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Chair: Mr. John Brassard



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1115)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

I'm going to open up meeting number 111 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Before we go in camera, I wanted to bring something to the attention of the committee.

Mr. Fisher, to your point the other day about the scheduling, right now as it stands we have the social media draft report, version one, later today. We have the Ethics Commissioner and the Commissioner of Lobbying on the 16th. Then, we have the main estimates on the 18th, which is the Information Commissioner coming in. I've left time later on that afternoon for the second hour, in case we need to complete the draft study.

For the purposes of the committee, we have 17 meetings, or fewer, left in this session. We have two different studies that need to be done. This is where I need direction from the committee. We have Villemure one, as I'll call it, which is the study on information and disinformation, and then Villemure two, which is the Winnipeg lab study. I need an order of precedence from the committee to determine where we want to go on those studies and which one we want to do first. It will help the clerk and it will help the analysts to provide witnesses for the committee on those studies.

Mr. Cooper, did you want to speak to this?

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): I want to move a motion.

The Chair: Okay, I'll come back to you. We're on this right now.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Villemure, on the calendar.

Please, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, both studies are near and dear to my heart because they're both very important. Disinformation and misinformation are, in fact, linked to everything we've been seeing in terms of election interference, and so on.

However, it seems to me that the Winnipeg lab and concealment study is the priority, compared to the other study. Ethically speaking, they're both worthwhile studies. But if I have to choose one, I would go with the Winnipeg lab report.

The Chair: Thank you.

I forgot to mention that the Privacy Commissioner will be appearing before the committee on May 9.

[English]

Mr. Villemure, you prefer that we start with the Winnipeg lab study. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Yes, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any other discussion on that?

Again, from a scheduling standpoint, we want to make sure that the analysts and the clerk are in a position to succeed.

Go ahead, Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Our preference would be to study the misinformation ASAP, if possible.

The Chair: Okay, we have converging views here on where we need to go.

Is there any other discussion on this from any other party?

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I was going to express, about the misinformation study, that, at least on this side, we were all eager to get to it. Instead of choosing one or the other, perhaps there's a way to mix up the two and do one meeting on one and one meeting on the other, or something like that. Then we could actually cover both.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Villemure, you still have the floor.

Mr. René Villemure: In answer to my colleague, we've tried what he's suggesting a few times in the past. However, I found that constantly switching from one study to another sometimes made it harder for us to follow. This was also true for the analysts. That's the reason for my choice.

I suggested both studies, and both of them are close to my heart, believe me. The choice is heartbreaking, but I still maintain my preference for the Winnipeg lab study.

Mr. Housefather's suggestion is sound, except that, having tried it that way a few times—this was before my colleague was a member of the committee—I know that these topics are pretty heavy when you are invested in them, and I find it difficult to jump from one study to the other every week.

The Chair: Alright. Thank you.

[*English*]

For the benefit of the committee, not only do we have the draft report that we're dealing with today, but we'll be dealing with the information tool report as well, so that might leave us a little less time going forward.

My preference, frankly, is to do one over the other, and what that study is can be determined by the committee. Certainly, we'll deal with that. I don't expect that we're going to have a draft report on either one of these studies done before the summer. This may take us well into the fall.

Go ahead, Mr. Bains and then Mr. Green, on this issue.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to note, considering that the Winnipeg lab study is being done already in another committee, it would give us an opportunity as the only committee studying misinformation and disinformation and the very important work that needs to be done there.

My preference is that we do the misinformation/disinformation study.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Bains.

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

If I recall, the motion that Mr. Villemure put forward was for three meetings. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct, yes. Both of them were for three meetings.

Mr. Matthew Green: The Winnipeg lab study at the Canada-China committee is scheduled for how many meetings?

The Chair: Mr. Villemure, you're sitting on that committee. Is that correct?

Mr. René Villemure: I'm subbing on that committee. This is an open-ended motion.

The Chair: Okay, so there's no definitive timeline and no number of days. It sounds like it could go on for a while.

Mr. René Villemure: Yes, and they can call witnesses as they wish.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: This is what I would say, just from a strategic point of view. I happen to think that allowing that study to happen would actually give us a lot more context for questioning, for filling in the gaps, for cross-examination. It's a process that's been going on for quite some time, so in terms of the urgency, whether it's next week or three weeks from now doesn't seem to be a burning question, which is why I never supported the Standing Order 106 meeting, for that reason.

I think it's important. I'm not sure that, strategically for us as a committee, we would get as much out of studying it concurrently with the other committee. I have found, in my position in opposition, that it's quite useful to refer to the Hansard and the testimony of ministers and the evidence provided by people from other committees to be able to provide a more adequate cross-examination.

If I had the privilege of sitting on both committees, it wouldn't matter to me, but I don't. For that reason, I would say that we should probably prioritize the misinformation/disinformation, and see what happens on the Canada-China committee. At least they would have another couple of weeks of testimony provided there. I'm of the opinion that the more is on the record officially, the better for us. I'm sure members in opposition could appreciate the ways in which people tend to get their stories tangled up over time. I would much rather have them do their full testimony there, and then have their testimony to reference in our own lines of questioning when it comes to that point.

That would be the only reason why I would support the misinformation/disinformation study first. It's simply one of strategic and logical sequence.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Green.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, the floor is yours.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I find Mr. Green's position very interesting. It's true that, though the Winnipeg file is important, it isn't urgent. I completely agree with what my colleague has said. However, I need some clarification.

We were previously examining the aspect of the file on access to information, a topic on which we are experts here at the committee. I had asked, not knowing whether it would be possible, for this part of the study to be sent to us from the Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China to avoid the same study being done twice. Since we're more specialized on the subject, I was wondering if we could make this request. My answer would change because, similarly to Mr. Green, I also enjoy hearing what others have said. It allows us to detect potential contradictions. Regardless, I will follow the will of the majority.

That said, it's an important, urgent and troublesome topic. If we put this back to the fall, it might fall by the wayside. This is one of my concerns.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

[English]

Just for clarification, we cannot compel the Canada-China committee to send us information. That's something that, obviously, we'd have to be following.

The thing I'm looking for right now is just an issue of priority.

Mr. Green, I see your hand up on the topic. Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: We're just in April now. I'm not suggesting that this would go to the fall. I'm suggesting that we would do a week and a half of this, and then we would get to it. Even if it is two or three weeks, we have until June. It's about an eight-week stretch.

The Chair: When I talked about referring it to the fall, perhaps the report and the drafting of that report might happen in the fall. I see us in a situation where we'd end up dealing with these two issues. I just needed to know which one was first and which one was second.

We could, if we wanted, start on April 30 with either one of these and continue on May 2 and May 7. That would take care of three meetings, either on this one or on the other one. I just need direction from the committee. I don't think we have consensus at this point, but I'm looking to get some consensus.

If you want to do the disinformation and misinformation study on the three dates that I just proposed, and then come back on May 21, 23 and 28 with the Winnipeg lab study, we could do that.

[Translation]

Do you agree with that, Mr. Villemure?

Mr. René Villemure: Yes, I do.

[English]

The Chair: Do I have consensus on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We're good. That gives us clear direction. On April 30, May 2 and May 7, we will do the disinformation and mis-

information study. We will do the Winnipeg lab study on May 21, 23 and 28.

That's just so everybody is clear. We have consensus. Thank you for that.

Mr. Cooper, I saw that you had something you wanted to discuss with the committee.

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

I will be moving a motion in light of the shocking report in The Globe and Mail of the criminal leak of classified information by a top Liberal connected to the Prime Minister that resulted in the member for Don Valley North being tipped off that he was being monitored by CSIS.

I will now read the motion, after which I have some comments to make with regard to the motion.

The motion is as follows—

• (1125)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: My apologies. I'm subbing in. Is it possible to receive a copy in both official languages so that I can follow along?

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll let him move the motion, and then—

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): This is on the point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We have some parachutes that have just landed in the room, and it's customary for members—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Excuse me. Are you referring to me as a parachute? That is very disrespectful.

Mr. Michael Barrett: So is interrupting people, Sherry.

It's customary for members—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I have the floor—

Mr. Michael Barrett: You do not. You do not have—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I have a point of order before the chair, asking for a copy of the motion.

Mr. Michael Barrett: He gave me the floor.

The Chair: Hang on a second.

Michael—

Mr. Michael Barrett: This is not how this works.

Chair, you recognized me, so I'm going to finish my point of order.

The point of order is that it is a practice now where Liberal members look to interrupt Conservatives when they have the floor. Mr. Cooper hasn't even moved his motion and they're already trying to silence him and shut him down—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): But he was parachuted in here too.

Mr. Michael Barrett: —when he's looking to move the motion.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you—

Mr. Michael Barrett: They've created great disorder.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: [*Inaudible—Editor*] parachutes landing here today.

Mr. Michael Barrett: They've created great disorder.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I would ask that everybody just calm down. Mr. Cooper has the floor.

I appreciate your point of order. I will ask Mr. Cooper, once he moves that motion, to make sure the clerk has a copy of the motion in both official languages.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Like we do every time.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, go ahead with your motion.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Chair, the motion is as follows:

Given that,

media reporting states that a Liberal Party member informed the Liberal candidate for Don Valley North that he was the subject of a CSIS investigation in 2019 and that,

this information could only be obtained from classified national security briefings, with the leak undermining the work of Canada's intelligence agency and violating Canada's national security laws and that,

since only select individuals in the Liberal government and Liberal Party would have received this classified information from CSIS, and would have been responsible for sharing this information,

the committee call the following witnesses:

National Director of Liberal Party, Liberal Designate for SITE taskforce, Azam Ishmael

Liberal Designate for SITE taskforce, Braeden Caley

Liberal Designate for SITE taskforce, Mathieu Lafrance

Liberal Campaign Director, Jeremy Broadhurst

Former Chief of Staff to the Minister of Public Safety, Marci Surkes

Former Chief of Staff to the Minister of Public Safety, Zita Astravas

Former Chief of Staff to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Rob Jamieson

Deputy Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, Brian Clow

Director of CSIS, David Vigneault

Commissioner of the RCMP, Michael Duheme

National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, Nathalie Drouin

Other witnesses deemed relevant by the committee

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I wish to speak to the motion.

The Chair: That's fine. Thank you for the motion, Mr. Cooper.

I'm going to rule that the motion is in order. We are in committee business. To be fair to the other members of the committee, I want to make sure they have a copy of it in both official languages.

I understand that the clerk is working on that right now.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Yes, I submitted it to translation.

The Chair: Okay.

I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes to ensure that all members have a copy of it.

When we come back, I'm going to give you the floor, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: That's perfect.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1125) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1145)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

The translated copy of the motion has been shared with members of the committee.

For the benefit of the committee, when we're dealing with motions that are going to be moved, as the chair I would like—and I know the clerk would as well—as a matter of courtesy, to receive them in both official languages. Twenty-five minutes of our time was just spent translating this document.

Before we begin the discussion, I want to make sure that everybody is aware that any discussions are going to go through the chair. There will be no cross-floor discussions at all. We're going to deal with the discussion on the motion at hand. Any disruptions with respect to a point of order just because you don't like what somebody is saying will not be tolerated by the chair. I am asking that if you're going to initiate a point of order, state succinctly what point of order you're raising with respect to the Standing Orders.

I'm not going to let this meeting descend into chaos. I am asking that everybody act like adults because if there is significant disruption, I will suspend the meeting.

With that, we are going to discuss the motion as presented by Mr. Cooper.

I have a list. Mr. Cooper is going first, and then Mr. Brock. I saw Mr. Fisher's hand and I saw Mr. Bains' hand as well. That will be the order in which we have a discussion.

Mr. Cooper, you have the floor. Go ahead.

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

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead on your point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Succinctly, as per your direction, Mr. Chair, I am referring to Standing Order 108(3)(h). Again, if you're going to look that up, it's Standing Order 108(3)(h).

It specifically says that the committee's mandate is to study matters related to reports of the Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, and the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner pursuant to the Conflict of Interest Act. Matters related to the conflict of interest code for Members of the House of Commons are studied by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

It goes on to say that the committee can also study any legislation or regulation, or propose initiatives that relate to access to information, privacy and ethical standards relating to public office holders.

What I am suggesting to you, Mr. Chair, is that this motion is out of order because it does not fall under the mandate of the committee. This issue is actually currently being studied at PROC, where Mr. Cooper, Mrs. Romanado and I sit. We almost have more PROC members here than we do ethics committee members, to be honest.

I would encourage this discussion to continue in that place, and that Mr. Cooper—who isn't a member of this committee, either—move that in PROC.

I would suggest to you that based on what I've said—based on the standing order that I referenced, which you requested—this motion is not in order and you should rule it out of order.

The Chair: I appreciate that intervention, Mr. Gerretsen.

I did rule that the motion was in order for several reasons, not the least of which is what I consider to be the mandate of the committee, which is access to information, privacy and ethics. I also ruled on the basis that our committee did study foreign interference and presented a report to Parliament. I believe that this issue is within the mandate of the committee.

I appreciate your point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper. You have the floor.

• (1150)

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

For years—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I mentioned to you before that I may have something to supplement.

The Chair: I did not hear that, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I had done that before, but—

The Chair: I didn't hear that.

Are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have just a small supplement to the point made by Mr. Gerretsen, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: There is no allegation of foreign interference in this motion, nor is there any allegation related to the ethical standards related to public office holders. If there is any ethical violation, it would be by a non-public office holder.

Again, Mr. Chair, I would respectfully request that you identify what within the mandate of the committee actually relates to the motion proposed by Mr. Cooper.

Thank you.

The Chair: Again, I appreciate that.

I think I've stated, within the mandate of the committee and the history of the committee, my ruling on that. I have ruled on it, Mr. Housefather.

If you have an issue with that, I certainly invite you to challenge the ruling. In the absence of that, I'm going to go to Mr. Cooper. He has the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

For years, the Prime Minister has attempted to cover up his knowledge of Beijing's interference in our elections—interference that benefited him and the Liberal Party—and attempted to cover up and misstate the facts about what he knew and what Beijing did to support the candidacy of the now sitting member for Don Valley North, whom the Prime Minister touted as a member of his team. It was interference that Beijing engaged in to advance Beijing's interests that also benefited the Prime Minister.

It was confirmed, Mr. Chair, at the public inquiry last week that CSIS briefed senior Liberal officials that Beijing had, in fact, interfered in the Liberal nomination in Don Valley North in 2019 to benefit the now member for Don Valley North. We know the Prime Minister was informed about the contents of that CSIS briefing. We know, in the face of the knowledge that the Prime Minister had, that Beijing interfered to assist the now member for Don Valley North—then the Liberal candidate for Don Valley North.

What did the Prime Minister do? He effectively gave the green light to Beijing's interference. He didn't rescind the nomination. There's nothing to indicate that he made any further inquiries. Instead, he merely shrugged his shoulders, signed off on that compromised candidate and then attempted to cover it up. When allegations and intelligence came to light about the activities of Beijing in support of the member for Don Valley North, the Prime Minister called people names and attempted to misdirect and mislead. Now, of course, we know—it was reported on a year ago—that Beijing did in fact interfere in that nomination for the benefit of the member for Don Valley North.

Yesterday, The Globe and Mail reported that the classified information that was provided at that CSIS briefing was illegally leaked, and that resulted in the member for Don Valley North being tipped off that he was being monitored by CSIS. We know that only a handful of top Liberals were at that CSIS briefing. They are among the highest-ranking officials within the Liberal Party. All of them are closely connected to and associated with the Prime Minister.

There were three people—three top Liberals—at that CSIS briefing. They were the national director of the Liberal Party, Azam Ishmael, Braeden Caley and Mathieu Lafrance. According to the testimony of one of the Prime Minister's top advisers, Jeremy Broadhurst, when he appeared before the procedure and House affairs committee on April 25, 2023, Ishmael informed him about the CSIS briefing. Broadhurst had the “requisite security clearance”. We know there were only four people—three were directly briefed, and a fourth received the details of that briefing. We know that the following day, the Prime Minister was briefed by Jeremy Broadhurst.

There were five people—five top Liberals, including the very top Liberal himself, the Prime Minister—who were briefed and had the details of that classified information.

• (1155)

It is important to emphasize the seriousness of what happened, based upon the report in the *Globe and Mail*. Someone connected to the Prime Minister leaked classified information that consequently disrupted an ongoing CSIS intelligence operation. Someone connected to the Prime Minister, the top Liberal official, compromised the work of CSIS and put the partisan interests of the Liberal Party ahead of Canada's national security.

In so doing, they committed a serious criminal offence. They contravened section 4 of the Security of Information Act, which is punishable as an indictable offence with a term of imprisonment of up to 14 years. It is about as serious as it gets.

Someone—one of those four people, either the Prime Minister himself or one of a select number of chiefs of staff in the Liberal government who would have also had, at the time, the requisite security clearances—leaked classified information that then undermined and thwarted a CSIS intelligence operation, to advance the partisan interests of the Liberal Party, and that benefited a hostile foreign state: the Beijing-based Communist regime.

There are questions arising from this that Canadians deserve answers to, and we, as parliamentarians, have a responsibility, on behalf of Canadians, to get those answers.

As I see it, there are at least four questions, in the wake of this shocking report, that need to be answered, and they are as follows: First, which top Liberal official illegally leaked the classified information? Who's the top Liberal who broke the law? What's the name of that person? Who's the criminal associated with the Prime Minister, and who compromised Canada's national security? Second, who tipped off the then Liberal candidate, now the member for Don Valley North, that he was a target of, or at least being monitored by, CSIS? Third, when did the Prime Minister first learn of this criminal leak? Fourth, once the Prime Minister knew—and he did know; he had to have known—did he refer this criminal leak and major national security breach by one of his top Liberal officials to the RCMP?

This incident, the latest piece in a massive scandal involving Beijing's interference and the Prime Minister's turning a blind eye and, in some ways, giving a green light to it when it benefited him, highlights the absolute rot and corruption of this Prime Minister and those around him. This is a serious matter. It's scandalous, and it is

further evidence that, for this Prime Minister and those around him, it's all about advancing the Prime Minister's selfish, personal interests, and the partisan political interests of the Liberal Party, which he leads—national security be damned.

It's imperative that the ethics committee, which is the committee responsible for access to information—and here we have classified information and a massive illegal flow of classified information—get to work, commence hearings and bring in, as a starting point, and, I would submit, as a priority, the four people who we know received that classified information.

One of those four, either the Prime Minister or one of a select number of senior chiefs of staff in the Prime Minister's government, broke the law, and we need to find out who that person was.

We also need to hold the Prime Minister accountable, because whoever broke the law is one of his top officials. The Prime Minister knew about it. He was briefed about it, and we know he turned a blind eye to the evidence of Beijing's interference. If he did not report this criminal incident to the RCMP, then he effectively was complicit and worked to cover it up.

• (1200)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Brock, you have the floor on the motion, please, followed by Mr. Fisher and Mr. Bains.

Go ahead.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I thank my colleague Mr. Cooper for his excellent analysis and for putting into context the seriousness and the importance of this motion and quite clearly why it should be studied not only in other committees but also particularly here in the ethics committee.

This government—I have known all along, as have Canadians, literally for the last eight years—is the most ethically challenged, corrupt government this country has ever seen.

• (1205)

I think this public inquiry, the evidence we have heard through this public inquiry and the reports from a number of media giants really underscore and make abundantly clear to me as an opposition parliamentarian, but also, I'm sure, to my colleagues on the bench, as well as people across Canada, the rationale as to why the Prime Minister, his government and his backbench fought so hard to avoid this public scrutiny.

We always knew there was a fire to this raging smoke, this smokescreen. Actually, it really brings home to me personally, given all the work I've done on a number of committees, but particularly in relation to the foreign interference angle, why he hand-picked special rapporteur David Johnston, who had access to the same information that the justice is now receiving but clearly had a different focus as he was receiving the information, and a different focus in terms of his report: that, in his view, "irregularities" weren't sufficient to raise red flags. There was no mention at all about the leaks. He had access to that information. Canadians were denied the right to know that information. It brings it all home to me why they did everything they could to avoid public scrutiny.

I've had the ability to assess the cross-examination of our Prime Minister yesterday and contrast and compare that with his cross-examination, if you can call it that, when he testified at the Emergencies Act inquiry by Justice Rouleau. It was not a good day for the Prime Minister. There were so many significant differences in the evidence that he gave, as contrasted to that of his chief of staff, Katie Telford, when she testified over a year ago.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes. She lied.

Mr. Larry Brock: Well, some could say she lied, and that's certainly an approach that you can take. However, the most glaring example was that she was adamant a year ago that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reads ferocious amounts of material, voluminous amounts of material. Everything that is put in front of him he reads, and he follows up. He takes his job as Prime Minister seriously, and he takes the job of Canada's national security seriously. What an absolute joke that is when you heard from the Prime Minister himself yesterday that he's too busy to read. He's too busy to read confidential briefs from CSIS that highlight incidents that could compromise our national security, the fairness of elections and the integrity of nominations. He's too busy to read that himself. He wants his yes-men and yes-women to do a summary for him. That is a very damning, conflicting piece of evidence, Mr. Chair.

Now we hear that there was a top Liberal staffer, who reported directly to the Prime Minister, who leaked classified, sensitive information compromising, as Mr. Cooper has indicated, the CSIS investigation. There is clearly an offence for that type of activity. Section 4 of the Security of Information Act spells it out in plain language that a person who holds confidential information and shares it with another individual—in this case, the member for Don Valley North—has committed an offence under that act. Section 27 outlines the punishment for that act.

What my colleague Mr. Cooper talked about was the indictable phase of the prosecution of that offence. It's actually a hybrid offence. You can proceed by indictment or summary conviction, but given that the limitation period for prosecuting by summary conviction has long passed, it has to be indictable. This person has a high probability not only of being convicted, but of spending the next decade in federal prison. That's how serious this matter is.

In the last six to twelve months, Mr. Chair, with all the scandals and all the rotten corruption from this Liberal government.... At one point I was sitting on four or five committees at the same time just keeping track of all the scandals. I remarked to myself, imagine all the referrals that the RCMP is getting just from the actions of this Prime Minister and his government and the federal public service. I

just spoke to my friend Mr. Cooper, and I said I often wake up at night just thinking about all of the scandals and all of the potential investigations.

We finally had an opportunity, not too long ago, to question the commissioner of the RCMP regarding the SNC-Lavalin scandal. The only thing that I could conclude from that, notwithstanding their strong proclamations that nobody is above the law, including the Prime Minister.... The evidence was there. The evidence was very clear, based on the information that they had available from the Ethics Commissioner, that Justin Trudeau did commit the offence of obstruction of justice by attempting to interfere in the decision-making of his then attorney general.

The only thing I could conclude, like many Canadians reviewing that exchange, was that there was indeed a two-tier level of justice. Now, I'm hoping that the RCMP are watching this, following along with the inquiry, reading the press and gaining some suspicion. To launch any police investigation, Mr. Chair, there has to be some suspicion. To lay a criminal charge under the Security of Information Act is a low threshold. Does the RCMP have reasonable and probable grounds—a very low standard—to prove beyond a reasonable doubt for conviction purposes and to believe that a top Liberal insider, a political staffer who reports directly to Justin Trudeau, leaked highly sensitive, classified information from CSIS?

● (1210)

I think, based on the evidence we have heard in this inquiry, that threshold has easily been met, so I would hope, given their reservations that no prime minister in the history of this country has ever been charged with a criminal offence, that they cast aside their reservations and their political reluctance to look at the Prime Minister as a suspect worthy of criminal prosecution and go after the sole person who is responsible for this leak.

My colleague Mr. Cooper stood up yesterday in the House, during QP, and quite pointedly asked the question that Canadians deserve to know and that all parliamentarians deserve to know: Who was that person? The parliamentary secretary stood up, completely ignored that question and talked about, as many Liberal members have talked about, how they respect the inquiry and welcome the inquiry. Again, that was not being completely truthful and honest with Canadians. They knew there was something to hide. They knew there was a smoking gun, and here it is. This is worthy of a full-blown investigation, Mr. Chair, and that is why I very proudly support this motion.

Before I give up the floor, I am asking for a brief amendment to the motion. There is a reference to a Mathieu Lafrance in the motion. Where his name is referenced, the amendment should read, "Senior Liberal staffer who received CSIS briefing, Mathieu Lafrance".

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brock.

Thank you for that correction. I'm going to accept that as an amendment. I don't anticipate we're going to have any discussion on the amendment because—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, I have a comment.

The Chair: Is it on the amendment, Mr. Gerretsen?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: First, I would like to understand exactly where it is. I'm looking at the motion. I don't see.... How is it being amended?

Mr. Larry Brock: Replace how it's stated with this: "Senior Liberal staffer who received CSIS briefing, Mathieu Lafrance". He was not part of the SITE task force. That's why I'm seeking the amendment.

• (1215)

The Chair: It's an amendment for clarification of his role. Is that correct, Mr. Brock?

Mr. Larry Brock: That's correct.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gerretsen, does that answer your question?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I just wanted to know where it was.

The Chair: I don't see any discussion on the amendment.

I'm going to accept the amendment as a clarification without any further discussion. Is it agreed?

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

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm asking that all members, as a courtesy, put their phones on silent, with no vibrating or tones, because I have been informed it's affecting our interpreters. Phones have been going off quite regularly.

We're going to continue with the discussion on the motion as amended. We agreed to the amendment.

I have Mr. Fisher, Mr. Bains and Mr. Gerretsen after that.

Mr. Fisher, you have the floor on the motion as amended.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I certainly hope you can hear me. I have been having some Internet issues.

I put my name on the list and put my hand up so that I could talk about the appropriateness of this motion for this committee. I believe that Mr. Gerretsen spoke to that. Mr. Chair, when my Internet was off, I believe you ruled that it was the appropriate place to have it. I still question why that is.

I do find it funny that Mr. Cooper is here today. He parachuted in from PROC, of which he is vice-chair and which is sitting right this minute, so I do find that a bit of a surprise.

I'm interested in getting back to the thing we had on the agenda today, the consideration of the draft report. I see now that we have

44 minutes left before our time is up, and we were going to have an hour and 45 minutes to talk about the consideration of the draft report.

Since there are other people on the list, I will certainly listen to the other people who have their hands up, but I would like to see if there's a possibility today to get to that draft report.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Bains, you're next. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There's a lot to unpack here. I'm actually concerned about the hypocrisy of the Conservative Party here. I'm going to talk about a few things.

I'll start off with the fact that this motion is a little bit confusing, considering that we have a public inquiry that is currently taking place and that this is an unconfirmed media report. I know the motion says "Given that, media reporting states". We have a public inquiry. I'm not sure if this is a discovery that was made there or if this is a revelation of a media report. We've seen allegations in the media take place previously.

I know the member, Mr. Cooper, indicated that there are a lot of questions. There are a lot of questions. The broad topic of foreign interference and the national security and integrity of our systems is extremely important. However, I'm curious as to why the Conservative Party is quiet and has been quiet. We had a Canadian murdered on Canadian soil. We had an emergency debate on it. There was zero interest. Nobody showed up on the other side of the House.

We have a motion put forward by the member for Surrey-Newton, a very important motion on the intimidation and the threats of foreign actors on Canadian soil. That's coming up. I hope the members will second that motion and join the important discussion and debate that will take place around that.

The hypocrisy I want to speak to is the fact that we've had reports post-2021. There was the nomination of the member of Oxford. We've had issues stated by.... We've even had the former leader of the Conservative Party make claims that there was foreign interference in his being ousted as the Conservative leader. This is recent. There have been issues of Iranian interference in the Richmond Hill CPC nomination race recently.

More importantly, the strong relationship between the member for Calgary-Heritage and the Prime Minister of India goes back many years to when he helped produce a news report claiming that Pakistan was involved with the Sikh separatist movement. If you look at some of the information surrounding his history.... I would like to raise his relationship with the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation, an Indian think tank set up with funds from Indian oil giant Reliance Industries.

The member for Calgary-Heritage also helped produce a controversial report by former CBC reporter Terry Milewski that alleged that Pakistan secretly created a Sikh separatist movement. The report was amplified by official Indian government accounts, which triggered a backlash in the Sikh diaspora community here. There was silence on the other side—nothing.

The topic is extremely important. However, this motion is clearly based on media allegations and on nothing revealed in the public inquiry that's currently going on, which is extremely important. We need to know that.

• (1220)

If these allegations are real, bring it all forward.

Why is there silence on the other side about these issues I'm raising right now? I know Mr. Cooper talked about questions. Which top Conservative is turning a blind eye to concerns in the nomination battles they're having? If you look at their leadership race, even, there are allegations of foreign interference from India. You have Iran, India, China. All of these issues are currently being studied in the public inquiry taking place. They're being investigated. If there are allegations that are found to be true, the RCMP will step in.

Why is the Conservative leader himself not obtaining security clearance? The hypocrisy is unbelievable.

All I see here is a lot of bluster and an opportunity for grandstanding and getting the clips they need when we have a very important public inquiry taking place in front of everybody—all of Canada. They can tune in. Discoveries are made. People are testifying. Witnesses are being called. All the important people listed here will be called in to present the information they have. Therefore, I don't understand why this is being introduced here when we have a fulsome public inquiry taking place.

If there are any questions, they should be directed toward the Conservative Party about the hypocrisy they're showing right now, their silence on the meddling by other nations taking place, and their sole focus on just one.

• (1225)

The Chair: Are you done, Mr. Bains? I heard a pause there. Are you good?

Mr. Parm Bains: I paused. Are we allowed to pause?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You are allowed to pause. It was an extended pause, so I was wondering whether you were done.

You have the floor. Continue, please.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

I think that the members opposite often come in and table-drop motions so that they can repeat their practised lines and talk about corruption. What about the corruption, or the silence and the hypocrisy that we're not...? If you want to hold one party to account, hold yourself to account, because accountability should be across all aisles.

I know that members opposite have raised issues, such as allegations about police stations, but they never raise the point that it was the previous Harper government that set that poor precedent and allowed Chinese police officers to come here, to intimidate and to try to repatriate citizens who they alleged were criminals. They set that poor practice, and we're cleaning up that mess now.

I just want to reiterate that the key word today from the Conservative Party should be "hypocrisy". They talk about corruption. It goes both ways. The hypocrisy that they're showing, the silence in all of these nomination races that are taking place within their leadership.... They're not coming forward and calling any of this to account. Their former leader, who recently claimed that he was ousted, claimed it was due to foreign interference that he was pushed out of the Conservative Party.

I'll just reiterate that the first four words in this motion state, "Given that, media reporting states". We have a public inquiry in which Justice Hogue is taking this matter in front of all Canadians. The public inquiry should continue, and if there are any revelations there that are discovered, the appropriate public safety agency should step in to investigate the matter further.

I'll end my comments there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

I have Mr. Gerretsen, Mr. Housefather, Mrs. Romanado and Mr. Barrett.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Bains said it so well that I don't think I need to add anything. Thank you.

The Chair: The extended pause really added a lot more drama.

Thank you.

Mr. Housefather, are you in agreement with Mr. Bains?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I am totally in agreement—no problem. I cede the floor.

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado, are you in agreement with Mr. Bains and what he had to say?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I will just say that I remove myself from the list.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks very much, Chair.

I don't agree with Mr. Bains, but I'm glad we were able to hear comments from members.

I will propose an amendment. Once it's moved and the clerk has the opportunity to capture it, then perhaps I'll leave it to you, Mr. Chair, to consider if a suspension is in order for it to be translated and circulated to members.

I'm going to go ahead with the amendment, if that's okay.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Barrett, with the amendment.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In the motion, where it says “sharing this information, the committee”, it would strike the words “call the following witnesses” and read, “direct the chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to write to the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and ask the procedure and House affairs committee to consider this matter, including the following witnesses”. That’s the end of the amendment. The list of witnesses, with Mr. Brock’s amendment having been accepted, would be included.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Green, I see your hand up on the amendment. I understand that the parties have been working on this. I’m going to allow the clerk to do what she needs to do, but I think the amendment is very clear and very simple. I’m going to go to Mr. Green on the amendment, and if there’s a need to suspend so that we can circulate the amendment, we’ll do that.

On the amendment, Mr. Green, go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Not to shock the Hansard, but I will go on the record and say that this is a very practical and appropriate move by friends on the Conservative side. I certainly support it and I think it shows good faith, particularly, if I’m being very open here.... We spent our time discussing our priority of business in the beginning of this meeting in a way that would have set forth the rest of our calendar. One of the issues that I’ve had—and I won’t be nearly as animated as my last description about Mr. Chong—is having the same things going to multiple committees, and I think what Mr. Barrett has done is eliminate that prospect.

Certainly, if there are concerns—and they’ve outlined them in a very long and detailed way—they should be studied. I think PROC is the appropriate place for it to be studied, and I look forward to that. Should there be any unresolved issues that would have more alignment with our mandate here at ETHI, then at that time I might be willing to entertain a revisiting of that. In the meantime, I think it’s important that this committee stay the course with the work that we’ve set out to do for the remainder of this session, and not necessarily have a new thing coming from our Conservative friends every other week, who want it to take precedence over everything else that we do at committee.

I appreciate that we’re going to get a chance to hopefully explore some of the valuable work put forward by my friend from the Bloc, Mr. Villemure. I just want to say that I appreciate Mr. Barrett’s intervention and amendment, and hopefully we can find good consensus around the table to have this referred to PROC.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Michael, if you want to clip that and go ahead and put it in your fundraisers, feel free to do that.

The Chair: Breaking news.

Mr. Green, I appreciate that.

We’ll suspend for a few minutes, just to give the clerk enough time to work on the amendment proposed by Mr. Barrett.

Thank you.

• (1230)

(Pause)

• (1240)

The Chair: Thanks for your patience, everyone.

We wanted to make sure that we got the amendment proposed by Mr. Barrett to everyone in both official languages.

I’m just going to read the amendment one more time. Well, I’ll read the motion, as amended:

Given that,

media reporting states that a Liberal Party member informed the Liberal candidate for Don Valley North that he was the subject of a CSIS investigation in 2019 and that,

this information could only be obtained from classified national security briefings, with the leak undermining the work of Canada’s intelligence agency and violating—

It should be “violation”.

—of Canada’s national security laws and that,

since only select individuals in the Liberal government and Liberal Party would have received this classified information from CSIS, and would have been responsible for sharing this information,

that the chair of the committee write—

Well, this says “write”.

The Clerk: Yes, sorry. That’s my mistake. It should read, “that the committee direct the chair of the committee to write”.

The Chair: No, that’s not right. I’m reading it off a screen, and I’m reading it off a paper here.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett, just to clarify this.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It should read, “that the chair of the committee be directed to write to the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee and ask the procedure and House affairs committee to consider the matter above, including the witnesses below”.

The Chair: Okay. So the chair will be directed to write to the chair of PROC and ask the PROC committee to consider the matter, including the witnesses, and then the list of witnesses is there.

I’m sorry for the confusion. I’m reading off a paper here.

Mr. Villemure had his hand up.

Go ahead on the amendment, Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: I don’t know if I have to move a sub-amendment or just ask for clarification, but my comment has to do with the French version; in my opinion, the English version is fine.

When we write to the Chair of the Procedure and House Affairs Committee, we can suggest that they consider a specific matter, but we can't order them to do so. The same goes for witnesses: We can suggest them, but we can't issue an order. That's what's not being translated, at the moment.

The Chair: How can we remedy that? Do we need to change a word?

Mr. René Villemure: We could write: "That the committee chair write to the chair of the PROC committee and suggest that this matter be considered." Subsequently, we could add, "including, for example, the following witnesses."

Personally, I would prefer there not be any witnesses.

• (1245)

The Chair: As you say, the committee may make suggestions, but not demands.

I think the English version is correct. How can we correct the French version? I'm not sure which words to use.

Mr. René Villemure: I proposed that the chair write to the chair of the PROC committee and "suggest that this matter be considered".

The second part has to do with witnesses. If we suggest that a matter be considered and then provide names for potential witnesses, it's as if we were issuing an order.

Both proposals have to be suggestions. We could say, "including, for example, the following witnesses."

The Chair: All right, thank you, Mr. Villemure.

As previously mentioned, we can make suggestions, but cannot give orders. We will make the necessary correction.

[English]

Mr. Barrett, it's your amendment. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: If there is expressed understanding now to you, Chair, that that's the intent, then I don't think a subamendment is necessary, because Mr. Villemure's clarification is exactly the intent of the amendment.

It is not a direction. It's for their consideration, to consider the preamble and to consider this list, not just because that's the extent of the powers of the committee, but also because that's the spirit of the amendment.

The Chair: As chair, I'm very clear as to what the intent of the committee is with this motion. I can work with the clerk and the analyst on the appropriate language for the letter, to reflect what the committee is asking me to do based on this motion. That's not a problem.

Go ahead, Mr. Housefather, and then Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, I listened to the suggestion by Mr. Villemure and I think that, to be consistent between the English and French, the word "ask" should be "suggest". *Suggérer* in French is "to suggest".

We could say, "write to the chair of the PROC committee and suggest that the PROC committee consider the matter above", so it

would be identical. "Ask" isn't *suggère*. We should make them both the same.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I will leave it to the analysts and the clerk to suggest to me what should be used, and we will use it appropriately.

Go ahead, Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I agree with Monsieur Villemure's "suggest".

I have a procedural question.

Mr. Cooper, Mr. Gerretsen and I sit on PROC. If you were to write a letter to the chair of PROC asking them to consider this, would it not also be appropriate for Mr. Cooper to bring forward a motion of study at PROC that would support the letter? I don't know if it's necessary to include all the names, because I'm assuming he will bring forward a motion with even more information he would like to include. Maybe we will have witnesses, as well.

Maybe we should have a motion that would support asking PROC to continue their study on foreign interference. I'm assuming Mr. Cooper could bring forward the motion to include whatever additional witnesses and information he would like at the appropriate time. I'm assuming he's going to bring a motion, anyway.

The Chair: I like the path we're on. I feel comfortable with the path we're on, but I wouldn't want to be a chair who directs another chair on what to do. Ms. Chagger can take our letter as a committee under consideration and probably have a discussion with the vice-chairs of the committee about where they want to go with this, and then present a motion at the appropriate time at the PROC committee.

I would leave it at that, from a procedure standpoint. That's what I'm comfortable with, right now. I hope other members of the committee are in the same comfort zone.

I appreciate your intervention.

Mr. Cooper, I saw your hand up. I think it was in relation to this.

• (1250)

Mr. Michael Cooper: It's okay.

The Chair: I don't see any other hands.

I think we've come to a reasonable resolution on this. I appreciate the work. First and foremost, I understand the seriousness of this. Second, I appreciate coming together and working to make sure it's directed to a place where I hope it's disposed of quickly.

As Mr. Green said, we have some work ahead of us on this committee, with 17 or fewer meetings. I don't want to diminish the importance of this issue. We are the access to information, privacy and ethics committee. We are an oversight committee that is deemed to hold the government to account. I hope the same can be said if and when this ends up at PROC.

Do we have consensus on the amendment?

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

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, go ahead on the main motion as amended.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Just briefly, Mr. Chair—because I didn't speak before to give my perspective—while the inquiry is on, I do not think it appropriate that the committee be seized with this at this time. I am going to be voting against the motion, because I think this should wait until the inquiry is over. I think that's the appropriate venue for discussions of this. The member mentioned a number of things. The Conservatives have a lawyer at the committee and they can cross-examine the witnesses. These issues can be raised, so I would wait until after.

I also don't agree, necessarily, with the allegations that are set out in the framework, so I'm going to vote against it.

Thank you.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Is there any other discussion on the main motion?

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll add my comments.

I don't have much of an issue with the directive part of the motion. I have an issue with the preamble and everything else in there.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

There is no further discussion.

I can sense that we're not going to have consensus on the main motion as amended. I am going to ask the clerk to take a vote.

We have a tie. I vote in favour of the motion.

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

The Chair: I don't see any further discussion.

I am going to advise the committee that we're going to take up the study on social media at the next scheduled meeting where that study has been scheduled.

I'm going to adjourn for today.

Have a great weekend, everyone. Thank you.

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