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Chair: Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer



Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting 135 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

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 hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Ms. O'Connell.

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

I'd like to move that we resume debate on my motion of December 5 in relation to the study of Indian interference.

The Chair: The motion is moved.

Ms. O'Connell, do you want to speak to it?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Yes, please. Thank you, Chair.

This is in continuation of where we left off on Thursday. Based on the testimony provided by Mayor Patrick Brown, he indicated that MP Rempel Garner had, in fact, received a phone call from the consul general of India. He described it as "an angry phone call". From there, she had a 45-minute debrief with two of his campaign staff, Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu and Mr. Harkirat Singh.

On Thursday, we were debating the invitation of Ms. Michelle Rempel Garner, Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu and Mr. Harkirat Singh to testify at this committee. That is the motion before us. I think it's very clear, based on the testimony, why it's important to speak to them.

Given the fact that we have scheduled on the agenda for later to complete the auto theft study, I don't want to belabour this point. It's where we left off last week. Given that everyone wanted to adjourn the meeting at our six o'clock hour, I think it's only fair to deal with this off the top and then move on with the rest of the agenda.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

I see that the email is being sent with the motion.

In the meantime, I recognize Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I believe we have two meetings left on the India study.

The Chair: We actually never set.... It was a minimum of this many meetings, and we can always add meetings. We haven't spoken on that either yet.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Can I raise a point of clarification?

I presume that all the parties or some of the parties have submitted witnesses for this study.

• (1105)

The Chair: If you mean the Indian foreign interference study, yes, they have.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Why do we need a motion for this? We can just submit these people as witnesses. If the Liberal Party wants to submit those as witnesses, then we'll have an opportunity to have them come as witnesses.

The Chair: Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: The deadline to submit witnesses has passed, and this is based on the testimony.

It's a motion before us that is in order. If there's no objection to it, then we should vote and move on to the rest of the agenda.

The Chair: I'm being told by the clerk that it's flexible. There was a deadline, but it was more just to encourage folks to submit witnesses so that we can have more folks testify.

The motion is on the floor, but I understand your point, Mr. Lloyd; they could be invited.

Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): I'm just reviewing this. These two folks, Mr. Sandhu and Mr. Singh, were mentioned by Mr. Brown. I'm not clear why we would be.... I assume, based on Liberal patterns, that they're going to ask them to come and then force them to come. It just seems to be that that's how we've proceeded.

It's just odd because we started this study with a very serious matter. It's alleged that the Indian government was involved in a murder and possible additional attempted murders or other extortion efforts and things like that, very serious matters.

Now it seems that this study has turned into some sort of hunt for anyone who knows Mr. Patrick Brown. It just seems that it's really devaluing the core focus of this study, which was really to review the impact, the causes and the potential solutions for the fact that a foreign government is allegedly involved in murders of Canadian citizens on Canadian soil. This does seem like a very far departure from that, and I don't see how this would serve the overall purpose of looking to prevent future murders in this country by foreign governments, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

I think the end result is the same, whether we pass it through a motion or just have the clerk invite the witnesses.

One of the witnesses we can't force to appear, and we haven't even seen if the other two witnesses are willing to come or not. I'm just wondering if there's a consensus in the committee to just invite them, or do we stick with the motion?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Stick with the motion.

The Chair: We're sticking to the motion.

Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I move to adjourn debate on this, so that we can just get past this already.

The Chair: A motion to adjourn debate has been brought forward. We have to proceed to a vote.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Just as a clarification, in that case we don't get to vote on the substance of this motion.

The Chair: Exactly.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

I will ask for a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: The nays have it. The motion remains on the floor.

If there are no more hands, maybe we'll proceed to a vote on the motion to resume debate.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'll ask for a recorded vote.

The Chair: We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: We're resuming debate on the motion.

I see Ms. O'Connell's hand is up.

• (1110)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Sorry, I just want to clarify. The motion passed. Is that correct?

There was a motion to adjourn debate, which failed. Therefore, we went back to the motion, which we just voted on, and it carried.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Simon Larouche): The motion to resume debate has passed.

The Chair: We voted down Ms. Dancho's motion. Then we voted in favour of the motion to resume debate.

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

On the motion, I'll ask for a recorded vote.

The Chair: We are discussing the actual motion itself to summon the three witnesses.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Sorry, it's not to summon; it's to invite them.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

When we voted on the adjournment of the debate requested by Ms. Dancho, we were still in the middle of a debate, so I don't understand why we had to vote to resume that debate. I was sure we'd just voted on the motion and passed it.

[English]

The Chair: I just want to be very careful on the procedure of this, very quickly.

A motion was brought forward to resume debate by Ms. O'Connell. A motion to adjourn the debate was brought forward by Ms. Dancho. We voted on that motion first. We dismissed the motion to adjourn. We went back to the motion to resume debate, which we just voted in favour of.

Now we have resumed debate on that motion, which is to invite those three witnesses. Now we are on the substance of that motion. We need one more vote to actually....

Mrs. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): For clarification, we were having a debate on Ms. O'Connell's motion, and after that, there was a motion to adjourn that debate. We voted against that. Doesn't that imply that we are back on the debate on that motion?

The Chair: The initial motion was to resume debate. We passed that motion to resume debate, so now we're on the substance of that motion.

Procedurally, that's where we are.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's fine. I'll ask for a recorded vote on the motion.

The Chair: Okay, we'll have a recorded vote on the motion.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: There are still people on the speaking list, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I've already called for a vote. I'm sorry.

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

You can't call for a recorded vote when there are still people on the speaking list.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, I hear you, but three seconds ago your side was under the impression that the motion had actually, in substance, passed.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That doesn't matter, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You can challenge the chair if you want, but I've called for the vote.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Before I challenge the chair, I will just say that this is a bad precedent. It basically means that the chair can unilaterally say.... When somebody says, "I want a recorded vote", you can cut off parliamentarians' ability to speak when they're on the speaking list. That actually goes against the fundamental rules of Parliament.

The Chair: I hear you, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: If there is a member who wants to speak, they have the right to speak. When the speaking list is exhausted, only at that time can there be a recorded vote. This is a fundamental right of parliamentarians.

My name was on the speaking list. I waved at you several times. You weren't paying attention. I made it known to you at the soonest availability that I was ready to speak. Ms. O'Connell said that she wanted a recorded vote, but there was no.... She was still speaking at the time. She was speaking. A member cannot just call for a recorded vote and cut off debate. That is just an absurd, gross violation of our rights as parliamentarians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

I genuinely did not see your hand up.

Again, I was under the impression that a few seconds ago, your side was okay with the entire motion passing, so I assumed that—and you guys are shaking your head—you guys were okay with it. I didn't see any hands, so I thought we'd move on to the vote.

• (1115)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: This is a violation of the Standing Orders, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just arriving here, and it does seem that there's a lot of confusion as to which motion we are on. Can you restate what motion we are debating right now? Then I'll decide whether or not I need to be on the speaking list.

The Chair: It's been emailed, I think.

The motion is this:

That, in relation to its study of Indian interference, the committee invite the following witnesses:

1. The Honourable Michelle Rempel Garner, P.C., M.P., Calgary Nose Hill;
2. Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu;
3. Mr. Harkirat Singh.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order.

Can you clarify whether there was actually anyone on your speaking list? Despite Mr. Lloyd in his mind wanting to, if he doesn't indicate to the chair, that's not actually a speaking list or a speaking order. If they don't indicate to you, you have no obligation to then ask.

I didn't think.... I even said earlier that if there was no one else on the list.... Nobody put their hand up. I suggested that you call the

vote if there was no one else on the list, and no one put their hand up.

If the Conservatives are now disappointed that their mental telepathy didn't go through and that they didn't actually indicate to the chair that they wanted to be on the speaking list, they can challenge you, but I even said it on the record that if there was no one else on the list, you could call the vote.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, again, you can challenge me, but—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I will challenge you.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I move that the privileges of members of this committee were violated when the chair proceeded to a vote before elapsing the speakers list.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Is that a motion?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That is a challenge of the chair.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: You just challenged the chair. That's the motion.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: He violated our privileges.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for a moment.

• (1115)

(Pause)

• (1115)

The Chair: I'm going to resume the meeting.

There's a challenge to the chair.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: No, there's no such thing.

An hon. member: Yes, there is.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: You can raise it in the House. You can't raise it in committee as a challenge.

There's a motion on the floor, which is dilatory, which is a challenge of the chair, so there's no actual debate on it.

An hon. member: This is [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order, go ahead, Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Lloyd is now trying to reframe it.

I asked, "Is this a challenge to the chair?" He said, "That's what I'm doing. I'm challenging the chair." Now they're trying to say that it's a different motion.

There was a challenge to the chair, which is a dilatory motion, and we vote on it. If Mr. Lloyd wants to change that now, it's too late. I even called him on it, and he doubled down, saying it was a challenge to the chair.

The Chair: I just need a second. We're going to suspend for a little while.

• (1115) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1130)

The Chair: The meeting is resumed.

There's a bit of confusion on the floor. Mr. Lloyd, I don't know if you properly moved that motion or not. There's been a bit of back-and-forth. I've been fair to you guys; I did not see you raise your hand. I will bring it back to the point where you can discuss the motion. I think that's where we'll go, because then we can at least talk about the committee business and move forward with that.

We're going to go back. Right now we are at the actual substance of the motion.

Mr. Lloyd, I recognize you, again, because there's a bit of confusion here.

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

I do appreciate your being fair on this, because I believe it would have been a violation of my privilege if we had carried forward with a recorded vote while there were still, in my opinion, members on the speaking list.

Before I get to the substance of the motion, I just want to relate Standing Order 116(2)(a):

Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order.

Mr. Chair, you have ruled that Mr. Lloyd can have his time back, so I would suggest that he speak to the motion at hand.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's not a point of order.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Yes, it is. It's relevant.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, I can't tell you what to do with that, but maybe you could speak to me after about the rules. I just read the rules very recently. Maybe we should move on to the substance of the motion itself.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you Mr. Chair. I do appreciate that. I believe this is part of the substance of the motion because we dealt with it, but I'll dispose of this very quickly.

Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, wait one second. We're speaking about the substance of the motion to invite witnesses. Is this related to that?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

I did hear that Ms. O'Connell has a point of order.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: My point of order is about relevance. You've already ruled on this, so he can't speak to it. He needs to speak to the motion, which is on inviting witnesses.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, we're debating his motion. You said that we can debate the motion now.

The Chair: No, we're debating the substance of the motion.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Oh, you mean Ms. O'Connell's motion. I see. There are so many motions flying around.

Okay, so we're back to the Liberal motion.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, please be judicious with your language. We're back to the motion.

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

I will say that it is my experience in this committee that members are given a wide latitude to get to the point. I can assure you that I'm going to be very brief with the point I'm about to make, and we can continue on with doing this debate.

Standing Order 116 says—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order on relevance, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting that the Conservatives don't want to speak about inviting Michelle Rempel Garner and two witnesses who had a debrief.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's not a point of order.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: My point of order is on relevance. If he can't speak to the main motion, he should allow us to vote on it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

I've also made the same point to Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

So, Standing Order 116(2)(a) reads:

Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House, the Chair of a standing, special or legislative committee—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order.

Mr. Chair, he's directly violating your ruling. He made a big fuss about his privilege to speak on the motion, and now he's not speaking on the motion. He made this fuss to be able to debate the motion, and he's refusing to debate the motion.

I'd ask for relevance. If he can't get to it, then we should move to the next speaker.

The Chair: I do agree with Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm not clear on which standing order Mr. Lloyd is violating. Perhaps Ms. O'Connell can—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: It's with regard to relevance. You have to speak to the motion.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Which number is that?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I haven't even been given a chance to speak to the motion. I keep getting cut off.

The Chair: Mr. Dowdall.

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): I have a point of order.

I'm curious. I'm usually not on this committee, and it has been rather confusing since I've been here.

I'm just wondering if I could hear what the motion actually is, again.

• (1135)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'll read it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It's been emailed. It's been shared in everyone's inbox.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'll happily read it so that the Conservatives know what they're filibustering.

The Chair: I can read it, Ms. O'Connell.

That, in relation to its study of Indian interference, the committee invite the following witnesses:

1. The Honourable Michelle Rempel Garner, P.C., M.P., Calgary Nose Hill;
2. Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu;
3. Mr. Harkirat Singh.

That's it.

Mr. Lloyd.

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

It's always been my experience in this committee that members are given latitude to get to the point. It's the same thing in the House.

If Ms. O'Connell wants to keep cutting me off before I can make my point, then we can have a very long committee meeting today, or we can just get through what I'm about to say and move on in this discussion.

Standing Order 116(2)(a) says:

Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House, the Chair of a standing, special or legislative committee may not bring a debate to an end while there are members present who still wish to participate....

Further, paragraph (b) of the standing order says:

A violation of paragraph (a) of this section may be brought to the attention of the Speaker by any member—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I was almost done.

The Chair: Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Chair, he is trying to relitigate a ruling you already ruled on. In fact, the whole issue was about him wanting to speak to this motion, and now he's refusing to speak to it. If the Conservatives would like to justify why they don't want these three members to come, then that's fine, but I would like the relevance.

It's very disrespectful to your ruling, Mr. Chair, that you gave him the opportunity to speak on the main motion and now he's not doing it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

Mr. Lloyd.

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

I'll take a little step back:

(b) A violation of paragraph (a) of this section may be brought to the attention of the Speaker by any member and the Speaker shall have the power to rule on the matter. If, in the opinion of the Speaker, such violation has occurred, the Speaker may order that all subsequent proceedings in relation to the said violation be nullified.

This committee study that we've been having on the issue of Indian foreign interference is important. I want to continue on with this study, but I just think it's important, because there was so much confusion in this committee over your initial ruling.... I do appreciate the fairness that you brought when you changed that. If we had gone forward with a recorded vote on this motion while there were still members.... I take you at your word that you didn't see or didn't claim to see, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, I've already ruled on this. Please move to the substance of the motion.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I've been talking about India.

Do you recognize me, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

I've been talking about the motion. I talked about the fact that we almost had a recorded vote on the motion. This is clearly on the substance of the motion, the fact that we almost had a recorded vote so that members couldn't have a debate on this.

I appreciate the fact that you have rescinded your initial ruling that you said you didn't see anyone on the speakers list. I do appreciate the fairness with which you have conducted this committee. It can get quite bumpy at times, Mr. Chair, but I do appreciate that you took a step back there and that you've let members have the opportunity to speak—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: On a point of order, it's for Ms. Dancho. She wanted to know the standing order. It's Standing Order 11(2), in regard to order and decorum and repetitive questioning.

Chair, at some point, you'd have to rule for the member to either get to the relevance of the motion, which they are avoiding speaking about because they don't want to invite these three witnesses, a Conservative colleague of theirs.... They're filibustering. If he has nothing relevant to say to move to the motion, then I would—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On a point of order, this is debate, Mr. Chair. She doesn't have the floor for debate.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: —suggest you move to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

An hon. member: That's not a point of order, Chair.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's totally a point of order. Relevance is a point of order.

An hon. member: Well, you've said it like five times.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Well, then get to it.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd.

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

I was just extolling your virtues to this committee, Mr. Chair. I just want to say that I do appreciate your changing your ruling, because the fact is that we couldn't have, actually, any debates or any actions that we took after a privilege motion if the Speaker of the House had indeed ruled that my privileges were violated—which, I believe, they would have been if you had continued—and it would have nullified the important work of this committee that took place afterwards. It is really for the sake of this committee that I just clarify this very important standing order point so that we don't waste our time, because, as I said, this is a very important issue.

One thing that's very interesting is that we've had all of these meetings and I feel like there's been a real lack of coordination. I've heard very interesting testimony. We've heard from members of the Sikh community who have raised very serious concerns about their safety in Canada. We have these allegations of electoral interference, and we brought in Mayor Patrick Brown last week, who actually shed a lot of light on the fact that these allegations did not have any impact on the Conservative leadership race.

It just feels like the Liberals, at every one of these meetings, instead of wanting to talk about the broad issue—which is of deep concern to the Sikh community and to all Canadians, frankly—that a foreign government would interfere in any way in our country, especially in a criminal way, when we're seeing that Canadians are being killed, allegedly by agents of a foreign state...we seem to be going down this very narrow path. It's like the Liberals are like a rock climber and they've found this very tiny little ledge that they can attach their fingers to, and we're going down this rabbit hole while ignoring this very broad issue of the concerns of the Sikh community over their safety.

To illustrate what this little toehold is.... I don't think it's even a toehold. It's that, allegedly, my colleague, the Honourable Michelle Rempel Garner, was working on the Patrick Brown leadership campaign and during that time.... I believe this was during 2022. It was a very tumultuous time in Alberta. Jason Kenney was the premier at the time, and he went through a leadership review. He won 51% of the vote in that leadership review but chose to step down. That was a very tumultuous time.

I know that there were a lot of people in Alberta politics who were thinking about how they were going to fill that vacuum, and my colleague, Michelle Rempel Garner—I'm proud to be a colleague with her—was thinking about throwing her hat in the ring to succeed Jason Kenney as the Premier of Alberta, and because of that very.... I mean, it was a very serious undertaking to run for the leadership, because it's not just that she would become the leader of the party, the UCP, but that the leader of the UCP would automatically become the premier of Alberta.

You can imagine, Mr. Chair, how serious an undertaking that would have been for my honourable colleague, Michelle Rempel Garner, and the ability for her to do that while also co-chairing Mayor Brown's leadership campaign. I mean, I like to think I'm a hard-working member of this House, but to co-chair a federal leadership campaign while also running your own provincial leadership campaign.... I don't think there's any person in this room who could credibly claim that they could do both of those things at the same time.

It's very clear from Mayor Patrick Brown's testimony that we had last week, and the words of my colleague, the Honourable Michelle Rempel Garner, that she ceased to work on the leadership campaign of Mayor Brown so that she could pursue.... In the end, you know, she did initially pursue it, but she did not actually follow through with her run for Premier of Alberta.

I think that's a very credible and, frankly, true analysis, but we have the Liberals here who are trying to stake their claim on the idea that somehow the consul general of India relayed to Michelle Rempel Garner that they were unhappy about terminology that Mayor Patrick Brown was using in his campaign.

Mayor Brown certainly didn't think that crossed the threshold, although I did note that last week he said that if there were actual people being intimidated and not buying memberships to support him, that would cross the threshold, but none of that has actually really been, you know.... There has not been any evidence provided at this committee that this happened, so now we have the Liberals proceeding with every little sliver they can get. We're getting a new meeting, and this is going to go on forever.

• (1140)

What we really need to do is take a step back at this committee. We have a tremendous amount of work that we're doing. We still have the study of Corrections transferring the notorious killer Paul Bernardo to a medium-security prison. That report has not been finalized yet. That's something we started over a year ago. We have the auto theft report, which we could have actually completed. We could have gotten to it now. It's very important and we could have gotten to it, yet we're dealing with this ridiculous motion to invite people when the Liberals could just invite them themselves.

I just think that we're going down this road.... We're overly politicizing this issue. I think Mayor Brown made a very good point about this. He was reticent to come to this committee, and that's why he was summoned by the Liberals. He felt that the Liberal government was politicizing this issue and he didn't want to come. He did respect the will of the committee, and he did come.

We don't need to go any further down this path. I think we need to talk about the real, substantive issues, especially the alleged criminal activity that has taken place in Canada, and the intimidation of members of the Sikh community in particular. We just saw it in the House last week. I don't know if you saw this. Actually, you were there, Mr. Chair. I saw it in the House. One of your own members.... After a unanimous consent motion was put in the House, another member of your party came into the House and said that he was threatened in the lobby, the government lobby, by members of your caucus, Mr. Chair. Members of the Liberal caucus are threatening other members of the Liberal team over this issue, and I think that's highly concerning.

I'm not sure if the member is going to be bringing forward a privilege motion in the House, but I can tell you that if any person in this House.... Thankfully, I've never had to endure this myself, Mr. Chair. I've had very collegial relations in my seven years here in the House, but when I saw the member for Nepean come forward in the House and say that he had been threatened by members of his own caucus—

• (1145)

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

The Chair: Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's on relevancy. We're debating a motion to have three witnesses come to the committee. It's not about anything that's happened in the House. If we're going to go down that road, let's talk about how the Conservatives were intimidating the NDP during a vote.

Can we stick to the motion about having three witnesses come?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Mr. Lloyd, again, I ask you to stay on point. We're discussing a motion to invite witnesses.

I'm going to put this out there to the committee itself. Again, we can withdraw the motion and just invite the witnesses, which is what I said initially as well.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Sure.

The Chair: If you guys are okay with that, we can just invite them, and we can move on.

I know that Madame Michaud is shaking her head, and I really do wish to get to the auto theft study. Again, we have a small sliver to be able to.... Okay.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: With my remaining time....

Am I recognized, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We're going to withdraw the motion. Is that okay?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Yes, but I need to relinquish the speaking position, Chair.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I have a point of order.

Chair, you've offered up a solution and—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I want to accept the solution. I just want an opportunity to speak.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

I appreciate that offer, and I take you at your word.

I move that we adjourn debate.

The Chair: And invite the witnesses...?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: They can do whatever they want.

I can't move that on a dilatory motion. I can't add qualifiers.

The Chair: The motion can be withdrawn. We don't have to adjourn debate.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's just the way I thought it would be done most cleanly.

The Chair: It can be withdrawn with unanimous consent.

Do we have unanimous consent to withdraw this motion?

I see thumbs-up, so we're okay. We're going to withdraw that motion.

(Motion withdrawn)

The Chair: I would really like to move on to the auto theft study.

We will invite those witnesses.

Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Chair, wait. I just want to be crystal clear that if we give unanimous consent, you'll be inviting these three witnesses.

The Chair: We will definitely be inviting these three witnesses.

Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Okay. We're fine with that.

The Chair: Mr. Dowdall and Mr. Viersen, are you both at committee?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I think Mr. Dowdall is the voting member. I'm just here out of interest on the auto theft issue.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to move into that now.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 23, 2023, the committee is resuming its study of the growing problem of car thefts in Canada. We are returning to the review of the draft report.

Does the committee wish to move in camera for this portion of our work?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We're going to move in camera.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1145)

(Pause)

• (1220)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: We are back.

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

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses today.

Rachel Gilmore is an independent journalist. Pierre Jolicoeur is a professor of political science and dean of the faculty of social sciences and humanities at the Royal Military College of Canada. Finally, we have Pekka Kallioniemi, a researcher with the International Centre for Defence and Security.

Just for the sake of the committee, I know that Ms. Gilmore has a hard stop at 1:30, and I understand that it's very late for Mr. Kallioniemi, so we will try to wrap up this meeting earlier. Thank you so much for appearing.

Now I give the floor to Ms. Gilmore for an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Ms. Rachel Gilmore (Independent Journalist, As an Individual): Hi, everyone. Thanks for having me.

This is obviously a very important topic, and I have some big feelings about it.

To kick things off, I'm sure you all remember the "freedom convoy". Well, as part of my coverage at the time, I joined several Telegram channels and groups where organizers and supporters gathered to exchange everything from planning details to fringe conspiracy theories. You might not have realized this, but it was actually just days after the convoy—actually, you guys probably do know this—that Russia invaded Ukraine.

It was a really interesting time to be monitoring all of those Telegram channels, because all of a sudden, the ones that had been posting about the convoy and COVID—groups with tens of thousands of members primed to distrust experts, government, media and institutions—shifted to posting about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, often claiming that Russia's invasion was actually justified because of reasons that the government and the mainstream media won't tell you.

This illustrates something that experts have said time and time again: Russia identifies the areas where we're most prone to polarization and pours gasoline on the fire that we've already built ourselves.

Don't just take my word for it, though. You can take it from Russia. In the documents that the DOJ released in September in the U.S., we saw details from Russia's "Good Old USA" project and its "Guerrilla Media Campaign" in the United States. Those documents show that Russia identified existing sources of polarization to then exploit. The "Campaign Topics" they planned to focus on included stuff like what they called the "Threat of crime coming from people of color and immigrants", "Risk of job loss for white Americans" and what they called "Privileges for people of color, perverts, and disabled".

That gives you a sense of the kinds of divisions Russia focused on exacerbating. It has a lot in common with what I would call the "right-wing grifter sphere" and what comes out of there, where people rail against immigration, attack diversity and inclusion, pearl-clutch about anti-white racism and oppose trans rights. Those are the kinds of topics you hear from people like Tim Pool, Benny Johnson and Lauren Southern, and those are the same influencers who ended up on the payroll at Tenet Media, which Russia was allegedly funding to spread its talking points. If we accept the premise that Russia never influenced their editorial decisions, as these influencers claimed after the fact, that implies these folks are so good at dividing and polarizing western society that Russia likely saw it as a good investment to just fund them to make more of their organic content—yikes.

When we indulge in divisive, conspiratorial and often hateful rhetoric, we are doing Russia a favour, because a society that doesn't believe in institutions, in science, in journalism, in the validity of experts, in the value of taking care of each other and in the importance of a shared reality is a society where democracy and stability are under threat.

That's a note for the politicians who use this same kind of divisive and conspiratorial rhetoric: Consider what it means that Russia engages in the same tactics when it tries to undermine our democracy. Don't make it easier for them.

I want to touch on one last, slightly boring but super important, topic. When it comes to online disinformation, I want to emphasize the importance of taking action against Google's monopoly on digital ads.

The advertisers don't know where their ads go anymore. They take their ad spend and they give it to a company like Google, which says that it will reach, say, women aged 25 to 35 who want to buy a car, but it's actually very hard for advertisers to know where their ads end up, because Google and a bunch of middlemen place those ads for them. When an industry group tried to track this last year, 3% of the international digital ad spend, which is on track to hit a trillion dollars next year, went to an "unknown delta". That's billions of dollars.

In the course of my reporting, I've seen ads for the U.S. government mint placed on Iranian websites that are likely sanctioned. I've seen ads for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on a porn website. Do you think those advertisers wanted to fund those websites? Do you think that, if they had the choice, they'd rather fund disinformation websites than actual journalism?

Advertisers can't demand transparency on where all of their ads actually go. They can't demand better from Google, because it's the only game in town. Breaking up Google's monopoly and ensuring advertisers know what they're funding would be one incredibly effective way of ripping a profit motive from several disinformation websites.

With that, I am happy to take your questions.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gilmore.

I now invite Mr. Jolicoeur to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jolicoeur (Professor of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Royal Military College of Canada , As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

It is reassuring to see how seriously the Public Safety and National Security Committee is taking the threat that Russian disinformation and influence operations are posing to Canadians, to our democracy and our society.

The points I am making today are my own and do not represent the position of any organization.

My research has focused on Russia's foreign and security policy for the past 30 years. During the past 10 years, I have also been focusing on the weaponization of information by Russia and other actors who threaten Canada and other western democracies. I look specifically at why Russia is exploiting information and how current operations fit into the larger context of Russian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.

As part of this research, I look at the effects of Russian information exploitation on Russia's neighbours as well as generally on democracies and what we can do to defend democracies against information attacks and other attempts to influence and undermine our societies.

I will focus on what the Kremlin is doing when targeting Canada, why it targets Canada, how it targets Canada, how current Russian operations fit into the larger context of Russian long-term goals and what I recommend we do to defend against Russian influence attacks.

What is Russia doing? Russia deliberately and systematically targets Canada and its allies 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the information space. The Kremlin sees itself in a war with the west and believes that—like in a zero-sum game—if the west has problems, Russian society is better off. This is how the Kremlin sees things. It's important to note that this is not the position of all Russians; it's the thinking of the Russian president and the Russian political elite, who benefit directly from Vladimir Putin's corrupt authoritarian regime.

Russian interference and disinformation campaigns are not only directed at election cycles but are pervasive and persistent. The Kremlin seeks to leverage and exaggerate societal fault lines, to disrupt our political systems and societies as part of a strategy called “Russian reflexive control”, aiming at changing long-term worldviews and mindsets of citizens. The goal is to affect behavioural change in western countries towards Putin's personal goals.

All Canadian residents are targeted by Russian disinformation and influence operations, not just selected politicians. Targeting of Canadians and Canadian interests happens at home, but also globally and is not only aimed at generating an effect or impact in Canada.

Why is Russia influencing the west? For the Kremlin—like other authoritarian undemocratic regimes such as China—the sheer existence of democracies is a threat to its regime's survival. Countries like Canada show every day that the repression, violence, censorship and corruption we see in authoritarian regimes is not only unnecessary, but that it is harmful and fundamentally not in the interest of citizens. Russian citizens cannot compete with westerners, not in terms of living conditions, economic development, political stability or general happiness of the people. Therefore, the way we live and how much we thrive directly challenges and threatens authoritarian systems as it shows citizens living under authoritarian regimes how much better we live in democracies.

I'm going to move on to the conclusion right away, because I think I'm running out of time.

What can we do? I have five suggestions.

● (1230)

First, information policy needs to be revised across the board in the Canadian government. Second, we can adopt a sanctions framework, similar to that the EU just introduced last month, targeting individuals that support Russian influence and disinformation operations in Canada more effectively and better utilizing existing legislation. Third, we can adopt a DND information operation policy replacing the one from 2018. Fourth, we can focus more on the role of influencers in Russian influence campaigns. Fifth, we can hold Canadian companies accountable that are helping evade current Canadian sanctions.

I'll end there. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

[English]

I'd like to invite Mr. Kallioniemi to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Pekka Kallioniemi (Researcher, International Centre for Defence and Security, As an Individual): Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Pekka Kallioniemi. I'm a Finnish expert on social media and disinformation, and in recent years I have mainly focused on Russian online disinformation in a series titled *Vatnik Soup*.

It's safe to say that during the last 10 years, Russian online influence operations have been the most effective in the world, and the Kremlin has attempted to interfere with elections and referendums around the world.

The latest example is the massive social media campaign that Russia ran before the presidential elections in Romania. An unknown pro-Kremlin, anti-NATO candidate gained over 20% of the total vote during the first round only by campaigning on TikTok. The whole election was eventually annulled due to the massive Russian interference campaign exposed by Romanian intelligence agencies.

In many countries, Russians hire and manipulate people to spread false narratives online, and Canada is not an exception. There are several prominent figures parroting Kremlin viewpoints regarding, for example, Ukraine and Syria. Tenet Media was mentioned previously, but there are also several academics, journalists and other social media personalities who spread Russia's lies online. Some of them are motivated by money and others by ideology or their egos. Some may even have become victims of Russian blackmail, or *kompromat*.

This is how Russia usually operates. They hide the origin of the message. It's also the reason why their messaging is so effective. They have this ability to make it seem organic and local.

Of course, all this will be—and, to some degree, already is—supercharged with the use of AI. Since February 2022, Russia's main goal with their influence operations has been to stop any kind of military aid to Ukraine. In the long term, they also try to destabilize western societies, undermine trust in democratic institutions and weaken adversaries through division and confusion.

The rationale behind this is that any—

● (1240)

The Chair: I am sorry, but we have to suspend. There is a fire alarm.

[The meeting was adjourned at 12:43 p.m. See Minutes of Proceedings]

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