that in there. They saw right through it. We'll get to that at some point this fall, I know.

However, again, for the motion that's at hand and Mr. Turnbull's innocence of "Oh well, you know, the minister might come down at that point, and we can ask some broad questions"....no. Our motion has the minister appearing here within the next two weeks. It's necessary and again, it is timely, colleagues, and there should be no reason.... There's a major issue with the inquiry currently under way again this fall, the latest round of hearings. Justice Hogue does not have all the documents that they are requesting.

I support this motion. All colleagues should support this motion, so we can have the minister at the table to answer those questions. We asked in June. They said everything was fine, not to worry about it and that they gave everything they deemed to be necessary—in their own opinion, not in Justice Hogue's and the inquiry's work there. They deserve to have this. They deserve to have the minister here. We deserve to have the opportunity to ask questions and get to the bottom of this so that the integrity of what's happening in that work is maintained.

To have this large cloud hang over the work that's being done on this important topic, which is—to the Bloc, I agree—the vitality of our democracy, if the Liberal cabinet can hold back and make redactions of documents that Justice Hogue deems not appropriate, not right and not reasonable, and we have that overhang the work as it goes.... Let's have the minister here. Let's get to the bottom of this, and let's get full transparency in all of this.

With all the work over the course of the fall, the Minister of Public Safety being here to answer questions is reasonable and, I think, a very good start to answering the many questions he has to account for.

● (219525)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

We have Mr. Gerretsen, followed by Madame Gaudreau.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: The issue here is that there's new information that's evolving all the time that we want to be reactive to and ask questions about. Conservatives have some information now that they're reacting to because they want to be able to ask questions about this, but there are new details that are emerging every day.

For example, I will read to you from Sam Cooper, someone whom the Conservatives are really big fans of in terms of his reporting. This is what he reported yesterday:

In explosive testimony before the Hogue Commission, former Conservative leader Erin O'Toole revealed serious concerns about a Conservative Senator allegedly promoting the interests of a Chinese state-owned enterprise in Ontario.

O'Toole said a sitting MP had alerted him about the Senator's lobbying for an economic interest linked to China, sparking concerns about potential foreign interference. O'Toole testified that he considered removing the Senator from caucus but faced significant challenges....

Later on, Mr. Cooper goes on to report:

A classified source has also alleged to *The Bureau* that the Senator in question was assessed by CSIS as a key actor in a Chinese election-interference network in Toronto, which allegedly implicated at least 11 federal candidates from both major parties in the 2019 election.

My point here is that, yes, I have a lot of questions too. I have questions about this. I don't want to jump the gun by calling the minister here when more information could come out. Hogue has to finish her work and the work is due by the end of this year. A lot more information could come forward, potentially explosive information like this, which I, too, would have questions about.

Do we want to call the minister here every time something like this comes to light, or do we want to let Hogue finish the work, let all of the details come to light and then have a conversation about it? I think the latter is the more appropriate way to do it. Let's get all the information so that everything can come to light before jumping the gun and calling the minister here to answer for a piece of testimony that happened to be heard on one day. As I just indicated, there's a lot of testimony, and I believe there's a lot more to come that we're going to learn about.

• (219530)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

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

I see that my Liberal colleagues aren't opposed to hearing from the minister, are they? So we have something in common.

Next, we have a motion before us, and you know very well that the Conservatives won't give up. You also know my position on this motion. You need only read this motion, which states that we will invite the minister within 14 days of the adoption of this motion regarding his priorities for the return of Parliament and his mandate. In my opinion, we've come back and the minister won't be coming to meet with us for anything else.

In addition, we already have Bill C-65, and we already have to prepare the agenda. I can't vote against that.

I would like to hear what my colleague Ms. Mathysen has to say about where she stands on that. I invite my colleagues to withdraw their request to speak and to call the question.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Gerretsen tried there to make a case, but I think he made the case for supporting having the minister come here in the next 14 days. He's just passing all of his comments of what he said all over the place there. Well, let's just let the justice finish her work.

• (219535)

Mr. Michael Cooper: It's being impeded.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Yes, it's being impeded; that's absolutely correct. The reason the minister needs to come.... The minister was

here at our last meeting and at the table because the commission is not getting all the documents it is requesting. Here we are again with "Oh, just let them finish." They always do this. They stall and obstruct. They try to make it look innocent: "Oh, don't worry about it. We'll have them down later." They always play these games. Canadians don't trust them.

It's another perfect example of what's happening right here. They are stalling and stalling. We had this meeting with the minister in June. Then what they did was that they quietly did an order in council and passed a few more documents on. They wouldn't even say how many documents there were.

However, at the end of the day, here's the part, Mr. Chair, that matters the most. Mr. Gerretsen just leaves out.... As for "let them finish their work," we agree. Let them finish their work with all the documents they deserve, want and should have. Hearings are under way less than a kilometre away from this committee room—probably a few hundred feet away, if you're getting quite technical—as we speak. They still don't have....

It says it right in the article. They're going to quote journalists and what they're saying. I'm happy to do the same and make the same argument Mr. Gerretsen is making. We should have the minister here in two weeks because they should be finishing their work, and they should be finishing their work with everything they have.

It says right here:

The order does not specify how many additional documents will be released to the inquiry or how many redactions will be lifted.

It continues:

But four months after the publication of her report and even after the government's latest...release, Hogue is still pushing for more records.

In a statement, the PCO didn't even confirm all of this.

Again, supporting our argument to get the minister here immediately and with urgency, it says right from the same article in the *National Post*:

But national review agencies and observers are increasingly concerned that the government is constantly expanding its definition of what is a cabinet confidence to prevent the disclosure of certain information.

In interviews, two national security academics say the government's latest release order is very narrow and unlikely to provide all the information Hogue is seeking.

It says right in the same article:

What is being released now is "a very narrow window into a much broader range of intelligence reporting, and it's not the most important window either,"....

This is what they try to do. Kick the.... They say, "Oh, yes, we'll have the minister down at some point about Bill C-65 and the bill that's there, and we'll ask some general questions." No. The minister needs to be here in the next two weeks, answering questions on this and getting this issue resolved. The integrity of the work that Justice Hogue is doing is on the line.

If, months after our last hearing in June in Parliament, it's still hanging over here not resolved and still not satisfied.... Here we have Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Gerretsen saying not to worry and to just let her do her work. We agree. Let her do her work by providing everything she deserves to have and needs to have, all the documents she deserves to have of what she deems reasonable to see and not what the government deems reasonable for her to see, to do a review of its very own actions—or, in many cases, inaction—when it comes to foreign interference.

Therefore, I appreciate Mr. Gerretsen's intervention. I hope he has more because every time he does, he makes the argument for why the minister should be here within two weeks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Turnbull is next, followed by Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

God, I have a lot to say about this, so I look forward to future conversations.

I think I've already made the case for why and how we know that Minister LeBlanc will be coming to committee already as a part of our studies that we have and of bills, including government legislation, which, as we know, should take priority.

We all know that Conservatives will always say that we're masters of our own domain, which we are. However, government legislation should take priority, in many cases, on committees. Minister LeBlanc will certainly, I'm sure, attend the study of Bill C-65, which is a great bill that deals with foreign interference and electoral integrity.

I'd like to propose an amendment to Mr. Cooper's motion. I'll read it into the record. It would be:

That the committee invite the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs to appear before the committee for no less than one hour in relation to his priorities for the return of Parliament and his mandate, as part of the study of Bill C-65.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just before we enter into debate on the amendment proposed by Mr. Turnbull, did everybody catch that?

[*Translation*]

Were we able to understand it in French? Ms. Gaudreau, do you need a copy in French? Yes? Okay.

[*English*]

Colleagues, until Madame Gaudreau.... I'm not sure she was in her seat at exactly the moment this was introduced. She does have to have an opportunity to see this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, would it be enough if Mr. Turnbull repeated his amendment in English? We could continue until the written translation is ready. Would that be okay?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: In the interest of efficiency, if my colleague speaks very slowly and then we get the translation, that may suffice.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*English*]

With that, Mr. Turnbull, if you can just....

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I would also like you to ask me the question you asked Ms. Gaudreau. As a francophone member from Quebec, I also have the right to have access to documents in French and to motions in French. I would like you to take the time, if you want to consult francophone members, to consult not just Bloc Québécois members.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct, Mr. Berthold.

The reason I consulted Ms. Gaudreau is that she had mentioned that there was a problem. You didn't flag a problem. I understand and respect the fact that there are a number of francophone members and, in future, we will make sure that everyone has what they need to do their work in both official languages. However, that's why I didn't ask you about it at that time.

With that, thank you for the reminder.

[*English*]

Mr. Turnbull, if you could, please slowly reread your amendment.

In the future, colleagues, I would ask, for all members, when we know we're going to propose an amendment, that as the amendment is being read in, somebody on your team do their best to translate it into the other language so that we don't lose efficiency at the table, just as a matter of general practice.

Mr. Turnbull, could you just repeat the amendment, please?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'd be happy to, and you have my apologies for reading it so quickly into the record.

I'll start from the top. I move:

That the committee invite the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs to appear before the committee for no less than one hour in relation to his priorities for the return of Parliament and his mandate, as part of the study of Bill C-65.

Now, I would just maybe summarize. It's changing it from “two hours” to one hour, removing the “within 14 days” and adding “as part of the study of Bill C-65”, which is consistent with the very first intervention I made on this motion. I think it's more than reasonable that we'll have him come as part of Bill C-65.

Thank you.

● (219540)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Colleagues, we now enter into debate on the motion as amended by Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, Ms. Gaudreau, is the interpretation good enough for the moment? It seems so, yes. We'll get the translation shortly.

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

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

Through you, and with greatest respect, Mr. Turnbull, the effect of this amendment is to gut the motion. It entirely guts the motion. The fact is that we're going to hear from the minister on Bill C-65, otherwise more properly known as the loser Liberal pension protection act. We're going to hear from him on that. He has a lot to answer for on that bill with respect to inserting into a so-called elections bill a clause that protects the pensions of soon-to-be defeated Liberal MPs.

As Mr. Duncan stated, when I went home, Canadians were absolutely disgusted by this cynical and corrupt attempt to pad the pockets of soon-to-be defeated Liberal MPs. Boy, I can tell you, Canadians can't wait for a carbon tax election to throw out one of the most corrupt governments in Canadian history. Be that as it may, we're going to hear from the minister, and he has a lot to answer for on his cynical and corrupt loser Liberal pension protection act.

However, we also need to probe the minister on his obstruction and the Prime Minister's obstruction of Madam Justice Hogue's inquiry, the refusal of the minister to name the 11 compromised MPs and the refusal of the minister to clarify whether any of those compromised MPs sit in Justin Trudeau's cabinet, which, I think, says everything Canadians need to know.

The effect of Mr. Turnbull's motion would put us in a position where this motion wouldn't even need to be put forward, because we're going to hear from the minister on the loser Liberal pension protection act. The purpose of this motion is to hear from the minister on a much broader range of topics and to hear him for two hours in a separate meeting.

The Chair: Colleagues, before I go to the next speakers, which would be Mr. Duncan and Mr. Calkins, this is what I'm going to do. If I don't hear, by the end of Mr. Calkins remarks, that there is any movement and that we're just going to continue debate, I'm going to suspend the meeting to offer the parties an opportunity to discuss how they want to move forward. We've used up 45 minutes of the meeting.

Understandably, it's legitimate, but we do have to emerge from this meeting with a path forward on committee business. There is ample opportunity for us to have conversations.

As I said, we'll have Mr. Duncan, followed by Mr. Calkins. If it still looks like we're at an impasse, I'm going to suspend and give parties an opportunity to talk and try to break through our impasse, so that we can make a decision on this and get to setting an agenda for committee business. We have legislated timelines on things. We have questions of privilege. We have a variety of other very important people to bring forward.

Obviously, it's within everybody's right to continue this conversation, but there's no point in continuing the conversation if we don't have an idea of how we're going to get to a solution. I'm simply offering this as a preface to where we're headed.

Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours.

Mr. Eric Duncan: We talk about an impasse and good faith to try to come to something. We have a motion from Mr. Cooper—a very reasonable two hours to have the minister here within 14 days. Forty-five minutes into the meeting, what does Mr. Turnbull do? He cuts it in half from two hours down to one. For Canadians who aren't experts in parliamentary hearings, the minister gets one hour. The minister gets 10 minutes for an opening statement with a couple of rounds, and now the 14 days are taken out so they can kick this can down the road.

It is not good faith what the government has done with this amendment, to take out the part about two hours down to one. It's not in good faith to completely remove the 14 days. The government is trying to spread everything out here and distract from the real, urgent issues at hand.

Mr. Chair, you've just talked about the many outstanding issues this committee has to deal with. The minister is responsible for many of those, and there are many questions on a wide range of topics. Again, I'll repeat the urgency of this. The government does all these things to kick the can down the road, obstruct, stonewall and try to look innocent and nice. It's just a good-faith effort on the government's part to put an amendment that's reasonable and fair—that's nonsense.

The minister should be here within two weeks for two hours and should be held accountable. The urgency of all this, again, is with respect to the integrity of the inquiry that Justice Hogue is undertaking right now. There are hearings under way of not having access to all the documents that she deems relevant and reasonable to have. The government keeps brushing it off and saying, "Oh, we'll do this or that." The government members could ask questions in their rounds, but, again, the minister should be here for a full meeting of two hours and should be here within two weeks.

This is not in good faith. I'm not going to let the government get away by saying, "Oh, here's a reasonable amendment to try to move this along." It's nonsense. It's further obstruction. It's further games. The minister can come for two hours within two weeks and answer the many outstanding questions that our committee and Canadians have for him.

● (219545)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Calkins, the floor is yours.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the Canadians who will be watching this or who are watching and listening to this committee right now, the effect that this amendment has on the main motion moved by my colleague Mr. Cooper will be exactly what Mr. Duncan predicts. It will cut the amount of time that we have to question the minister more proportionally. It cuts the committee time in half and it actually cuts the time that the minister has to answer questions by significantly more than half because it doesn't alter the minister's time for opening remarks, which would leave a mere 50 minutes for questions from members of Parliament, rather than an hour and 50 minutes.

This is a frustrating bone of contention. It also removes the element of 14 days. Time is of the essence, given the scope and mandate of the Hogue commission. I certainly don't take any comfort in any good faith because I've seen this many times over the last nine years.

Then, of course, adding on the context at the end of the motion of “the return of Parliament and his mandate” in relation to the study of Bill C-65 means that any question that anybody asks that's not germane or pertinent to Bill C-65 will be interrupted with points of order by, I'm assuming, Liberal MPs, to try to further obstruct and provide cover and a place for the minister to hide in relation to other questions.

That is why the wording in the motion by my colleague, Mr. Cooper, leaves it broad. We could ask the minister questions about legislation. We could ask the minister questions about foreign interference. We could ask the minister about the integrity of our election institutions and election readiness by Elections Canada, but many of those questions would potentially be deemed out of order should we adopt this amendment.

It's frustrating, but this is the pattern. I remember the conversation that we had at this committee about whether or not it was actually this committee's role to continue to pursue foreign interference, and everybody said that we're going to push this off. I can't recall how many times we've had document production requests from this committee and the big argument around this table was that members of Parliament shouldn't be seeing these things because we don't have the security clearance and so on. The solution from the government—the coalition at the time—was that we're going to give this over to a commission and to a justice who will have the security clearance to see all of the documents.

Of course, that was just code for sending the justice only the documents that we think the justice should see and not the documents that we would have liked to have seen produced before this committee and before the law clerk. It's not even the documents that the commissioner herself and her team have suggested they need in order to fully ensure accuracy and the details necessary to carry out the mandate the commissioner has.

It's always about weasel words, saying they're going to try to make this look like they have nothing to hide. However, it really is that they're going to duck and cover and continue to provide cover for this government, which frankly does not have the confidence of Canadians and quite understandably should not have the support of this House.

It's frustrating for me to watch this continued charade where the government pretends to be acquiescing and to be open, honest and transparent with Canadians, and then its actions and behaviours are anything but.

I will not be voting in favour of this amendment proposed by Mr. Turnbull. The minister can appear, as far as I am concerned, within the 14 days.

I would encourage my colleagues who actually care about the future of our country to vote against this amendment. Let's have a vote in favour of transparency. Let's have a vote in favour of

democracy. Let's have a vote in favour of holding the government to account, which is what all of us ought to be doing at this table.

● (219550)

Say no to the amendment proposed by Mr. Turnbull and get back to the main motion, which I think should be passed in its original form as presented by my colleague Mr. Cooper.

The Chair: Colleagues, I did mention that I was ready to suspend, but only if there are folks who want to speak to this further. If there are not, then I'm going to call the question for a vote.

I have Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Berthold who would like to continue, so what I'm going to do is very briefly suspend and give us all a few minutes to breathe and talk to each other. Hopefully, when we come back and Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Berthold have the floor, we will get some movement on this.

We are briefly suspended, colleagues.

● (1150)

(Pause)

● (1200)

The Chair: Welcome back.

My understanding is that we made good use of our suspension. We've resumed debate on the motion as amended.

Ms. Mathyssen, I recognize you. You have the floor.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: I would like to make a subamendment, if I may.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Chair, you said, “on the motion as amended”. I don't think it's been amended yet.

The Chair: No.

I'm going to assume you said, “point of order.” I'll clarify if I didn't say it correctly.

We are continuing debate because, as soon as an amendment has been moved, we are immediately debating the amendment.

Did I say, “motion as amended”?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's what you said.

The Chair: I apologize. We are debating the amendment that was proposed to amend the motion.

Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: We had a speaking list before you suspended, because you said, “We'll call the question.”

The Chair: You are correct. I had Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Berthold.

Ms. Mathyssen, I apologize. I recognized you, but I did have a speaking order.

Mr. Turnbull, did you still want to go?

[Translation]

So I'll give the floor to Mr. Berthold; then it will be Ms. Mathyssen's turn.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Calkins, for the clarification.

I'm sorry about that, folks.

[Translation]

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

It will come as no surprise if I say that I don't trust Mr. Turnbull's amendment in terms of getting Minister LeBlanc here quickly enough to know what his priorities are and what he's working on right now. The 14-day deadline in the motion is absolutely essential. I know what I'm talking about, given my experience on August 19, when I attended a meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. I had a commitment from the Liberals, behind the scenes, that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change would appear before this committee within 14 days, and we were asked to stop insisting on including that in the motion. Finally, Mr. Guilbeault appeared yesterday, September 17, a month later.

I find it very hard to believe that ministers are acting in good faith when it comes to appearing before the committee if they aren't required to do so within a specific time frame. As a result, I think it's essential to maintain the 14-day deadline, because since these informal discussions with the Liberals, I no longer trust the ministers to appear quickly. Ministers choose when they will appear based on their political priorities and not on the needs of Canadians and Quebecers. I find this absolutely unacceptable. I've already put my trust in informal discussions once recently, so I think it's absolutely essential that the 14-day deadline remain in this motion.

I'll see how the discussions go, but if the 14-day deadline disappears, expect it to come back one way or another, Mr. Chair, because I don't agree with removing it at all.

• (219605)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Berthold.

[English]

Ms. Mathyssen, the floor is yours.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: I appreciate all the discussion on this and the back-and-forth. I would agree with the Conservatives that the part about putting in “as part of the study of Bill C-65” is a bit repetitive, considering the minister would come for that anyway. I'm not sure what the cleanest way to do this is, but I think, to try to bring everyone together—as I always try to do—I could do this two ways.

I think it might work if I first bring forward a subamendment to the amendment. Ultimately, it would change Mr. Turnbull's move to one hour back to two. We would keep the removal of the “14 days of the adoption of this motion”, but we would then remove “as part of the study of Bill C-65”. That's so everyone can come together, move on with this and vote for it.

We all get a bit. We all give a bit.

The Chair: Ms. Mathyssen, can you can read the subamendment?

Then, colleagues, as a procedural reminder, once Ms. Mathyssen has read the subamendment, we will begin debate on that subamendment. Should there be no debate necessary, we will immediately go to a vote.

Ms. Mathyssen, being mindful of our interpreters, please read slowly. If your team could work on getting a copy of that to—

[Translation]

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

The Chair: One moment, please.

[English]

Ms. Mathyssen, could your team also just work on getting a copy of the subamendment to the clerk, please?

[Translation]

You have a point of order, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'm very open when just one small word is changed, but there are a lot of changes in this case. So I won't be able to go any further until I have the documents translated into French. I need them.

The Chair: Let's wait a moment to see if it's complete.

[English]

Ms. Mathyssen, do we, by chance, have a written version of that subamendment yet?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: We are working on it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Colleagues, we're just going to briefly suspend, because we do have to respect the fact that there are two official languages, and if a member of the committee is asking for the ability to undertake important parliamentary work in their language of choice, we have to honour that.

[Translation]

Is that what you wanted, Ms. Gaudreau?

Okay.

[English]

We're just going to suspend very quickly.

Lindsay, might I ask if you could speak to Madame Gaudreau, just so that we can clarify?

We're going to very briefly suspend here, colleagues.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1215)

The Chair: Colleagues, my understanding is that there have been some discussions.

We're going back to Ms. Mathyssen. I lost track of time for a moment.

Where we left off a few moments ago was that we needed a translation piece to come into effect.

Ms. Mathyssen, perhaps you can update the committee as to what discussions were had and where we're at.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: I believe that we have provided the clerk with the full changes and that it has been distributed.

Has it not been distributed?

The Chair: The clerk will distribute it, but keep going, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: I'll read it slowly to ensure proper translation, but it's fairly simple. The full motion, if it were to be subamended, would now read:

That the committee invite the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs to appear before the committee for no less than two hours in relation to his priorities for the return of Parliament and his mandate.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

I think that's clear.

Mr. Berthold, the floor is yours.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I would like to amend my colleague's subamendment.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have a point of order.

Chair, as far as I know, in terms of procedure, you can't subamend a subamendment.

The Chair: That is correct, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Berthold, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: You're right, Mr. Chair. I stand corrected.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent to amend the subamendment.

I think we've all watered down our expectations a bit. For our part, we're saying that it's urgent to have the minister appear before the Thanksgiving break because of the constraints of the Hogue Commission. We're therefore proposing that we have a meeting with the minister within 21 days of the adoption of the motion, that is before the Thanksgiving break. That would give the minister more time to adjust his schedule.

I think that's a reasonable proposal. Everyone is moving forward with their amendment. As I mentioned earlier, Justice Hogue must absolutely be given the opportunity to have access to all the information. If we have the opportunity to question the minister before Thanksgiving, it will give the foreign interference commission time to do its work properly.

I'm therefore asking for unanimous consent to add "within 21 days of the adoption of the motion" to my NDP colleague's subamendment. I think that would be better.

[English]

The Chair: Colleagues, Monsieur Berthold has asked for unanimous consent, so the first thing we have to deal with is whether or

not the committee would like to grant their approval of his unanimous consent request.

I'm looking around the room.

An hon. member: What is it? What is his...?

The Chair: It's what he....

Hon. Mona Fortier: May I suggest a point of order?

The Chair: Just one second, colleagues. I know we have a lot of things flying in the air right now.

I want to clarify what's happening here. Monsieur Berthold is asking for unanimous consent to provide a subamendment because he does not have the ability to do so otherwise. The first thing we have to do is to decide whether or not we grant unanimous consent to Monsieur Berthold to present a subamendment to the subamendment.

Is it permissible as far as the committee is concerned? Are we clear on this?

Now I'm looking around the table. Are we granting Mr. Berthold unanimous consent...?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: No.

The Chair: I hear no.

Colleagues, we will now resume the discussion on the subamendment that Ms. Mathyssen has put forward, but I just want to intervene for a moment. This is getting.... It's self-explanatory where it's getting.

Colleagues, if you have commentary you would like to add to the subamendment Ms. Mathyssen has proposed, now is the time to do so. If you do not, we're going to get to a vote on her subamendment, which would then allow us to get back into discussion and, hopefully, a vote on the motion as amended.

I'm looking around the room. Does anybody want to speak to the subamendment?

Clerk, I ask you call the vote on whether or not the committee will accept the subamendment proposed by Ms. Mathyssen.

(Subamendment agreed to: yes 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Amendment as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Colleagues, we are now resuming debate on the motion as amended.

Mr. Berthold.

● (219620)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I would like to move another subamendment to the motion. I tried to do it in a very cordial way, with all my colleagues, but it didn't work. So I'm going to move that we make the following amendment to the motion, "no less than 2 hours, within 21 days of the adoption of the motion".

[English]

The Chair: Colleagues, we have a new amendment put forward by Mr. Berthold.

I see that Mr. Cooper would like to speak to it.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

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

I'd like to speak in favour of the amendment put forward by Mr. Berthold.

I would note that it is consistent with the spirit of the motion, namely that the minister come to provide the committee with an update of the minister's priorities at the beginning of the fall sitting. I think it's quite reasonable for the minister to be here before Thanksgiving.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Seeing nobody else wanting to speak—

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: It bears repeating, Mr. Chair. I don't have it in front of me. I want to make sure of the wording; otherwise, I can't vote.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Do you want me to read it, Mr. Chair?

[Translation]

The Chair: There are two ways to proceed. If you agree, Ms. Gaudreau, I can give the floor to Mr. Berthold so that he can reread his subamendment. If not, we'll have to give him a moment to write something.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I accept that he will reread his subamendment in French, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Berthold, can you read it again, please?

Mr. Luc Berthold: The motion would read as follows:

That the committee invite the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs to appear before the committee for no less than 2 hours within 21 days of the adoption of the motion in relation to his priorities for the return of Parliament and his mandate.

● (219625)

The Chair: Is that correct, Ms. Gaudreau? Yes? Okay.

[English]

Colleagues, I'm looking around the room. No one is asking to speak to this.

I am going to ask the clerk to call the vote on the amendment proposed by Mr. Berthold.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Colleagues, I'm looking around the room. I believe everyone understands that we have an amended motion. We now need to either continue debate, which it doesn't look like anyone is interested in doing, or call a vote on the motion as amended.

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

The Chair: Colleagues, as my people say, *mazel tov*. We have accomplished a feat here. *Mazel tov* simply means congratulations. I don't know if we have a Yiddish translator back there.

Colleagues, I am now going to suspend briefly, because we're going to move in camera to discuss committee business. We know we have lots of things to do. I'm just going to allow the clerk and everybody else to kind of reset for a moment.

Thank you for your co-operation. We're going to suspend. We will resume in camera and begin a conversation on committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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