



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 120

Thursday, September 26, 2024

Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon



Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, September 26, 2024

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting 120 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I would like to remind participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether you're participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

We're engaged in a review of the foiled terrorist plot in Toronto and of the security screening process for permanent residence and citizenship applications. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on August 13, the committee is resuming this study.

I want to remind members that there is currently a section 517 publication ban in place. A section 517 publication ban prohibits the publication of any information, evidence or representations made at or in anticipation of a bail hearing. Any bail conditions, reasons of the bail court and any evidence or materials relied upon at the bail hearing are prohibited from disclosure.

I would now like to welcome back our witness.

As an individual, we have the Honourable Ralph Goodale, former minister of public safety and emergency preparedness and current High Commissioner of Canada in the United Kingdom. Welcome, sir.

I now invite Mr. Goodale to make an opening statement.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Former Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

After more than 30 years in the House of Commons and attending more committee meetings than I can count, both as a member and as a witness from time to time, it is interesting to be back in this environment once again. I hope that your important work on security screening produces useful recommendations.

With respect to the specific events that sparked this meeting, I am not in a position to have first-hand knowledge of the subject matter. As you know, ministers, and diplomatic officials, for that matter, do not engage directly in active agency operations. I recall the words of former minister Jason Kenney, who often pointed out

that skilled, professional public servants completely independent from politics were always best placed to do the necessary work. Ministers should expect to be kept informed, especially about contentious matters, and they can provide guidance through ministerial directives. Otherwise, they do not intervene.

Within the constraints of a police investigation, court proceedings and a publication ban, I hope I can offer some context and perspective gained from on-the-job experience.

For four years, from November 2015 to November 2019, I had the opportunity to work closely with the RCMP, CSIS, CBSA and other relevant agencies to achieve two fundamental objectives: keep Canadians safe, and safeguard our rights and freedoms. That period produced a number of policy innovations, increased funding and new legislation supporting law enforcement, national security and intelligence, including new and clarified powers to combat threats and risks.

Now, for the past three and a half years, as the high commissioner in London, I've had the chance to see the international end of this work. I meet periodically with the U.K. Home Office and its police and security agencies. I've participated in a key British security task force. I receive security briefings at least weekly from our own agencies, drawing on input from across the Five Eyes. I visit the highly secure venues where our Canadian security, intelligence and law enforcement teams operate in the U.K. It's clear that they are really good at what they do. They are highly valued and trusted by their international colleagues.

It's also clear that the challenges confronting Canadian agencies also exist in the United Kingdom, across the Five Eyes and in the countries with which we have co-operation agreements. We all have similar issues to confront. Close collaboration with global partners is absolutely indispensable for our security and for theirs. It's a two-way street of mutual benefit, and it works. That's because global partners know and trust one another. We and they are all working toward the same ends, and sometimes on the very same files. No one can do it alone. Everyone understands the huge importance of teamwork and reliable, timely information. The instant something of value is identified anywhere, it is relayed immediately to those who need it.

As the public record shows in this case, our Canadian agencies made excellent use of the information as soon as it was available to protect the public and take the suspects into custody. Getting such information in usable form at the earliest possible moment is always a prime priority. Searching the Internet, especially the dark web, is a huge worldwide task. The technology is often impenetrable. The service providers are often unhelpful. The volume of gruesome, ugly stuff to be assessed is daunting. It's like looking for a needle in a cesspool.

I worry about the well-being of the skilled professionals, Canadians and others, who tackle this vital work every day for national security, intelligence and law enforcement. They deserve strong support. Their successes must be applauded, along with the international partnerships that empower them. We all need to be committed to continuous improvement.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your attention. I look forward to our conversation.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We will start our questions at this point with Mr. Lloyd, please.

Go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you for your testimony, High Commissioner.

I agree that we need to support our hard-working civil servants who are on the front lines. Importantly, we also need government to implement policy to give those hard-working civil servants the tools to protect Canadians.

In a chronology given to us on the entry of the alleged terrorist Ahmed Eldidi, he was allowed into the country in 2018 on a temporary resident visa. Later that year, he submitted an asylum claim, which was ultimately granted.

You were the Minister of Public Safety at the time. Is that correct?

• (1540)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: In 2018, yes, I was.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

In 2018, which is the same year that Eldidi entered the country and a year before he was granted asylum status, your government stopped requiring police clearance certificates from certain countries of origin. When this change was introduced and when you were minister, did you have decision-making power over that deci-

sion? Did you have any concerns about the decision to not require police clearance certificates from certain countries of origin?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Chairman, I heard this point being made in a previous meeting of the committee. I have not been able—from the long distance that I am at—to verify the facts of what exactly is being alleged here. It is something about which I have no direct knowledge because I was Minister of Public Safety, not Minister of Immigration. There's a difference in our ministerial responsibilities.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

I understand how ministries work. I understand that Public Safety and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada work very closely together.

A policy decision was made under your government when you were Minister of Public Safety to stop requiring police clearance certificates from countries where there is a very high risk.

Was this not concerning to you at all?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: One of the focuses that we had in that particular year, as I recall it, was making the use of biometrics universal across the system. That would be within the purview of the public safety portfolio, whereas a decision about the other matter would not.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, when you look at the basic approach to security screening as it existed in 2018, as it exists now, as I understand it, and as it existed before our government came to office in 2015, the fundamentals of that system are the same now as they were then. There has been no diminution in the quality of the investigations.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'd suggest, Minister, that removing police clearance certificates is a pretty serious policy change.

Last year over 682,000 study permits were approved by this government. That works out to be a permit approved every 45 seconds.

Now, I understand that you weren't the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, but in your experience as a minister, do you think that processing a permit every 45 seconds, when we're dealing with people potentially coming from countries that are high risk, is adequate time to vet people?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The experience that I've had with the people who do this work—at least the part of it that falls under Public Safety, CSIS, CBSA, the RCMP and so forth—is that they are very skilful. They do their work extremely conscientiously. If they err, they err on the side of being cautious. They take the responsibility of public safety with the *gravitas* that it deserves.

I found that to be the case under the previous government prior to 2015. I found that to be the case of the same officials doing the same job in the same way when I was their minister. I think [*Inaudible—Editor*] both before and after 2015, take it very seriously. Politics has nothing to do with this.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I agree with you, High Commissioner, that hard-working civil servants are certainly trying their best, but when they're having essential tools taken away from them, like having security clearances from countries of origin, we're really taking away tools from them. In this case, I believe it was a tool that could have potentially been used to prevent an alleged terrorist from coming to this country in the first place.

However, your former colleague and the current Minister of Public Safety said that in this case, the system worked as it was supposed to.

The fact is that our immigration system let in an alleged terrorist and ignored at least four risk factor flags. It then later gave him citizenship and gave student visas to two other alleged terrorists.

Do you believe that this is truly how the system is supposed to work?

• (1545)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Chairman, I think the ministers have said very clearly that the reason they're conducting this review at the present time is to find out if, specifically in this case—or more broadly, systemically—there are gaps that need to be filled.

Judging by what appears in the public media to this point about these particular cases—and we're all operating under an information limitation of what can be put in the public domain and what cannot—no one had any information about a terrorist connection to these individuals until about June of this year.

None of our agencies had prior access to any such information, and neither did the Americans, the British, anybody in the Five Eyes or any of our other allies. When the connection was identified in about June of this year, it was immediately imparted and acted upon. The public was protected, and the suspects were arrested.

Can all of that process in the circumstances of this case be improved upon? That is what the ministers are conducting their review to find out.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. Gaheer, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, High Commissioner, for appearing before the committee.

For the sake of the folks who are watching online, Mr. Lloyd just made a point that there's a student permit approved every 45 seconds. There's no way you can approve a visitor visa or a student permit in 45 seconds. It takes months and possibly years, as my constituents know, to get a student permit approved. There's a security check, an eligibility check and finances, amongst other things, that are checked. No, it does not take 45 seconds to approve a student permit.

Moving on to the actual meeting today, High Commissioner, when you were the minister of public safety, were you ever briefed on Ahmed Fouad Mostafa Eldidi?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: No.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Can you reasonably conclude that you weren't briefed on Eldidi because Canada, like our Five Eyes partners and like-minded allies, was not in possession at the time of any intelligence linking Eldidi to ISIS?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: That's correct. CSIS and other agencies have testified that the information first became available to Canadian authorities in about June of this year.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: How confident are you that, once Canadian intelligence became aware of the threat posed by the two individuals, they took all reasonable steps to quickly and efficiently neutralize the threat posed to Canadians?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I'm obviously not privy to the facts of the case, but judging by the transcripts of this committee, which I have read, and judging by the public media reports, the various Canadian authorities that you would expect to be engaged—CSIS, CBSA and the RCMP—acted very quickly to make sure, first of all, that the public was protected and, second, that the individuals were arrested and brought into custody as rapidly as possible.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: High Commissioner, you were named public safety and emergency preparedness minister in 2015, after a decade of Conservative cuts to those different agencies that you took charge of.

Can you speak about the landscape and what it looked like when you first became minister of this portfolio? What work did you undertake as minister of public safety and emergency preparedness to ensure that our intelligence, national security and law enforcement agencies were working properly and were resourced properly?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: It involved a pan-government effort. I, of course, was involved. The Department of Finance was involved in our analysis and investigation as well. Sister departments like immigration were involved as well.

As I said earlier, I think in terms of the nuts and bolts on the street and at the ports of entry and so forth—the operations of our agencies—they are undertaken by extremely dedicated individuals, who strive every day to do the very best job they can possibly do and to find ways to improve their performance and make sure that we are all constantly getting better at the incredibly important task of public safety in an incredibly difficult world.

In 2008, 2014, 2015 and 2016, ISIS was a growing threat in the world. Our government recognized that we needed to make sure that our agencies were properly equipped and in a position, with the capacity, to keep Canadians safe and to safeguard the security of the nation.

Broadly speaking, we undertook to do three things. One was to bring in innovative new policies where that would be required. An example would be this whole point of making biometrics broadly used across every dimension of what we do in the security checking process. It was used in some cases but not all. By 2018, we had made it universal.

We also improved information sharing with our international partners. We took steps to upgrade the quality of what we do under cybersecurity. Some of that was policy changes. Some of that was legislation. We passed, if I remember correctly, with the help of all parliamentarians, at least 12 pieces of major legislation, including the anchor piece, Bill C-59.

Over that period of four years, we also increased the funding available to these agencies by about 42% from beginning to end, which the government has continued to improve upon as well.

You need to make sure you have the best trained people, that they have the legal mandates and the legal authorities to do what they need to do, that they are publicly accountable through all of your oversight and review agencies, and that they have the enthusiasm of knowing that their government and the population stand behind them in this absolutely incredible mission of keeping Canadians safe.

• (1550)

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Thank you, High Commissioner.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Goodale, for being here today. We appreciate it.

The members of the committee wanted to invite you to appear to hear your comments, since you were the minister at the beginning of the timeline, when these people arrived in the country, or at least one of them—

The Chair: Excuse me, madam.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Excuse me, Madam.

I'm having a little bit of trouble with the sound. I don't seem to be getting the translation.

The Chair: Mr. Goodale, we'll suspend for a few minutes to see if we can sort this out.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I sincerely apologize, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: There are no worries. We're suspended.

• (1550)

(Pause)

• (1555)

The Chair: We all have those struggles with technology at times.

I think we are good to go now.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you still have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: That's wonderful. Thank you.

Mr. Goodale, can you hear me? Can you hear the interpretation?

Could you let me know that everything is okay? That's great.

Thank you for being with us today. I greatly appreciate it.

I understand that the members of the committee wanted you to be here, given that you were the Minister of Public Safety at the time these events began. However, I'm a little surprised that you're here, because I don't really know what we're going to get out of it.

Even in speaking with the current Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the current Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, we have not managed to obtain a great deal of information due to the ongoing investigations. It is hard to obtain accurate information and understand what happened.

Perhaps I will instead ask you about your experience during the period when you were the head of the Department of Public Safety, about everything related to security screening and working with the Department of Immigration on similar cases, and about how things were going during that period.

During other committee meetings, a few members have said that your constituency offices receive a lot of requests for assistance with immigration files. It's very complicated, cumbersome and time-consuming.

I imagine that you follow Canadian immigration issues closely. Obviously, we want to prevent cases like this from happening again.

In your experience as Minister of Public Safety, were there improvements to be made in terms of co-operation between departments, especially in terms of security screening?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Chairman, the level of co-operation between the immigration department and the public safety portfolio is at a very high level. It was throughout all of my experience with my responsibilities. Judging from my seat in the opposition when I was watching the previous government, back before 2015, there was a high degree of co-operation then, too, between immigration and public safety.

In some other jurisdictions, those two responsibilities are actually in the same portfolio. Here in the U.K., for example, the Home Office is responsible for all the things we would consider to be traditional public safety responsibilities, plus immigration. It's all in the same portfolio here in the U.K. In Canada, it is separated out, so it requires the ministers and their officials to collaborate closely with one another. That, in fact, was my experience.

One of the very first things we had to tackle when we came into office in the fall of 2015 was the Syrian refugee process. That took an enormous level of collaboration among IRCC, public safety and all the agencies within public safety—the RCMP, CSIS and CB-SA—plus the Department of Global Affairs and the Privy Council Office. That apparatus worked remarkably well in managing what was a very challenging objective but one that was carried off quite successfully without in any way cutting corners or compromising anything with respect to public safety. Safety and security were absolutely maintained throughout that whole project.

Interdepartmental collaboration is fundamental. In looking at the issue of security screening, it will be very useful for the committee to move past the rhetorical debate and get quite specific about the things you may identify in your hearings, wherever improvements can be made. The ministers are certainly going to be looking for that. I hear them speak about the review process they launched. The committee could make a very constructive contribution.

One area I would recommend—because I know how important the international dimension is here—is maintaining those co-operation and information-sharing agreements in top-notch condition. Where you can expand them and get collaboration and co-operation with new countries, do so, because that sharing of information among countries and agencies is exceedingly important to make sure that, when decisions have to be taken, those who carry that responsibility have the most information at their disposal so they can make a proper decision.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you. Unfortunately, I don't have enough time left to ask you a second question, but I will have a second round.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

We go now to Mr. MacGregor. You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, High Commissioner, for joining our committee today and helping guide us through this study.

My first question will draw from your experience as a minister for public safety. During the course of this study, we had some discussion on police certificates. From your experience, can you talk a little bit about some of the challenges that can arise from police certificates, depending on what country they're originating from? We know that, in some countries, there are police forces carrying out the mandate of what could be an oppressive regime. They have varying levels of respect for human rights and, sometimes, they just

may not have the capacity that we're used to dealing with here in Canada.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The relationship between Canada and the U.K. is really quite extraordinary. When our police forces exchange information, we can be absolutely confident that we each, on both sides, can rely on that information and that it was collected with the proper respect for due process, the rule of law and all of the other principles that are fundamental to the way our societies work.

In other parts of the world some of these systems are not nearly as reliable, so when we receive that kind of information from those other parts of the world that may not share our values, system of governance or legal principles, the agencies obviously look at the information—and it is part of their decision-making process—but they also weigh what is there in terms of its credibility. They are making a decision, not on behalf of that other country but on behalf of Canada and Canadians, and, accordingly, they have to bring Canadian principles and standards to bear on the probative value of the information.

Any investigator always has those kinds of decisions to make. Some evidence is more compelling than others, some information is more reliable than others, and you have to make sure you're making a good, credible judgment about how much weight to put on that particular point.

• (1605)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, High Commissioner. I appreciate that.

You have transitioned to a new role on behalf of the Government of Canada, occupying the office of High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. You did mention, in an earlier answer, that the U.K. government has the Home Office, which has, in one department, what are two responsibilities in Canada. Are there any other particular aspects of how the United Kingdom screens for people? I know that national security is of particular importance to the U.K. and, certainly, it can be very visible when you visit London, among other places. Are there any particular aspects of how the U.K. does things that you think we can learn lessons from? As a committee, ultimately, we want to make recommendations to the Government of Canada, so is there anything you can share with us that could find its way into a report and a recommendation?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: It's a very interesting question. In many ways, many of our systems and approaches in Canada are already modelled on the British precedent.

One point that is taken for granted in the U.K. by the public, which would probably raise eyebrows and raise questions in Canada, is the use of photo identification. They say that London is the most photographed city in the world and surveillance cameras are everywhere. When you walk around the streets, you can certainly see them.

Photo ID and visual identification were important factors in the way the new Labour government here addressed the right-wing extremist violence that occurred in the U.K. about a month and a half ago. There were riots in a number of communities and a lot of very extreme civil disobedience. The U.K. moved very decisively with its police and security forces and dealt with that situation quite emphatically.

It was perhaps to be expected because the new prime minister, Mr. Starmer, is a former director of public prosecutions, so dealing with a crisis situation of that nature would be right in his wheelhouse. Broadly speaking, while all of these things are always controversial, I think people would say he dealt with it all in a very effective and forthright manner.

However, one area for which this committee might want to look at a British precedent is the use of technology for the purposes of identification in emergency situations. When you have life and limb at risk, when there is the potential for violence and when crowd control and the restoration of order are an important public priority, using photo ID proved to be reasonably effective in the circumstances of a few weeks ago in the U.K. It's not nearly as developed in Canada. In fact, it's quite controversial in Canada, but maybe this committee should examine the pros and cons and have a good, solid, technical discussion about whether this is a valid innovation for Canada to consider.

• (1610)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll start our second round now and go back to Mr. Lloyd for five minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first comment is on these police certificates. I find it interesting that they are no longer required for temporary residents, yet we're still using them for permanent resident applications.

Wouldn't you agree, High Commissioner, that our hard-working civil servants have the training and intelligence to be able to discern between a quality police certificate report coming from a country that is credible and a police certificate report coming from one that isn't credible?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Chair, when the officials from IRCC were before the committee, I believe they went into quite an explanation about how they determine what is appropriate for a reference for further security investigation and what is not, depending on the circumstances of each individual case. They are the ones who have all—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: To reiterate my question, High Commissioner, wouldn't you suggest that it's always generally better to have more information than less information, and trust our officials to make the right call?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Within the bounds of what is reasonable, Mr. Chairman, it's obviously helpful to have more information if it is relevant and if you can get it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, High Commissioner.

I have here the terrorist screening dataset encounters data from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. It shows that in 2023,

there were 484 matches on the U.S. terrorist watch-list at land ports of entry along the Canada-U.S. border. So far in fiscal year 2024, there have been 321 of these encounters. Since 2017, these numbers have gone up 123%.

I think you'd agree, High Commissioner, that next to our relationship with Great Britain, our relationship with the United States is a privileged one, and it's one of our most important relationships. Are you at all concerned, with this skyrocketing number of terrorist encounters the U.S. government is reporting, that we're at any risk and that the U.S. government is taking this seriously?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I do know from my experience in the portfolio that the relationship between the American and the Canadian agencies is very close. It's very tight. In fact, we enacted legislation to facilitate the movement of information back and forth across the border. It's important to them and it's important to us.

We have to make sure that the quality of the information in all of the watch-lists is as high, as comprehensive and as accurate as it can be. That's a constant challenge.

The working relationship between Canada and the U.S. in protecting that amazing border between our two countries, which is one of our greatest assets both ways, is a very profound [*Inaudible—Editor*] and we're working at it every day. It's huge.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: It is one of our greatest assets as a country. It is huge.

Seeing that it's increased by 123% since 2017—to 484 last year—are you at all concerned that this skyrocketing number, if not stopped, could potentially jeopardize this relationship?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I have every confidence that the Canadian authorities are very well respected and credible in the eyes of their American counterparts and vice versa. Together, they do what they need to do.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, High Commissioner.

I'd like to turn it over to my colleague, Raquel Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, High Commissioner, for being with us.

It's frustrating, as members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, that we have yet to really receive any idea of how this could have been prevented and what we need to be doing moving forward, despite multiple ministers and former ministers coming.

I would like to move the following motion on another very important issue.

I move that:

Given that sexual assaults have increased by 75% and sexual violations against children have increased by nearly 120% over the past nine years;

The committee undertake a study of no fewer than eight meetings on the rise of violent crime, particularly sexual assault and intimate partner violence against women and children in Canada; that the committee invite the Minister of Public Safety and the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to appear as part of the study for no less than two hours each, separately; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Mr. Chair, I have been away from this committee for a year. I'm very honoured to be back. In my absence, I was quite concerned about a number of headlines that I had seen in Manitoba and across the country, which inspired me and the committee to put forward this motion today. I hope committee members will take it seriously and we'll support a study on that.

I just want to put on the record, before I wrap up, a few of the stories that had inspired this motion and why I feel it's a critical public safety issue that we study.

For example, in February, all of Manitoba was rocked when we learned of the story that a Manitoba man was charged with first-degree murder in the deaths of his partner and three children. His three children were found deceased in a burning vehicle. It was a horrific week in Manitoba when that was found out. We're a very small community.

In February, a Calgary man was sentenced for killing a three-year-old girl who interrupted him playing a video game. I think you'll recall that as well.

In March, it was reported that six Edmonton children were killed in 2023. It was so bad that first responders were struggling to cope.

It was also reported this past year that the accused in a child sex abuse case was wanted on a Canada-wide arrest warrant, where he had allegedly sexually abused a child while on bail for sexually abusing a child.

Just yesterday, in Manitoba, a convicted child sex offender was released from prison with a high risk to reoffend.

I could go on and on. I have a whole binder of stories just from the past 12 months of what's been happening to women and children in this country. Even right here in Ottawa this year, a hospital reported that it is seeing a 30% increase in people seeking help for sexual assault.

I feel that this is an extremely pressing issue, given the recent statistics. Particularly concerning are sexual violations against children, which are up 120% in the last nine years. I sincerely hope that this committee will take it seriously and agree to study this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you. I find that the motion is in order.

Mr. Lloyd wishes to speak next.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I want to be very quick because I want everyone to have an opportunity to question our esteemed witness while he's here. I hope we can all co-operate on this very important issue and get this study on the docket, then get back to questioning.

I'm obviously in support of this motion. I think it's a very important motion. I hope that we can all vote for it very quickly and then

maybe discuss more of the pertinent details about meetings and witnesses at a subcommittee meeting.

The Chair: Mr. MacGregor, go ahead.

• (1620)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to my colleagues for bringing forward this motion. It's certainly an issue that is top of mind for a lot of folks. I know that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women is also doing a similar study so, obviously, the fact that two committees are now considering this shows how serious it is. I'm in agreement with the spirit of what's being attempted here. I'm not sure whether I want to specify the number of meetings, so I hope my Conservative colleagues might be open to just leaving that open and not specifying exactly that we have to have no fewer than eight meetings. Maybe we can include language "of up to six". I know, Mr. Chair, that we're going to have a subcommittee meeting following this, so, hopefully, at that subcommittee meeting we can determine the order in which we want to do our studies.

I indicate my support for this, but before I hand the floor back, a notice was given out for a motion that I want to move later on. I just want to read it into the record:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study examining how addressing gaps in community mental health and substance use health supports, including preventative and early intervention services, can improve public safety in Canada; that both the Minister of Public Safety and Minister of Mental Health and Addictions be invited to testify separately for one hour each in this study; that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

I would like the subcommittee to look at this motion as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

The motion on the floor specifies eight meetings. If you want to change that, I suggest that you move an amendment.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I will take this opportunity to move an amendment to the motion. Simply, where it references "of no fewer than eight meetings", I would put "of up to six meetings". If it looks like, during the course of the study, we need more, I'm totally open to that. I just don't want us to set a minimum number at this point in time.

The Chair: I will go to Mr. Lloyd, followed by Madam Michaud.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I think Mr. MacGregor will agree that language saying "of up to six meetings" will prohibit the committee from adding additional meetings. Won't "of six meetings" instead of the "of up to six meetings" be a better amendment for that?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I will take Mr. Lloyd's advice and reword it to what he stated.

The Chair: The discussion now is on the amendment.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think this is a very important motion. Sexual violence against women, and children in particular, is an issue that concerns us all. It is a problem in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada.

I agree with Mr. MacGregor's proposal. Let's start with six meetings and then, if we see that we need to go beyond that, we'll make adjustments. I wouldn't put "at least eight meetings", because that's a lot to start with. Afterward, we can see how many witnesses we have to submit.

I hear people say that another committee is already looking at this issue. I'm always torn when work is duplicated in the House of Commons, when a number of committees are studying the same subjects or issues. Perhaps we should see what kind of work has been done or is being done at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Otherwise, I don't necessarily see a problem with this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

Go ahead, Ms. Dancho, on the amendment.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues and the support for the motion.

The FEWO study has concluded, and there were a number of recommendations that I reviewed. I want to make sure the studies aren't the same. I think the status of women committee did excellent work there, but there was no focus on children in particular, which I think is missing. We rarely talk about children at committees. Given what I discussed and the knowledge all of us have about challenges being faced by children in our own ridings, particularly with sexual violations and other violence, I think it's a gap for committees across the board that we should address here.

They didn't call the RCMP, our national police force. The RCMP doesn't only do frontline policing, it also does a lot of investigative work. It works with international partners. I think there's a lot we can learn from the RCMP.

However, I agree with the amendment. I really appreciate the spirit of collaboration and the openness to have more meetings if necessary. I agree with the amendment.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

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

The Chair: Ms. O'Connell, please go ahead for five minutes.

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

Thank you, High Commissioner. I really appreciate you being here and your testimony today.

When Minister LeBlanc appeared before our committee on this study in the summer, he also spoke about intelligence-sharing rela-

tionships between Canada and the U.K., in particular between CSIS and MI6. In your testimony here today, you spoke about challenges that both countries and, in fact, the entire world are facing with similar issues and growing threats in the world. In response to Mr. MacGregor's question, you specifically brought up right-wing extremist violence.

I had been looking into some of this, and I think you're referring to the far-right disorder that had clear Russian involvement. The headline on the article is that former MI6 spies have been saying this. One of the areas, from reading articles in the Guardian, was that one of the far-right mechanisms for creating disorder, mistrust and distrust was to create news outlets on online platforms that look like mainstream American network news and specifically have individuals who are, in this case, U.K. citizens promote and influence Russian interference and Russian media-type messages to impact politics and the democratic institutions in the U.K.

Is this a conversation that's happening as widely in the U.K. government as it is here in Canada?

• (1625)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: It's a conversation that I think is happening in democratic countries right around the world. This notion of misinformation, disinformation and the difficulty of being able to discern fact from fiction—fake news, as it's often called—is something that democracies everywhere are struggling with.

There's a lot of collaboration between Canada and the U.K. in dealing with this area of foreign interference. It has been a topic in the past among the Five Eyes countries and among the G7 countries. The U.K. perhaps has more experience than most. The U.K. often makes the point that Euro-Atlantic security is a critical priority for them, and the most malevolent actor in the Euro-Atlantic theatre is obviously Putin's Russia. That's evidenced by the awful, brutal and illegal war of aggression in Ukraine.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, High Commissioner. Sorry, I don't mean to cut you off, but I am limited on time.

Given that very dire and dark picture you've just painted that the world is facing with such a brutal dictator influencing democratic institutions in the U.K., in Canada and abroad, and given that very serious testimony, Mr. Chair, I move:

That, given the testimony of the High Commissioner, and the unanimous adoption of the motion moved by Pam Damoff on Thursday, September 19, 2024, to initiate study into Russian-backed interference and far-right disinformation campaigns intended to manipulate the Canadian public, the committee immediately prioritize and begin its study.

The Chair: I find this in order, it being very germane to the topic at hand.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Ms. Dancho, go ahead.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate the motion.

I believe the motion I put forward today is also very urgent, given the rise of sexual violations against children, the murder of children and what we're seeing with sexual assault against women. Frankly, in the years I've been here—and I think many of us have been on this committee for a while—we have neglected this area of public safety.

I would also note that the ethics committee is also studying a similar motion. I believe that motion says the committee will be studying it immediately. I don't know if the Liberal members have an update of where the ethics committee is on that, but I know that motion indicated some fair amount of urgency. There is some overlap there.

I feel very strongly that my motion is urgent, and it's been neglected as an issue across our committees, particularly this one. While I appreciate the motion, I feel very strongly that my motion is also very urgent.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1630)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order, Chair. Could we let the witness go so that we can debate this?

The Chair: Are we all good with that?

High Commissioner Goodale, I know it's late in the day there, and I appreciate you spending time with us. It's always delightful to see you. Thank you for being here, and thank you for your excellent testimony today. We will let you go.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. O'Connell, please go ahead.

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

I'll start with Ms. Dancho's points before I get into the substance of my motion and the debate. I don't disagree whatsoever with studying violence against women and children. This is crucially important work and this is precisely why it was a unanimously passed motion. There's no debate there on how important that is.

We must also look at the fact that Russian state actors have potentially been paying influencers in Canada to disrupt our democratic institutions and our public safety. The high commissioner was just here, talking about examples in the U.K. of violent demonstrations that were pushed for by influencers in the U.K. with very serious connections back to Russian state actors.

This committee is sometimes tasked with dealing with multiple security risks and multiple studies at once.

It was just a few months ago that Conservatives stood in the House on a regular basis to talk about foreign interference as being a huge threat to democracy, but now, all of a sudden, when there are connections to Conservatives and Russians, it's no longer a priority to be studied. I find that deeply concerning. I find it deeply concerning that we've approved this study and Conservatives now seem to be backing out of wanting to make it a priority.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. The member is spreading falsehoods.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's not a point of order. In fact, you spread falsehoods at every committee and we have to listen to them. That's actually the point of this study.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. It's against the Standing Orders to insult members of Parliament. That is deeply insulting.

I have not spread any falsehoods today.

I ask that you enforce the Standing Orders, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: First of all—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: It is my point of order, sir.

The Chair: Excuse me.

We are suspended.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: I will resume the meeting.

If you wish to make a point of order, please go ahead.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is against the Standing Orders to insult members of Parliament.

I have not made any falsehoods today or at this committee. I would appreciate if Ms. O'Connell would retract that statement. It is deeply insulting.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think that the allegation that falsehoods were proposed is an opinion. I don't think that's an insult.

If Ms. O'Connell wishes to retract or make any adjustments, I will leave that up to her.

Carry on, Ms. O'Connell.

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

Clearly, this study makes Conservatives nervous.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I also take offence to the comments from the member opposite. Simply stating that Conservatives are connected to Russian disinformation as she did is generalizing all of us at this table. I find that to be a direct insult to my esteemed colleagues and our integrity.

I would ask the member to withdraw that comment.

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe that's an opinion. She's entitled to have that opinion. I will offer once again that if she wishes to withdraw, she may, but she's just making an opinion.

Ms. O'Connell, carry on.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: It's not just my opinion. It has been widely reported that there are connections to Conservative influencers in Canada with links and ties.... In fact, there's a U.S. indictment talking about Russian ties to influencers in Canada, and they happen to be influencers who promote Conservative values and views. Now, who those Conservatives are who might be connected.... I think that's precisely—or not, if that's the case—why this committee should look at that. If there is misleading or incorrect information in the U.S. indictment or if assumptions are being made that are not accurate toward Conservatives, then there should be no fear of doing this very study.

When we discussed this motion, Mr. MacGregor made an amendment to include CEOs or representatives from the various platforms. I'm very grateful that he made that motion because of what the U.K. is experiencing. The High Commissioner referenced in his testimony violent demonstrations, anti-immigration demonstrations that were promoted by Russian state actors through alleged local far-right extremist supporters in the U.K. Facebook took down posts that were spreading fake anti-immigration rhetoric. I'm very anxious to talk about that with those representatives we've all agreed to have attend as witnesses. I want to hear what they're doing to address this. In the U.S. presidential campaign when certain communities are targeted with misleading disinformation and mis-information, lives can be put at risk. There's a real threat to public safety.

I think we, as Canadians and as a committee, have a right to look into whether violent extremists are being funded in this country by Russia to target communities or immigration and to see where the money is coming from and who it's going to. In the U.K., those demonstrations were to attack immigration and racialized communities. I think we owe it to Canadians to make this a very real priority and to hold social media platforms to account if they are allowing Russian-backed information and accounts to continue to run very dangerous rhetoric that could put our communities at risk.

I represent a very diverse community. I'd be very concerned if social media platforms allowed influencers who are Canadian and are being paid by Russia to allow any of my constituents or any Canadian across this country to be harmed because they didn't bother to look into the source of this. I'd be quite upset.

We, as a committee, should be held accountable if we don't take this as a very serious priority. It's precisely what they're calling for in the U.K. They're calling for governments to look into the tracking of the money, into travel patterns and into who is connected to Russian state actors who are coming into countries—Canada being one of them—to spread Russian propaganda for the sole purposes of undermining our democratic institutions, creating social disorder and bringing violence against communities that they want to harm. I think of our Ukrainian population in this country and how deeply concerned they must feel to know that Canadians who are posing as influencers, or are influencers online, are actually being paid to spread propaganda for Russia. I think we owe every single Ukrainian in this country the duty to look into this, to not wait another minute but to start bringing witnesses forward.

• (1640)

I will ask for a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. MacGregor, go ahead.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the comments made by Ms. O'Connell. I don't think anyone around the table underestimates the importance of this study, and that's why the original motion got a unanimous vote. I think it's important for the Canadian public listening right now to understand that all political parties represented at this table did support that motion.

A couple things come to mind, Mr. Chair. We have a subcommittee meeting that was supposed to be scheduled for the second hour today where we were going to meet to figure out our path forward. We do have two draft reports that I'm sure we would like to see completed, and there already have been a number of different study ideas introduced.

I want to make very clear that it's not that I don't see this as a priority. It's just that this motion introduced by Ms. O'Connell is forcing us as a committee into this binary choice, and I think we owe it to ourselves as a committee to have a discussion on the merits of all the motions on the table.

With that being stated, and with respect to what Ms. O'Connell is doing here, in an attempt to lower the temperature in the room and have a more fulsome discussion, I move that we adjourn the debate.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We will carry on. Is there any further discussion on the motion of Ms. O'Connell?

Mr. Lloyd, go ahead.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I move that we adjourn the meeting. Then we can move to subcommittee.

The Chair: The motion to adjourn the meeting is in order.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on Ms. O'Connell's motion?

Seeing none, I will call for a recorded vote, please.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I have a point of order.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: No, not during a vote. He already called the question.

The Chair: We can't interrupt a vote for a point of order. I will recognize you immediately after the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

• (1645)

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

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I asked to adjourn the meeting based on the misunderstanding that the motion to adjourn the debate had succeeded.

The Chair: By my count and from what I heard, the motion was defeated.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Chair, I have a point of order.

I'm listening online. Could members remember not to speak when they're not recognized, for the sake of the interpreters? I couldn't even tell who was talking, as there were discussions going on. I could hear you and Ms. Dancho at the same time.

In fairness to interpreters, only one person should be speaking at a time.

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate that and we will endeavour to do exactly that.

The clerk has sent out a budget for this foiled terrorist plot in Toronto study. I believe you all should have a copy of it. We need an approval of that budget.

It's so moved by Ms. O'Connell, so we have a vote now on the floor.

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

The Chair: I believe that wraps up our business for this meeting and we will adjourn. We will commence the subcommittee meeting right away.

We are now adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>