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# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 130**

Thursday, November 21, 2024

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Chair: Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer





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• (1555)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 130 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

**The Chair:** Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I'd like to remind participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hands if you wish to speak, whether participating via Zoom or in person. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

I do see that Ms. Michaud has her hand up.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** With your permission, Mr. Chair, I would like to speak before we begin.

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** I tabled a notice of motion regarding Canada's borders two days ago, and I'd like us to debate it immediately. I've previously discussed it with my colleagues and I believe I have the support of all parties, at least the Conservatives and Liberals. We could do this very quickly before we welcome the witness. Everyone has received the motion, but I'm going to read it again:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the consequences to Canada of the measures announced by Donald Trump during the American presidential campaign concerning the deportation of persons illegally present in the United States, and of the Canadian Federal Government's plan to ensure border security and compliance with federal immigration law and policies.

That the committee invites the following witnesses to testify:

1. For two hours each accompanied by senior officials of their respective departments:
  - a. The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Public Safety.
  - b. The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.
2. For one hour each:
  - a. Ms. Kirsten Hillman, Canadian Ambassador to the United States.
  - b. Mr. David L. Cohen, United States Ambassador to Canada.

c. Ms. Chrystia Freeland, Chair of the committee on Canada-US Relations.

d. Mr. Michael Duheme, Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

e. Ms. Erin O'Gorman, the President of the Canada Border Services Agency.

3. As well as any witnesses the committee deems necessary, in accordance with the committee's usual practices.

That the committee give priority to this study and report its observations to the House.

I therefore move that we briefly debate it now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

There's a motion on the floor from Ms. Michaud. Would anyone like to debate it? I'm seeing nodding heads.

If there is unanimous consent from the committee, can we adopt this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

Go ahead, Mr. Morantz.

**Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I have a matter I'd like to quickly bring up before we get to the witnesses.

I have a motion which has been on notice. I'd like to move it, and read it into the record:

Given that recent court filings have revealed disturbing details about a thwarted ISIS linked bomb plot targeting Jewish Canadians on Parliament Hill, and given that hate crimes have increased 251% over the past nine years,

The committee immediately prioritize a study to investigate the dramatic rise in terrorist plots and acts of violence targeting Canada's Jewish community, including the thwarted terror attack on Parliament Hill; that the study be comprised of no less than six meetings; that the Minister of Public Safety, the Special Advisor on Jewish Community Relations and Antisemitism to the Prime Minister, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Commissioner, the Director of the Parliamentary Protective Service, the Director of Canadian Security Intelligence Service and other law enforcement officials, and civil society and academic organizations, including the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and B'nai Brith, be invited to testify as part of this study; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Mr. Chair, briefly, this is a very important motion given what happened. I was at that rally last December where there were hundreds of people on the front lawn of Parliament Hill. If the RCMP hadn't done their good work in foiling this plot, the carnage would have been something which we would have never been able to accept.

The revelations about this foiled terrorist attack on Parliament Hill against the Jewish community strikes at the very heart of our democracy. It's something that parliamentarians should be very concerned about.

I want to thank my colleague, MP Raquel Dancho, a fellow Winipegger, for bringing forward this important motion.

We have an important witness here today, so I suggest that we quickly get to a vote on this motion so that we can get back to the witness.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morantz.

This motion was originally brought forward by Ms. Dancho.

The motion is on the floor.

I recognize Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thank you so much, Chair.

I thank the honourable member for his words. I agree with him. It's extremely concerning what's going on right now. I've had numerous conversations with Rabbi Stephen Wise in my riding about the rise of anti-Semitism.

I just read an article about the number of youth being radicalized to ISIS. We also have another problem in this country, which is the rise of Islamophobia and the rise of youth being radicalized, predominantly online.

Chair, I also had put in a motion.

I'm hoping that we can deal with Ms. Southern, who's taken the time to come in today, and we've summoned them.

I would like to read the motion that I have. I'm hoping that we can have a more fulsome debate on this at a future meeting.

The motion that I had proposed—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. Damoff.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I don't preclude my great colleague from introducing her motion—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm not introducing it. I'm just going to read what I'm going to put forward. I'm not introducing it.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** You're not moving the motion?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm not moving it right now. I just want to read what I would be proposing.

It reads:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), and given the growing trend of violent extremism, in particular, the increase in youth involvement, the committee invite Brigitte Gauvin, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) deputy commissioner for national security, representatives of the RCMP's federal policing integrated

national security enforcement team, Robert Burley, executive director of the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence, officials from Public Safety Canada and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, representatives from TikTok, X, Snapchat, Discord, Reddit, Facebook, Telegram, Minecraft and Roblox to discuss the foiled terrorist plot against the Ottawa Jewish community, the rise of violent extremism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, recent measures the federal government has undertaken to address it, and the role that social media and gaming platforms play in radicalizing youth and mobilizing violence.

Chair, I could amend Mr. Morantz's motion to reflect what I would like to bring forward, but given that we have summoned this witness to be with us today, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate. We can return to it at a future meeting.

**The Chair:** That is a dilatory motion.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** I just want to clarify because the member did preface that with the condition that given we have a witness here, which makes it non-dilatory.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** No, it's not debatable.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** I think that is a debatable motion. If the motion had been simply "I move that we adjourn debate", then I would agree that it's a dilatory motion.

If you look back on what she actually said, she said, "given that we have summoned this witness to be with us today, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate." I think you should consult with the clerk because I believe that makes the motion conditional and subject to debate.

**The Chair:** From my review of the rules, which I reviewed very recently actually, it's not. I think the motion is in order. We have a motion on the floor to adjourn debate on this.

Mr. Lloyd, go ahead on a point of order.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC):** I wish to challenge the chair on that.

This is from page 1068 of chapter 20 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, by Bosc and Gagnon: "If a dilatory motion is accompanied by a condition, it becomes a substantive motion. It is then subject to the rules on the admissibility of such motions. It also becomes debatable and amendable."

I believe your ruling would be incorrect, Chair.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** From my interpretation, I don't think there was a condition attached to what Ms. Damoff said. They're shaking their heads.

There is a challenge to the chair in my second meeting.

Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The decision of the chair is sustained; therefore, we go back to the motion brought by Ms. Damoff to adjourn debate on the motion that was brought forward by Mr. Morantz.

We will have a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** The motion to adjourn is defeated.

We return to the speaking order. The speaking order, I have been told, is actually at the discretion of the chair, and technically, Ms. Damoff still has the floor.

I have Mr. Lloyd right after that. Then I have Ms. Michaud and then Mr. Johns. That is the order as it stands right now.

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** On a point of order, Chair, I believe that once a member moves a motion, it ends the member's speaking turn.

**The Chair:** I've been told by the clerk that, in practice, we've seen both.

The same benefit that I extend to Ms. Damoff today, I promise to extend to all parties today and in future meetings.

Ms. Damoff, you have the floor.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Chair, on a point of order, I hate to do this to you on your second day, but again, we're going to have to challenge the chair on that ruling.

**The Chair:** I have been informed by the clerk that the speaking list is entirely in the purview of the chair, and it actually cannot be challenged.

Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

We will return to Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

I will repeat what I said before. We took the time to summon a witness. She is sitting here ready to testify on an issue that we all think is important, and I think it's really unfortunate that we're delaying this.

I am going to propose a fairly substantial amendment to Mr. Morantz's motion. I do have it in both official languages. In essence, what it will do is amend Mr. Morantz's motion to reflect the motion I read previously.

I don't want to take the time to read it again, but I will say that I think all members should be concerned about the number of youth who are being radicalized and about the fact that it's being done on gaming platforms and on social media. We need to broaden the study to be more than just about one attack. There are multiple people.

I will move my amendment, and I'm assuming that you want to distribute it, Chair.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** I think it's being distributed as we speak.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'll read it into the record:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), given that recent court filings have revealed disturbing details about a thwarted ISIS linked bomb plot targeting Jewish Canadians on Parliament Hill and given the growing trend of violent extremism, in particular the increase in youth involvement, the committee invite Brigitte Gauvin, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police deputy commissioner for national security; representatives of the RCMP's federal policing integrated national security enforcement team; Robert Burley, executive director of the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence; officials from Public Safety Canada and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service; the director of Parliamentary Protective Services; representatives from TikTok, X, Snapchat, Discord, Reddit, Facebook, Telegram, Minecraft and Roblox; and civil society and academic organizations, including the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and B'nai Brith, to discuss the foiled terrorist plot, the rise of violent extremism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, recent measures the federal government has undertaken to address it, and the role that social media and gaming platforms play in radicalizing youth and mobilizing violence; that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

Mr. Chair, may I speak to it, briefly?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm not going to speak for a long time because I really do want to get to our witness.

I hope that members will recognize that this is a broad problem and one that we need to tackle. I know we have a lot on our plate, but I think it's important that we recognize the bigger issue that we have with young people being radicalized, whether it's to ISIS or to groups that target women the LGBTQ2 community or the Muslim community. I hope that all members will agree to this amendment and that we can move forward.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm just wondering whether we could have a brief suspension to discuss this motion.

**The Chair:** Next on the speaking list is Mr. Lloyd, so would you rather that Mr. Lloyd speak to it or would you rather, especially—

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** I'll remain on the speaking list, but we'd like a short suspension.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll suspend.

I remind committee members that Ms. Southern has been waiting very graciously. She has flown from B.C. and this committee did summon her. Thank you.

• (1615)

(Pause)

• (1620)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Lloyd, you have the floor next.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** I'll be brief, Mr. Chair.

I believe that you ruled this amendment in order. I think, for a number of reasons, the precedent has been set that this amendment is out of scope of the original motion. It significantly changes the scope of the motion, so I would like to challenge the chair's ruling that this amendment is in order.

**The Chair:** We are once again going to have a vote on whether the chair's ruling shall be sustained.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Lloyd.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Thank you. I appreciate your consistency, Mr. Chair.

With that, I think it is important we get to the witnesses, so I would like to move that we adjourn debate on this amendment.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, as a point of clarification, is he adjourning debate on the entire topic or just the amendment? I want confirmation before we vote.

**The Chair:** I'm being told by the clerk that, procedurally, it will be on the whole.

I'm seeing nodding across the room.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We are adjourning debate on the motion and amendment.

Thank you for your patience, Ms. Southern.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on September 19, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of Russian interference and disinformation campaigns in Canada.

I'd like to now welcome our witness today, Ms. Lauren Southern.

Ms. Southern, for your benefit, I'd like to specify that your testimony, or that of any witness, is protected by parliamentary privilege. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states the following:

Witnesses appearing before committees enjoy the same freedom of speech and protection from arrest and molestation as do Members of Parliament.

Before we proceed, I have to inform the committee that the summons could not be served to Liam Donovan. The committee can decide whether they want to take any action on that.

We'll go to Ms. Southern for her opening statement.

**Ms. Lauren Southern (As an Individual):** Thank you.

Honourable Chair and esteemed members of this committee, I would like to thank you for so enthusiastically inviting me to speak today.

My name is Lauren Southern. I am a filmmaker, YouTuber and proud Canadian.

In late 2023, I was contracted to make weekly videos by a start-up company called Tenet Media. Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice released an indictment that alleges the founders of Tenet created the company in conjunction with two Russian citizens, with funding ultimately originating from the Russian government. Per the indictment, the founders of Tenet Media deceived the personalities they contracted regarding their alleged source of funding.

I'll make a few points clear at the outset.

First, at no point during my involvement with Tenet did I ever have knowledge of the allegations in the indictment.

Second, the only person who ever had any creative control over my videos was me. No one from Tenet or anywhere else ever dictated what topics I covered or what opinions I held.

I always seek to fight disinformation in all of its forms and therefore I have a duty to inform this committee that disinformation has been spreading within these very walls. Some in the media and even witnesses to this committee have attempted to paint a picture of Tenet as a hugely influential player in the political media landscape. This, frankly, is just not true.

A previous witness at this committee, who went unchallenged, stated that Tenet Media controlled a network of over 16 million subscribers. This is not true. On their largest platform, YouTube, Tenet had barely over 300,000 subscribers. I believe the 16 million figure referred to the total number of subscribers among all of the personalities who had videos contracted or licensed by Tenet. With a subscriber base like that, given all of the facts, Tenet had absolutely no control over.... To claim that Tenet controlled those subscribers would be like claiming that a TV network had influence over the United States presidency because they air reruns of *The Apprentice*. The same witness claimed Tenet garnered over one billion video views and 20 billion impressions. I have absolutely no idea where those numbers came from. Very readily available public data shows that, on its largest platform, YouTube, Tenet received only 16 million total views.

Based on the witness's specious numbers, he asserted that Russia received "extraordinary value for money." Anyone with even a cursory understanding of new media would know, however, that \$10 million for 16 million views on YouTube hardly qualifies as extraordinary value. In fact, it qualifies as a total failure. Therefore, there is in fact a silver lining here if the allegations are true. It appears Russia did attempt to influence western media, but they failed pretty miserably.

Now, I know the chief concern of this committee is how this debacle may have influenced Canadians. Well, I was the only Canadian commentator and the only host who consistently discussed Canadian issues. In fact, if the company had any creative control over me, which they didn't, they probably would have asked me to stop making Canadian videos, since they didn't perform very well. Therefore, if you were worried about this alleged Russian money unduly influencing Canadian issues, I have good news: It didn't happen.

I'll be honest. It has been surreal for me to watch our government, experts and media assert that scripts I would jot down in my notes app in line at the grocery store were secretly part of a giant foreign influence campaign. Arguably, the largest actual impact on Canadians here has been the number of tax dollars they've had to spend investigating this non-issue.

Some in the media and this government seem to have concluded that the only reason a regular Canadian could possibly hold certain views that do not align with the current Liberal administration is because of pernicious, widespread Russian disinformation. I would like to propose an alternative hypothesis. I know it may sound insane. I know this breaches the borders of conceivable thought, but maybe, just maybe, some Canadians consulted their own moral compass and decided they don't want this country funding foreign wars. Maybe they look around at hospital lineups or housing prices and think immigration might be a little high. Maybe they lost their business during lockdown and think, "I worry about my freedoms in this country."

Some in this government are hell-bent on drastically exaggerating the extent of foreign influence because they can't seem to stomach the idea that they might be wrong about something and that a growing majority of Canadians legitimately and organically oppose what they are doing. They simply can't conceive that they are becoming unpopular naturally, so there must be foul play at work.

Let me make this abundantly clear once more: No one but me, through my true experiences as a Canadian, has informed my opinions. To any members of this government who may be listening, I would suggest you familiarize yourselves with these opinions, because they are rapidly becoming the views of the majority of this nation.

Thank you.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Southern.

We'll start with the questions.

Mr. Lloyd, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Ms. Southern, for coming to this committee today. This has been a very interesting study, and I found your statement today interesting, and it answered a number of the questions that I was going to have for you, but I still have some additional questions.

The indictment itself—and you have read the indictment, I assume—alleges that RT employees and Tenet Media used a fake persona named Eduard Grigoriann to deceive the commentators. Were you ever approached to make content by someone posing as Eduard Grigoriann?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No, during the call I had, well over a year ago now, that signed me up for the company, I was told vaguely about a tech investor. I can't remember the exact name I was given, but I never spoke to someone named Eduard Grigoriann.

• (1630)

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** When were you first approached to do work for Tenet Media?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I wish I could remember the exact date, but it would have been probably four months before the company launched.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** The indictment alleges that this Kalashnikov character edited your videos in the past.

Is this true, and in the past have you allowed others to edit your videos? Is this a common practice?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** The editing process is just the cutting and adding of audio. In fact, any sort of text that would be on screen or any sorts of words said by me were entirely under my control. They had these individuals under the fake name editing the initial videos, and then I got an American editor assigned to me later on. I also edited some videos in-house, but once again the editing process has no control over the actual content of the videos.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** You would sign off on the final content of the videos?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes, I would go in and I would say, "Cut at two minutes 30—it's going too long—and add a soundtrack at three minutes." I had full control.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Can you say for sure whether or not this Kalashnikov person was involved in the editing at any time?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I don't know. They had I believe it was someone under a fake name.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Okay, thank you for that.

The U.S. indictment alleges that commentators were paid upwards of \$100,000 to produce this content. Was this what you found in your experience was what content creators were being paid by Tenet?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** This was one of the large surprises for me when the indictment dropped. I was on \$275,000 for all operations, and that was not my personal salary. I was contracted to make three videos a week, news reports and two mini-documentaries. I had multiple staff, including a researcher and an assistant. This budget paid for my studio, flights, videographers, staff, myself.

I only made around \$100,000 Canadian for my personal salary, so if you want to do a separate panel on the wage gap in alleged foreign influence campaigns, we can certainly do that.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** What sort of due diligence did you perform before you began working with Tenet Media? Did you ever question where this kind of money was coming from? Did you not find it at all suspicious?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Once again, given the budget I was given and the offer I was given from two people who have worked in media and were employed by the Blaze—

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Is that Lauren Chen?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** —Lauren Chen, it was not suspicious that this would be a start-up company whatsoever.

Once again, I was running a severely underfunded operation. In fact, at multiple points, I found it difficult to continue to make multiple documentaries each month. To afford that, I needed more staff on board, and so I would apply for more funds and was told that the company simply didn't have them available given it was a small start-up.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Do you feel that you were taken advantage of in this situation? Do you feel you were deceived by Lauren Chen and Liam Donovan?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I wasn't given the information in the indictment, so if it's all true, then yes.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** That seems clear.

With that, Chair, how much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** You still have two minutes left.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** You actually answered a lot of my questions on this already, Ms. Southern, so I'll have to regroup and pass it on to the next speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

The next speaker is Mr. Erskine-Smith for six minutes.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Thanks very much, Chair.

I want to get back to the amount that you were compensated. You said you made \$100,000 personal that you were able to take home with you, but what was the total amount before you paid out different contracts?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It was \$275,000 U.S.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** It was two hundred and something thousand U.S.?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It was \$275,000 U.S.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Okay, and how many videos did you create for Tenet Media?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It must have been upwards of 80. I don't know; I couldn't tell you the exact number, but it was quite a few. I had three—

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Okay.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Sorry. Let me give you more specifics. I was contracted to do three videos a week and two mini-documentaries a month.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Okay.

You said they had only 300,000 subscribers. Is that right?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes, but what's more interesting to me is that only, I believe, a few months before the indictment dropped, they had only around 100,000 subscribers. In fact, I had a documentary with the company that was at around 10,000 views for a long time. Mere days before the indictment dropped, it was at millions.

I know there were ad campaigns done to promote the videos, but I think the numbers have been massively inflated by those who have an interest in exaggerating foreign interference.

• (1635)

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** What was your idea of the business model here? I mean, they're paying you \$275,000 U.S. I know that you're taking home \$100,000 after that, but there are others with even more followers and presumably are going to get paid more as a result, in their stable of influencers. How are they making money off this, in your view?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I was the top contributor, so I was getting some of the top view counts at the site. I was hustling very

hard to make sure my videos did well, trying to grow the company. I did not know the salaries of my peers. I was under the assumption that they were getting paid the same, if not less, because I was doing a large amount of videos.

It made sense, certainly, that a start-up from someone at a tech company could give the amount of money necessary. Certainly, I was being asked to start doing advertisements at Tenet. I assumed that the start-up money must have been drying up and they needed to integrate ads into this. It certainly made sense from all the information that I was provided.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Who was your main point of contact? Was Lauren Chen your main point of contact at Tenet?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No. It was typically Liam, but really, I was just left alone as long as I was fulfilling my contract. I wasn't speaking to them that often.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** When someone comes to you and says they want you to join them and they make a pitch, you're not just going to join anything. Was it Liam who made the pitch and sold you on it?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Lauren made the pitch, and then Liam sent the contracts over.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Lauren made the pitch. What was your relationship with Lauren like before she made the pitch to you?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It was cordial. They're very friendly people. We had met in person before. I'd had 10 years of knowing her in the same industry as me. She's always made pretty decent videos on YouTube and for the Blaze and various other companies.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** She's in your world. You've known her for 10 years.

You've read the indictment, I assume.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Here she and Liam [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] talking about the Russians and that they are aware of where this money is coming from. It must have sent chills down your spine that you'd been working for Russian money.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** We still.... If I know anything about my time spent in media and people speculating about both the work I've done and my personal life and all these things, it's that, unless I was there, I don't know anything. I don't know what happened.

I'm not going to make comments about Liam or Lauren, because I do not know the inside out of what went on there, other than the comments in the indictment.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Right. So you read the indictment and you sort of shrugged, "Well, I wasn't there; I don't know that this is true, so it's of no concern."



**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I certainly didn't shrug. I'm not looking to work for any.... I'm not looking to be an asset of any government—foreign or domestic, for that matter—so no, I was not happy with the idea that I would be working for—

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Then it should be pretty concerning for you—

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I was certainly happy with the integrity of my work, all of which was done of my own volition and with all of my own opinions. If there are any concerns by this committee about anything I may have published that was not factual, I'd be happy to correct that, but....

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** I don't know. In your opening you talked about people getting frustrated with this federal government, but one of your major examples was people who “lost their business during lockdown”. Sure, people were obviously very frustrated if they lost business during lockdown, but you must know, having been very vocal on this, that it was the provincial governments who implemented the lockdowns.

You are aware of that, right?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Sure, but there were plenty of acts by the federal government to shut down legitimate protests, shut down people's bank accounts—

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** No, no, no. Sorry. You said they “lost their business during lockdown”. You would know, I assume, that this would be a provincial matter.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I think you're getting into semantics here. There are plenty of reasons to be concerned about freedom in Canada.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** No, no, no. The differences between provincial and federal governments are certainly not semantic differences.

You also said in your opening that your views “are rapidly becoming the views of the majority of this nation”. Do you think the great replacement theory is going to become the view of the majority of this nation any time soon?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It depends on what you mean by “the great replacement theory”. What do you mean?

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Well, what do you mean by the great.... Well, that there's an active attempt to replace a white population with a non-white population: What do you mean by that?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I think there are a lot of people who have concerns about the impacts of mass immigration removing the culture in certain areas. I think you could ask people in Brampton or individuals in Surrey what they think about the language being spoken around them, whether it's a Canadian language whatsoever, whether they feel that their culture is being preserved. I don't think it's an insane concept.

In fact, I think many liberals would agree that many cultures and peoples have been replaced before by mass immigration—our indigenous population not least of all.

• (1640)

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** You might think it's insane, though, to head over to Russia, speak with a neo-fascist, Aleksandr Dugin, and then praise the guy—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Erskine-Smith—

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** You might think that's a level of insanity.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Why would that be insane?

**The Chair:** Mr. Erskine-Smith, I'm sorry, no. The time is up. We're actually over a little bit.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Do I get to answer the question?

**The Chair:** Hopefully, another member can give you time to answer the question, but we're actually already over the time.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I think it's fair to allow the witness to answer the question.

**The Chair:** I'm going to move to Madam Michaud and then Mr. Johns—

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** I have a point of order also.

**The Chair:** If you like, you can give her time to answer that question from your time.

I have Mr. Shipley on a point of order.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** We've been sitting in this committee for many months—many years now—and prior to your taking over that chair, that was always the policy. If there was a question asked, the witness did have a chance to answer. That was always the policy.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** It's normal.

**The Chair:** I actually tried to stop Mr. Erskine-Smith from asking the question. I spoke while he was speaking—

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I've been accused of some insane things, and I think it would be nice to—

**The Chair:** Again, if members feel differently, they can give the witness time to answer from their own time.

[*Translation*]

I turn the floor over to Ms. Michaud for six minutes.

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

Thanks to Ms. Southern for being here and for accepting our invitation to appear today.

Ms. Southern, since I'm going to speak in French, you can use your earpiece to get the English interpretation.

Earlier you mentioned that you had full control over the content of your videos. I don't know if you can tell us about that subject and the content you addressed. That might help us understand why Tenet Media approached you first. It's been alleged that Tenet Media is under Russian influence.

Why do you think Tenet Media picked you to make three videos a week and two documentaries a month?

I would appreciate it if you could give us a few examples of topics that you address in your videos.

[English]

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes. Thank you.

I want to quickly take two seconds to respond to the allegations that I am an insane person for interviewing Aleksandr Dugin, given that my inspiration for the interview was from TVO's *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*. He interviewed Dugin. I don't think we would be calling him insane in this House. I think there is a deliberate effort to slander me for political purposes.

Now, to answer your question as to why you think I would be picked to make these videos, I've made a lot of content over the past 10 years: multiple documentaries that have received millions of views and really have encouraged a lot of people to consider ideas they haven't thought of before, like the plight of farmers in South Africa who are being murdered, or my film *Borderless*, which covered mass immigration to Europe from the perspective of immigrants who, quite frankly, were being screwed over and sold alive by human traffickers.

I think that I have a long history of creating very honest journalism that addresses issues that a lot of people are too afraid to broach, and that's why, I believe, I was approached by Tenet to work for them.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Have you discussed Canadian politics and Russia's illegal war of aggression on Ukraine in any of your videos?

Have you often addressed those kinds of political topics?

[English]

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I don't believe I recall making a single video about the Russia-Ukraine situation, but I certainly made videos about Canada, and they were all based on my own experience living here as a Canadian.

I made a video about housing prices in Vancouver, for example, something that I have seen go to absurd levels. I have families who live around me in my community who have been forced to live in trailer parks because the housing prices have gone so high they cannot afford rent. I look at the inflation with groceries and families struggling to afford food because the taxes are so high, because of bad policy put in by this Liberal government. I make videos on these subjects.

I make videos about the concerns of mass immigration without integration. You know, just a few weeks ago I had a friend of mine almost lose her daughter's life because an immigrant who refused to get a proper driver's licence smashed into her car, just missing her daughter, and then tried to intimidate her into not contacting ICBC.

When we have these issues of mass immigration without integration, when we have these issues of so many foreign buyers coming into this country and inflating prices, and when we have these issues of not putting the Canadian populace first, people want to hear these opinions.

I'm sorry to tell you once again, to the people here who might think that this is all foreign propaganda, it's not. No one told me to have these opinions. I grew up in Surrey. I grew up in B.C. I live in this country. I live paycheque to paycheque right now, you know. I struggle under this government, as many other Canadians do, and all of the opinions I put out here are my honest opinions.

• (1645)

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

Would you please explain to us the course of events that led to the criminal investigation that was opened into Tenet Media? When did you learn that those allegations had been made, and when did you stop making videos? I imagine you had no other choice. Were you surprised? Were you at all suspicious of that start-up company? How do you think this all happened?

[English]

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Once again, I had no reason to be suspicious. Of course, I was surprised when the indictment dropped. I did not have knowledge of what was in the indictment.

Once again, I can't comment as to how this all happened, because I was simply a contracted video creator. I just made videos for them.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

I understand your situation and your story, but you nevertheless don't seem to be taking this foreign interference seriously.

The allegations before you are extremely serious. Russian interference and disinformation are a fact in Canada right now. My impression is that you aren't as worried about our democratic institutions as I am.

Am I wrong? Do you think foreign interference is a major concern?

[English]

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Once again, as I said in my opening speech, there were individuals, who were witnesses to this committee who went unchallenged, who claimed that Tenet Media made one of the number one podcasts in the world, *The Rubin Report*. *The Rubin Report* was created 10 years before Tenet even existed and had no association with Tenet Media. Dave Rubin's—God bless him—show at Tenet Media struggled to even reach hundreds of views, yet that level of misinformation was coming from within these very walls.

Forgive me if I seem like I am downplaying what is going on, but there has been a great exaggeration to the point of lying within this committee about the level of foreign interference happening. The biggest concern I have is the regular Canadians who I interviewed who inspired my videos and my content who are being slandered as Russian disinformation rather than the people here who might be disturbed by my correcting the record.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Michaud.

Mr. Johns, go ahead for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Ms. Southern, before collaborating with other influencers, what steps do you take to ensure that the media in which you are appearing is acting lawfully?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** What steps do I take to ensure the media I'm appearing in is acting lawfully?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Yes.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** As much as I would love to be able to afford a private investigator to go and confirm every contract I sign, in 10 years of working with someone in the same industry and being given a very standard boilerplate contract that I would get from any other company, I've never had this happen before. I think, in retrospect, it's easy to say that I should have done more investigation, but what investigation would you have done in my shoes?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I think it's important to do due diligence. You have a significant following on social media platforms where misinformation can spread rapidly. How do you ensure that the content you share is not used by foreign entities to amplify narratives that undermine Canadian democracy or national security?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Are you accusing me of spreading narratives that have undermined democracy?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm just asking you a question in terms of how you ensure that the content you share is not used by foreign entities to amplify narratives that undermine Canadian democracy or national security. What measures do you take?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I ensure that every contract I sign and have ever signed in media gives me full creative control of every single thing I say and publish. That's how I ensure it.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** There are concerns that individuals or groups may be unintentionally aiding foreign governments in spreading divisive narratives. How do you respond to allegations that your on-line content has been used to further Russian propaganda or influence Canadian public opinion?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** As far as I'm aware, just this month, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a pause to immigration or a decrease in immigration for the next three years, citing unsustainable growth. This is one of the critiques that has been my main critique on Tenet Media and off Tenet Media. Having it portrayed as Russian disinformation by this committee or even aiding and abetting Russians has been very interesting. I understand that I may have been right too early on this issue, so I must be socially punished by this regime. Although much too late, I happen to believe that Justin Trudeau is making the correct decision there.

I would hope that this committee wouldn't advocate Canadians to stop drinking water or wearing seat belts because someone with the last name Ivanov or Petrov suggested it was a good idea.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** That's not what we're asking.

What is your stance on foreign interference in Canadian elections and political discourse? Do you believe there is a clear and present danger from foreign actors such as Russia? If so, what responsibility do individuals like you bear in preventing the spread of foreign influence? Do you take any responsibility?

• (1650)

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I was a commentator for a channel who had full control over the videos I made, and I ensured they were truthful. If you want to point to anything I have said that has been disinformation or aiding and abetting—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm actually asking what you believe. Do you believe there is a clear and present danger from foreign actors such as Russia? If so, what responsibility do you believe individuals like yourself in your platform have to aid in preventing the spread of foreign influence?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I think it is rich that I am sitting here and am being asked what I have to do to stop foreign influence and foreign interference—as a Canadian citizen, while we sit here with MPs like Jennifer O'Connell, who said “boo hoo” to Conservatives who wanted actually elected politicians working with foreign governments to be exposed. I am a regular Canadian.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** So, I take it that you don't take any responsibility.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] too.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm sorry, but it's not your turn, Ms. O'Connell. I'm going to continue.

How do you reconcile your business model, which prioritizes user engagement and raking in massive profits from clicks, with the necessity to protect users from harmful disinformation that can lead to real-world consequences like hate-based violence?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** How is anyone in this committee supposed to stop disinformation abroad if they can't stop it within this committee? Why wasn't Ben Scott challenged when he cited false numbers about Tenet's views? Why wasn't he challenged when it was said that Tenet created the top podcast in the world, that it was getting billions of impressions? If we cannot stop disinformation within this committee, then I'm sorry, but no one here is stopping disinformation coming from abroad or foreign interference.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** What effects do you believe your content has on Canadians?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I think I speak for the majority of Canadians. I think I speak for people who don't have a voice in this government. I think I speak for people who feel they have been censored and shut up for too long by the mainstream media, and I'm proud of it.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm glad we're talking about how you personally feel. Can you speak about how you feel about your online content, since it was aiding in objectives that were planned, plotted and executed in the Kremlin?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Would you say that Justin Trudeau's reduction of immigration is aiding and abetting the Kremlin? Should he be pulled in here because he had the same ideas that I had?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** No, I'm just asking you whether you have any personal feelings that your online content was aiding in those objectives.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I do not. I disagree with that. I think I have very normal opinions that were all coming from myself. No one told me to have my views. No one forced me to have my opinions. My opinions are based on living and growing up in this country.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay.

Have you ever been in direct or indirect contact with Russian government officials, organizations or agents?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I've spoken to RT in the past, before the war.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay.

Can you provide more information about the nature of these interactions, if any?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I've done contributions to RT before, as many did pre-war, including Larry King and Michael Moore. I think the only interview I ever did that even had anything to do with Canada was a brief interview on the trucker convoy, which was a live report on events happening around me. I would have been just as willing to share that report with the CBC if it had asked me.

**The Chair:** Mr. Johns, that does conclude the first round. Thank you.

We'll move on to the second round now.

Mr. Shipley, you are first.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Southern, for being here today.

Some of these questions have probably already been asked, but we'll make it a little repetitive. Could you give us a little more context to these?

My first question is this: Were you ever employed by a digital media company to create content before signing on with Tenet?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Do you want to elaborate on that?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It was Rebel Media.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Before signing on with Tenet, had your content ever been monetized on YouTube?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** What was your relationship with Lauren Chen and Liam Donovan? How did they pitch this platform to you?

What were you offered, and what due diligence did you do before signing on?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** They were colleagues of mine in the media sphere working for various different companies. We had brushed shoulders at political events before, maybe only a handful of times.

Lauren and I were fairly friendly. She called me and told me that they were starting up a new company, that they had an investor who was in the tech realm. I wasn't that interested at first, to be honest. Then she called me a few more times and told me that it would be a totally free speech contract, that I could do whatever I wanted.

They sent me the offer. At that time, I was looking to expand and hopefully be able to hire some staff to improve the quality of my videos. Being able to do so while having total freedom and control over the content I produce is, quite frankly, something you get at almost no media companies—very few, anyway. That's why I haven't worked at very many over the last 10 years, other than Rebel, which had a similar contract. So, yes, I considered myself pretty lucky to have found a start-up company that was looking to give its creators full creative control.

• (1655)

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** You did travel to Russia in 2018 and published an extensive interview with Aleksandr Dugin, a man who is referred to as "Putin's brain". During your trip to Russia, did you engage with any other political actors? Have you maintained any relationship with any individuals that you met in Russia?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes. During my trip to Russia, I did interview quite a few other subjects. I decided against publishing those interviews as I felt there might be some influence on the direction of them. I only published the Dugin one because I totally arranged that one.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Have you been back to Russia since February 24, 2022?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have not been back to Russia.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** You unlisted several videos from your YouTube channel on the topics of the war in Ukraine and of your travels to Russia. When did you unlist these YouTube videos and why?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I actually unlisted significantly more videos than just those. There were things that had to do with just life, relationships and various different topics. I made a decision a few months ago that I want to take a break from social media altogether. I think the entire thing has become very unhealthy. One of the ways I engage with it now is that if I go on social media, I remove content instead of add it.

If you find my Instagram, there have been lots of selfies of me removed. If you look at my Twitter, there have been lots of tweets of mine removed. I go back and choose a video or a post to remove instead of adding to it, since I think we have really lost the thread of sanity on the Internet these days.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** There's definitely some truth to that.

I want to keep asking some questions, but I'm going to take a brief moment aside from that. I want to put verbal notification of a motion, and that motion is this:

Given that it was reported this week that the families of Paul Bernardo's victims had been denied the right to deliver their impact statements in person at his upcoming parole hearing, and that the parole board is now saying it is "currently working to accommodate the in-person presentation of statements by victims" who wish to appear at the November 26 hearing,

The committee invite:

The Minister of Public Safety

The chairperson of the Parole Board of Canada

The Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime

To appear separately, for an hour each, to testify on how these decisions are made, and the process of determining whether they are "unable to ensure safety and security of all hearing attendees"; and

That these appearances occur before December 17.

I'll speak very briefly to this because I do want to get back to Ms. Southern.

Obviously, everybody is aware of what has happened this week with the French and Mahaffy families being barred from attending Paul Bernardo's parole hearing in person. Frankly, I was shocked and disgusted to hear that this had taken place.

The parole board stated they were "unable to ensure safety and security of all hearing attendees". I'm not sure why that would be different now. When he was in maximum security, they were allowed to attend. Now that he has been moved into medium security, they're saying that security is going to be an issue.

We did hear from the lawyer for the families, Tim Danson. He stated that it "was nothing short of gut-wrenching to experience the painful and heartbreaking reaction of Debbie Mahaffy and Donna French when they learned that the PBC was prohibiting them from representing their daughters (and themselves), and denying them the right to confront Paul Bernardo, in person."

An article in the Toronto Star states, "He went even further in his letter, calling the PBC's decision 'bone chilling,' and argued that it runs contrary to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which he said enshrines the right to in-person victim impact statements."

Mr. Danson also stated, "It is incredible how the 'system' is there to assist and benefit Canada's most notorious sadist, sexual psychopath and murderer, but not his victims, who suffer every day."

As I said, Chair, I just wanted to put that on verbal notification, please.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

It's on notice, and your time is up.

Next, we will move to Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Southern, for being here today.

I want to go back to the trip you took to Russia in 2018.

Who paid for that trip?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I paid for it.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** You mentioned that you did several interviews there. Were you paid for those interviews?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I was not paid to do any of those interviews.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** It has come up who you interviewed while you were there, and that was Aleksandr Dugin, who has been referred to as "Putin's brain". Actually, how did you get an interview with him?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I watched an episode of *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, where he interviewed Aleksandr Dugin, and then at an either earlier or later date, he also interviewed a translator of Dugin's, who was a University of Toronto Ph.D. student. I contacted one of his translators and got his email, and said, "Mr. Dugin, could I conduct an interview with you?" In a very brief response, he just said yes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I just want to read what Dugin said in 2014, that Russia should, "kill, kill, kill" Ukrainians. He has previously been involved with Pamyat, which has been described as the most significant anti-Semitic organization since perestroika. He has expressed his admiration for the SS, adopting the alter ego Hans Sievers, named after the war criminal who was general secretary of the Nazi research institute that Heinrich Himmler established.

I'm just curious. I know you've mentioned Steve Paikin a number of times. I had limited time to look here. It's slightly different from the interview you did. I'll just be honest. Why would you want to platform someone like that?

• (1700)

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It was for the exact same reasons that Steve Paikin did and TVO did, because he is an interesting geopolitical figure. I was more right than I bargained for initially in how interesting he would get. When I watched the TVO interview and when I watched the work of Michael Millerman, one of his translators, they figured these ideas of—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Do you agree with his views on Ukraine?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No. I don't think we should "kill, kill, kill" the Ukrainians. On the contrary, I think we should be trying to not kill anybody. I'm not a big fan of killing people, Ukrainian or otherwise.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Do you prescribe to his anti-Semitic views?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No, once again.

You're interviewing me right now. Do you agree with all of my opinions?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** No. I actually find some of them quite offensive.

I'm curious what a "Canadian language" is. Is that Ojibwa and Cree?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Typically, in Canada, our national languages are English and French. I figured this was common knowledge here, but....

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Okay.

You know, it's funny. I was just in the Baltic countries and met with the NATO strategic communications centre of excellence, and a lot of what you put out aligns perfectly with the types of Russian misinformation I heard about, particularly around immigration. Anyway, that's just a comment.

You keep referring to Steve Paikin and the fact that he did an interview with someone.

You went to Russia. If I'm not mistaken, you were barred from going to the U.K. Is that correct?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes, I was barred from going to the U.K.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Why was that?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** That was because I tried to set up a pride parade in Luton, and the Islamic population there typically is not a big fan of that. I was told it was stirring up hatred.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** So you went to Russia to stir up hatred against Jews?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I'm so sorry—what are you referring to?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** You deliberately made a trip to Russia to interview someone who is one of the most anti-Semitic people around. Was it just to be controversial?

Do you find that funny?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I do find it funny that you are accusing me of taking a trip to Russia to stir up hatred against Jews, when I don't think Jews came up once during my interview with Aleksandr Dugin. I don't know where you're getting that from.

Once again, Steve Paikin conducted an interview with him, so I guess you would have to make the same anti-Semitic accusations against TVO.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Ms. Southern, his views are well known and you deliberately went there, so you're basically trying to create chaos. The funny thing is that's what they say Russia does: It tries to create chaos in society. It sounds like your goal is to try to create chaos, and I don't get the sense that you have a lot of respect for western liberal democracy as it is.

Anyway, that's my time, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have two and a half minutes.

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

Ms. Southern, I like to go back to the money aspect that was addressed a little earlier.

Earlier you said that Tenet Media gave you a budget of \$275,000 U.S. and that you managed to draw a salary of \$100,000 Canadian.

Is that correct?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes, that's correct.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Were you asked to reimburse that money at any time? When Tenet Media shut down as a result of the allegations, did the Canadian Security Intelligence Service or the

RCMP, for example, come knocking at your door? Did one of those security agencies pay you a visit following the allegations?

[*English*]

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have not been asked to reimburse any of that money, but I have been visited by CSIS, which, quite frankly, has been putting immense psychological pressure on me to become an informant on this subject and other subjects. Ultimately, I declined because I am not looking to become an asset for foreign governments nor for this government, and I did not like the way in which CSIS threatened and stalked me.

I would like to know how much Canadians paid for that, by the way.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

This past September, the UN reported that, since Russia began its illegal war on Ukraine in February 2022, 11,700 Ukrainian civilians had been killed and 24,600 wounded. That's an enormous number of people, and all of them civilians.

How do you feel knowing that you accepted money from a country that's conducting this war of aggression on Ukraine and that has caused thousands of deaths? Don't you find that unsettling?

[*English*]

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** You will never catch me speaking ill of the Ukrainian people. They are good people. It is horrific what is happening to them and the losses that are happening to their community. I hope that the suffering they are going through ends. I hope that the Ukrainian people will be free.

I do not want and never have wanted to be an agent of any state, an asset of any state, foreign or domestic. If that was happening, I have always, at any inking, run the other way.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Next, we have Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I only have one burning question left.

Do you take any steps whatsoever to verify that the people paying you are legitimate and don't have ulterior motives?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** This would not be a question being asked of any individual working in media if not for the retrospect of this situation. I have had contracts. I have worked with many individuals. They have all looked the same as Tenet, and they have never come up with this problem. This is a very unique circumstance and, once again, I think the eyes of retrospect are playing heavily on your questioning.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Given the situation and that Tenet is under investigation by the U.S. government, I think it does qualify as a reasonable question.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** If you think there was an action I should have or could have taken that the average person would normally take, please do let me know, Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** In the future, will you be making any significant efforts to ensure the people who are paying you are legitimate and don't have ulterior motives? Is this something you're going to incorporate into your future business model?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have always worked very hard to ensure the things I am doing are legitimate, that I'm not being influenced by anyone. I've lost jobs over this.

There is a lot of money, as I'm sure you know—probably not the majority coming from Russia, probably more from China and other countries—going into politics, going into media and going into influencing what people think. The way I protect myself from that... There is a completely messed up and influenced media organization ecosystem going on right now. I only sign contracts with people who give me full creative control, because right now, in this environment, that is the only way to protect yourself. If you are ever working for an organization that has creative control over you, you're going to find yourself in hot water. Quite frankly, that is the majority of media outlets within this country, too.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Right now, are you telling us you're not going to take any different steps to ensure that the people who are paying you are legitimate and don't have ulterior motives?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** The steps I'm taking are that I'm not going to work in media again, because I am tired of this subterranean fed-level nonsense going on. I would like to just go on with my normal life as a Canadian and not be harassed by CSIS, the government, or you people.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Next, we have Mr. Motz for five minutes.

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, Ms. Southern, for being here.

My questions aren't intended to harass, but rather to find some information.

You're described as a social media influencer, someone who's a political activist and a commentator.

What are your objectives? What do you aim to achieve when you connect with an audience?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** My aim has always been to speak for people who don't feel they have had a voice in mainstream media or regular media and to convey facts.

I'm a human being. Everyone that does media is a human being. I don't want people to follow me like I'm some sort of god, take everything I say as their opinion and to have 100% influence. I want to provide as much factual information as I can with data from my own research, or from on the ground, and let people take that information, look at a variety of different sources and come to their own conclusions. That is my hope for the work that I have done.

• (1710)

**Mr. Glen Motz:** You said this briefly in your opening, I believe, and in an answer to some of my colleagues' questions.

What motivated you or prompted you to start collaborating with Tenet Media? Was it the friendship only, or was it something else?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** It was that. It's usually very good to be working with a media company when you are in the social media content creation environment. I had been independent for so long. It's very hard to do. It's very hard to fundraise for a studio, for equipment and to do films. I wanted to expand the type of films I was doing. Although, once again, it was underfunded, it was a larger budget for me to be able to do more interesting and higher quality work than I was doing before.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** That's fair enough.

You had indicated that you always put significant efforts into making original and thoughtful videos and that your contract gave you full editorial control. You have made that very clear today.

Have you ever been compensated to endorse a specific idea?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Not on anything?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Not from anywhere?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Have you ever received information from another organization, an individual or a government for you to share on your social media platforms?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No, other than...like, not paid for. I've certainly had lots of people send me, "Hey, share this tweet. I just did an interview. Share this." That's a very normal thing to happen in media.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** I don't know how much time I have left, but I have two thoughts from your answers to other questions.

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** You indicated that when you were in Russia, you had concerns about some other interviews you had done. You chose not to broadcast or release those interviews. You didn't explain why.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** There was an individual who told me they could set up interviews in Russia for me. Initially, I was excited about this because they were able to get access to quite prominent figures. As things went on, they were pushing me to do content and work, which, once again... If I feel anyone is pushing me to share ideas, I push back.

They were trying to get me to go and do a film on the Donbass region, in 2018. I found this strange. Obviously, I didn't know there was going to be an invasion that would happen at any point. Being offered all access to that area, military access, seemed suspicious to me. I rejected doing the film and deleted all the other interviews that I had conducted—or refused to publish them, rather—that were in connection with this individual.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Thank you for that clarity.

You made a very direct and scathing comment about your opinion of the current media landscape in this country. Can you expand on that a little bit? Obviously, other people have concerns as well. Can you expand on what you were referring to in your description?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have been doing YouTube for 10 years. When I started doing YouTube, it was individuals who were interested in sharing their opinions and beliefs, without compensation, and who genuinely cared about issues.

Over the past 10 years—

**Mr. Glen Motz:** What I'm referring to is this. When you responded to Mr. Johns' question, you talked about receiving compensation and made reference to the media outlets that exist today, the national media outlets, receiving compensation from, potentially, places in this globe that are hostile to our democracy in Canada.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes. What I was getting at is that I believe there is a.... I would have to give a written response, later, with the details, but based on my time—

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Could you, please?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes, I can.

Based on the time I've spent in media over those 10 years, I believe that a large majority of content is being influenced by corporations, domestic government or foreign government, or being paid for. I would say that half of the contributions, likes and views on content are now all botted. They are not legitimate, genuine views. They are being astroturfed.

This is part of the reason that I am personally stepping away from partaking in social media myself. I don't believe that a lot of the Internet we are engaging with today is real people. It is very different. You can feel it, if you spent time on the Internet 10 years ago.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Mrs. Zahid, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Southern, have you been contacted by Canadian or American law enforcement about your role in the Russian-run Tenet Media op, given the U.S. indictment?

• (1715)

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes. As I mentioned, CSIS came to my house while I was making dinner for my child and tried to speak with me. They did so in a way that I was not comfortable with. I have also, quite frankly, experienced quite a bit of harassment and stalking from them, when I told them I did not want to speak. They

called me dozens of times. They found my gym. They told me, essentially, that if I did not become an informant for them...that I love being a mother, I love my child and I would love to see him grow up and to be there to provide for him, and it would be a shame if something happened to me.

I'm not too impressed with the state of law enforcement in this country right now, to be honest.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Are you aware that the content you created for Tenet Media's Russian disinformation campaign is still available on Tenet's Rumble page?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have no control over that, but sure.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Have you spoken to Lauren Chen or Liam Donovan since the U.S. indictment?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have not.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** You have no relationship with them.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have not spoken to them since the indictment.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Will you use this opportunity today to call on Tenet to remove any and all content created by you from their Rumble and X accounts?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** No. All the content I made was of my own volition, based on my own opinions and free speech, so I'm happy for that content to still be out there. Quite frankly, I spent a lot of money making some beautiful documentaries in which hard-working Canadians are featured. These are Canadians who put themselves out there and are now being slandered as Russian disinformation. I think that's a real shame.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** TikTok, Meta and YouTube have all removed Tenet Media from their platforms using the U.S. indictment. X, formerly known as Twitter, has not.

Why do you think that is the case?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** I have no idea. I don't work for these social media companies.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Knowing what you do now about Tenet Media and where their money was coming from, would you do anything differently?

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Yes. I wouldn't have worked for them if I'd known where the money was coming from.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** I'll pass my time to Ms. O'Connell.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I move to resume debate on the amendment to the motion proposed by Mr. Morantz.

**The Chair:** We have a motion on the floor to resume debate.

I'm looking around the room. Do we have UC?

No. I'm seeing the shaking of heads.

Do you want a recorded vote?



**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

**The Chair:** We will resume debate on the amendment.

Before that, I'm wondering if we can relieve Ms. Southern from committee.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Southern, you're free to go.

**Ms. Lauren Southern:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there other speakers? I'm seeing Mr. Lloyd.

There's a point of clarification from Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Chair, when we adjourn debate, do we not go back to the original speaking order? That would mean I should be up.

**The Chair:** Okay, go ahead, Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'll let Ms. O'Connell speak first. I think that would be the best thing.

• (1720)

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** I'm not speaking about the amendment. We're good with it.

**The Chair:** If we go back to the original speaking order, it would be Mr. Lloyd, and then Mr. Johns.

Mr. Lloyd.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to get back to this issue, as well.

I have concerns about the amendment that was put forward, because of the removal of... As I said earlier, I don't think it is even in scope, although the committee has made its ruling that it is. I'm concerned that we're not prioritizing this study to investigate the rise in terrorist plots and acts of violence targeting Canada's Jewish community, especially considering that we were told about a thwarted terrorist attack that was to occur on Parliament Hill, where my colleague Marty—who's sitting next to me today—was present, along with the leader of the official opposition and numerous other members of Parliament, not to mention the hundreds of members of the Jewish community and allies who showed up on Parliament Hill. Not prioritizing that is sending a pretty strong statement.

I'm also very concerned that we're not including the Minister of Public Safety in this, or the special adviser to the Prime Minister on Jewish community relations and anti-Semitism. I think a lot of Canadians, particularly members of the Jewish community, would like to hear from their special adviser on anti-Semitism, considering this attack was undoubtedly fuelled and motivated by deeply held hatred and anti-Semitism. I'm very unhappy to see that this has been removed.

Also, the director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and other law enforcement officials are being removed. I have a lot

of concerns. I think Canadians want to hear from CSIS on this. There were a lot of Canadians, members of the Jewish community and even colleagues of mine who said, "Why did we have to learn about this from a news release?" People who were there weren't even informed. They had to find out about it from the news. I think that's very concerning, as well.

I noted something positive about this. The original Liberal motion that was read into the record by Ms. Damoff earlier sought to exclude members of the Jewish community, including the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and B'nai Brith. I would not have, in any way, wanted to support a motion by the Liberals that sought to exclude members of the Jewish community—particularly these two organizations—from presenting to this committee and speaking on this. I am glad to see, though, that in the amendment they put forward, they haven't tried to exclude the Jewish community by removing that, despite the fact that they sought to remove others from this. There's a bit of good mixed in with the bad here.

Obviously, there are a great number of criminal and public security issues in this country. They're all very important. They're particularly important to the communities they impact. However, I'm very concerned that the government is expanding the scope of this study on such a level that it undermines the value of specifically investigating the rise of anti-Semitic hate in this country and this foiled, ISIS-inspired bomb attack on Parliament Hill.

I'm not sure why Minecraft, Reddit and Snapchat are included in there. There are other organizations. I'm not sure if there's some direct connection between those and the attack. I don't know whether the Liberals have some information we don't, but it appears to me that there could be other, very valuable witnesses included in this. Perhaps Minecraft isn't the best witness to talk about a study on anti-Semitism and a bomb attack on Parliament Hill. However, I'm happy to be told that, perhaps, Minecraft had significant involvement in a terror attack on Parliament Hill. Otherwise, if there is no evidence that these social media companies are somehow involved in this, I would suggest that the Liberals who proposed this amendment are trying to undermine this study and blow it wide open so that we have useless meetings that don't get to the heart of the issue.

I think witnesses who would be very useful to have at those meetings are the special adviser to the Prime Minister on Jewish community relations and anti-Semitism, the Minister of Public Safety and the deputy minister, and CSIS.

• (1725)

I find it astounding that this government does not want to hear from its own officials, its own minister and our own security services, but they want to hear from Snapchat, Reddit, Minecraft and I don't even know what this Roblox is. It sounds like a toy that my kids might play with.

I'm just absolutely shocked that they are actively trying to prevent us from hearing from government officials, because that's really what we're here to do in committee. It's to hold government to account. That's what Parliament is all about. If we're not hearing from government, then we're not doing our jobs. I guess the government MPs on this committee feel that it's their role to shield the Minister of Public Safety and shield bureaucrats and civil servants of this government.

That's not the proper role of parliamentarians. It's to hold government to account and get the truth, so that Canadians can get the truth about what happened. I know that all Canadians are very concerned about the threat of an attack on Parliament Hill, which is the heart of our democracy in this country. The fact that it was allegedly youth who sought to perpetrate this attack is very disturbing.

We had an extensive study at this committee on ideologically motivated violent extremism. The fact that we're seeing this happen and that in this case—I want to be very mindful because I know there are some continuing issues with this—youth were allegedly involved in this, I find that very concerning.

With that, I just want to make it clear that I will not be supporting this amendment to the motion, for the reasons that I put forward.

I'll cede the floor to the next speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

The next speaker is Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know it's been a long meeting. Even with the fact that we started late, it feels like a very long meeting. I know you're dealing with many different difficult issues here at this committee. I'm here replacing Mr. MacGregor.

Just hearing right now the conversations and the thoughts of my colleagues, there are lots of different ways to move forward. I think there are opportunities for collaboration on the content of it. Ms. Damoff has some ideas. We certainly have some ideas on how we'd like to proceed, but we're two minutes from 5:30 p.m. and this meeting was supposed to finish at 5:30 p.m. A lot of MPs need to catch flights to get back to their ridings to serve their constituents, Mr. Chair.

I would like to—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Just to clarify, Mr. Johns, the meeting will end at 5:56 p.m., because we started late.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Well, I don't think we're going to see a resolution to this today. I don't forecast that we're going to resolve this in the next 15 or 20 minutes. I think there needs to be some work done outside of this committee meeting.

Given that it's 5:30 p.m. and, again, a lot of MPs have flights to catch to get back to their ridings, I'm going to move that we adjourn the meeting and come back to this on Tuesday.

I move to adjourn the meeting.

**The Chair:** There's a motion to adjourn. I'm seeing nods. I'm seeing nays as well, so we'll go to a vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The motion passes.

Just before I hit the gavel, very quickly, the committee asked me last time for a bit of a calendar. I don't have a calendar, but I have a notice. On Tuesday, I'd like to return to the auto theft study that Madame Michaud brought forward on that very important topic. We can wrap that up on Tuesday, and then on Thursday we'll resume the study on the foreign interference from India.

Madame Michaud.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Mr. Chair, I'm glad you're proposing that we wrap up our car-theft study. That won't take much time.

However, pursuant to the motion that we adopted earlier today regarding a study on the border situation and the government's plan to address an influx of migrants, the committee should give priority to that study. Consequently, I wonder when we'll be starting it, since the motion states that it's a priority and therefore takes precedence over other studies.

I would just like you to clarify your opinion on that.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I see your hand is raised, Ms. O'Connell.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** I don't have an issue with that. I think we need time to contact the witnesses and schedule them, but we can have that conversation to schedule timing. I recognize that it's a priority.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.







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