



## Interview Summary: Anne McGrath

Anne McGrath, Principal Secretary to NDP leader Jagmeet Singh and former National Director of the NDP, was interviewed by Commission counsel on February 20, 2024.

### Notes to reader

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary contains information that relates to the Commission's mandate under clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of its Terms of Reference. Information provided during the interviews that relates to other aspects of the Commission's Terms of Reference has been omitted from this summary, but may be adduced by the Commission at a later stage of its proceedings.

## 1. Background

- [1] Anne McGrath is the Principal Secretary to federal **New Democratic Party** ("NDP") leader Jagmeet Singh. Her history as an executive with the federal NDP is as follows:
- a. President of the federal NDP from 2006 to 2009;
  - b. Chief of Staff for Jack Layton from 2008 to 2011;
  - c. Chief of Staff for Thomas Mulcair from 2012 to 2014 and
  - d. National Director of the NDP from 2014 to 2015 and 2019 to January 2024.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Watson replaced Ms. McGrath as National Director of the NDP in January 2024.

## 1.1 History with the NDP

- [2] Ms. McGrath's involvement with the NDP began in 1993. She ran as a provincial NDP candidate in Calgary in 1993 and 1995.
- [3] She moved to Ottawa in 2000 and became involved in the NDP at the federal level, including with the federal executive and on Jack Layton's campaign team. At this time, she was also working at the **Canadian Union of Public Employees ("CUPE")**. She worked at CUPE for a few years until she was working full-time with Jack Layton on Parliament Hill. She was President of the federal NDP from 2006 to 2009 and Jack Layton's Chief of Staff from 2008 to 2011.
- [4] Ms. McGrath served as the National Director for the federal NDP from 2014 to 2015. She then acted as Thomas Mulcair's campaign manager for the 2015 federal election.
- [5] She returned to Alberta following the 2015 election to work with Rachel Notley as her Chief of Staff and in other roles. Ms. McGrath ran in Calgary in the 2019 provincial election. Following that election, she moved back to Ottawa to serve as the National Director of the NDP, a position she held until January 2024, when she became Jagmeet Singh's Principal Secretary.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Federal NDP concerns about foreign interference by India

- [6] The NDP's primary concern about foreign interference is the Government of India and its mis/disinformation campaigns in Indian newspapers and online publications targeting Jagmeet Singh since at least 2019. For example, the *Hindustan Times* published an article describing Mr. Singh as glorifying the man behind the Air India bombing. The only information the NDP has received about the Government of India's actions in respect of the Party and Mr. Singh is from media reports and rumors.
- [7] After the 2021 election, the Government of India tried to set up a meeting between the High Commissioner of India and Jagmeet Singh. Ms. McGrath was concerned about the proposed meeting. The NDP did not respond to the invitation, but Ms. McGrath raised the

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<sup>2</sup> Jagmeet Singh's Chief of Staff and campaign manager for 2021 was Jennifer Howard.

issue with the person from **Privy Council Office (“PCO”)** who was at the **Security and Intelligence Threats to Election Task Force (“SITE TF”)** meetings she attended in 2021 (see Section 3.3 below). That person then reported it to CSIS. In response, CSIS contacted Ms. McGrath and she met with CSIS representatives in December 2021. CSIS gave her no actionable or practical information. They told her not to meet over Zoom or to use WeChat, as precautions. While it was easy for her to avoid using WeChat, it was not practical to avoid Zoom in the midst of the pandemic, when all meetings were being conducted over Zoom.

### 3. The NDP and foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections

#### 3.1 NDP concerns about foreign interference in the 2019 elections

- [8] In 2019, the NDP’s national operations was not aware of concerns about foreign interference in the 2019 election. The Party did not work with its candidates on awareness of, recognizing, or countering attempted foreign interference. The only information the NDP received about foreign interference in the 2019 election was from media reports after the fact.
- [9] There were media reports that diaspora group had concern about foreign interference. None of these concerns came directly to the NDP.
- [10] In 2021, the CBC reported that, Shawn Devine, a federal NDP candidate for Ottawa South who lost in 2019, had someone working on his federal campaign that had subsequently been arrested for being a Russian spy. By the time the report came out, Mr. Devine had left federal politics and was a City Councilor in the City of Ottawa. The NDP did not take steps to verify the information or learn more about the circumstances surrounding it, nor did it report the allegation to the SITE TF or any other government entity, organization or agency.
- [11] Jesse Calvert, Deputy National Director of the NDP, described his experience with the SITE TF during the 2019 elections to Ms. McGrath: while there were government

communication protocols for issues (not limited to foreign interference), such communication was after the fact, so it was not a useful process.

### 3.2 NDP concerns about foreign interference in the 2021 elections

- [12] During the 2021 election, Ms. McGrath did not hear about foreign interference from the NDP's volunteers or candidates. People were concerned with campaigning during COVID-19. The safety issues that the NDP dealt with during the 2021 election campaign were pandemic-related (e.g., MPs and Jagmeet Singh being harassed and picketed) and solutions were focused on making sure candidates could operate politically without danger (e.g., by having RCMP protection).
- [13] Like in 2019, she was not aware of any concerns of foreign interference during the campaign or election; she only heard about foreign interference issues after the fact in the media. Foreign interference was not an issue on which the NDP worked with candidates.
- [14] The issues Ms. McGrath heard through the SITE TF (see next section) did not seem to be relevant to the NDP.

### 3.3 Participation in SITE in 2021

- [15] Ms. McGrath participated in the SITE TF during the 2021 election, but the NDP did not receive much information about potential foreign interference, how to recognize it, or what to do about it.
- [16] During the 2021 election, Ms. McGrath attended three SITE TF meetings at secure facilities at CSE or CSIS. The RCMP, CSIS, CSE and PCO, and two representatives from each political party attended these meetings. All party representatives had to obtain security clearances to participate but nothing classified as Top Secret was discussed. The party representatives Ms. McGrath recalled were as follows:
- a. Ms. McGrath and Jesse Calvert (NDP);
  - b. Walied Soliman and Trevor Bailey (Conservative Party of Canada);
  - c. a lawyer and an individual (Liberal Party of Canada); and

d. an individual for the Green Party of Canada.

The Bloc Québécois did not attend.

- [17] Parties received educational presentations on extremism and cyber security but were not given copies of the slide decks presented. They were not offered any tools or strategies for detecting, deterring or countering foreign interference.
- [18] SITE TF asked the political party representatives to report to it any issues about foreign interference. The NDP and other party representatives asked questions like, “How do we know if something is foreign interference?” and, “Will you tell us?” They did not receive satisfactory answers to those questions.
- [19] The party representatives told the SITE TF that parties would be reluctant to speak about internal party affairs, for example, if there was a concern about a nomination race, in front of other political parties.
- [20] After one meeting with the SITE TF, Al Southerland from David MacDonald’s office at PCO emailed Ms. McGrath three phone numbers, including a PCO number, as a reference if issues around foreign interference came up. However, there was no information about when she should use these numbers.
- [21] The SITE TF meetings did not give the political parties any information that could be passed onto candidates or campaign staff. There were no actionable items flowing from these meetings.
- [22] In 2021, the SITE TF seemed to have a lot of resources, but its process seemed *pro forma* and not a priority.
- [23] There was no room for feedback in the SITE TF process. Ms. McGrath says this is also reflected in Morris Rosenberg’s review of the **Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (“CEIPP”)** during the 2021 election.
- [24] Ms. McGrath has also received SITE TF reports about federal by-elections.

## 4. Foreign interference and nomination races

[25] According to Ms. McGrath, nomination races can be fraught and possibly prone to foreign interference because people can get close to nominees. However, Ms. McGrath does not agree foreign states are exerting control over NDP nominations. While foreign governments could arrange to have foreign agents work for a nominee, she believes that this probably does not happen.

## 5. NDP vetting process

[26] The NDP's election candidate vetting process is very intrusive and extensive. A member of NDP staff acts as vettor, completing a deep dive into a candidate's social media profiles using the candidate's own passwords. The vettor also checks for criminal or other legal issues. Sometimes, the vettor interviews the potential candidate. The results of this vetting process were provided to Ms. McGrath in her role as NDP National Director, and she approved federal candidates.

[27] There are "hero" ridings where the outcome is either a clear win or loss. There are also battleground ridings, where the outcome is more uncertain. For battleground ridings, candidates get guidance on vetting their staff, but to her knowledge, foreign interference is not discussed as part of that guidance.

## 6. Flow of information about potential security and intelligence threats

### 6.1 From government to political parties

[28] Federal political parties receive high level briefings from the SITE TF (see Section 3.3 above). They get no other formal or informal information from the government or government entities, organizations or services. Ms. McGrath says the media has been the NDP's main source of information about foreign interference.

[29] Ms. McGrath wonders what the point of the SITE TF meetings is, including getting the required security clearances, when parties received no useful information or guidance about foreign interference from these meetings.

## 6.2 From the NDP to government

[30] Ms. McGrath goes to PCO if there are potential issues of foreign interference. She understands that the information she provides to the PCO in this regard is reported to CSIS. While she can report directly to CSIS, she has not done so.

## 6.3 From the NDP to its members of Parliament, staff, candidates and volunteers

[31] The NDP has not done much to support its members of Parliament, staff, candidates and volunteers in looking for and sharing information about foreign interference.

[32] Jenny Kwan raised concerns about what foreign interference means for her. Ms. Kwan met with David Johnston in his role as Independent Special Rapporteur. The NDP has not taken any action in response to Ms. Kwan's concerns. The NDP does not know what it could or should do to support Ms. Kwan.

## 7. Elections Canada and foreign interference

[33] Ms. McGrath recalls that a complaint was made by the federal NDP lawyer to Elections Canada or to the Commissioner of Canada Elections in relation to Jenny Kwan's campaign in 2021. Ms. McGrath does not consider Elections Canada to be a resource for combatting foreign interference.

[34] The NDP meets with Elections Canada regularly, including at formal in-person meetings about elections twice a year, which last for two days. Foreign interference has never come up in the NDP's meetings with Elections Canada that Ms. McGrath has participated in, including when discussing changes to the *Canada Elections Act*.

## 8. Recommendations

### 8.1 Nomination races

[35] Control of nominations should remain within each political party, but Ms. McGrath believes it would be useful to have someone who knows about foreign interference oversee nomination races. This would have to be at the federal level.

### 8.2 Flow of information

[36] There should be a way to let parties know if there are concerns of foreign interference across the country. For example, if the NDP had known about concerns with Shawn Devine's campaign, they would have spoken with him and his campaign manager about those concerns at the time (see Section 3.1 above).

[37] Ms. McGrath recommends that political party representatives obtain and maintain Top Secret clearances in order to meet with and be briefed by intelligence agencies on classified information about foreign interference concerns. As an example of how this would work, Ms. McGrath explained that Jagmeet Singh and Jennifer Howard were updated by PCO representatives on the intelligence about India's involvement in the murder in BC.

[38] Each party should meet separately with government agencies about foreign interference because party representatives are not going to speak about internal party affairs in front of other parties. These meetings should happen before the election period, as well as during.

[39] There should be a person within government designated to receive information about foreign interference from political parties.

### 8.3 Guidance to political parties

[40] Government should tell political parties what to do if the party suspects foreign interference. Ms. McGrath would like the process to provide more helpful and practical guidance to parties about detecting, deterring, and countering foreign interference.



#### 8.4 Advice on changing party rules to address foreign interference

- [41] After every election campaign, the NDP strikes a committee that reviews the campaign and generates with suggestions for changes to rules for the next campaign. These proposals are adopted by the NDP's Federal Council and then used in the next election. It would be helpful for advice about foreign interference to feed into this process.
- [42] The NDP has not made any rule changes in response to concerns about foreign interference, but it has increased its requirement for how many days someone must be a party member before they can vote in nomination races. During the 2021 campaign, Ms. McGrath was asked to waive this rule, but she did not do so because she thinks one needs to be a party member and have a stake in the process and not just join to vote for a specific nominee.