



Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference in Federal
Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions

Enquête publique sur l'ingérence étrangère dans les
processus électoraux et les institutions démocratiques
fédéraux

Public Hearing

Audience publique

**Commissioner / Commissaire
The Honourable / L'honorable
Marie-Josée Hogue**

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Iranian Canadian Congress

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Ottawa, Ontario

--- The hearing begins Friday, September 20, 2024 at 9:32 a.m.

THE REGISTRAR: Order, please.

This sitting of the Foreign Interference Commission is now in session. Commissioner Hogue is presiding.

The time is 9:32 a.m.

COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Good morning.

So it's you, Ms. Rodriguez, who will conduct the examination this morning?

MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: That's right. Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Is there any housekeeping before?

MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: No. I would just ask that the witness, Michael Crase, be sworn in.

COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Good morning, Mr. Crase.

THE REGISTRAR: Mr. Crase, could you please state your full name and then spell your last name for the record?

MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Michael Crase. Last name is C-r-a-s-e.

--- MR. MICHAEL CRASE, Affirmed:

THE REGISTRAR: Thank you very much. Counsel, you may proceed.

MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

--- EXAMINATION IN-CHIEF BY MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Good morning, Mr.
2 Crase.

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Good morning.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** We're going to start
5 with just some housekeeping matters.

6 You recall being interviewed by Commission
7 counsel on September 4 this year?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do.

9 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And I would ask that
10 the Court Operator pull up WIT101.EN.

11 And is this the witness summary that was
12 generated from your interview?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And I understand you
15 have a correction to make to this witness summary today. Is
16 that correct?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And if you can
19 just let us know what paragraph and what the correction is.

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Paragraph 36, where it
21 reads "Should the review process raise any questions, an
22 interview can be organized with the prospective nomination
23 candidate", we always interview every nomination candidate.

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay, understood.

25 So the interview process is as of right, so
26 to speak. It happens in every case, not only if the review
27 raises questions. Is that correct?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Thank you.

2 So we'll make that correction and it will be
3 entered into the record.

4 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000101.EN:**

5 Conservative Party of Canada (Michael
6 Crase) (Stage 2)

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And just for the
8 record, the French translation of the interview summary is at
9 WIT101.FR, and we don't need to pull that up.

10 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000101.FR:**

11 Résumé de l'entrevue: le Parti
12 conservateur du Canada (Michael
13 Crase)

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Now, the Conservative
15 Party of Canada also prepared an institutional report at the
16 request of the Commission. Is that correct?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Great. And if we can
19 call up CPC13.EN.

20 If we scroll down a bit so we can see the
21 title.

22 So this is the -- just down. Thank you.

23 This is the institutional report that was
24 prepared at the request of the Commission; correct?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And you've had an
27 opportunity to review this institutional report?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have reviewed it, yes.

MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And I will now turn to CPC12. And these are the appendices to that report that we just looked at at CPC13.

And go down. Yeah.

So that's a series of appendices. And you've had a chance to review these appendices as well.

MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And do you adopt the institutional report and its appendices as part of your testimony before the Commission today?

MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you very much.

And just for the record, the French translation of the institutional report is at CPC13.FR.

--- EXHIBIT NO. CPC0000013.EN:

Conservative Party of Canada
Institutional Report for the Public
Inquiry into Foreign Interference in
Federal Electoral Processes and
Democratic Institutions

--- EXHIBIT NO. CPC0000013.FR:

La forme masculine est utilisée ici
uniquement afin d'alléger le texte.

--- EXHIBIT NO. CPC0000012:

Conservative Party of Canada
Institutional Report for the Public
Inquiry into Foreign Interference in
Federal Electoral Processes and

1 Democratic Institutions

2 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: So I'll start a
3 little bit with your background, Mr. Crase.

4 I understand you have a long history with the
5 Conservative Party of Canada, first as a volunteer and then
6 as a staff member. Is that right?

7 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That's correct.

8 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And you are currently
9 the Executive Director of the Conservative Party, a position
10 that you held since November of 2022. Is that right?

11 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That's correct.

12 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Now, prior to
13 assuming this role, you were the Executive Director of the
14 Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario starting in 2018.
15 Is that right?

16 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That's correct.

17 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And between 2010 and
18 2015, you were a regional organizer for the Conservative
19 Party of Canada. Is that right?

20 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

21 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Is there anything
22 else about your background that you would like to highlight
23 or to note other than what we've just talked about?

24 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No, that's fine.

25 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Okay. So I want to
26 start with a very high-level question. Does the Party -- and
27 when I say "the Party", I might say "the Party", "the CPC",
28 "the Conservative Party". We all understand this to be the

1 Conservative Party of Canada.

2 Does the Party view foreign interference in
3 electoral and democratic processes as a significant issue?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think the Party is
5 quite concerned about the electoral process integrity, in
6 general, foreign interference certainly. A part of that, our
7 leader in parliamentary caucus have made a lot of statements
8 about this. I know our foreign affairs critic is a party to
9 these proceedings as well.

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And does the Party
11 view itself, its candidates, or its members of parliament as
12 targets for foreign interference? And maybe I'll take that
13 one at a time. Does the Party view itself, the Party itself
14 as a potential target for foreign interference?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah, potentially. I
16 think we're concerned, yes.

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** What about the CPC
18 candidates? Does it view them as a target for foreign
19 interference?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Potentially, yes.

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what about
22 members of parliament that are part of the Conservative
23 Party?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Potentially, yes.

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And why is
26 that? Why does the Party view those entities as vulnerable
27 to foreign interference?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** As I said, you know, we

1 are potentially concerned about it, you know, frankly, from
2 some of the -- some of what we've heard here so far, and
3 certainly some of the reports that have come out in the --
4 you know, over the past times it's become a more and more of
5 a discussed issue.

6 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And are you aware of
7 political party vulnerabilities that have been identified --
8 specific vulnerabilities identified by the security and
9 intelligence agencies in Canada?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have never been -- I've
11 never spoken to or never been in touch with any of the
12 security apparatus about vulnerabilities of the Party.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So I'll take you to
14 some, so that we can have a context for the discussion. I'll
15 take you to CAN 37690.

16 **--- EXHIBIT NO. CAN037690 0001:**

17 Site Threat Assessment of Foreign
18 Interference Threats to Canadian
19 Democratic Institutions - 2024

20 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And if we can go down
21 to the second page, just to see what it is. Okay. So that
22 is a SITE Threat Assessment of Foreign Interference Threats
23 to Canadian Democratic Institutions, and it's dated February
24 of 2024.

25 So I want to take you to the third bullet
26 point. You can go down. Sorry, the second bullet point.
27 Let me just make sure I'm looking at the right thing. Can we
28 go to the third page? Okay. Keep going down. Okay. Thank

1 you. It's actually paragraph 6 there.

2 So it says in paragraph 6:

3 "Exploiting loopholes in political
4 party nomination processes.

5 Nomination processes for political
6 parties in Canada are not regulated
7 by federal or provincial government
8 legislation or enforcement bodies
9 ([example], Elections Canada and the
10 Office of the Commissioner of Canada
11 Elections). Each political party
12 sets and enforces its own rules, and
13 party members can vote in nomination
14 races, regardless of their legal
15 status in Canada. For example,
16 individuals who are not Canadian
17 citizens -- and therefore cannot vote
18 in elections at any level of
19 government in Canada -- can still
20 vote in a party nomination process as
21 long as they are party members. In
22 some instances, the membership fee is
23 paid for, or reimbursed by. a hostile
24 state actor [...] or its proxies.
25 The nomination process can be
26 critical, as many ridings in Canada
27 are considered 'safe seats' that have
28 long been held by a particular

1 political party. In other words,
2 gaining a party's nomination in a
3 riding that has long supported that
4 party is akin to winning the
5 subsequent election. Therefore, Fl
6 activities during the nomination race
7 could achieve the desired outcome
8 without reliance upon Fl activities
9 during the election period. Fl
10 actors exploit this loophole to
11 engage in Fl that target specific
12 candidates and particular electoral
13 ridings."

14 And I just want to take you a little bit
15 further down under "Cyber threat activity". Keep going down.
16 Keep going. There we go. And it says there, paragraph 12,
17 the last sentence,

18 "Political parties, candidates and
19 their staff continue to be targeted
20 by cyber threat activity; however,
21 this will likely take the form of
22 cyber espionage, disinformation or
23 deepfakes in the future."

24 So I wanted to ask you, in your view, what
25 are the most serious vulnerabilities that are facing your
26 party?

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** You know, in regards to
28 the nomination process, our party -- or I recognize the

1 statements made. We have no -- or never been contact, have
2 no information to suggest that our nomination process has
3 been attacked in any way along those lines. We have a number
4 of controls in place designed to support the integrity of the
5 process as a whole through staff positions through our
6 various committees and processes. You know, those would also
7 include our ability to counteract any foreign -- counteract
8 foreign interference attempts to circumvent those nomination
9 processes. It's -- you know, it's difficult to sit here and
10 talk about the specific threats when -- you know, reading
11 this and seeing this, again, having not been contacted,
12 having not been spoken to about the -- about any of the
13 specifics here. I would have no knowledge that it would be
14 us in general at all that they're referring to. But I
15 haven't -- you know, I haven't received anything specific on
16 that.

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And in terms of where
18 the Party gets its information related to foreign
19 interference or foreign interference threats, you mentioned
20 that you have not been contacted, so what are the sources of
21 information? Where does the Party get its information
22 related to FI?

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have a member of our
24 staff who is a long-standing -- a long-standing member of our
25 staff, our director of operations, who is tasked with being
26 our communication with the regulatory bodies and bodies along
27 these lines. He's been a SITE representative since 2021 as
28 well and has the clearance.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And this is Trevor
2 Bailey?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** This would be Trevor
4 Bailey, yes.

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right. And what did
6 you say his position within the Party was?

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Director of operations.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Director of
9 operations. Okay. And so is he then the main source of
10 information, he goes, gets information from the SITE Task
11 Force, it sounds like that's what you're saying, and then
12 comes back and shares that information with the rest of the
13 Party?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** He would be the
15 individual speaking to any of those agencies, including SITE.

16 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And are there
17 any other sources of information for the Party on foreign
18 interference, or is it SITE through Mr. Bailey?

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Through Mr. Bailey.

20 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And you
21 mentioned that he has a security clearance. Do you know what
22 level of security clearance that is?

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do not, no.

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And we know
25 that the Party leader, Mr. Poillievre, is not top-secret
26 cleared. Do you -- are you aware of whether anybody within
27 the Party is top-secret cleared?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Within the Party I am not

1 aware of anybody that's top-secret cleared.

2 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay.

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I can't speak to the
4 parliamentary side of the Party.

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And has Mr.
6 Bailey attended SITE meetings since the last general
7 election?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I don't know the specific
9 contacts or meetings that he's attended.

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And so who
11 does Mr. Bailey report to when he ---

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** He reports to me.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Now we expect
14 that there will be evidence tendered in the course of the
15 hearings that the SITE Task Force held unclassified briefings
16 in advance of each federal by-election since June of 2023 and
17 invited the political parties to attend. And we expect the
18 evidence to be that the Conservative Party did not attend
19 these briefings. Do you know whether the Party declined
20 invitations to attend these unclassified briefings?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So first I think I had
22 heard of them is when you raised them with us. I know that I
23 certainly was not invited and when we went back and took a
24 look, we couldn't find an invitation to Mr. Bailey either on
25 it. So I'm unclear as to who they reached out to regarding
26 those invitations.

27 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. But you have
28 asked Mr. Bailey about this and whether he ---

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah, counsel -- our
2 general counsel asked him, yes.

3 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And generally,
4 do you know, since Mr. Bailey reports to you, whether the
5 Party views these briefings as useful, or helpful, or
6 desirable?

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have never received, to
8 my recollection, any information from Mr. Bailey coming from
9 any of these briefings that was particularly helpful or
10 suggestive of items or things that we should do.

11 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And does the Party
12 think there should be a closer relationship between political
13 parties and security and intelligence agencies including
14 SITE?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think the more
16 information that we are given, the more -- and are able to
17 use, the more that we can do.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So briefings would be
19 more helpful, is that fair?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Number of briefings, I
21 won't speak to. Certainly what we -- you know, specific
22 information that we are told I think would obviously be
23 helpful.

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Now, you've mentioned
25 that Mr. Bailey gets information from SITE on foreign
26 interference and that informs the party's views on foreign
27 interference and the information that it has on it.

28 Is there any passing on of that information,

1 so to speak, to other members of the party? Do you take that
2 learning from SITE and then use that to educate other party
3 staff members, candidates, campaign staff? Does that
4 information make its way beyond Mr. Bailey?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I think there's a
6 couple different avenues there. Mr. Bailey has direct
7 responsibility or has responsibilities, along with the
8 director of membership, for our membership process and would
9 engage with other directors, I think, if there were items
10 that came out of the information that he receives that could
11 be useful on that.

12 As we are talking about beyond that to our
13 EDAs or to our volunteers at the level, I think that is
14 likely something we would follow, although I haven't seen
15 anything to that effect that's been brought to my attention
16 that we would pass on.

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Now, in terms of
18 training or information that's provided to candidates, does
19 the party provide any kind of basic information or any kind
20 of training on foreign interference to its candidates?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So as we are just
22 beginning the cycle of candidates, nominations of, and the
23 training that's resulted in that, I think we're still in the
24 process of developing the broad-based training that we would
25 use. And that's an evolving scenario that would cover a
26 number of things. I would imagine that anything relevant
27 that we could include as part of this, we would certainly
28 include in the training.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what about ---

2 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Just a question.

3 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Yes, go ahead.

4 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** In the past, did you
5 provide any information in that respect? Any training in
6 that respect in the past?

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I have not been here
8 in this role for a general election at this point, so
9 certainly I have not seen anything regarding foreign
10 interference in past training. I think it's something that's
11 obviously become more noted, more spoken about since the last
12 election.

13 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And same question for
15 party staff. Does the staff, party staff, receive any
16 training on foreign interference?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Nothing at this point.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Now, to what
19 extent does the party provide guidance or resources to MPs?
20 So once a candidate becomes a Member of Parliament, does the
21 party provide resources or guidance with respect to, for
22 example, the hiring of staffers? Is that an area that the
23 party would give any guidance on?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, the staff that would
25 be hired for an MP and their constituency office, or their
26 Parliament Hill office, or House of Commons staff, the party
27 doesn't involve itself in that.

28 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And in terms of any

1 guidance or resources regarding an MP's conduct with foreign
2 diplomats, foreign officials, does the party give any
3 guidance or resources to MPs on that topic?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, I haven't been a part
5 of any, and I would think those would be conversations to be
6 had at the various positions of the House of Commons.

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what about with
8 respect to conduct online? So for example, social media
9 activity, what platforms to use or avoid, how to interact
10 with other posters, whether to post personal information,
11 that type of guidance. Does the party provide any of that to
12 MPs once elected?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Having not -- I haven't
14 been a part of coming out of a general election where we
15 would have a group like that, but I have not seen anything
16 specific to that.

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And what about
18 with respect to foreign travel? Any advice or any kind of
19 resources with respect to that?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe the leaders in
21 Whips office deal with that with Members of Parliament.

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And what about
23 those -- that type of guidance or resources, but to
24 candidates. So does the party provide any guidance with
25 respect to hiring campaign staff to candidates?

26 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Mostly -- you know, I'm
27 not sure in the way that you're discussing. There's
28 certainly the -- when a candidate is nominated, they have

1 both the regional organizer and a desk officer that are their
2 primary points of contact. And as they build their campaign
3 teams out, they would work with them to assign those roles,
4 generally very volunteer roles, to a local campaign. That
5 would be more along the lines of people that they know. I
6 myself was a campaign manager a number of times for my local
7 riding. Those would be the conversations that would happen.
8 So I'd say it's more conversational than guidance when we're
9 talking about bringing in those roles, recognizing that these
10 are volunteers that are largely driven from our riding
11 associations.

12 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So it would be
13 the EDAs, the electoral district associations, that would
14 provide any such guidance, if at all? Is that?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think -- again, they
16 would -- there's a lot of the individuals from the EDAs that
17 would take volunteer roles in our various riding level
18 campaigns.

19 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what about -- so
20 is that true of all of the other areas that I touched on
21 earlier in terms of conduct with foreign officials and
22 diplomats, conduct online, foreign travel. Is that guidance
23 that would come from the EDAs and not from the national
24 party?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, on those things, you
26 know, candidates would bring questions about that through
27 their desk officer, generally, and we would address them on
28 the individual basis.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So there's no
2 kind of upfront training. It's if they come to you with
3 questions, then you provide those answers? Is that right?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** There would be -- there's
5 an onboarding process for new candidates that talk about how
6 we, you know, how we would deal with a social media post, for
7 example, things along those lines. But -- and the
8 expectation of our candidates are that when you are nominated
9 to run in your riding, that's where you should be. so we
10 would talk about travel and things like that along those
11 lines.

12 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So you mentioned Mr.
13 Bailey as being the SITE representative. Is there anyone
14 within the party whose role specifically includes identifying
15 risks of foreign interference vulnerabilities, identifying
16 vulnerabilities, responding to them? Is that within an
17 individual's role or a committee's role?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Not specifically. I
19 think there are a number of individuals or, you know, to your
20 point, committees of national counsel that take part in
21 different ways of maintaining the integrity overall of the
22 processes there in place to oversee, such as the nomination
23 processes.

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And if it came
25 to the party's attention that there was a caucus member of
26 your party that may have -- may be involved in foreign
27 interference activities, what are the options available to
28 the party and what steps could it take in that case?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So from a caucus member
2 standpoint, that's obviously a bit more complicated, and
3 there is a caucus process that exists within the House of
4 Commons and within caucus itself for who is a member of
5 caucus and who is not.

6 From our side, it's about are they a
7 candidate for us? Are they, you know, a member of our
8 candidate group moving forward? We have a number of
9 processes. That would not be specific to anybody that is,
10 you know, simply a current sitting Member of Parliament, but
11 any candidate that's nominated. So just -- there is a
12 separation there, in my view.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Absolutely. So I
14 understand you to say that that would be something that the
15 caucus process the House of Commons would deal with?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They would certainly take
17 the lead ---

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah.

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** --- and then, you know,
20 if an individual is no longer a member of the Conservative
21 Party's national caucus, ---

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** M'hm.

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** --- there are obviously
24 things that we would -- there would be a part for us to play
25 subsequent to that in terms of their candidacy.

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And so if it came to
27 the party's attention that a candidate ---

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** M'hm.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** --- was maybe
2 involved in foreign interference activities, what are the
3 steps that the party can take? What are its options?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I'd start by saying
5 I've never been faced with that. And in any situation along
6 these lines, we do have a number of mechanisms in place, a
7 number of remedies in place, or tools at our disposal, which
8 I can speak about in a second, but a lot of this is going to
9 depend on what our next step is and how we proceed in terms
10 of what is brought to us, how it is brought to us, from who
11 it's brought, the level of detail associated with that.
12 Assuming that we are at a -- you know, that we are at a point
13 where action is warranted, necessary, we have the --
14 obviously, the ability to remove a candidate at any time,
15 that that goes through our National Candidate Selection
16 Committee, which is a committee of National Council, which we
17 would bring -- which we would bring the recommendation to.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And who would bring
19 that recommendation? Would that be you?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, it would be myself
21 or my designate.

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So I wanted to
23 ask how, if at all, the Party's thinking on foreign
24 interference has evolved since the last General Election.
25 Have there been any lessons learned, any thought to what to
26 do in response to some of the allegations that have arisen in
27 light of GEs 43 and 44?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Are there specific

1 allegations that you're speaking about there regarding the
2 Conservative Party?

3 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Just in general the -
4 - I think, as you mentioned, this has now come -- foreign
5 interference is now more at the forefront and I think people
6 are more sensitized to these issues since GE 44 in
7 particular. Has the Party's thinking evolved with respect to
8 foreign interference since then and has it thought about any
9 steps or measures that it might put in place to better
10 protect itself against foreign interference?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think that we are
12 always reviewing the processes that we're responsible for,
13 you know, I think specifically if we're talking here the
14 nomination processes that -- or processes that we are
15 responsible for executing and the number of controls and
16 tools that we have in place to deal with, frankly, any kind
17 of irregularities, of which this could be one. But we're
18 constantly reviewing those tools.

19 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And
20 specifically, we know that in GE 44 there were some
21 allegations raised by MPs in your Party, specifically Kenny
22 Chiu and Erin O'Toole, about allegations of potential foreign
23 interference in their campaigns.

24 So I'm just wondering if the Party has
25 thought about that and has made any adjustments or changes to
26 its process as to how to respond if a candidate were to raise
27 that in the next General Election, for example.

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I'd start by saying

1 I've been there during the last General Election. I'm not
2 entirely clear what or how those concerns were brought, what
3 time -- at what timeframe they were brought during the
4 campaign. What I can say is that any -- again, any issue
5 along these lines would initially come in through the desk
6 officers.

7 At that point in time, depending on what
8 we're looking at, we would engage the different individuals.
9 General counsel would be, I think, a consistent person we
10 would engage throughout this. Our response would be pretty
11 -- would be situational based on that.

12 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. I want to
13 speak now to your electronic infrastructure and cyber
14 security.

15 Can you generally describe the Party's IT
16 infrastructure, what it consists of? I'm thinking of
17 website, there's email accounts, there is likely an internal
18 network, so maybe you can describe that for us.

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Sure. I would preface
20 this by saying I'm not a technical expert, so you'll have to
21 bear with me on the level of technical detail there.

22 But to the question that you've asked there,
23 our infrastructure includes -- our internal infrastructure
24 would include the items that you outlined as well as our
25 central database. We have a sizable and experienced IT team
26 at Party headquarters. Many of the longest-serving members
27 of staff come from that team and they have always been very
28 proficient at their jobs.

1 We are actually working to expand that team
2 at this point. We're in the process of hiring a cyber
3 security expert to oversee any concerns that may arise.

4 Additionally, if there has been a concern in
5 the past in any way, we have engaged outside help, most
6 recently to do a review, make sure that we're doing the right
7 things. IBM's -- I believe their X Force is the name of
8 their specific unit that handles that, and we have engaged
9 them and made some changes whenever that occurs.

10 Within the infrastructure itself, though, we
11 use two-factor authentication for access to our emails,
12 things along those lines.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And who is the
14 infrastructure for, meaning -- it's accessible to Party
15 staff. I imagine they have maybe a portable on the website,
16 they have email addresses, they have access to the database.
17 Is that also the case for candidates? Is that also the case
18 for EDAs? So to what extent does the Party provide that kind
19 of centralized IT infrastructure for candidates, campaign
20 staff, EDAs, Party staff? Maybe you can just speak to that.

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I would say there's three
22 elements that I would address here.

23 So the first would be support, and so the
24 Party to all levels, whether it's our internal requirements
25 or to our campaigns or volunteers, there is a support desk
26 and network to help them with this because they're part of
27 that team that I spoke about earlier.

28 The -- we also have our database, and that

1 has different levels of access. It is something that,
2 through our mobile app, individuals would use to canvass,
3 volunteers would use to canvass. That's very much a -- just
4 an input kind of scenario. Headquarters access would
5 obviously be substantially more -- substantially greater in
6 terms of our ability to access that system.

7 The third -- and within that I should
8 mention, by the way, that we do not provide emails to
9 candidates, email accounts or anything along those lines.
10 They get those.

11 Hardware would be the third item. We provide
12 hardware to Party staff, but not to local campaigns or local
13 riding associations.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And do candidates
15 have access to hardware? Do they have ---

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They do not.

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** No. So you don't
18 issue phones to candidates, for example, or laptops or
19 anything of that nature.

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We do not, no.

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Does anybody
22 else get hardware other than Party staff?

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No.

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Can you
25 generally describe for us the Party's contact, familiarity
26 with, relationship with the Canadian Centre for Cyber
27 Security, CCCS?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So again, reaching back

1 to Mr. Bailey, my understanding is that he maintains contact
2 with that group. The specifics of that, I don't have
3 offhand.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Are you aware
5 whether the Party has reached out to the Cyber Centre for
6 advice or for assistance in any way?

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I'm not aware of that,
8 no.

9 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And what about
10 the Party's contact with the House of Commons IT security?
11 Is there any contact between the House of Commons IT security
12 and the Party?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No. No, the House of
14 Commons is a completely separate entity.

15 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Now, have you
16 made any changes to your IT infrastructure, to your security
17 to just increase the robustness of the system, to increase
18 its -- enhance the system itself since the last General
19 Election? Have there been any changes to ---

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We're getting into -- I'm
21 sure there are a number of things that I won't be able to say
22 off the top of my head because they are things that would
23 happen in the background in just the general ongoing
24 improvement of our systems. And by the way, the vendors that
25 we would access was, for example, payment processors who are
26 always improving these things internally. The implementation
27 of multi-factor authentication, that would be something that
28 would be new since the last election.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And is there
2 any assistance offered to candidates to address any cyber
3 security concerns that they may have? Does the Party assist
4 in that?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think that, as I said,
6 we're developing training. There will be IT components of
7 that training.

8 I have not seen the specific decks yet or
9 things along those lines, but we have -- our support desks
10 are -- on the IT side, again, would route in through the
11 contact that they have, are there to support them in these
12 elements.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And we've
14 talked about Members of Parliament, Party staff, candidates.
15 What about nomination contests, which I understand the Party
16 views as kind of at a different level because they're not yet
17 candidates ; they're just members that have decided they
18 want to seek a nomination. So to what extent does the Party
19 extend any of that assistance that it gives to candidates to
20 nomination contestants?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The first kind of, I
22 would say, formal assistance that we would give in any ways
23 is post-nomination. A nomination candidate will have, to a
24 degree, a relationship with their regional organizer or with
25 the desk officer responsible to help them through the process
26 of becoming a candidate. But beyond any specific training or
27 any guidelines or anything along those lines, that occurs
28 post-nomination.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And what about
2 any kind of guidance or supports for candidates regarding any
3 personal devices or personal accounts they may have? Does
4 the Party provide any assistance with respect to that?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** In terms of what; what
6 kind of device they should have, or...?

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Well, whether they
8 should be, for example, conducting certain business on
9 personal accounts; whether they should be, you know, posting
10 on certain social media sites on a personal account? Is
11 there any kind of guidance with respect to dos and don'ts,
12 best practices, that type of thing?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Once an individual
14 becomes a candidate, there would be a cooperative guidance on
15 social media posts and best practices along those lines. In
16 terms of the physical devices, I don't believe there's any
17 specifics around that.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So is the
19 Party confident that it has the resources and ability to keep
20 its IT infrastructure secure?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I would start by saying
22 that we have no evidence to suggest that our IT
23 infrastructure is not secure; that we invest heavily in both
24 the individuals and the systems that -- and I mean, heavily
25 financially in the individuals and the systems that we have
26 in place to maintain the operation and security of those
27 systems. And, you know, generally speaking, our Party has
28 been on the record for years as saying that it is the job of

1 the Party to finance its own operations. So I believe we
2 have the resources, based on my understanding, to continue to
3 address this.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So on that point, in
5 terms of the resources, would the Party be open to a system
6 by which the Government of Canada provides security and IT
7 infrastructure to all political parties, but that would mean
8 that it would also have access to its information and to its
9 data?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I would say this,
11 historically our Party has said that we should be responsible
12 for our own activities, including financing.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Now, I want to
14 talk a little bit about membership and the requirements for
15 membership. I understand that membership is governed at a
16 federal level, is that right?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is correct.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And this might
19 be the easiest way is to go to the institutional report which
20 lists the requirements for membership. So I'll take you to
21 CPC13.EN. And I believe it's at page 4 of the document, of
22 the PDF, yeah.

23 Okay, if you go down, "Membership
24 eligibility," great. So I just want to see all of those.
25 Perfect, right there.

26 Okay. So we'll kind of take these one by
27 one. So this is the requirements for membership; is that
28 correct?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

2 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And so the first
3 bullet point -- well, first of all, the opening sentence
4 says:

5 "Membership in the Conservative Party
6 of Canada is open to every citizen or
7 permanent resident of Canada who..."
8 (As read)

9 And then it lists five bullets there. So
10 what are the -- so it's citizens and permanent residents are
11 the only individuals that are able to be members; is that
12 correct?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is correct.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And how is
15 that verified at the time of the membership application?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I think there are
17 three parts of -- if you'll allow me just to expand on a
18 bit, ---

19 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Yes.

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** --- that all contribute
21 to a level of verification here. The first is there is a
22 level of honesty that we would expect on a membership
23 application and that they attest to the fact that they are
24 eligible to be a member of the Party under these lines.

25 Additionally to that, the way our Party
26 membership fee is collected, we only accept personal credit
27 cards from a Canadian financial institution, we only accept
28 personal cheques from a Canadian financial institution or

1 personal money orders from a Canadian financial institution.
2 We don't accept cash into the process; we don't accept
3 prepaid credit cards into the process, anything along those
4 lines. And I bring that up here because, you know, that is a
5 part of the verification, the fact you have these Canadian
6 financial instruments to purchase your membership from.

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Sure. And if I can
8 just stop you for a second. When were cash donations or cash
9 membership payments eliminated?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe following 2015.

11 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** okay. And you said
12 you don't accept prepaid credit cards.

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** How are you able to
15 identify whether something is a prepaid credit card versus
16 just a regular credit card?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So this is getting into a
18 technical side that's a bit beyond my technical knowledge,
19 but what I have been informed is that there is a -- through
20 our vendors, through the vendors that handle payment
21 processing both in terms of membership and other financial
22 transactions in the Party, those vendors can identify whether
23 it's a Canadian financial institution, whether it's a prepaid
24 credit card, and can block those transactions from occurring.

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And so maybe
26 I'll ask a few more questions about the payment process in a
27 second, but I just want to go back to these eligibility
28 requirements.

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Sure. I did have a third
2 point on ---

3 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Yes, go ahead.

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** --- eligibility
5 requirements, which is not at time of purchase. I know you
6 mentioned time of purchase, but is -- I think it is important
7 that the system works at the time of purchase, and at the
8 time of exercising the rights of that membership, and those
9 things need to work together, ---

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right.

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** --- where an ID
12 requirement is a fundamental part of that verification. That
13 ID requirement, though, occurs at the time of the exercising
14 your franchise as a member, whether that be in a nomination
15 contest or in another way.

16 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And we'll get
17 to that. I do want to ask you about that as well. So you
18 said that the citizenship and residency requirement is an
19 attestation on the application at this point of membership;
20 correct?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** It's a check box.

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It is.

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And then has
25 attained the minimum age of 14. I think we understand why
26 political parties accept memberships as young as 14. How is
27 that verified?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** How is their age

1 verified?

2 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** That's right.

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Again, I would say that
4 that is -- yeah, the attestation but verified through the ID
5 requirements later on.

6 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. But at the
7 time of purchase, it's attestation; correct?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Exactly.

9 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And then
10 signifies their intention to join the Party. Is that simply
11 by the application itself is signifying their intention?

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And here we
14 have:

15 "Has personally paid the Party's
16 national membership fee in the amount
17 specified by bylaw and in the manner
18 specified by the National Council,
19 which set rules and procedures to
20 provide reasonable assurance that the
21 membership fee was paid by the member
22 personally." (As read)

23 How do you verify that the membership has
24 been paid by the member personally?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The way that we verify
26 that is, frankly, through the mechanisms by which you can
27 acquire your membership. As I mentioned, we are talking a
28 personal credit card from a Canadian financial institution;

1 we're talking personal cheque from a Canadian financial
2 institution; we're talking personal money order from a
3 Canadian financial institution. No avenue such as cash or,
4 you know, you mentioned prepaid credit cards, which do not
5 have that attached to them, are able to be used to acquire a
6 membership in the Party. And that, I think, is an important
7 verification.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right. And so what
9 kind of flags does the system kind of pick up? What are the
10 issues that the system might pick up, based on the
11 information that the applicant provides for membership?

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Do you have anything
13 specific? If you're talking kind of broadly, the system will
14 flag, for example, if the same credit card is used for a
15 number of memberships; that it something that our system
16 flags and we take a look at right away. The system would
17 flag if there is anything strange with IP addresses for how
18 they are getting processed, are the IP addresses not -- not
19 within Canada? Are multiple memberships coming through the
20 same IP address? That might not necessarily be anything --
21 anybody trying to do anything wrong. They've sold
22 memberships on a forum and there -- somebody is uploading
23 them into the system. But it is something the system flags
24 and human eyes are put on to check to see what's going on.

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And so, is the
26 online -- is the application process solely online or do you
27 still have paper applications for membership?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** There's still a paper

1 option. I would say at this point, you know, well into the
2 mid-90 percent of our memberships are purchased online.

3 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So is there -- and
4 the checks that you say for IP addresses and that sort of
5 thing, prepaid credit cards, that's not a manual check,
6 that's an automated flagging. Is that right?

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The -- yes. The prepaid
8 is the automated rejection.

9 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right.

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The IP checks are
11 automated -- are flags, but then would be put forward to
12 somebody to take a look at.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So when a paper
14 application comes in, how do those checks get carried out.
15 It's not an automated process I imagine, because it's not
16 online.

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No. But the credit card
18 information on there again would flag if we have multiple
19 memberships trying to be purchased under the same credit
20 card. Obviously, there's being no ---

21 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Is it possible for
22 someone to buy more than one membership?

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It is. It is possible,
24 for example, with a joint credit card. My wife and I have a
25 joint credit card. If we purchased a membership along those
26 lines.

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Okay. But apart from
28 that, you know, if I decide that I want to buy membership for

1 my three kids that are over 14 and my spouse, is it something
2 that I can do?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** There is a family
4 membership option that is up to six people, as long as they
5 live in the same address.

6 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** And that's the only
7 situation where it's possible to buy multiple ---

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is the only
9 situation.

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- memberships at the
11 same time?

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct. Yes.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what additional
14 information is provided by the applicant? I imagine home
15 address, that type of information?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And you
18 mentioned that there is a lag time -- and maybe this was in
19 your interview summary -- a lag time between when the
20 membership is applied for and when the membership card is
21 issued. What happens in between that time and how long is
22 that time usually?

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** There it varies. But
24 you're talking generally within -- within a few weeks. This
25 frankly gives us time to do the payment processing side of
26 this when you click and send, send it through.

27 There are also several lists that we do have
28 to manually check against, and we periodically do. There are

1 members -- or there are individuals who are not eligible to
2 be members of the party. For example, if they've had their
3 membership revoked due to -- due to some kind of issue. If
4 they go on and try to purchase it again, the system would
5 allow that to a point, but then the -- that's when that
6 verification would occur, we'd run the names against the list
7 of people who are not eligible.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And if someone's home
9 address that they've supplied for their contact information
10 doesn't match, for example, the address associated with the
11 credit card they've purchased the membership with, is that
12 something that would get picked up or flagged?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The address verification
14 from a credit card standpoint is to my understanding limited
15 to postal code. So there'd be some variability in that.
16 Again, I think that that would primarily be addressed at the
17 time of exercising the franchise when you're coming to vote
18 for a nomination.

19 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And so, when issues
20 are flagged, are memberships sometimes not allowed ---

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** --- or they aren't
23 processed?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah. And so, the
25 process for that would be -- and I don't have the exact
26 wording in front of me. But when you submit your membership
27 application it says this is an application to that effect.
28 And occasionally they would receive, for whatever reason that

1 we discussed here, they would receive an email back saying,
2 listen, it's been reviewed and here's the refund of the
3 money, we have not processed the membership.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Thank you. Now what
5 happens if a party learns after a membership has been issued
6 that the membership was purchased under false pretences?

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have -- we have a
8 revocation process to revoke a membership. I would imagine -
9 - or I would say that I haven't seen anything specifically
10 like that before where it was an issue where they were not
11 eligible as a result. But depending on the case there would
12 be different mechanisms. Some of them very automatic, this
13 person was not -- never eligible to be a member of the party
14 due to the fact they've had a membership previously revoked.
15 That doesn't need to go through any process to remove their
16 membership.

17 If it is for example, a conduct issue
18 subsequent to the membership, the party has a member's code
19 of conduct and a process in line with that that could lead to
20 membership revocation.

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Thank you.

22 Now, in terms of party contributions and
23 payments made for contributions, are you looking for the same
24 type of irregularities when people are making donations?
25 What are you looking for there? Are there systems to kind of
26 flag irregularities?

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** From the processing side
28 of contributions, the technical side of that would be very

1 similar. We do not accept -- or we flag donations that come
2 from an IP address that looks -- looks suspicious.
3 Certainly, that doesn't necessarily mean that it is, but the
4 system would flag that. As far as the other elements to it,
5 again, you know, the system automatically would reject
6 prepaid credit cards. The system would -- and those type of
7 elements, they would be very consistent.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. I want to turn
9 now to nomination contests. Does the party view nomination
10 contests generally as vulnerable to foreign interference?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The party puts a lot of
12 effort and has a lot of resources in maintaining the
13 integrity of our nomination process and the systems that
14 we're responsible for putting against any kind of
15 irregularity. This could be one example, although I am not
16 aware of us ever -- of us every having an issue along those
17 lines.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So does -- the
19 party has no reason to believe that any of its nomination
20 contests have been targeted for foreign interference?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have no reason to
22 believe that, no.

23 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Now, who
24 organizes and coordinates the nomination contest? Is it the
25 federal party, or is it the EDAs, or is it a combination?

26 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It's a combination and
27 I'm happy to walk through the process as a whole if that's
28 helpful.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Sure.

2 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** When a nomination is
3 about to take place, and the candidates prior to that may
4 have expressed interest, they may have received their access
5 to the Canada portal, which is our application process. But
6 at the time that a nomination is ready to occur, a closing
7 notice is issued from headquarters.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So before we
9 go there, so you mentioned a portal.

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

11 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So at what point does
12 that become accessible to a candidate?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** At any point. Usually
14 the process would be this, is that an individual would
15 request, I'm interested in being a candidate. They would
16 have a conversation with maybe their local candidate
17 nomination committee, which is a committee of the riding
18 association, maybe a conversation more likely with the
19 regional organizer, or the desk officer responsible for that
20 reason at party headquarters.

21 Subsequent to that initial conversation, an
22 access to their specific candidate portal would be granted.
23 And this is a tool that has a number of elements attached to
24 it. A very extensive questionnaire, a bunch of background
25 checks they need to -- they need to approve. A bunch of
26 authorizations for us to contact the CRA for example, or
27 anything along those lines. Access to their social media
28 accounts, and the archives. A whole variety of things. It

1 takes quite a bit of time for people to go through this.
2 It'd also have the good conduct bond of \$1,000 and the 25
3 signatures of members of the riding.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So I can actually
5 take you to the requirements.

6 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Sure.

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** It's in the
8 institutional report at CPC12. And it's at pages 16 --
9 starting at 16, I believe. Oh, these are the -- yeah, sorry,
10 CPC13. My apologies. Yeah, and if we can go to page 16?
11 Okay, if we can go down? Okay.

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So if we can keep
14 going down where it says "A nomination contestant means an
15 applicant who", and so -- oh, yeah. Keep going down,
16 actually, because it's 16 of the document and not of the PDF.

17 Application. Yeah, there it is.

18 So starting from page 16 of the institutional
19 report, we have a list of the documents that the applicant,
20 the to-be contestant, has to complete and fill out. And
21 we'll keep going to page 17 because, as you mentioned, the
22 list is quite extensive as to what the candidate -- or the
23 contestant needs to provide. And including there, we can see
24 the questionnaire, certificate of conduct, criminal record
25 check, credit check, confidentiality agreement, declaration.

26 Keep going down, please.

27 Completed forms authorizing the Canada
28 Revenue Agency, the Canada Border Service Agency, Citizenship

1 Canada.

2 And so if we can keep going, the requirements
3 continue on to page 18.

4 So as you say, it is quite a long list of
5 documents that the applicant has to provide to be a
6 nomination contestant. Is that right?

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is correct, yes.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And how long does a
9 member have to be a member in order to apply to be a
10 nomination contestant?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Six months.

12 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And are any of
13 these questions in the questionnaire or any of the documents
14 that the applicant provides looking specifically for flags or
15 irregularities relating to foreign interference?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think there are many
17 here that, if there was an issue along those lines, would be
18 relevant, although it's not specifically and only for that
19 purpose.

20 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Are there any in
21 particular that you can think of that might assist in
22 determining whether there are any concerns along the -- along
23 those lines of foreign interference?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Specifically, you know,
25 we would take a look at, really, a lot of this, but you know,
26 the actual questionnaire itself, I think, is important. You
27 deal with work histories, you deal with organizations that
28 individuals might be involved with, you might have

1 volunteered with.

2 You know, some of these authorization forms,
3 I suppose, could be along those lines as well, though I
4 haven't seen anything to that effect that's been used in this
5 way.

6 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Okay. So the
7 application is not necessarily looking to flag for those
8 specific issues.

9 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: It's looking to flag for
10 a number of things.

11 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Right. And so you
12 mentioned that a closing notice is issued at some point, and
13 maybe just kind of take us through the process after that
14 closing notice is issued.

15 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: So a closing notice
16 issued. From that moment on, any individual has 14 days to
17 finish and complete and submit their application.

18 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And how long do they
19 have to continue signing up new members?

20 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Forty-eight (48) hours
21 post-closing notice.

22 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Okay. And you
23 mentioned at the beginning of your testimony this morning
24 that every applicant gets an interview.

25 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

26 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: So maybe explain a
27 little bit the interview process, what are you looking for?
28 What's the purpose of the interview?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So the application itself
2 is just the beginning of that, and it's telling us where to
3 point, where there might be additional questions that need to
4 be asked. An interview would be part of this process post-
5 closing notice. That interview would be conducted by the
6 local candidate nomination committee, which is comprised of
7 both members of the Board of Directors of that riding
8 association, but also some members at large of the
9 association, and a -- well, myself or my designate has a
10 position on each one of those candidate nomination
11 committees. The designate would almost exclusively be the
12 regional organizer in the area, would be part of that.

13 They would interview and ask questions, and
14 then provide a recommendation to the National Candidate
15 Selection Committee, which is a committee of National
16 Council.

17 The National Candidate Selection Committee
18 would look at that recommendation. That recommendation would
19 be whether to allow this candidate to proceed or not in the
20 process. And National -- NCSC would either affirm or
21 overturn that recommendation, at which time, assuming that it
22 is affirmed, the individual is a candidate, they would be
23 issued a membership list and be placed on our ballot for when
24 the nomination occurs, which would be within 47 days.

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And when
26 they're given the membership list, are they able to raise any
27 concerns with respect to that list?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** With the initial list,

1 absolutely, throughout the process. I think one of the main
2 reasons why -- and it would not be the only list they are
3 given. They'd be given a final list closer to the date, as
4 there is -- you mentioned there is a lag in terms of
5 processing time between those last few memberships that would
6 come in as a part of that and when -- and when the nomination
7 would occur.

8 But throughout that process, there would be
9 opportunities for a candidate to take a look at that list
10 and, generally speaking, say, you know, "I know that these
11 individuals signed up, but I don't see them on the list. Can
12 we please check into why they wouldn't appear?". That would
13 be the kind of thing that we would get.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And speaking
15 now to the voting process, so the nomination meeting, now, I
16 understand that nomination contests are held in person. Is
17 that right?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That's correct. There is
19 the ability for us to alter that a bit, which there's one
20 example we've done in the cycle, but we almost exclusively
21 hold them in person. And the one -- or was in person. The
22 one example was still in person. It just had an additional
23 mail-in element to it due to the fact of the geography of the
24 Northwest Territories.

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. But they've
26 never been held online.

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They've never been held
28 online.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And proxy
2 voting, I understand, is not allowed. Is that right?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is correct.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And now, walk us
5 through when a member arrives at the meeting, the types of
6 checks -- and you had mentioned this earlier in your evidence
7 -- the types of checks that are done at the -- when they
8 arrive at the door.

9 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So an individual would
10 arrive at the door. There would be a series of tables,
11 depending on the size of the membership, membership lists
12 broken up by last name, generally speaking. And those tables
13 would be staffed by volunteers and scrutinized by scrutineers
14 for the candidates.

15 An individual -- they would have their part
16 of the membership list, however it was broken up. Individual
17 would come and present their identification and the ---

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** What kind of
19 identification, sorry, is required?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They would need to prove
21 both that they are -- you know, the name matches the
22 individual and that the address matches the information in
23 our system, so that could be a driver's licence which would
24 have both. It could be a passport, another piece of
25 identification that verified name and address.

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And photo ID to
27 verify that the person is ---

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct, yes.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** --- the person.

2 Okay.

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Two things could occur at
4 that point, you know. Either all the information lines up
5 perfectly, at which case they are struck from the list, a
6 ballot is issued, they would vote and move forward. There
7 could also be where the information does not line up, right.

8 Sometimes individuals who are known by a
9 name, you know, known by -- maybe I go by my middle name, and
10 that's what I wrote down in my membership application and my
11 identification says something differently. That would be an
12 example of something that would be sent to the credentials
13 desk to verify.

14 Maybe I'm not on the list, in which case that
15 individual would go to the credentials desk to try and -- to
16 determine -- you know, to find the record of their membership
17 and go through there.

18 The credentials desk would go through a
19 process to attempt to verify the information. If it can't be
20 verified, the individual wouldn't be allowed to vote.

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And so if a
22 member signs up and provides a certain contact information
23 address and that address doesn't match the photo ID that
24 they're presenting, is that something that would get flagged
25 and how would that be dealt with?

26 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That would be something
27 that would get flagged by the individuals at the desk, the
28 volunteers at the desk, I imagine also by the scrutineers

1 that were looking over it. That individual would go to
2 credentials, and assuming the situation that you just
3 described where they -- the ID they have doesn't match the
4 address requirement or the address that is in our system, the
5 returning officer would make a ruling on whether they could
6 vote or not. But that would seem to be pretty clear-cut that
7 they could not.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And what are
9 the mechanisms to raise issues or contest the nomination
10 meeting as it's happening? So if somebody sees something
11 that they're concerned about or something happens that
12 somebody is concerned about, what are the mechanisms in place
13 there to address that?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So part of my role is to
15 appoint the returning officer for every nomination meeting.
16 There's no specific criteria around that, although I would
17 say that in practice I have only appointed Party staff who
18 are experienced in these matters. And those concerns which
19 we raise through the candidate's team -- nomination
20 candidate's team there, would go to the returning officer.
21 They are the individual that would make that decision on the
22 ground during the nomination.

23 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what are some
24 options? What would be done if there was a concern about the
25 fairness of the contest or any other issue that might bring
26 into question the -- whether or not it's -- the contest is
27 otherwise fair or is being done properly?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That's -- there's not a

1 lot to go on with that. I think it would be very
2 situational, depending on the specifics. If it was an
3 example, an individual comes and says, you know, you're not
4 allowed to campaign for this nomination on the site of the
5 voting location, that would obviously be dealt with some way.
6 Sometimes, you know, the parking lot is too crowded. That'd
7 be dealt another way. Those are the kind of issues that we
8 would deal with there.

9 In terms of any kind of membership concerns,
10 the rules are pretty -- they're pretty structured in this,
11 right. There's a certain ID requirement. That ID
12 requirement needs to be met.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what are the
14 mechanisms to raise issues about a nomination contest after
15 the nomination contest has concluded?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So there is an appeal
17 process. Within five days, the candidate that wishes to
18 appeal has to provide in writing to myself and the NCSC that
19 they wish to appeal the nomination. They would have to state
20 the grounds by which they are challenging the nomination, and
21 at that point in time, we would take a look and, depending on
22 the scenario, engage who we need to engage to conduct the
23 investigation.

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** If a nomination
25 contestant, prior to the nomination meeting taking place,
26 raises concerns that they're being targeted for foreign
27 interference, that there's foreign interference with respect
28 to their campaign, what are the -- does the Party have any

1 mechanisms in place to deal with that, to investigate it?
2 How would the Party deal with that situation?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Well, I've never had, at
4 this point, a situation where a candidate for -- an approved
5 candidate for nomination has come forward and said this is
6 the case.

7 Our mechanisms are very much a robust, are
8 much designed that there has to be somebody that we can
9 assign the responsibility to, and so by that, I mean another
10 nomination contestant or members in the Party. Those are the
11 kind of areas where we would have a process in place to
12 sanction or to act inside the process.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right. So if it's
14 coming from the outside, a foreign actor, the Party doesn't
15 have the capacity to investigate that type of thing.

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No. Whether we -- and I
17 doubt we could even tell if it was foreign or domestic.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right. And so what
19 would the Party -- would the Party take any steps in that
20 situation?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Our nomination process is
22 determined on people coming -- you know, members coming to
23 exercise to vote. As I said, not having been faced with that
24 situation at this point, I don't have the specifics on how we
25 would proceed. But as I mentioned, the processes we have in
26 place are really designed to create fairness between the
27 candidates.

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Can you just tell me for

1 how long do you have to be a Party member before being
2 allowed to vote in a nomination contest?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** You need to be a member
4 within 48 hours of the membership cutoff for the nomination.
5 So if I were to issue a closing notice today, you'd have to
6 be a member no later than this time on Sunday.

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And then typically,
8 how long after the closing notice is the nomination contest
9 held?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It varies, but I would
11 say generally we are looking at a few weeks to a month, in
12 that timeframe.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So I guess the
14 answer to the question would be, it would typically -- you
15 would be a member, at a minimum, for a few weeks to a month -
16 --

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** --- before you're
19 eligible to vote in a nomination contest.

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, sorry. That's what
21 you were -- absolutely.

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Very briefly touching
23 on leadership contests, is the Party aware of allegations
24 that the CPC leadership races were targeted for FI attempts
25 in the last two leadership contests? And these are
26 allegations.

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I was not the Executive
28 Director or a Party employee for the time for either of the

1 leadership races that you've spoken about there, so I don't
2 have any specific information beyond the two, I think, very
3 brief paragraphs in the NSICOP report that touched on it.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And does the Party
5 have any information regarding that?

6 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No. No one has, to my
7 knowledge, ever approached us with any kind of detail around
8 these allegations. As I said, the only time that I have seen
9 any reference to them is in that report.

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Thank you.
11 To touch very briefly on electoral district
12 associations, does the Party have any information about
13 alleged attempts to control a federal EDA Board?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, we do not.

15 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Are you aware
16 of any vulnerabilities within your Party system that could
17 make that possible?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Do you have any examples?

19 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Well, I'm asking you.
20 Yeah.

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have a number of
22 controls in place that are designed, again, for any of these
23 circumstances. They are retroactive in nature. We can -- a
24 Board can remove a member of their own Board for misconduct.
25 National Council has the ability to remove a Board as a whole
26 and hold a new meeting to elect a new Board.

27 We have the ability to deregister a riding if
28 it comes to that. We have the Members' Code of Conduct that

1 members can use and access or -- it can come from a number of
2 sources, but members can use and access for any of these kind
3 of concerns.

4 Those are the kind of controls we would have
5 in place.

6 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Thank you.

7 Turning now to mis and disinformation and the
8 media ecosystem, do you agree that mis and disinformation can
9 be a vehicle for foreign interference?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Having not seen anything
11 specific to that in regards to us, I would say, listening to
12 this, that absolutely, I think it could be, sure.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Well, we heard from
14 Member of Parliament Michael Chong ---

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah.

16 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** --- earlier this week
17 that he was the target of what appeared to be a foreign-
18 directed disinformation campaign against him last year, so
19 that would be an example of ---

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Has the Party seen
22 instances of this beyond the example I just gave in any of
23 its campaigns? And that was not in the context of a
24 campaign, my example, but has the Party seen instances of mis
25 or disinformation in its campaigns either during the General
26 Elections or nomination contests, or by-elections, for that
27 matter?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So again, I've not been -

1 - I was not Executive Director during the last General
2 Election. I cannot think of an example of one of our
3 candidates for nomination that is contesting a nomination or
4 a by-election where we've been flagged on specific online
5 foreign interference issues.

6 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Does the Party
7 maintain a TikTok account?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We do not, no.

9 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Why is that? Is
10 there a specific reason, or...?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That decision was made
12 quite some time ago. I think it's just not a -- you know,
13 there's clearly some concerns around TikTok, is my
14 understanding. I'm not an expert on these things, but it's
15 just not a tool that we use and I think there are some pretty
16 documented reasons why that might be a good idea not to.

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** But the Party is on
18 other social media platforms, including X and Facebook and
19 LinkedIn, for example, those platforms?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We're on X, for sure.
21 Yes, absolutely. And Facebook for sure.

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So you mentioned the
23 Party's Code of Conduct. Does the Code of Conduct or
24 anything else include any guidelines for candidates in terms
25 of spreading or amplifying suspected or confirmed
26 misinformation, disinformation, anything along those lines
27 for candidates?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think specifically on

1 the spreading, I can't think of that off the top of my head
2 that it would beyond the fact that that -- the general
3 harassment and elements in the code would be broad enough to
4 cover that, I believe.

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right. Would the
6 Party consider adding something to that effect into its Code
7 of Conduct for members?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That would be a question
9 I think National Council would have to consider.

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Now, the NDP in its
11 evidence yesterday through its Executive Director suggested
12 an independent social media watchdog to regulate social media
13 algorithms. Do you have any views on that recommendation?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I -- that would not be an
15 idea certainly that I would have come here with. I think
16 anything around those lines is certainly something that
17 Parliament needs to be involved in, not us. But I would say
18 that I -- that on a personal level, I don't have any concerns
19 about the restriction of free speech, a fundamental freedom.

20 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** On the topic of
21 recommendations, is the Party open to regulation by the
22 Elections Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Canada
23 Elections, of nomination contest and/or leadership contests?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** This is a question that I
25 think you would see from my interview summary that is not
26 mine to answer. I think, first off, it's very vague in terms
27 of what exactly we're talking about here, and there are a
28 number of folks from our side -- I imagine all parties would

1 have to take a look to see what those recommendations were.
2 Generally speaking, we feel very confident in the systems
3 that we have in place, both for nominations and leaderships.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And would the
5 Party be open to something akin to the Panel of Five, which
6 is -- I'm sure you're familiar with the term, operating
7 during by-elections or leadership contests?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think as I said, the
9 Party is very comfortable with the systems we have in place
10 to administer our own leaderships.

11 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Does the Party
12 have any other recommendations for the Commission as it
13 relates to foreign interference?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think that would --
15 that wouldn't be something I would talk about. Now I know we
16 have standing here, and I think there is a time where counsel
17 will have the opportunity for that.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Yes, and I'm sure
19 you're referring to the policy phase?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Thank you very much.
22 Any other parting thoughts or anything else that we haven't
23 talked about that you would like the Commission to know?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, I've closed, and I
25 think I've said this, but that we take the integrity of the
26 processes that we are tasked with running very seriously.
27 We're constantly attempting to improve, and you've pointed
28 out, for example, the elimination of cash as a ability to

1 purchase a membership post 2015. Those are the kind of
2 things we're always looking to do to tighten up our
3 processes, but we're very confident in them and have no
4 reason to think otherwise.

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Thank you.

6 Commissioner, those are my questions. Thank
7 you very much.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you. So we'll
9 break for 20 minutes, so be back at 11:10.

10 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

11 The sitting of the Commission is now in
12 recess until 11:10 a.m.

13 --- Upon recessing at 10:50 a.m.

14 --- Upon resuming at 11:13 a.m.

15 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

16 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
17 Commission is now back in session.

18 The time is 11:13 a.m.

19 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So first one is the
20 counsel for Concern Group.

21 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. DAVID WHEATON:**

22 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** Good morning.

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Good morning.

24 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** My name is Dave Wheaton.
25 I'm counsel for the Chinese Canadian Concern Group.

26 In terms of electronic infrastructure, you
27 mentioned a sizeable and experienced IT team and consulting
28 with outside entities as being among some of the supports

1 that the Conservative Party has. What sources of funding
2 does the party rely on to implement and maintain this level
3 of infrastructure?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The only sources of
5 funding for the party would be our donations from our donors.

6 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** And so therefore any
7 additional procedures or preventative measures, such as, for
8 example, greater ID verification or systems for detecting
9 online disinformation would be funded entirely with
10 contributions and membership fees?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, not membership fees.

12 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** Oh, sorry.

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Donations to the party.

14 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** But that's right, with
15 the deletion of membership fees?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Sorry, excuse me?

17 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** I'll repeat my question.
18 Therefore, any procedures for preventative measures, ---

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** M'hm.

20 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** --- such as greater ID
21 verification or systems for detecting online disinformation
22 would be funded with donations?

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They would be funded
24 through the party's budget, and the party's budget is funded
25 through donations.

26 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** Do you think that could
27 put smaller parties at a disadvantage in terms of cyber
28 security?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have no information, no
2 knowledge how the infrastructure of any other party big or
3 small works. I can only speak for ours, that we are
4 fortunate to be supported by, you know, last year over 52,000
5 donors and we're able to provide that infrastructure.

6 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** Okay. Thank you. I have
7 no further questions. Thank you.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

9 Counsel for Jenny Kwan.

10 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MS. MANI KAKKAR:**

11 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Goodmorning. I'm Mani
12 Kakkar, counsel for Jenny Kwan.

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Good morning.

14 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** Good morning. I have a few
15 questions, a few themes that I'd like to cover with my
16 questioning today. The first is with respect to TikTok. In
17 your testimony, you mentioned that the Conservative Party
18 does not have a TikTok account. Does it have policies for
19 its candidates or for those that are running in nomination
20 races?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So for anyone running a
22 nomination race, as I specified before, we don't provide that
23 level of oversight until the nomination is complete. As in
24 terms for candidates, I am unaware of any candidate that has
25 a TikTok account.

26 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** Okay. But it's not
27 prohibited by the party?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have an onboarding

1 process, of which our communications director works with the
2 candidates. I think appropriate social media, kind of,
3 guidelines are part of that conversation. I haven't been
4 part of that direct conversation.

5 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** Okay. No, I appreciate
6 that, but do you know if the guidelines have a specific
7 prohibition or any rules particular to TikTok?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I haven't seen anything
9 that says specifically, "No TikTok," but I don't believe any
10 of our candidates have TikTok.

11 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** Thank you. I appreciate
12 that. Moving to a different question, you had talked in
13 detail about your verification processes with respect to
14 credit cards and payment methods, that you try to use payment
15 methods that allow you to essentially verify the identity of
16 the person that is applying to be a member of the party. And
17 while I appreciate that isn't necessarily something you've
18 done to target FI in particular, but I wanted to put to you
19 CAN.3769, 37690.

20 And on page 2, paragraph 6, and just to
21 preface my question, I'm not suggesting that you needed to
22 know this or have this in place, but it does indicate in this
23 paragraph around nomination processes half way down that
24 oftentimes members and membership fees might be paid by the
25 individual, so by their own credit card, but are actually
26 reimbursed by a hostile state.

27 And I just wanted to confirm with you that
28 your current methods of payment and verification wouldn't

1 capture someone in this situation?

2 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: You are correct. We have
3 no evidence to suggest this has occurred.

4 MR. MANI KAKKAR: And right now you wouldn't
5 have the tools to identify that either?

6 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: We have not seen any
7 evidence to suggest this has occurred.

8 MR. MANI KAKKAR: And would you agree with me
9 that as a political party, it may be difficult for you to
10 implement these tools, that you may need to work with
11 government agencies to effectively identify or take steps in
12 situations like this?

13 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I think any ideas like
14 that, we'd have input at the policy phase of these
15 proceedings. That's -- you know, that's a pretty vague and
16 broad term about what that would look like, so I don't have
17 anything to add to that.

18 MR. MANI KAKKAR: Okay. And just to follow
19 up briefly, can you think of any tools that you could
20 implement or that you have now that could help you deal with
21 a situation like this where membership fees paid by an
22 individual but they're reimbursed by a potential FI actor?

23 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I think that, frankly,
24 the fact that we don't have bulk membership purchases beyond
25 the family membership form that we spoke about earlier makes
26 the situation that you're providing quite -- you know, quite
27 a challenge to operationalize. People need to pay
28 individually with these methods. These methods need to be

1 attached to those individuals. And, you know, we are a very
2 large party. We currently have hundreds of thousands of
3 members of our party. This is -- that's a -- that in and of
4 itself is, I think, a difficult thing for someone to
5 influence.

6 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** I appreciate that, but I
7 think what you've said to me is that it's maybe difficult to
8 influence, but right now, you don't have the ability to
9 identify this sort of situation or to take steps?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No. We have not seen any
11 evidence to suggest that's happened.

12 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** I appreciate your
13 testimony. Moving to my final theme and set of questions,
14 I'd like to take you to your interview summary, which if you
15 have it with you is absolutely fine. If you need me to pull
16 it up on the screen, I'm happy to ask that WIT101 be pulled
17 up.

18 And down to paragraph 51. And actually, if
19 we could just scroll down to paragraph 52?

20 Here it says that you became aware of
21 allegations of potential FI affecting Mr. Shahrooz. I wanted
22 to ask if you took any proactive steps or if any of the
23 members of your team took any proactive steps either, one, to
24 reach out to Mr. Shahrooz?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Mr. Shahrooz was not, at
26 this point, seeking a nomination for the party or a candidate
27 for the party.

28 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Are you saying that he

1 wasn't -- he had not made his intentions clear to seek a
2 nomination or that he hadn't completed and given you a
3 nomination package?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** He never filed a
5 nomination package with the party.

6 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** And did you know that he
7 intended to do so?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I know that he had stated
9 that he intended to run. I don't know at which point he got
10 in that process.

11 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Okay. But you were aware
12 that he intended to run and provide you with a nomination
13 package, assuming if he ran, that he would need to do so?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, I -- from reading
15 what he has posted, I don't follow the individual accounts of
16 everybody that's seeking a nomination for us. We have
17 hundreds and hundreds at this time that are seeking
18 nomination in our seats, and so I wouldn't have followed it,
19 certainly, on a day-to-day basis by any stretch.

20 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** And by no means am I
21 suggesting that you need to do that, but in this particular
22 case, it seems you are aware that, one, he intended to run,
23 and two, that he was alleging that there was some potential
24 foreign interference, because it says that you were aware
25 once it became -- made publicly available on Twitter or X.

26 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I was aware of his
27 statements after -- which I believe the statements were
28 connected with his decision not to seek the nomination after

1 the fact. That is the first I had heard of the particular
2 comments he made.

3 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Did you have any
4 discussions with Mr. Shahrooz about the alleged interference
5 he was suggesting occurred?

6 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I've never spoken with
7 Mr. Shahrooz.

8 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Did you have any
9 discussions within your team specifically, not just limited
10 to, but Mr. Bailey, who's your SITE Task Force
11 representative?

12 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No.

13 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Do you think it would have
14 been appropriate to do so even though Mr. Shahrooz ultimately
15 did not seek nomination, or seek to run in the nomination
16 rights?

17 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Again, at that point in
18 time, he's no longer part of the process seeking a
19 nomination. We wouldn't engage at that point.

20 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Would it be possible that
21 interference could occur at the point of prior to the
22 nomination process, preventing people from running in a
23 nomination race for your party, and that is your position
24 that you should or should not have a role in determining if
25 that's happened or a role in taking proactive steps if it
26 has?

27 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Well, the systems that we
28 have in place from a proactive perspective is our ability to

1 oversee the process in terms of the other candidates running,
2 other members in play. I'm not sure how we would engage with
3 comments positively or negatively online about a particular
4 candidate. My understanding subsequently of this one is Mr.
5 Shahrooz is critical of the Iranian regime, and there was
6 some conversation that that would lead to a disallowance as a
7 candidate. I have no reason to believe Mr. Shahrooz would
8 have been disallowed as a candidate.

9 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** I apologize. Could you
10 just repeat? You understand that Mr. Shahrooz was
11 complaining about the foreign interference and that that
12 would disallow him to be a candidate? Could you ---

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That was my ---

14 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** --- just clarify that ---

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** --- understanding, yes.
16 Post his withdrawal. And so I have no reason to believe had
17 Mr. Shahrooz not submitted a package he would have been
18 permitted to contest the nomination.

19 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Okay. And where did you --
20 how did you find this out, this piece of information?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** This piece of
22 information? That I believe is in his -- was in his
23 comments, so I don't have those comments in front of me.

24 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** I appreciate that. So
25 perhaps taking a minute here, I just want to understand the
26 Conservative Party's position on if, whether it's Mr.
27 Shahrooz or someone else in the future, there is allegations
28 of foreign interference prior to someone filling out a

1 nomination package that may prevent them from actually
2 running in the race, what is your party's position on your
3 involvement, what it might be, or should be?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We haven't faced that
5 yet. I think that had that -- those kinds of scenarios been
6 brought to our attention, we would have the conversation with
7 the departments, with political operations, with our general
8 counsel to see what those particular circumstance is. I --
9 beyond that, I can't really say.

10 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** And so you think you should
11 be having those conversations more proactively so that
12 systems are in place prior to the next election or any sort
13 of by-election that may occur?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think, as I said, once
15 we have a series of controls, once a candidate is in the
16 process and has filed their papers, it's challenging when
17 we're talking about people who are, to various levels, just
18 speaking about being -- filing those papers or contesting a
19 nomination.

20 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** So then maybe shifting
21 focus, let's assume that Mr. Shahrooz had filed his papers
22 and was seeking nomination, and he then indicated -- you
23 noted -- I think you note in paragraph 54 that he did speak
24 to members of your operations team about this, but let's say
25 that he had filed and was running in the nomination race. If
26 he felt that there were potential concerns of FI, who would
27 he speak to? Would it be the same political operations team?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It would be the political

1 operations, although we'd likely engage different
2 departments, depending on what the circumstance was.

3 MS. MANI KAKKAR: And does the Conservative
4 Party currently provide members of its political operations
5 team with any sort of training or information around foreign
6 interference?

7 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No.

8 MS. MANI KAKKAR: So how would they be able
9 to detect or maybe understand what steps they need to take
10 next in a case where some of the facts might suggest foreign
11 interference or someone who's alleging that they've been
12 interfered with?

13 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Well, I think that's why
14 it would be a broader conversation that would include general
15 counsel.

16 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Okay. In this particular
17 case, even though I understand that he did not ultimately run
18 in the nomination contest, did, at any point, you or Mr.
19 Bailey raise potentially sharing this information with CSIS,
20 or any of your partners on the SITE Task Force, or anyone
21 else that you're -- that you speak to in the government that
22 is specifically assisting with foreign interference?

23 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No, the only information
24 that I have on this was Mr. Shahrooz's comments post his
25 withdrawal from the process.

26 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Okay.

27 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Ms. Kakkar, your time is
28 exhausted, so I will ask you to ask your ---

1 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Last question.

2 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- question.

3 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Which is well timed. Thank
4 you.

5 I think just in -- as a final point, what
6 steps, if any, do you anticipate taking as a party, so that
7 when it comes to the next general election or the next by-
8 election you're in a position to have candidates nomination
9 contestants, those running in nomination contests, approach
10 your organization about potential FI and what steps you would
11 then take?

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Our candidates for
13 whether they've completed and are part of the nomination
14 process, completed their package and are part of the formal
15 process, or our candidates that are nominated have a point of
16 contact with any concerns, not just specific to this. When
17 those concerns are brought forward, as I mentioned earlier,
18 they are triaged out. A lot of circumstances are unique and
19 different, and we handle them as they come.

20 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** And I will seek leave of
21 the Commissioner. May I ask one small follow-up question?

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes.

23 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Thank you.

24 So are you suggesting that you wouldn't have
25 a specific process in place for FI, that it would just be
26 housed within the general processes you already have
27 available?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I would say that the

1 processes we have available are designed to maintain the
2 integrity of our process that we oversee. I think foreign
3 interference is captured largely in that. But as new
4 situations arise, we're -- like, we're flexible in how we --
5 in how we're going to deal with things, and we have the
6 resources available to us to do that.

7 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Thank you for your
8 testimony.

9 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Mr. Singh, counsel for
10 the Sikh Coalition.

11 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. PRABJOT SINGH:**

12 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Good morning,
13 Commissioner, Mr. Crase. My name is Prabjot Singh. I'm
14 appearing as legal counsel for the Sikh Coalition.

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Good morning.

16 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** So in speaking with
17 Commission counsel, you mention that you began your role with
18 the Conservative Party in November of 2022, after the
19 leadership race had already been completed. Do you recall
20 when you first learned about concerns or allegations that the
21 Government of India engaged in some kind of foreign
22 interference activity targeting the Conservative leadership
23 race?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I can't say specifically
25 a date. The only instances that -- the only knowledge I know
26 of those allegations I think came in the NSICOP report or in
27 any kind of a media that was driven from that. Those
28 comments all were without context though.

1 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Was your attention ever
2 drawn to a story published on this topic by Sam Cooper in
3 about December 2023?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Not -- I can't recall
5 specifically of the time, no.

6 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Mr. Operator, if we can
7 bring up TSC 13?

8 **--- EXHIBIT NO. TSC0000013:**

9 Indian proxies funding Canadian
10 politicians "at all levels of
11 government": CSIS Report

12 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** And if we can just scroll
13 down a few paragraphs after the subheading "gatekeepers"?
14 All right, just a little bit lower. Further down. Right
15 there. Yeah, right there.

16 And so I do note that this is an unverified
17 media report, so I'm not asking you to comment on the
18 veracity, but Mr. Cooper reports reviewing an October 2022
19 CSIS Intelligence Assessment that talks about an Indian proxy
20 securing party memberships, that the Indian Consulate in
21 Canada informed a different leadership candidate who was
22 running for leadership at the same time that he cannot attend
23 any Indian community events or events hosted by the
24 Consulate. And the assessment goes on saying that this
25 leadership candidate had previously taken a policy position
26 contrary to India's interests, which is why India tried to
27 hinder his campaign in the diaspora.

28 Do you recall any of these claims being made

1 publicly at any time?

2 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No, I don't recall.

3 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: Madam Commissioner, with
4 your leave, I'd like to bring up a document from the Party
5 database. It's -- I believe it's already been made an
6 exhibit. Again, I'm not asking Mr. Crase to comment on the
7 veracity, just to see if that information was conveyed to him
8 or if it's familiar.

9 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Just can you tell -- can
10 you say which document you ---

11 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: Sure.

12 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: --- want to refer to?

13 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: It's CAN 4985. I did let
14 Mr. Sheppard know this morning and my friend as well that I
15 would seek leave to ---

16 --- EXHIBIT NO. CAN004985:

17 Foreign Interference and Elections: A
18 National Security Assessment - CSIS
19 IA 2022-23/57

20 MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON: Has Mr. Crase been --
21 has he seen the document?

22 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: I'm not sure if he's had
23 a chance to see it. I did let my friend know.

24 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Okay. Let's put up the
25 document.

26 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: And if we just scroll
27 down to page 6?

28 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: If he's not in a

1 position to comment ---

2 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: Sure.

3 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: --- he will let you
4 know.

5 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: Yeah, of course.

6 So, Mr. Crase, this is an intelligence
7 assessment from CSIS. And if we -- page -- if you scroll up.
8 Right there, right there.

9 So Mr. Crase, it's heavily redacted, but the
10 document states that the Government of India has engaged in
11 foreign interference activities related to the leadership
12 race for a political Party in Canada, and it goes on to say
13 that this example serves to highlight the degree of influence
14 some foreign states can have over diaspora communities.

15 Again, I'm not asking you to comment on the
16 veracity, but was this information ever conveyed to yourself
17 or to the Conservative Party with regards to the leadership
18 race?

19 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: So I have not seen this
20 document. As for -- in regards to was it conveyed during the
21 leadership race, I wouldn't know.

22 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: At any point in time, had
23 you had a conversation with Trevor Bailey, who was appointed
24 as the Conservate SITE representative, about whether security
25 or intelligence agencies communicated concerns about the
26 leadership race?

27 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I do not recall any
28 conversation that highlighted that, no.

1 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** So even after the NSICOP
2 report talked about potential interference in the leadership
3 race, it wasn't a conversation that was had internally within
4 the Conservative Party.

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No.

6 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Would you agree that any
7 information that, you know, substantiates these concerns or
8 allegations should be made public in the interests of
9 transparency and security? Is that a recommendation that you
10 would make?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think the
12 recommendation phase of this in terms of any kind of policy
13 on that I think is a different section.

14 From our standpoint, the -- you know, broadly
15 speaking, whether it's this document, whether it's the NSICOP
16 report, whether it's the article that you highlighted all
17 speak very high level and vaguely about an allegation, but
18 there's no meat around that. There's no -- there's nothing
19 beyond the literal one sentence themselves, which is -- you
20 know, seems essentially the same in both documents.

21 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Madam Commissioner, my
22 time's up. I have one last question, if that's okay.

23 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes.

24 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** So just given the gravity
25 of the threat and the fact that the leadership race of a
26 political Party in Canada may have been targeted for foreign
27 interference and we're talking about an individual who
28 becomes an eligible candidate to become the Prime Minister of

1 Canada, so given the nature of the allegations, the fact that
2 they were made very publicly, has the Conservative Party
3 carried out any internal investigation or informal
4 discussions about this threat activity?

5 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: About the threat -- like
6 specifically?

7 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: About the threat
8 activity, about the vulnerability, about actions that could
9 be taken by the Party.

10 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: We're confident in our
11 process and the hundreds of thousands of people that voted to
12 elect our leader.

13 MR. PRABJOT SINGH: Thank you. Those are all
14 my questions.

15 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Thank you.
16 So I don't know if it's Me Lafrance or Nirman
17 for the OCCE?

18 Me Lafrance?

19 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:**

20 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: Good morning, Mr.
21 Crase.

22 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Good morning.

23 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: Sébastien Lafrance
24 for the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

25 Just a few clarification questions, if I may.

26 So you said earlier to the Commission's
27 counsel that the only allegation -- and I paraphrase here --
28 the only allegation in a leadership contest of foreign

1 interference that you have seen was in the NSICOP report;
2 correct?

3 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Correct.

4 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: And then do you
5 remember if there was any evidence supporting these
6 allegations?

7 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I have not been -- I've
8 not seen any evidence, no.

9 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: I would like to --
10 if I can ask the court reporter to bring up the document
11 WIT101.EN.

12 Thank you very much.

13 And to go to paragraph 58.

14 Thank you very much.

15 So is it consistent with what you just said
16 here that if you look at the second sentence -- well, first
17 of all, you're aware of this paragraph. Do you remember this
18 paragraph 58?

19 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Just give me a second
20 here.

21 Yes.

22 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: Thank you.

23 So in the second line when it says, "Mr.
24 Crase stated that he has not seen or heard of any evidence
25 reporting this allegation, that he has no information beyond
26 what is included in the public NSICOP report", so basically
27 this is what you just told us, that you didn't -- have not
28 seen any evidence supporting these allegations; right?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Specific to those
2 allegations, correct.

3 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Excellent. So will
4 you agree with me that when allegations are not supported by
5 evidence -- that these allegations will be unsubstantiated
6 and they will not be supported by evidence, then the
7 allegations will simply not be followed up with; right?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think it's correct that
9 it is challenging to follow up with just a blanket statement.

10 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Thank you.

11 So now, are you aware of a complaint that was
12 submitted to the Office of the Canada -- of the Office of the
13 Commission of Canada Elections -- my apologies -- with
14 respect to also -- to a leadership contest and foreign
15 interference? Are you aware about it?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So are we talking about
17 the one that was responded to on February 16th?

18 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Well, we're talking
19 about -- here about what's showing in paragraph 59 here.

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Okay. Yes.

21 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Thank you.

22 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I would say that it
23 would be important to highlight the word "potentially" there.
24 We have no evidence to say that that had anything to do with
25 foreign interference.

26 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Thank you. You're
27 stealing my words from my mouth, sir. Thank you very much.

28 So these were potential allegations; right?

1 So allegations are not necessarily proven. They may be
2 uncertain. They may be proven later on. But they're still -
3 - at this point when they're allegations, they are not -- if
4 they are unsupported by evidence, they remain allegations.

5 Do you agree with that?

6 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

7 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** And being potential
8 added to allegation basically emphasizes the fact that it's
9 potential. It may not necessarily be supported by evidence.
10 Correct?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Absolutely.

12 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Have you seen any
13 evidence related to these allegations here in paragraph 59 or
14 are you aware of any evidence related to this complaint that
15 was submitted to the Office of the Commissioner of Canada
16 Elections here?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So my understanding is
18 the complaint was submitted before my time as Executive
19 Director.

20 The only thing I'm aware of is the response
21 from the Commissioner's office which was sent on, I believe,
22 February 16th whereby you addressed or your office addressed
23 the -- addressed the complaint and advised us of the no
24 further action was going to be taken.

25 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Thank you.

26 So then would it be fair to say, sir, based -
27 - by analogy with paragraph 58 and based on what you said
28 about paragraph 59 here with respect to the allegations

1 potentially relating to FI, that the Office of the
2 Commissioner of Canada Elections assessed the case and
3 determined that there was no foreign interference in the
4 case? Would it be fair to assume or to say?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, I would say a couple
6 things.

7 I don't think the complaint was sent in, as
8 it wasn't there at the time the complaint was sent in under
9 the auspice of foreign interference at all. We have a good
10 relationship with the regulatory bodies. The individual I
11 spoke on earlier, Trevor Bailey, has been in this role for a
12 number of years, and we often flag things that might be of
13 concern and then the Commissioner's office handles it how
14 they would handle it.

15 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** And do you remember
16 how it was brought to the attention of our office in that
17 very context here?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do not because I was
19 not there at the time. As I said, my understanding of it
20 really centres around the response from the Commissioner's
21 office.

22 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Okay. Thank you
23 very much.

24 So if I can bring your attention again to --
25 about to paragraph 60 here, if we can scroll down a little
26 bit.

27 So if I can bring your attention, sir -- so
28 do you remember this paragraph of your witness summary?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

2 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** So here, if you look
3 at the second line -- but I will read the first few lines of
4 this paragraph 60. So it says here:

5 "When the Party learned of the
6 irregularity and reported it to the
7 OCCE, Office of the Commissioner of
8 Canada Elections, through a complaint
9 on OCCE's web portal..."

10 Have you seen this complaint?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have not seen the
12 complaint.

13 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Do you know if
14 foreign interference was mentioned clearly, directly or
15 indirectly, in this complaint since you just said you have
16 not seen it?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have not seen -- I have
18 not seen it, so I do not know if foreign interference was
19 mentioned.

20 My understanding is it's not.

21 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Thank you very much.

22 So how -- and just to clarify the record
23 here, when you are reporting the fact that there was a
24 complaint made through the web portal of paragraph 60, would
25 it be fair to say that this complaint could have been made in
26 a different manner, not necessarily through the web portal?

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That was my
28 understanding, is it came through the web portal, but again,

1 that is just information that was conveyed to me. I did not
2 submit the complaint or was part of the process to submit the
3 complaint.

4 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Okay. Are you aware
5 that when there is a web complaint filed with our office,
6 that there is an email that is sent to the sender
7 acknowledging the fact that a complaint was submitted to our
8 office?

9 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have not filed a
10 complaint personally, so I would lean on Trevor Bailey for
11 that who would be that individual in our office.

12 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Okay. So basically,
13 those questions, my last one more specifically, you would not
14 be able to answer the question in all fairness?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, in all fairness,
16 yeah.

17 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Thank you. These
18 are my questions. Thank you very much.

19 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.
20 Counsel for the Human Rights Coalition?

21 **MR. DAVIS MATAS:** No questions.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** No questions.
23 Counsel for the RCDA?

24 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:

25 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Good morning.
26 Guillaume Sirois for the Russian Canadian Democratic
27 Alliance.

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Good morning.

1 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** During your testimony
2 you mentioned that you do not support regulations for social
3 media companies or content because such measures could limit
4 free speech. Did I understand that correctly?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe what I said is
6 I think that it is a question for Parliament. But I think we
7 should always be careful about limiting free speech.

8 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** But limits to foreign
9 interference content on social media is not obviously a
10 reasonable limit to free speech?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think Parliament should
12 take a look at that.

13 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. And I suggest
14 to you that greater restrictions on social media content and
15 companies could in some instances, such as foreign
16 interference, could help foster free speech rather than
17 undermine it. Would you agree with that?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I'm not an expert in
19 social media. I couldn't comment.

20 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** All right. Thank you.
21 Those are all my questions.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

23 So AG?

24 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** I understand
25 Commissioner that the AG has been granted the extra five
26 minutes?

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes.

28 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:**

1 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Thank you very
2 much.

3 I'd just like to clarify first of all, Mr.
4 Crase, I wasn't 100 percent sure I understood your evidence
5 about being invited to the SITE task force briefings from
6 time to time. Were you saying that you did not attend and
7 don't know, or were you saying that the Conservative Party of
8 Canada was not invited at all to the briefings in 2023 and
9 2024?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I am saying that I was
11 not invited, and we have to my knowledge, have been unable to
12 find where that invitation came.

13 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay.

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Or who that invitation
15 went to.

16 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** In fairness to
17 you, I anticipate that there will later be evidence in these
18 hearings that -- and I'm not sure if this goes to you, but
19 that that the executive director email account of the
20 Conservative Party was invited to the briefings in May of
21 2023. Do you have any reason to dispute that?

22 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No. That email doesn't
23 go directly to me. As I said, I do not recall receiving that
24 invitation.

25 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. And in
26 February of 2024, shortly ahead of the Durham by-election, I
27 anticipate that there will be evidence, in fairness to you I
28 should tell you that, that Steven Barber, Matthew Conway, and

1 Christina Maheux are the contacts invited by email. Do you
2 have any reason to dispute that?

3 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No.

4 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: Okay. And
5 lastly, in May of 2024, following the Durham by-election, the
6 SITE task force, I anticipate the evidence to come will say
7 that Ian Todd, Steven Barber, Matthew Conway, and Christina
8 Maheux on behalf of the Conservative Party were invited,
9 provided they are secret cleared to review the after action
10 report, so to speak, from the site task force. Again, any
11 basis to dispute that?

12 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I do not.

13 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: Okay. All
14 right. If we could go back to -- I don't know if we need to
15 go back to your witness statement. You were just looking at
16 it. But the comments that you had made about the allegations
17 in the public NSICOP report concerning the party leadership
18 campaigns. Do you recall that?

19 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

20 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: Yeah. And in
21 essence, I think you say that you haven't seen or heard of
22 any evidence to support the allegation and that's all the
23 information that you have gotten, what's in that report?

24 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That is correct.

25 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: If we could go
26 to COM363, which is that report briefly? And it will be at
27 paragraph 72. It's at page 32.

28 --- EXHIBIT NO. COM0000363:

1 NSICOP special-report-foreign-
2 interference

3 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** All right. And
4 what you're referring to there is the three sentences were
5 removed -- were deleted to remove injurious or privileged
6 information. The sentences describe two specific instances
7 where PRC officials allegedly interfered in the leadership
8 races of the Conservative Party. Right?

9 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

10 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** And then if you
11 look at paragraph 73, it refers to this paragraph described
12 India's alleged interference in a Conservative Party of
13 Canada leadership race. Yes?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

15 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** And I take it
16 that in both -- your answer applies to both those cases. You
17 have not seen or heard of any evidence supporting either of
18 those allegations?

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** This is what I have seen.

20 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Yeah. And you
21 do not yourself have a security clearance, right?

22 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do not.

23 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Now, do you
24 doubt that this characterization of the information removed
25 is accurate?

26 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I don't know how I could
27 answer that without the information there. What I can see is
28 the sentences provided.

1 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. Now, do
2 you know whether the Conservative Party's designated
3 recipient of classified information has been briefed on this
4 redacted information?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have not been provided
6 any information on that, no.

7 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. Am I
8 right that the party's designated recipient of classified
9 information is its Director of Operations?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, he has clearance.

11 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** And do you agree
12 it's a useful thing for your party, for any political party,
13 to have access to the relevant classified information
14 pertaining to its candidates, members of Parliament, members
15 of that party, and its leader?

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think the more
17 information we have, absolutely.

18 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** And you
19 understand that prior to 2015, opposition political parties
20 really had no way to access classified information. Fair?

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I did not know that. I
22 haven't -- was not Executive Director at that time.

23 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. Any
24 reason to dispute that?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Not at all.

26 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. You're
27 aware as well that the Government of Canada has offered to
28 the leader of your party, Mr. Poilievre, access to classified

1 information in this regard, provided he obtains a security
2 clearance, right?

3 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I've seen reports of
4 that, yes.

5 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: You know that as
6 a matter of public record, that the leader of your party has
7 declined or refused to go through the security clearance
8 process, right?

9 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I think that he's made
10 his statements about the reasons for that very clear.

11 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: And you
12 understand that by contrast, the leader of at least some of
13 the other opposition parties, the NDP and the Greens, have
14 agreed to go through that process?

15 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I'm not aware of that.

16 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: You're not,
17 okay.

18 Do you agree with me that the leader of your
19 party would be better informed on national security issues,
20 including these specific allegations concerning the
21 Conservative leadership races and other foreign interference
22 matters if he took the necessary steps to receive classified
23 information?

24 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I believe the leader of
25 the party is a privy councillor and that he has had
26 clearance. And I believe that his reasons, as he has stated
27 for being able to speak on this issue, and his concerns
28 around that are well known.

1 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Well, let's
2 leave that argument aside. I understand that argument that
3 he's entitled to it so he shouldn't have to go through the
4 process. But the fact of the matter is, my question was do
5 you agree he'd be better informed if he did so?

6 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe that there
7 should be ways to get that information where he is not --
8 where he is able to speak.

9 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** So he doesn't --
10 he has not chosen to take that route. But the fact of the
11 matter is that the result of that is that he has not been
12 briefed on either of these allegations, right?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I'm not part of those
14 conversations.

15 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** You don't
16 dispute that?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I'm not part of those
18 conversations.

19 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Can you give any
20 explanation at all for why your party's leader has refused to
21 take the steps that would be necessary, at least *de facto*
22 necessary, to see the intelligence relating to these
23 paragraphs and perhaps other matters affecting your party for
24 himself.

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think, again, he's made
26 his public statements very clear about the reasons for why he
27 has taken the action he's taken.

28 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Would you not

1 want to know, as executive director of the party, if, for
2 example, one or more of your party's MPs or participants in
3 its leadership contests are among, let's say, the examples of
4 wittingly engaged individuals referred to in the NSICOP
5 report?

6 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think that information
7 provided to the party in a way that we can use it is always
8 helpful.

9 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Would you not
10 want to know that though?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I would want to know
12 things in a way I could use them.

13 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** So if you can't
14 use them, you'd rather just not know?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think it is important
16 for us to be able to use the information that we're given.
17 We -- you know, in a process around a candidate, if we were
18 given, you know, information that did not have, you know, to
19 the points that we've talked about here, any substance to it,
20 that would be challenging to act on. We have a process.
21 There are appeals.

22 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Have you
23 encouraged the leader of your party to seek a clearance so
24 that he can know?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have never spoken to
26 the leader of the party on this.

27 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Thank you, sir.
28 Those are my questions.

1 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Thank you.

2 Conservative Party. Me De Luca?

3 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. NANDO DE LUCA:

4 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Good morning, Mr. Crase.

5 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Good morning.

6 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: When Ms. Rodriguez asked
7 you about the CPC's contact with the Canadian Centre for
8 Cyber Security, you couldn't recall the extent of Mr.
9 Bailey's contact with that organization. Could I ask you to
10 turn to your witness statement at paragraphs 5 and 20 and let
11 us know if that refreshes your memory at all?

12 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I mean, this appears to
13 be very ongoing. Yes.

14 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Okay. Ms. Kakkar had
15 some questions for you about the Richmond Hill nomination
16 contest and Mr. Shahrooz's participation in that, and I think
17 you confirmed that Mr. Shahrooz never actually submitted an
18 application -- a candidate nomination application. Is that
19 correct?

20 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Correct.

21 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Okay. Beyond that, did
22 Mr. Shahrooz ever file a formal complaint with the party,
23 other than his social media posts?

24 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No.

25 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: And you were asked a
26 couple of times about the NSICOP report most recently by my
27 friend from the Government of Canada.

28 Can we have that up again? It's COMM63.

1 And you were taken to paragraphs 72 and 73.
2 And you were read -- or you were referred to, at least, the
3 allegations of foreign interference by the PRC and India. Do
4 you recall that?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do.

6 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And do you have
7 those paragraphs in front of you?

8 Can we get to ---

9 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Not ---

10 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** --- paragraph 72 and ---

11 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Can you just wait for
12 the document ---

13 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Sure.

14 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- to be on the screen?

15 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** It's up. Paragraph 72
16 and 73.

17 You have those? Okay. And so you were taken
18 to those paragraphs, and those paragraphs suggest that --
19 paragraph 72 suggests that the PRC was involved in two
20 leadership races; correct? Or more than one leadership race;
21 correct?

22 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

23 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** And paragraph 73 suggests
24 that India was involved in one leadership race; correct?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

26 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And there's
27 citations for those allegations. And it's Footnotes 220,
28 221, and 222; correct?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

2 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** And those -- am I correct
3 that all those citations appear to refer to some sort of CSIS
4 information or product?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That's my understanding,
6 yes.

7 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And you've never
8 been made aware of what those products are or what the
9 information in those products are?

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct.

11 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And you've been
12 asked to attend at this public hearing as a representative of
13 the Conservative Party; correct?

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is correct.

15 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** And you're being asked to
16 respond to allegations that are made with respect to
17 leadership races for the Conservative Party of Canada;
18 correct?

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is correct.

20 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** And you've never been
21 made aware as to the basis of those allegations; correct?

22 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct.

23 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. Could I ask you to
24 -- you were asked by my friend, Mr. Lafrance, about the
25 complaint that was submitted by the CPC regarding their
26 membership irregularities in the 2022 CPC leadership contest.
27 Do you recall that?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

1 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And you made
2 reference to, and this is referred to in your interview
3 summary, to a response that was received from the OCCE. Do
4 you recall that?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do.

6 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And can I have
7 CPC9.01 pulled up?

8 Do you have that in front of you, sir?

9 **--- EXHIBIT NO. CPC0000009.001:**

10 Letter from the OCCE to the CPC,
11 dated February 16, 2024

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

13 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. Can I draw your
14 attention to the third paragraph on the first page of that
15 letter? Can you please describe for the record what is
16 contained in that paragraph?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Are you talking the one
18 "Upon..."

19 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Yes.

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Okay. It is a paragraph
21 outlining the Commission's decision not to proceed further.

22 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay.

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Commissioner's.

24 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** And can I draw your
25 attention to, if we go to the next page, the first full
26 paragraph? It starts with, "In the course of our review..."
27 Do you see that?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah.

1 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Could I ask you to read
2 that paragraph into the record, please?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:**

4 "In the course of our review, we
5 noted proactive steps taken by the
6 CPC to ensure that controls were in
7 place to govern the sale of CPC
8 memberships. This was evidenced by
9 the restrictions in place on
10 acceptable forms of payment and the
11 systematic review of transactions
12 prior to accepting a membership
13 purchase."

14 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. One more for you.
15 Can I ask to scroll down to page 3?

16 And can I draw your attention, sir, to the
17 first full -- or second full paragraph? It starts with, "The
18 potential for..."?

19 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** In the meantime,
20 Madam Commissioner, just Sébastien Lafrance from the OCCE
21 office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

22 Here just a procedural point if I may here.
23 This very document, CPC multiple zeros nine.001 was not
24 identified in the list of documents to which my friend is
25 referring to now, so I just would like to raise it and bring
26 it to the attention of the Commission. Thank you.

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you, but are you
28 making an objection to ---

1 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** I am.

2 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** Commissioner, it was
3 on the Commission's list of documents.

4 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Yes. Fair enough.
5 Thank you.

6 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

7 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Do you have that
8 paragraph, sir? "The potential for..."?

9 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

10 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Can I ask you to read
11 that into the record, please?

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:**

13 "The potential for anonymous and
14 unacceptable purchases was reduced
15 through the restriction of *Vanilla*
16 credit cards at source through
17 Moneris, the credit card processing
18 company. Through the application of
19 the CPC's rules and regulations
20 during the review of the membership
21 sales, the CPC appears to have
22 mitigated potential over-
23 contributions and reduced the
24 possibility of ineligible
25 contributions."

26 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Thank you. What's your
27 understanding of what a *Vanilla* credit card is?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe that is a

1 reference, sir, a term used for pre-paid credit cards.

2 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Thank you. And the
3 concerns regarding membership irregularities in respect of
4 which the complaint was filed and this letter was responded
5 to were in respect to the 2022 leadership contest. Am I
6 correct that they were not in relation to the leadership
7 campaign for the current leader, sir?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is correct.

9 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Those are my questions.

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

11 Any questions in re-examination?

12 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** No thank you,
13 Commissioner.

14 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So you're free to go.

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Thank you.

16 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you for your time
17 and for coming.

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Thank you.

19 So we'll come back at 1:25.

20 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

21 The sitting of the Commission is now in
22 recess until 1:25 p.m.

23 --- Upon recessing at 12:04 a.m.

24 --- Upon resuming at 1:27 p.m.

25 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

26 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
27 Commission is now back in session.

28 The time is 1:28 p.m.

1 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Good afternoon.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** So before we get
3 started with Mr. Ishmael, the Commission has one housekeeping
4 matter to deal with, Madam Commissioner.

5 During Mr. Crase's evidence, there were a
6 number of questions asked related to Mr. Kaveh Shahrooz, and
7 in order to complete the record, the Commission would like to
8 enter into evidence Mr. Shahrooz's interview summary with the
9 Commission. These documents do not need to be pulled up, but
10 they are WIT81.EN, WIT81.FR, and WIT81.1, and they are all to
11 be marked as exhibits.

12 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000081.EN:**

13 Interview Summary - Kaveh Shahrooz
14 (Stage 2)

15 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000081.FR:**

16 Résumé de l'entrevue - Kaveh Shahrooz
17 (étape 2)

18 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000081.001:**

19 Affidavit of Kaveh Shahrooz

20 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** The Commission's next
22 witness is Mr. Ishmael. If Mr. Ishmael could please be
23 sworn?

24 **THE REGISTRAR:** All right. Mr. Ishmael,
25 could you please state your full name and then spell your
26 last name for the record?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Azam Ishmael. Ishmael is
28 spelt I-S-H-M-A-E-L.

1 **THE REGISTRAR:** Thank you very much. Now for
2 the swearing in.

3 **--- MR. AZAM ISHMAEL, Affirmed:**

4 **THE REGISTRAR:** Thank you.
5 Counsel, you may proceed.

6 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Thank you very much.

7 **--- EXAMINATION IN-CHIEF MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:**

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Good afternoon, Mr.
9 Ismael. Do you recall being interviewed by Commission
10 counsel on August 20th of this year?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. If we could call
13 up WIT99.EN?

14 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000099.EN:**

15 Interview Summary: Liberal Party of
16 Canada (Azam Ishmael)

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** This was the summary
18 that was generated from your interview with Commission
19 counsel.

20 I'll just wait for it to come up on the
21 screen. Great.

22 Have you had a chance to review this document
23 for accuracy, Mr. Ishmael?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Do you have any
26 corrections, additions, or deletions that you would like to
27 make to it?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

1 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Will you adopt it as
2 part of your evidence before the Commission?

3 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

4 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: For the record, the
5 French translation is WIT99.FR.

6 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000099.FR:**

7 Résumé de l'entrevue FINALE - Parti
8 Libéral du Canada (Azam Ishmael)
9 (étape 2)

10 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Mr. Ishmael, the
11 Liberal Party also prepared an institutional report at the
12 request of Commission counsel. Is that correct?

13 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

14 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: If we could call up
15 LIB.2? LIB.2?

16 **--- EXHIBIT NO. LIB0000002:**

17 Institutional Report Liberal Party of
18 Canada

19 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: While that's coming up,
20 Mr. Ishmael, I'll ask you, did you have an opportunity to
21 review the institutional report?

22 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

23 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And is it accurate?

24 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

25 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And will you also adopt
26 that institutional report as part of your evidence today?

27 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

28 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So we have that

document in front of us now. For the record, the English appendix to the institutional report is LIB.3 and the French versions of the institutional report and the appendix are respectively LIB.4 and LIB.5. They don't need to be called up, but they should all be made exhibits.

--- EXHIBIT NO. LIB0000003:

Appendix A - Institutional Report -
Liberal Party of Canada

--- EXHIBIT NO. LIB0000004:

Rapport Institutionnel De Lenquête
Publique Sur Lingérence Étrangère
Parti Libéral Du Canada.pdf

--- EXHIBIT NO. LIB0000005:

Anne A Rapport institutionnel - Parti
libéral du Canada.pdf

MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: So Mr. Ishmael, it's your second time before the Commission so we won't spend too much time on your background. Suffice it to say, you have been the national director of the Liberal Party of Canada since 2017?

MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. I want to ask you about the Liberal Party's views about the foreign interference threat in general. What can you tell us about the party's views, broadly speaking?

MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: You know, I think like all major political parties in Canada, we recognize that it is a threat and a threat actor within our political system and we

1 try to be aware of it and defend against it where we can.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** What is the party
3 considered to be the most important vulnerabilities it faces
4 on the FI front?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well I think I'll speak
6 for myself, there is -- ultimately, the ultimate decision-
7 making body of the Liberal Party of Canada is the Convention
8 floor, but, you know, I think, by and large, we would see
9 misinformation, disinformation as the largest threat to
10 foreign interference.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Any other areas?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Cyber security, obviously,
13 is one that's been raised with us, so I would say those
14 probably are the major sources of area of foreign
15 interference in, yeah.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I want to turn briefly
17 to nomination contests because those have been identified by
18 the intelligence community as a potential area of
19 vulnerability. And I'll take you to some documents on that a
20 bit later, but just to start out, I just want to cover what
21 is required to make a person eligible to vote in a Liberal
22 Party nomination contest.

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Okay.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I understand the
25 criteria for joining as a registered Liberal, and I've been
26 told that registered Liberal is the correct terminology, not
27 member; is that right?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. The criteria
2 include being 14 years old; correct?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And being -- and
5 ordinarily living in Canada.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think it's ordinarily
7 residing.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Ordinarily residing,
9 yeah. That sounded a little awkward to me too when I said
10 it. Maybe I copied it down wrong. All right. And in terms
11 of that latter requirement, I understand that in practice it
12 sort of takes its meaning from what you need to do to prove
13 that you are ordinarily residing in Canada at a nomination
14 contest. Does that ---

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah. So the ways that
17 a person can prove that they are ordinarily resident in
18 Canada is with first government-issued ID with a Canadian
19 address on it?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Alternatively, with a
22 letter with an address on it from an institution like a bank,
23 or a credit card company, or a school, or university?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** In that case, I believe
25 you require -- it's required two pieces of ID.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I'm sorry, yes, quite
27 correct. So you're required to present one piece of
28 identification that proves who you are, right, what your name

1 is ---

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: M'hm.

3 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- and the other piece
4 of identification -- or, I'm sorry, the letter would be what
5 establishes your residency?

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

7 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And then there's
8 also a vouching practice. It's described in the IR. We
9 don't need to get into it, but that's a third way to prove
10 your identity and residency; is that correct?

11 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: That's correct.

12 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. I understand as
13 well that to be eligible to vote in a nomination contest
14 there's a time issue, there's a cutoff time issue. Can you
15 explain how that works?

16 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, so once the meeting
17 is set, the cutoff is set two to seven days prior to the call
18 of the meeting.

19 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Two to seven days prior
20 to the call of the meeting?

21 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

22 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And who decides
23 when the cutoff will be?

24 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Depends on the context,
25 but it's the national chair, the national campaign chair.

26 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And when the
27 cutoff occurs, what happens to the membership list for that
28 riding?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So the membership list at
2 that moment, those will be the people who are eligible to be
3 -- vote. They're then sent to the various contestants to
4 verify and scrutinize the list.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And the list as
6 it exists at the time of the cutoff, does that reflect the
7 list of people who are eligible to vote at the nomination
8 contest?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So folks who
11 sign up after the cutoff would not be on the list?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to turn
14 briefly to the residency requirement we just spoke about. I
15 understand the Liberal Party does not require a person to be
16 either a citizen or a permanent resident to join the party
17 and vote in a nomination contest; is that right?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to ask
20 you a little bit about the rationale for that. So I think we
21 can all understand why citizens would be able to vote in a
22 nomination contest. That makes sense. And I suppose some
23 might say that permanent residents are folks who are living
24 in Canada, and they've also taken steps to demonstrate their
25 intention to maintain a long-term connection to Canada.
26 Conversely, those who are neither citizens nor permanent
27 residents, they may hope to remain in Canada, or they may be
28 passing through; right? Why does the Liberal Party permit

1 foreign nationals who are not citizens or permanent residents
2 to vote in nomination contests?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So kind of as I said at
4 the top, you know, the ultimate decision-making body of the
5 Party is the Convention floor, and this rule has existed in
6 the Party for many decades. As a matter of fact, when I
7 looked into it to find the origin, nobody could point to the,
8 oh, this happened at this moment. So, you know, my response
9 I guess would be largely more philosophical and what I think
10 generally people agree with when it comes to this
11 requirement, and, you know, political parties are designed to
12 engage people and engage their communities. And the idea
13 behind this requirement is, you know, you may need service
14 from your member of parliament. You may be able to go
15 volunteer, and put up signs, and participate in all of the
16 kinds of various activities, political activities. So
17 extending that right to vote to individuals not only
18 encourages them to, you know, put them on the path to be, you
19 know, members of the Party, contribute to our democratic
20 processes, but also, you know, engages them in the overall
21 engagement of the Party.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'm going to
23 return to this in a moment, and maybe explore that a little
24 bit, but I want to ask you just at the outset, do you view
25 the requirements as they are, so the lack of requirement that
26 a person be a citizen or permanent resident, as a potential
27 vulnerability to foreign interference in Liberal Party
28 processes?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Do you want to explain
3 that?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I just think when it comes
5 to it, when you break down the requirements for permanent
6 residency or citizenship, if you were to extract that rule to
7 its extreme, you would need people to show up with either
8 their birth certificate or a passport to vote in nomination
9 meetings. So, frankly, it's not practical, and it also
10 creates a friction between, you know, public engagement, and
11 I think, you know, in a lot of cases, puts an undue burden on
12 people just looking to get active in their democratic spaces
13 in the overall process. And, you know, when you speak of,
14 you know, political parties, and when you think of the
15 engagement they do, we're engaging, you know, thousands, tens
16 of thousands of people every election when we go. So when
17 you break it down, as I said in my original testimony when I
18 first appeared before the Commission, you know, the ability
19 to orchestrate thousands of people, or hundreds of people to
20 influence the outcome of a single nomination meeting, without
21 it being detected by authorities or breaking some other
22 Elections Canada law or legislation, you know, to me, strikes
23 me as very, very, very minimal.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Well, let me ask
25 you about that a little bit. I mean, nomination contests are
26 -- I mean, by definition, it's a small subset of the people
27 who reside in a constituency who are able to vote in it;
28 right?

1 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

2 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: It's limited to
3 registered Liberals?

4 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes, correct.

5 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: It's limited to
6 registered Liberals who are signed up before the cutoff?
7 Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm just going to ---

8 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, correct.

9 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- ask you to ---

10 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, okay.

11 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And it's limited to
12 folks, typically, and we'll come to a slight exception, but
13 it's typically limited to folks who actually show up at the
14 nomination meeting ---

15 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

16 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- right? So there
17 can be -- how many people typically show up in a nomination
18 meeting?

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: It really can vary from
20 contest to contest. The largest contests I've ever heard of
21 were 20, 25,000 in the lead up to the 2015 campaign. You
22 know, thinking back to my time as national director, I think
23 the largest meeting we oversaw had 7,000 potential
24 participants. So, you know, on average, it's probably a few
25 hundred people, but it can expand quite rapidly.

26 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And I understand
27 that a lot of these contests are acclamations?

28 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And some of them are
2 going to be landslides, I imagine, in the nature of things?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Some of them are also
5 going to be very close though; right?

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct. Well, the nature
7 of our ballot, the balloting within the Liberal Party of
8 Canada is a preferential ballot, so with runoffs. So you do
9 get a scenario in which sometimes the voting is closer only
10 because multiple rounds generally tends to lead to closer ---

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. And however it
12 pans out, if there's two candidates, or three, or four,
13 ultimately, there are situations where a few dozen votes
14 might make the difference between one candidate and another?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I understand that there
17 is no fee involved to become a registered Liberal?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you want to
20 explain why that is?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So the 2,000 -- I believe
22 it was the 2016 Convention, it was put forward to the Party
23 membership of, you know, should we remove this barrier to
24 entry within politics to engage more people. And the Party
25 had just gone through a leadership process that included a
26 supporter category that allowed people to vote for whoever
27 they wanted for a leader without paying a fee. So this was
28 kind of the natural evolution of that thought process. So

1 bring -- you know, the idea was to bring in more people into
2 the Party, engage more people by removing the economic
3 barrier to participate.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Again, I'm going
5 to return to this in a little more depth later, but it has
6 been suggested that having a fee can provide a little more
7 friction in the process that might make foreign interference
8 a little more difficult, and that depending on how payment is
9 accepted, it might make it a little easier to detect or trace
10 suspicious activity.

11 Do you have any views on that?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, I think that's false
13 just with the reality of either you could go to cash payments
14 for memberships and then Elections Canada allows you to
15 accept up to \$20 cash for a Party membership in which cash is
16 untraceable, largely, or if you move to credit cards or if
17 you move to those kind of forms of payment, you know, they're
18 pretty ubiquitous, those pre-paid credit cards that you could
19 use to enter in the system. You know, you could go to Petro
20 Canada and get a Visa or a MasterCard prepaid, so I don't
21 think it's as meaningful a test as people think it is.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So we've heard
23 some evidence that it is easy to set up payment systems to
24 detect and disallow prepaid credit cards.

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'm not familiar with
26 that.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Have you made
28 any inquiries about that?

1 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No.

2 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

3 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Our Party membership being
4 free, I didn't need to look into it.

5 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. I want to ask
6 you, is it possible to have bulk signups of -- I almost said
7 members. Is it possible to have bulk signups of registered
8 Liberals in the Liberal Party?

9 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah. So if you're part
10 of a nomination contest, you can bring the information
11 together, if you're an accredited nominated candidate, and
12 provide to the Party in its prescribed form an Excel sheet
13 that we could help upload to the system.

14 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So the situation
15 is someone from a campaign submits to the Party an Excel
16 sheet with the information required, name, date of birth,
17 address. Anything else I'm missing?

18 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, I don't believe date
19 of birth is a requirement, but ---

20 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Oh, I see.

21 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: --- you know, the standard
22 biographical information that you need, so address and name
23 is probably ---

24 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So a single
25 campaign worker can show up with a spreadsheet with dozens of
26 names on it ---

27 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

28 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- submit them, and as

1 long as -- as long as the fields are filled out correctly,
2 the Party will process them and make them, not members,
3 registered Liberals.

4 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

5 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Yeah, sorry.

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: The Party secretary does
7 have the ability if I really felt that something was amiss to
8 impose other requirements, but practically speaking, we
9 accept it.

10 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Just to speak
11 briefly about the actual voting process, I think we already
12 covered what we need to for in-person nomination contests.

13 I understand as well that the Liberal Party
14 does permit virtual nomination meetings in some cases.

15 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

16 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Are they ---

17 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Particularly coming out of
18 COVID. That was the genesis of it.

19 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: So that's what I was
20 going to ask. Going forward, are -- do you expect them to be
21 common?

22 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I don't expect them to be
23 common, no.

24 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And just to put
25 it out there, in terms of -- are there steps taken to verify
26 identity and residence in virtual nomination meetings?

27 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Absolutely. The same
28 requirements remain.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And how are those
2 enforced in a virtual meeting?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So the Party invested in
4 technology that used facial recognition to compare the
5 person's face versus the ID they were presenting, so using a
6 third-party company, we use that. And if -- should the
7 person opt not to use that software, they were allowed to go
8 into a Zoom breakout room and hold up their piece of ID
9 against their actual face to do the confirmation.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I understand
11 that the Liberal Party has a greenlighting process or maybe
12 I'll call it generically a vetting process for potential
13 nomination candidates. Is that right?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Does the Party
16 do anything specifically to scrutinize candidates for
17 vulnerability to foreign interference?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The Party when it comes to
19 greenlighting of candidates is particularly vetting for
20 anything that would bring the Party's reputation into
21 disrepute, so it really covers the gamut. And you know,
22 while there's no specific question to foreign interference,
23 you're left -- it's a very rigorous process that would leave
24 you with a well-established kind of history and, you know,
25 establishment of who the candidate is.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Did the vetters
27 receive any sort of training or instruction to attune them
28 specifically to foreign interference as a concern to address

1 in the vetting process?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No.

3 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Has the Party been
4 provided -- I'm sorry. Does the Party provide vetters any
5 training resources specifically related to foreign
6 interference?

7 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: The Government of Canada
8 has just recently come out with some how to detect foreign
9 interference material -- I believe it was in May of this year
10 -- that ---

11 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

12 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: --- we'll be including in
13 training material going forward.

14 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Are there other
15 sort of resources from government that would be helpful to
16 the Party going forward in terms of specifically training
17 vetters how to better identify foreign interference?

18 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: That's an interesting
19 question. I guess it would depend on the material and, you
20 know, how dense it was.

21 We've always advocated for more kind of
22 common language training material, so if the government had
23 stuff to provide, then I'm sure we would review it.

24 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Up to what point can
25 the Party -- I'm sorry. If someone gets greenlit, up to what
26 point can a -- can the Party withdraw its approval for such a
27 person?

28 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Up until the Elections

1 Canada deadline for candidates, which is effectively
2 established by the time they print the ballot.

3 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So throughout
4 the nomination process and up until, effectively, you're
5 saying, when the ballot is printed.

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

7 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And are there
8 any mechanisms that can be used after the ballot's printed?

9 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Absolutely. As we saw in
10 the last election campaign the Prime Minister or the leader
11 of the Party can say they won't sit as a member of our
12 caucus, so by that time it'd be too late to remove them from
13 the ballot, but they wouldn't be a member or they wouldn't be
14 associated with the Liberal Party of Canada.

15 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: I want to ask you about
16 -- well, our focus here is forward looking, but I know that
17 when the intelligence community raised concerns about a
18 particular nomination contest in 2019, you were looped in on
19 those concerns as the SITE rep at the time.

20 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: As I'm allowed to confirm,
21 yes.

22 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Yeah. That was part of
23 the evidence at Stage 1 of these hearings, so fair enough.

24 Has the Party changed any of its nomination
25 rules that we've discussed so far in response to the concerns
26 that were raised by the intelligence community that ---

27 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No. We reviewed the
28 processes and, again, we found our system to be quite robust,

1 so there hasn't been any material change.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

3 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Did you also review the
4 requirements for becoming a member?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The Party hasn't reviewed
6 that ---

7 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** No?

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- requirement, no.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. The intelligence
10 community has continued to express concerns about what they
11 describe as loopholes in the political Party nomination
12 process.

13 I'm going to ask if we can turn up a
14 document. It's CAN37690. There's an underscore 0001.

15 So if we can page down to the next page,
16 we'll see -- yeah. It's a SITE TF -- if we can just go up a
17 tiny bit, we'll see it's from February of 2024, and it's a
18 SITE Threat Assessment of Foreign Interference Threats to
19 Canadian Democratic Institutions 2024.

20 And you were provided with this document in
21 advance of your testimony today?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I was provided with
23 hundreds of pages of documents yesterday, so I'd have to rely
24 on counsel that we received this.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right.

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** But I would say this is
27 the first time I'm looking.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Fair enough.

1 Well, I'll take you to the part that may have
2 caught your attention. It's on the third page of the PDF, so
3 I think it's one more page down, and it's points 5 and 6.

4 Yeah. So this is it.

5 So you'll see at paragraph 5 -- and I'm not
6 going to read the entire paragraph, but just a few parts. It
7 says:

8 "Foreign states use foreign
9 interference and seek to influence
10 Canadian politics by clandestinely
11 supporting candidates or elected
12 officials who are perceived to be
13 receptive to the foreign state
14 policies, narratives and geopolitical
15 strategies. At the same time, these
16 foreign states actively oppose
17 individuals who are perceived to be
18 against their interests." (As read)

19 It talks about how it happens at all levels
20 of government.

21 At paragraph 6, it says:

22 "Nomination processes for political
23 parties in Canada are not regulated
24 by federal or provincial government
25 legislation or enforcement bodies..."
26 (As read)

27 It gives examples, EC and OCCE, talks about
28 how the rules are set by the Parties. And about halfway

1 down, it says:

2 "The nomination process can be
3 critical, as many ridings in Canada
4 are considered safe seats that have
5 long been held by a particular
6 political party, in other words,
7 gaining a party's nomination in a
8 riding that has long supported the
9 party is akin to winning the
10 subsequent election. Therefore, FI
11 activities during the nomination race
12 could achieve the desired outcome
13 without reliance upon FI activities
14 during the election period. FI
15 actors exploit this loophole to
16 engage in FI the target specific
17 candidates and particular electoral
18 ridings." (As read)

19 And you'll see that paragraph is actually
20 titled "Exploiting Loopholes in Political Party Nomination
21 Processes".

22 So I want to suggest that there are two
23 points that we can take from this document. One is that SITE
24 assesses that foreign states have the intent to engage in
25 election interference, specifically around nomination
26 processes. Do you agree with that?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Do I agree that's ---

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Sorry, do you agree

1 that that's one thing we can take out of this document?

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That seems to be their
3 stated concern, yeah.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Although there is, from my
6 very, very quick read of this, there does seem to be some
7 erroneous statement of facts here. Nomination races are
8 regulated by Elections Canada. Any nomination contestant
9 that spends over \$1,000 must file a return with Elections
10 Canada and become subject to that regime.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Fair point. The second
12 point is that the intelligence community's view is that there
13 are potential vulnerabilities. They seem to describe them as
14 loopholes, in political party nomination processes that
15 foreign interference actors are exploiting. I'm going to ask
16 you first, do you disagree with SITE's assessment that
17 foreign interference actors have the intent to interfere in
18 the nomination process?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, that is SITE's
20 assessment, and I have a lot of confidence in SITE. So I
21 don't -- you know, if that is their opinion they have more
22 information than me. So you know, I'll accept the premise of
23 their conversation. But as, you know, I kind of said in
24 Phase 1, I think in terms of all the ways in which you could
25 interfere with elections in Canada, you know, mobilizing
26 hundreds, if not thousands of people to vote in a nomination
27 meeting is probably the most difficult.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'm going to

1 suggest the one thing that SITE is suggesting here is that
2 it's easier to affect a nomination contest because you -- it
3 involves far fewer people than a general election or a by-
4 election.

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Oh, it definitely does,
6 but it still requires -- you know, having participated in
7 many a nomination meeting and winning some and losing others,
8 you still need to mobilize people and it's not the easiest of
9 activities.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you dispute
11 the assessment of SITE that there are loopholes or
12 vulnerabilities in political parties' nomination processes?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'd have to kind of review
14 each one and have an opinion on each one. But again, I have
15 a lot of confidence in SITE. So if there's -- if they are
16 stating this concern, then it's worth, you know, considering.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And in fairness,
18 this document doesn't identify any party. Do you think that
19 there are vulnerabilities in the nomination process of the
20 Liberal Party that may make it vulnerable to foreign
21 interference?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think it depends on the
23 actor and the reality. You know, every system that you
24 create, and again it goes back a bit to the practicality
25 around, you know, what standard of -- what standard will you
26 keep when allowing people to participate. So every system
27 has some level of vulnerability. But I think by in large,
28 when you look at the Liberal Party of Canada's processes, and

1 as entered into the evidence, then you know, just how layered
2 the process is and how robust the system is in terms of
3 participating.

4 You know, we've already talked about you need
5 to prove just in the short period I've been on the witness
6 stand, we've talked about the fact that the candidates need
7 to be vetted by a committee, then then -- and accepted. They
8 need to then sign up by certain dates. Then they also need
9 to be, you know, participate in the race itself, and then
10 they need to show up and prove their identity.

11 So I think at any stage of that there would
12 be some vulnerability. But I think in the layered matrix of
13 the security of the overall process, I think you know, I feel
14 quite confident in it.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'm going to
16 press you a little bit on that and a couple particular areas
17 of the Liberal Party's nomination processes. And I want to
18 do that maybe by way of a hypothetical. Okay. So first
19 let's imagine that a foreign actor wanted to interfere in a
20 Liberal nomination contest. That's a reasonable thing to
21 hypothesize based on the assessments of SITE. Do you agree?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Sure.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah, okay.

24 Second, let's hypothetically imagine that a
25 foreign state accomplishes that end or attempts to accomplish
26 that end by clandestinely pressuring a bunch of foreign
27 nationals who legitimately live in that riding potentially to
28 support a particular candidate in a Liberal nomination

1 contest. Right? So the state directs them, you know, go
2 sign up to become a registered Liberal and tells them, you
3 know, show up at this contest at such and such a time and
4 case a vote for so and so. And all of this is done
5 clandestinely.

6 Let me ask you first about that. Do you
7 agree that. Do you agree that authoritarian governments are
8 likely to have the ability to apply considerable pressure to
9 foreign nationals living in Canada?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, that's a -- I
11 would assume that they have some ability, as that's how
12 they're motivating anybody they're activating. But at the
13 same time, you know, when you bring it back to the party, I
14 think the key word you said there was clandestinely. They
15 are clandestinely doing this. The Liberal Party of Canada is
16 not a police -- doesn't have investigative powers afforded to
17 the Courts or police officers. It doesn't have the same
18 security protections.

19 So when we talk about what is in the scale
20 and scope of the ability of the Liberal Party of Canada, I
21 feel pretty confident about it. But you know, if an
22 authoritarian regime has the ability to exercise influence
23 outside their borders, of course.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And do you
25 dispute that -- and particularly with respect to foreign
26 nationals who are not permanent residents, right, they don't
27 have any right to remain in Canada long term. They don't
28 have a demonstrated intention to remain in Canada long term

1 even. Do you dispute that an authoritarian foreign power is
2 likely to have the ability to apply considerable pressure to
3 such persons to do something like register for a party and go
4 and vote in a nomination contest?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So I'm not an expert on
6 how much pressure they could apply.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah.

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume somebody
9 who is returning to a country is probably more vulnerable
10 that somebody who is not staying within the country. But
11 from my understanding, Canadian citizens and permanent
12 residents here in Canada are also pressured. So I don't
13 think it is unique to foreign nationals.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Do you think that
15 foreign nationals are more vulnerable than citizens who have
16 a right to remain in Canada -- who are obviously can remain
17 in Canada, and permanent residents who presumably are going
18 to be able to as well?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume so, yes.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. In that scenario
21 where we have a foreign power who's applying pressure to its
22 foreign nationals, I want to ask you to comment a little bit
23 on whether a requirement that only permits citizens or
24 citizens and PRs to vote might provide some protection.

25 And so I'm going to ask you to first consider
26 the perspective of a foreign national, right? Do you think
27 that -- and I think you were alluding to earlier that
28 typically a requirement to be a PR or a citizen, it's sort of

1 an honour system, right? It's an attestation.

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

3 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: So it's not typically
4 verified by documents, right? But from the perspective of a
5 person whose being told, we'd like you to go join this party
6 and vote for so and so, do you think that the first step
7 being you have to lie and say you're a PR or citizen even
8 though you're clearly not, might dissuade some people from
9 engaging in that activity?

10 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think if an
11 authoritarian regime is threatening you from a place that's
12 not here in Canada, you're probably more worried about what
13 the authoritarian regime could do than anything that would be
14 done here in Canada.

15 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So you imagine
16 that that if this was told to, you know, a group of people,
17 that they're all going to be prepared to lie about their PR
18 or citizenship status because of the pressure of the foreign
19 power?

20 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I can appreciate that they
21 would be pressured to do so, but to do so undetected, I think
22 that's where it becomes more challenging.

23 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Can you explain
24 that?

25 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, again, you know in
26 my experience of mobilizing people and mobilizing large
27 numbers of people that you would need to influence nomination
28 meetings, and often times, you know, they talk -- the SITE

1 Task Force talks about safe seats, although I would argue,
2 you know, every election is contested very thoughtfully here
3 in Canada, but in those cases where there are quote unquote
4 safe seats, often times those bring the biggest nomination
5 meetings. Those brings meetings, and requirements, and, you
6 know, the hundreds or thousands. So the ability to, you
7 know, clandestinely organize that I think is more difficult,
8 and I think if ever detected, either by officials or by the
9 party, you know, it'd be referred to the, you know, the
10 Commissioner of Elections Canada.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Well let me ask you
12 about that detection angle, because I'm going to suggest that
13 if we look at the same requirement, but we look at it from
14 the perspective of the foreign actor, right, instead of the
15 foreign nationals, the foreign actor here, that if there were
16 a requirement that individuals be permanent residents or
17 citizens, it might make this tactic a bit riskier; right? If
18 we imagine the foreign state is trying to act clandestinely,
19 they don't want to get caught, and if they were to ask a
20 large group of foreign nationals to sign up for a party, if
21 that ever came to light, it would be clear that you had what
22 appears to be maybe coordinated activity by a large group of
23 foreign nationals who are breaking the rules in order to vote
24 in a nomination contest.

25 So I'm wondering if you agree that a foreign
26 nation that doesn't want to get caught doing this kind of
27 thing, again, they might be dissuaded by the fact that it is
28 against the rules and it could come to light?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think if you're
2 motivated to go to the extent of orchestrating foreign
3 interference, I don't think a self-attestation is the biggest
4 barrier to your action.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. But the
6 potential, I guess, is if that -- if it comes to light that a
7 bunch of people have self-attested falsely from a particular
8 foreign state and that breaks the rules, that potentially
9 raises all kinds of red flags, concerns, people start
10 worrying why are all these folks lying about this factor,
11 when if there's no such requirement, then it's all within the
12 rules?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I guess so. I think the
14 bigger story would be more that a foreign actor is creating
15 the influence; not so much that the rule has been broken.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you think it
17 would be easier to detect if it required a foreign actor to
18 break the rules?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know. I guess
20 it'd depend on what rule is being applied.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. Well, I'm
22 suggesting if you had a situation where only PRs and citizens
23 could vote.

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't think that that
25 would make it anymore difficult, no.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** You don't think it
27 would make it more difficult to detect?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I want to ask you
2 similar questions with respect to charging a fee.

3 So one thing we've heard some evidence about
4 is that there are ways to potentially detect or trace
5 activity, depending on the method of payment obviously and
6 the systems that are in place. Right. So we've heard that
7 it can be possible to detect bulk payments; right? So we had
8 a bunch of payment made on a single credit card. We've heard
9 that it is possible to determine whether the credit card used
10 to pay for a membership matches the name and at least postal
11 code that the member is giving; right? That there might be
12 some potential to detect irregularities around IP addresses.
13 So I guess if a bunch of payments are all coming from the
14 same spot at the same time, that might raise some flags.

15 So I wanted to ask you, again, with respect
16 to charging a fee, if a -- imagine a scenario where, again,
17 you have a foreign state trying to clandestinely induce a
18 bunch of foreign nationals to vote in a nomination contest.
19 Do you think that requiring each individual person to go and
20 pay a fee out of their own pocket, maybe with a Canadian
21 credit card, presumably it would be traceable to them, might
22 at least put a little bit of friction in the process?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Honestly, I don't think
24 so. Membership fees tend to be pretty nominal in Canada. I
25 think Elections Canada only allows them to be up to \$20. So
26 if you're already willing to engage in this activity, using
27 your personal credit card, which would circumvent some of the
28 security measures you talked about, I don't believe that that

1 would be a great source of friction in terms of keeping
2 foreign interference out of the system.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And let me ask you the
4 same sort of question, but from the perspective of a foreign
5 state. Again, let's suppose that this foreign state is
6 trying to keep things secret. Do you think that requiring
7 payment that would potentially create an easily traceable
8 record of this coordinated activity might dissuade or deter
9 the foreign state from engaging in foreign interference?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** If each individual is
11 paying through their own personal credit card, I don't know
12 that it would be easily traceable. It's only if the funds
13 originated from the foreign state, in which case that would
14 be a violation of the, you know, the *Canada Elections Act*.
15 So I'm not sure that it does.

16 And I would also think that if you're a
17 foreign state and you're compelling people to do this
18 anyways, I don't think, again, paying some nominal fee would
19 be the greatest barrier. No.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I guess I was
21 suggesting that the payment would be ultimately traceable if
22 any questions were raised later.

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** It's traceable to see who
24 shows up to vote at the actual meeting itself. So I don't
25 know that the additional friction of payment process would
26 create more friction.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Would you advocate for
28 any changes to the current legal regime around nomination

1 contests?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think more specifically,
3 like, ---

4 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Just general.

5 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Just any change? Well I
6 guess there's lots of changes that can be brought to
7 nomination races that would ease the administrative burden on
8 candidates that would, you know, I don't know, I think it
9 would matter, really, on what is being considered.

10 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Sorry, I should have
11 specified. With respect to any changes to the current legal
12 regime around nomination contests in respect of foreign
13 interference.

14 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Not that I can think of,
15 but should there be proposals come forward, happy to consider
16 them.

17 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. I want to turn
18 briefly to leadership contests. If I understand correctly,
19 there are no -- there's no standing set of rules for
20 leadership contests. They get drafted by -- is it the
21 Leadership Vote Committee?

22 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct. There's a
23 subcommittee of the party that gets put together at the time
24 of leadership contest.

25 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So we can't
26 really get into details because we don't know what the rules
27 would be the next time around.

28 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah.

1 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: But I take it that to
2 vote in a leadership contest, the person must be a registered
3 Liberal?

4 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

5 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And I think I saw, is
6 it 40 -- the cut off is 41 days before the leadership vote?

7 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I'd have to go back ---

8 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

9 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: --- and refer to the ---

10 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: But we can check in
11 your IR.

12 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: That does sound right
13 though.

14 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And the same
15 ordinarily reside in Canada requirement?

16 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

17 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And so the same
18 rules with respect to voting by non-citizens, non-PRs?

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

20 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Just to put
21 things in a little bit of context, I know you don't know what
22 the rules will be next time. In the past, have leadership
23 votes taken place in person, remotely, by mail, some other
24 mechanism I'm not thinking of?

25 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think in the history of
26 the party, we've probably done it all.

27 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Recent history.

28 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: In more recent history,

1 you know, the 06 Convention was done in person. It was a
2 Leadership Convention so it's decided on the Convention
3 floor.

4 More recently, from -- as I recall, and this
5 was before my time, it was done -- you were sent a ballot by
6 the mail, you registered, and then you voted online. And I
7 think you could also vote in person.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Has the party
9 given any thought to how concerns about foreign interference
10 might impact how voting and other processes in future
11 leadership contests might be organized?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I think like
13 anybody following the news, there's been some conversations
14 of these things. But I think, you know, quite honestly,
15 people are looking towards this Commission for
16 recommendations, and from the community as to how best to
17 proceed on this matter.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Has the party
19 historically done vetting of leadership candidates.

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you know if
22 that's something that might be considered next time around?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think, you know, when
24 they're drafting the rules, they will consider everything.
25 So I would imagine there would be some consideration of it.
26 But in the Liberal Party history, that hasn't been a
27 criteria. It's left to the Registered Liberals to kind of
28 vet the candidates.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Are there any
2 resources, and it could be advice or anything else, that
3 would assist the party, when the time comes, to ensure that
4 its leadership processes are secure?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, you know, in terms
6 of resources, I look to this Commission ---

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right.

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- and any guidance they
9 can provide. You know, I have read allegations that some of
10 the other major parties have maybe had issues around their
11 leadership process. So I haven't seen any detailed analysis
12 of that, but, you know, I would be fascinated to read that.

13 Beyond that, I think -- you know, the over --
14 again, our leadership process is a very layered process in
15 which, you know, each riding association only is allocated
16 100 points, so the ability to influence the overall
17 leadership is - remains quite difficult, you know, to
18 influence the final outcome of the leadership because you
19 would quite literally need a pan-Canadian network, which is
20 how you win those nominations, or how you win leadership.
21 But, you know, I think on all of these things, I think these
22 are known/unknowns, where we know that there is a threat out
23 there, but we don't know exactly what shape the threat takes
24 when it comes to leadership contest.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I'm going to turn to a
26 different topic, cyber security, IT security. I first just
27 want to talk about the Party's internal IT infrastructure.
28 So I understand that the Party has updated its approach to

1 cyber security after I think it was 2016. Has that been an
2 ongoing process?

3 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Absolutely.

4 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And what kinds
5 of things -- and I don't need granular detail, obviously, but
6 what kinds of things has the Party done to protect its IT
7 security?

8 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: You know, I think by and
9 large, the most sophisticated is consulting external experts
10 and having them bring their expertise to the Party and
11 assessing us for vulnerabilities and kind of providing a
12 roadmap as to how best to secure the Party infrastructure.

13 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

14 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: And another big piece is
15 that largely, the Party has moved all of our IT systems to
16 credible third-party actors, people like Microsoft Sales
17 Force, so on and so forth.

18 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Has the Party
19 had contact with the Cyber Centre?

20 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

21 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And specifically
22 with respect to its IT infrastructure, has the Cyber Centre
23 been helpful?

24 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: From my understanding --
25 I'm not a technical person, so I would say yes. Yeah, I'd
26 have to ask my IT person.

27 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Any ways it
28 could have been more helpful?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'd have to ask her, but I
2 -- you know, I think when it comes to cyber security, you
3 know, the number one resource the Party would ask for would
4 be a list of approved vendors, you know, and if they wanted
5 to help financially, negotiated -- negotiated rates on behalf
6 of all parties. But ideally, what we would like to be able
7 to do, or like to have, is a list of approved vendors and
8 experts that we can turn to because a lot of our time
9 internally is spent assessing vendors and trying to assess
10 where exactly do they fall within the security matrix. Is
11 this the best company to use for email? Is this the best
12 security to use for cyber securities, and so on and so forth,
13 and then you balance that against, of course, the costs that
14 are allocated to that. But it's an ever-changing landscape,
15 so, you know, whoever was best six months ago is not
16 necessarily best moving forward; right? So that would be the
17 number one resource we ask for.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Let me ask this
19 because you mentioned funding. Are there ways that the Party
20 could strengthen its electronic infrastructure that it, like,
21 lacks the financial resources to implement?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, I think all major
23 parties in Canada probably have the financial wherewithal to
24 engage with these companies and have the financial resources
25 to it. I don't see how a blanket, for example, per vote
26 subsidy would help us be more secure. If the government
27 wanted to kind of encourage us to spend in areas of security
28 that they felt were vulnerable and provide rebates in that

1 area, I think, you know, it would be interesting to hear
2 their proposal. But by and large, I would think that most
3 major parties -- you know, each Party raises millions of
4 dollars a year. I would think that they would have the
5 resources to invest in basic cyber security, and I hope they
6 do, frankly.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. I'm going
8 to turn to a slightly different subset of this topic. In an
9 election period, does the Party provide candidates and
10 campaign staff with IT devices, right, phones ---

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** --- and computers?
13 Okay. Does the Party offer candidates and campaign staff
14 access to the Party's own internal infrastructure to
15 safeguard their devices?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** For their devices, no.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We provide them best
19 practices to follow.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So you provide
21 them -- what does that entail?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, use two-factor
23 authentication. Oftentimes it's information that we've
24 either digested from government sources or just industry best
25 practices.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Does the Party
27 offer technical support?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not directly, but if

1 somebody were to call us and say, hey, I'm having trouble
2 navigating something, or I have an issue, we would engage
3 with them, of course.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The -- you know, the Party
6 exists to support local candidates win their local election.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I -- tell me if
8 this is correct, but what I'm imagining is you have a
9 candidate and a campaign staff. They are working off of the
10 same kind of phones that any of us might go into Best Buy and
11 purchase, or go to Bell, or Telus, or whoever else.

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** M'hm.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Computers bought off
14 the internet, or from some local store, and, basically, folks
15 are -- they're the first line of defence to protect their own
16 cyber security, hopefully by engaging the best practices you
17 suggest, but, ultimately, they're sort of on their own; is
18 that fair?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah, okay. We've
21 heard some evidence that some MPs maintain a personal device
22 for their non-House of Commons work. So personal, personal,
23 but also campaign work and fundraising. Is it the same
24 answer with respect to who is administering, helping, paying
25 for, protecting those devices, it's sort of the MPs own
26 responsibility to deal with?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do -- if we

1 imagine a scenario where a foreign actor, and, frankly, it
2 doesn't have to be a foreign actor, any sort of hostile actor
3 got access to a candidate's or a campaign's, you know,
4 campaign communications, fundraising communications,
5 extremely personal, private information, do you think that
6 would create a potential vulnerability?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely, yes.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you have any
9 thoughts about how candidates and campaigns can be provided
10 with better cyber security, whether it's through government
11 of parties, or what?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I think that the
13 challenge there is a logistical challenge; right? You've got
14 -- every party in the next election will have 343 candidates,
15 some of them who are stood up at the very last minute, some
16 of them who have been campaigning or cabinet ministers and
17 MPs. So the challenge always remains moving people to new
18 devices. You know, even in our personal lives, if my phone
19 were to break today and tomorrow morning I had to go get a
20 new phone, it's a real pain to move your information over to
21 a device. So it truly is a logistical challenge to get
22 around. I think the best case to secure it in, and this
23 comes even within our -- the Party walls and the staff that
24 work at the Party candidate is training and education as to
25 what to avoid; right? You know, we spend a lot of time
26 educating our employees of, you know, suspicious links and
27 suspicious activity, and what does this look like, and that's
28 probably your best mechanism, because every system is

1 fallible. This is why they keep attacking the system. So,
2 you know, it -- any direct recommendation, you know, somebody
3 would have to explain to me how we solve the logistics first.

4 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

5 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: That's the biggest
6 challenge.

7 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: In terms of that sort
8 of training, is there mandatory training for candidates and
9 campaign workers on cyber security?

10 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: It's not mandatory. It's
11 provided in the packages.

12 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And why is it
13 not mandatory?

14 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think like everything
15 that comes down to a campaign, it's, you know, a question of
16 time and logistics and recognizing you have candidates who
17 will be signed up long before an election starts and others
18 that will start on, you know, day 10. So when you make
19 something mandatory, you know, I always have the view that,
20 you know, there needs to be a consequence to it. You know,
21 if an employee doesn't do their training, well, we can
22 threaten to terminate the candidate, but, obviously, over
23 time, you know, you've got space there. You have abilities
24 to escalate it, versus in a campaign, you're talking about an
25 extremely short period of time, you know, as little as 36
26 days, and the candidate can be nominated up to I think it's
27 10 or 14 days into the writ. So you're talking about 20 days
28 on top of everything else that this person needs to do. So

1 when you say "mandatory", I think we always need to be
2 careful about what does mandatory look like.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I understand that
4 that's sort of the shortest timeline. Is that typical?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know. Typical is
6 hard to say in a minority government. You know, when you
7 have longer set election days, you probably have a little bit
8 more time. When you're looking at a minority government, you
9 know, sometimes -- I would say it's generally a bit tighter.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Just returning to this
11 idea about how, for example, government might provide better
12 security -- and, again, I realize there are unanswered
13 questions about exactly how that would work, but as a matter
14 of -- I don't know if it's principle or practical, but does
15 the Party have a view -- does the Party have concerns about
16 government offering this sort of infrastructure to candidates
17 in terms of the security of the information that would be on
18 it?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, the government
20 can offer any service, you know, and I'm sure some people
21 would consider it. I think it really depends on what is
22 being considered, right?

23 And ultimately at the end of the day, again,
24 and I think this is the consensus among political parties,
25 but I could be wrong, it's we're not asking the government to
26 do, we're asking the government to guide. Which is tell us
27 which providers are the safest ones and how to set it up so
28 that it is safe, and then we will engage them. We will

1 engage them directly and we will tell people to engage with
2 them directly.

3 You know, it's done in lots of other areas,
4 you know, if you want to have Facebook advertising during a
5 campaign for example, you need to provide validated proof of
6 who you are and, you know, we guide campaigns to do things
7 like that. Versus doing it, I always -- I always worry
8 about, you know, logistically what is possible.

9 Because what ends up happening in election
10 campaigns, as you can appreciate, it's a very difficult and,
11 you know, stressed period. People tend to flow to what is
12 the easiest thing that they can do. So if you say, well, you
13 now need to sign a 25 page form, and so through some
14 mandatory trainings on it and so forth, to access these kinds
15 of resources, your uptake on those resources wouldn't be, you
16 know, 100 percent. And I don't think that there's anything
17 that the party or any other parties would offer their
18 candidates that is 100 percent take up of an offering of a
19 party. I really can't think of one, other than maybe the use
20 of our logo. And even that some people try to change that.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And I understand this
22 is a little hypothetical, but in general, can the party not
23 just mandate, you know, you need to use X and Y service, you
24 need to use X and Y degree of protection, you need to use --
25 if there were a government option -- the government option in
26 terms of IT?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would tell you the
28 things that are mandated are very, very difficult to

1 implement and they have to carry a very heavy disincentive.
2 So the only thing I can think of which is mandatory for
3 Canada to do is go through the vetting process for example.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right.

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** And should you choose not
6 to go through the vetting process, well, you will not be a
7 candidate. It is, you know, those are the kinds of things
8 that I can think of when it comes to actual practices.
9 Because don't forget, you now, politics in Canada by in large
10 is a voluntary exercise, you know?

11 The candidates that are running are not being
12 paid. Often times the key campaign managers are not being
13 paid. Official agents who take on, you know months and
14 months of responsibilities and duties are not being paid.
15 They are all doing this just to be part of the democratic
16 process and you know, ultimately, to have their views
17 reflected in the House of Commons.

18 So when it comes to mandating things, you
19 know, that is a friction point. You are going to keep --
20 you're going to push people out of the system. And in a
21 country as large as ours, and the operations you need to
22 operate, it can become quite tricky.

23 And I think, you know, if you're thinking for
24 an email account for example, a candidates email account.
25 Well, it's not only on the side of the candidate you would
26 need to secure, but it's also whoever they are sending
27 information to as well, right? Because if the breach, as
28 with any email, the breach can happen on the sender or the

1 receiver, or it could happen further down the line. So when
2 you're looking at making things mandatory, it becomes quite
3 tricky as to how do you ensure compliance.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. But I guess, is
5 it fair to say though, the vetting process for example, is
6 mandatory because it's so important to the party ---

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** --- that the party
9 could likewise say, cyber security of our campaigns and
10 candidates is so important that we are going to mandate it?
11 That is an option, isn't it?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct. However,
13 submitting yourself to a vetting process, that might take a
14 few hours, a few days, depending on how complicated your
15 process is. Totally changing your IT personal infrastructure
16 could be a large undertaking, you know? Like, and again,
17 you're dealing with a wide array of people's capacities.

18 So everybody can sit and answer questions and
19 talk about their selves, and their past, and their political
20 beliefs. Not everybody would fully understand how to set up
21 sophisticated IT systems to protect themselves from a cyber
22 attack.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Has the party
24 investigated what that would require?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I just know from the
26 logistics of it. Oftentimes it is suggested for example,
27 that we use one unified email address and just operating that
28 we offer other systems that require usernames and passwords.

1 And we know from that experience that's hundreds if not
2 thousands of people hours. And you know, when you take that
3 experience and you apply it to something like email, where
4 you could have -- you could literally be administering 10s of
5 thousands of emails because if you wanted every volunteer to
6 have one, the burden would be so huge on the political
7 parties that it would be unmanageable.

8 And then there would be a cost associated
9 with it, and per Elections Canada, any cost incurred either
10 by the local candidate or the national party then becomes
11 subject to campaign expense limits. So when you're
12 allocating your budget, you need to think about what is the
13 best -- what is the best use of your allocated dollars.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Does the party
15 offer email addresses to any candidates, or is it only MPs,
16 or how does that work?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** As by rule, we don't offer
18 it to anyone.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We explain to people how
21 to set up their own accounts, and how to -- should they need
22 it, and how to make it secure. On occasion there have been a
23 few MPs that have requested accounts, but they tend to be
24 people who hold party positions, campaign co-chairs, stuff
25 like that.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And when you say you
27 help people set up their own accounts, does that mean like
28 Gmail accounts, or Outlook?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** If that's what they're
2 using, yeah. Like, they can call in and we can, you know,
3 we're -- we recognize that these are volunteers who are
4 looking to get engaged. So any point of friction that they
5 encounter, be it from, you know, setting up a Gmail account
6 to finding an internet provider for their office, or campaign
7 insurance, you know? We try to be full service to them
8 because we're so grateful to our volunteers across the
9 country and the people who are engaging in the process, that
10 we want to make this both as pleasant a process, but also as
11 seamless a process.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to turn
13 to mis- and dis-information. It's a topic that's come up in
14 these proceedings, and I'm wondering if you think there is a
15 risk of foreign interference occurring through disinformation
16 campaigns?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And what is that risk?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, mobilizing just
20 as much as when we were looking at the party and, you know, I
21 say it's very hard to mobilize hundreds of people to show up
22 to a nomination meeting, do it clandestinely, and get them to
23 execute all the similar action. I think that's very
24 difficult.

25 But I think when it comes to misinformation,
26 disinformation -- and I don't think this is true just of
27 foreign actors, I think this is true of domestic actors as
28 well, you know, an ill placed tweet, deepfakes, those kind of

1 things could sway large -- large opinions very quickly.

2 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Are there any formal
3 structures, or people, groups, within the party who identify,
4 track, respond to mis- and dis-information affecting the
5 party or candidates?

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: There is no formal -- no
7 formal mechanism.

8 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Is there like an
9 informal mechanism?

10 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, you see it come up
11 on the campaign, you know, very famously, I think there's
12 like articles from the *Buffalo Chronicle* ---

13 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Sure.

14 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: --- that will appear, and
15 then the party will be forced to respond to it. But I think
16 when you talk about misinformation, disinformation, you know,
17 some of it's spread by other political actors, sometimes
18 you'll challenge it if you see it, and it's ubiquitous
19 enough. In other cases, you know, it will be just people
20 flagging it for the party, saying, hey, somebody is saying
21 this about X or Y policy. And then you have -- you have to
22 gauge you know, does it make sense to respond, does it make
23 sense to engage with it?

24 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And I imagine things
25 have changed throughout time. But in more recently, has the
26 party tried to take recourse through social media companies?

27 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: You know, sometimes when
28 we see fake or false posts we'll report them. If we see

1 accounts that are purporting to be official accounts we'll
2 report them to the social media platforms, yeah.

3 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And how responsive are
4 they?

5 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Not very. If at all.

6 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Can you give any detail
7 about that, which companies, which --?

8 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, it would be the
9 large social media platforms.

10 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Yeah.

11 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: As you know, everybody
12 would use, like that's largely where the political parties
13 reside. And in terms of, you know, things from accounts
14 impersonating members of parliament, to accounts
15 impersonating candidates, or spreading just, you know, that
16 have large followings, and they are just spreading general
17 disinformation about party policies.

18 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Has the party sought
19 help from government, from SITE, or any other organization?

20 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Not explicitly, no.

21 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Does the party
22 have any guidelines for its own members about spreading or
23 amplifying potential mis- or dis-information?

24 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, the Liberal Party of
25 Canada does not spread misinformation or disinformation, and
26 if somebody were to bring it to our ---

27 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: (Laughter)

28 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: --- if somebody would

1 bring that to our attention, we would tell them not to. You
2 know, again, politics in Canada is largely an exercise in
3 reputation. So anything that would bring your reputation
4 into disrepute would be, you know, frowned upon and
5 discouraged in a meaningful way. So if somebody said, "Oh,
6 hey, there's this article that says," you know, I don't know,
7 create any hypothetical you want, we would say, you know,
8 "That's not true. Don't reshare that. Don't say that," you
9 know.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Particularly when it would
12 -- you know, if it were to come from a candidate's account or
13 an MP's account, it would be, you know, largely frowned upon.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Are there any, like,
15 specific directions provided to candidates? Or it's sort of
16 taken for granted? Or?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Generally it's "don't
18 lie."

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. I'm wondering
20 about your views about the role of government in countering
21 dis and misinformation. So we've heard a couple proposals
22 floated in various ways, for example, a proposal for an
23 independent social media watchdog, or legislation requiring
24 greater transparency from social media companies in terms of
25 their algorithms and whatever it is that makes them work.
26 I'm wondering if you any thoughts about government's role,
27 and in particular, in relation to those two suggestions?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I don't spend a

1 lot of time thinking about how the government can combat
2 these things, and I don't count myself as an expert on it.
3 You know, I'm sure government is filled with lots of people.
4 My hope is just that they consider it and they're actively
5 thinking about ways to discourage it and dissuade it, by
6 large.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Is it something that
8 the parties, and I guess particularly the Liberal Party, has
9 the ability to address on its own?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think the amount of
11 disinformation, misinformation that is out there on the
12 internet, it would be hard for us to counter ever single
13 false claim that goes against us.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I want to turn to
15 financial contributions. Donations made to the party. Are
16 there any mechanisms that exist to detect unusual
17 contributions or irregularities?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well there's the Office of
19 the Commissioner of Elections, and then of course Elections
20 Canada, who review our donation history. But internally, you
21 know, the finance department is always reviewing donations
22 and contributions.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And what kinds
24 of things are they reviewing donations for?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** By and large they're
26 looking for donations that go over the limit, because we have
27 a requirement under the *Elections Canada Act* to return any
28 surplus funds over the limit. They are looking, you know, if

1 something were to appear strange, they would probably flag
2 that. But a lot of the systems are built up to have
3 automatic triggers. But by and large, I think when it comes
4 to financial contributions, and we see this from Elections
5 Canada, it's often them who find it first, and they'll say,
6 "Hey, have you thought about, you know, what is the history
7 on these contributions and these contributors, and so and so
8 forth," and they'll engage us in a conversation.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Does the party tend to
10 flag when they're -- is there any mechanism for the party to
11 identify if there were, for example, suddenly an unusual
12 number of maximum donations in a particular neighbourhood?
13 Is there a mechanism to flag that formally within the party?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't think there's any
15 formal mechanisms. You know, it's largely based on -- it's
16 largely based on staff reviewing it and the, you know,
17 incorporated IT security systems; right? So a lot of online
18 transactions from a single IP address, like as you mentioned
19 earlier, that would get flagged and probably stopped.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Those kinds of things.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** What if there was, you
23 know, a sudden boom in households with multiple contributors
24 making maximum donations? Is that something the party would
25 note?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Often times that's
27 inquired by Elections Canada.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** And in our case, you know,
2 we may look into it if it looks strange, but often times, you
3 know, there's lots of families that support the Liberal Party
4 of Canada, thankfully.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Does the party accept
6 donations from prepaid credit cards?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I guess through our system
8 you may be able to produce that, but I'd have to ask
9 specifically. I've never contemplated that.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Does the system -- your
11 -- well, it doesn't have to be the system. Does -- if there
12 are payments made online, is there a way to determine or does
13 the system identify if they're -- the name and address sort
14 of correspond between the member who is making the payment,
15 supposedly, and the name on the credit card?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think that would be
17 reliant on the credit card processor more than the party. So
18 I can't speak to that explicitly. I'd have to ask -- I'd
19 have to confer with the finance department as to what checks
20 the payment processors make against that.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** But ultimately there would
23 be a check in that we issue the receipts for donations, so if
24 somebody were to all of a sudden receive a receipt for a
25 donation that they didn't make, that would raise questions
26 and they would likely call us.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And do you know if your
28 system would catch multiple payments on a single card, say?

1 At separate times, presumably.

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well we rely on recurring
3 donors in the party. You know, people make contributions,
4 particularly at election periods. They'll feel motivated to
5 make multiple donations. So.

6 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Sorry, I should have
7 said multiple payments for different persons on a single
8 card.

9 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: There would be the ability
10 to detect if multiple people have made donation off of a
11 single credit card. So the most obvious example would be a
12 husband and wife. But there is an attestation to say that,
13 you know, the funds are your own and you're donating, you
14 know, at your own volition.

15 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And do you know
16 if your system would catch that and flag it?

17 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I'd have to confer with
18 the finance team.

19 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. I want to ask
20 you about the -- and we've talked about this a little bit,
21 but ask you about the resources that the party provides to
22 address foreign interference threats. And I wanted to start
23 with candidates. Does the party provide any resources to
24 candidates to address foreign interference?

25 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think when it comes to
26 foreign interference, you know, there's the newly created
27 guide from government that we'll provide to candidates.
28 We'll pass through to candidates. But I think with any of

1 these things, the party is there to be, like, the one-stop
2 shop for any concern a candidate would have. You know, be it
3 policy, communications. If they thought they were the target
4 of foreign interference, you know, they'd reach out to us,
5 and in that case, you know, we'd relay it as appropriate.

6 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And in terms of
7 training to help them, for example, determine if they might
8 be a target of foreign interference, does the party provide
9 that?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We will be providing it
11 with the resource that the government has given us recently.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We haven't issued our new
14 candidate manual yet for the next election.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. Is the
16 intention that that information would be in the candidate
17 manual?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Will it be
20 mandatory to review that and engage in any sort of training?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** It will be provided to
22 them.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So up to them to
24 exercise their discretion to review it and how they review
25 it?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. What about any
28 guidance in terms of resources relating to foreign

1 interference in, say, the hiring of senior campaign staff?
2 So not every volunteer, presumably, but the folks who are
3 really at the top of the food chain in a nomination campaign?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, each political
5 campaign is its own independent unit of the party; right?
6 They often operate as, best way to describe it is maybe as an
7 independent franchise. So HR decisions are left with local
8 campaigns, but if anybody had a concern about this, you know,
9 we'd be happy to engage with them and say, you know, "Well,
10 what makes you think that?" And if that were to come
11 forward, I think it would be incumbent on the party to engage
12 the appropriate authorities on it.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. But in terms of
14 sensitizing people to things that they should look out for,
15 is there anything provided to ---

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not yet.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Are -- is any
18 guidance offered to Liberals about interactions with foreign
19 officials or accepting foreign travel? That sort of thing?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No. There's no guidance.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. I promise I
22 won't spend too long on this, but I do want to ask you very
23 briefly about SITE. I know you testified about this once
24 already. So I just wanted to ask you for a bit of an update.
25 We expect to hear evidence that SITE offered
26 unclassified briefings to the political parties in advance of
27 each of the by-elections since June of 2023.

28 Did the Liberal Party attend any of those

1 briefings?

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't think we did, no.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And why not?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well I received the
5 information and I passed it on to the campaign team, but
6 ultimately the way I read the email and, you know, just the
7 simple fact that it was unclassified, I assumed that this was
8 kind of a baseline setting. You know, and unlike -- I do
9 have the -- I guess the good fortune that I've been the
10 national director for a long time, so I've attended lots of
11 SITE briefings, and I tend to think that if they really
12 wanted us there, if there was information that was really
13 important for us to be shared with, either they'd make it
14 classified or, as they did this summer when they were
15 providing training on deep fakes, you know, they were quite -
16 - aggressive is not the right word, but they were quite
17 relentless in their pursuit of getting the attention of the
18 Party.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And were they
20 successful on that occasion?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So I appreciate
23 you've been in this role for a while and you've been SITE rep
24 and you have a lot of background information here. And what
25 I hear you saying, essentially, is I'm probably not going to
26 learn a lot new from an unclassified SITE briefing.

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That was my assumption,
28 yeah.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** What about other folks
2 who maybe haven't been around quite as long, other people on
3 the campaign team or elsewhere in the Party who might not
4 have the history that you have?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** From my understanding, it
6 was only open to two individuals, so I would have been one.
7 And currently we haven't designated the second person yet.
8 Waiting closer to a campaign to decide who that would be.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. You touched
10 on this earlier, but I want to ask you specifically about the
11 range of sort of tools or options available to the Party
12 about how to respond if a foreign interference threat arose,
13 so for example, if you were to receive information that a
14 candidate may be impacted by foreign interference activities.

15 And again, I know it's a broad question.
16 Impacted could mean persons believed to be a witting or
17 unwitting proxy. It could mean that they're the victim of
18 it. But what sorts of processes or tools or resources do --
19 exist in the Party for dealing with that circumstance?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think, by and large, it
21 would probably escalate very quickly to my office and then we
22 would engage the SITE Task Force and the people at PCO who
23 manage it and coordinate it.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to ask
25 you a question about one of the things you said in your
26 interview summary, if we could turn it up. I believe it's
27 WIT99 -- I knew that at one point -- page 4.

28 Yeah. WIT99.EN, please.

So you indicate -- and sorry, it's paragraph 14. That's perfect.

So there's a question there about there's no formalized processes, as you said. But you indicate campaign organizers -- this is about three lines down:

"Campaign organizers might investigate the validity of the claim to assess if it is serious enough to meet the bar of involving senior organizers to deal with it, perhaps by having a conversation with persons involved."

I take it from your earlier answers campaign organizers are not expected to receive training on foreign interference specifically whenever the next election occurs. Is that right?

MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. I'm just wondering, how are they going to decide whether to investigate, how to investigate, whether to speak to the person who may be involved?

MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: You know, political parties are -- particularly when it comes to campaign contests, are largely hierarchical organizations. Oftentimes, our campaign organizers are -- they tend to be the youngest staff and they're, I would say, by and large trained to seek out senior guidance, you know.

And again, this goes back -- this is not

1 unique to foreign interference. This is anything that would
2 bring the Party's reputation into disrepute in which -- and
3 this is where, I guess, you know, things get political. You
4 know, if they were to see or hear something that they would
5 think would be odd or required, you know, further
6 conversation or investigation, you know, we would expect them
7 to escalate it.

8 But you know, the range of things that could
9 happen would be so far -- is so wide it would be hard to say
10 like exactly do X or Y in a certain situation because like
11 even when it comes to -- for example, we were talking earlier
12 about leadership contests. You know, what does that threat
13 look like? What does, you know, engagement look like in
14 those periods? It's very nebulous.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I guess my question is
16 -- like I hear what you're saying, that you hope that the
17 campaign organizer might escalate a more serious concern, but
18 you've indicated here that they might also investigate the
19 validity of the claim, including having conversations with
20 the person that's involved.

21 I'm wondering if you think there's a
22 potential sort of risk in delegating so much of this
23 decision-making potentially to campaign organizers who are on
24 the front lines and might not have the expertise to
25 investigate a complaint like this.

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, I think this is
27 where what the claim is, right, where that -- I think that
28 matters a lot. You know, if you think if the claim is, oh,

1 hey, this person overseas gave a donation they may not be
2 eligible for, then I would trust that a campaign organizer
3 who oversees collecting donations on a regular basis to be
4 able to have a conversation and say, "Hey, you know, what
5 happened? Okay. I'm going to alert the Party to return,
6 refund that donation because it's not eligible -- it's not an
7 eligible contribution" or if it was something more serious, I
8 think that's when it would escalate very quickly, you know.

9 And in my experience, people are very quick
10 to involve more senior parts of the Party almost on any
11 issue, not just foreign interference.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Is it fair to
13 say, though, that there's no specific protocol to guide ---

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** --- the way someone
16 would exercise their discretion? You hope they'd use good
17 judgment, but ---

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** --- there's no protocol
20 in place.

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'll ask you
23 briefly about EDAs.

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Can I call them riding
25 associations? Is that ---

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Sure.

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Okay.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** So there have been

1 allegations that there might be vulnerabilities around riding
2 associations and that foreign entities might attempt to
3 influence or gain control of an EDA's Board.

4 First, I think it might be helpful if you
5 could tell us what role riding associations play in the
6 Liberal Party.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, riding
8 associations in the Liberal Party are kind of the heart and
9 soul of the grassroots engagement of the Party. So these are
10 separate legal entities set up per Elections Canada whose --
11 really, their number one task is engaging volunteers and
12 raising the funds for the next campaign.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Are they involved in
14 candidate selection in any way?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The candidate selection is
16 overseen by the National Campaign Team. They can be involved
17 through candidate search and helping us locate people.
18 Oftentimes, you know, some of our best candidates come from
19 recommendations from local associations. But local people
20 generally know what's going on on the ground, so.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Do they typically
22 endorse candidates?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's not typical, no.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. What are
25 the mechanisms the Party has if it felt it needed to remove
26 an individual from an EDA Board potentially because it had
27 concerns about foreign interference, for example?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah. As per the evidence

1 provided in the EDA by-law, there is -- you know, there's a
2 very formal process that somebody could follow. Either you
3 can take the riding over, you can remove the Board, you can
4 not recognize the EDA. If it's particular to an individual,
5 you could ultimately remove them from the Party, which would
6 have them cease control over whatever office they held with
7 the Party.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. The last thing,
9 I just wanted to open the floor to you if there's anything
10 else that you wanted to provide by way of information or
11 suggestions or recommendations that falls within the
12 Commission's current mandate.

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, the only thing I
14 would say just by and large around these things is, you know,
15 political Parties exist to engage and mobilize people to
16 provide the public good of participating in democracy. You
17 know, oftentimes it's lamented falling participation rates in
18 elections, and I think political Parties and -- this is not
19 my word. There's academic assessments on it. They mobilize
20 people to participate in the election, they increase turnout
21 in elections.

22 So oftentimes, that's lost in the
23 conversation, is, while looking for and looking to kind of
24 address challenges or vulnerabilities within the system, you
25 may overlook the reality that we are creating a barrier to
26 engagement. And ultimately, that is what political Parties
27 are set up for.

28 We're not police agencies, we're not

1 investigative agencies. We have quite burdensome regulation
2 that we follow, probably some of the strictest regulation in
3 the world. But ultimately, you know, what does a political
4 Party exist for, especially in Canada? It seeks to build
5 consensus, it seeks to engage volunteers, it seeks to raise
6 money to fight the campaigns and win the campaigns. But
7 ultimately, you know, we're trying to provide a public good
8 of candidates that all Canadians can be proud of across all
9 Parties, but also, you know, ultimately make excellent
10 Members of Parliament.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Thank you very much,
12 Mr. Ishmael.

13 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.
14 So we'll break for 20 minutes, so we'll come
15 back at 3:10, 3:12. It means probably 3:15.

16 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.
17 The sitting and the Commission is now in
18 recess until 3:15.

19 --- Upon recessing at 2:52 p.m.

20 --- Upon resuming at 3:17 p.m.

21 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please.
22 The sitting of the Foreign Interference
23 Commission is now back in session.

24 The time is 3:17 p.m.

25 --- MR. AZAM ISMAEL, Resumed:

26 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** The first cross-
27 examination will be done by Mr. Sirois.

28 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Commissioner, just before Mr.

1 Sirois begins, I just wanted to take an opportunity to remind
2 everyone, witnesses and counsel, to try to speak slowly for
3 the benefit of our interpreters. We have both French and
4 English interpretation and sign language interpretation.
5 Thank you.

6 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you for the
7 reminder on their behalf.

8 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:**

9 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Good afternoon. I'm
10 Guillaume Sirois, counsel for the Russian Canadian Democratic
11 Alliance. I would like to start by going back to a specific
12 point you mentioned during testimony. Did I understand
13 correctly that the Liberal Party was not reporting online
14 disinformation and potential online foreign interference to
15 the government all the time?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't fully understand
17 the question. I ---

18 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** When did the Liberal
19 Party see something that can look like foreign interference
20 online, or a disinformation campaign, for instance?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Oh, we see disinformation.
22 We don't know that it's necessarily foreign interference, so
23 we don't report it to the government, no.

24 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. I would like to
25 pull WIT 87, please. This is the witness summary of Lucy
26 Watson, National Director of the NDP. She also discussed
27 about whether or not to report to the government
28 disinformation campaign. And I want to direct you to

1 paragraph 86, please.

2 Yes, thank you. I'm going to read it to you,
3 just for the record.

4 "The NDP finds it worrisome that
5 [the] government does not seem to
6 have tools or a desire to deal with
7 this type of social media
8 manipulation. The party has reported
9 mis/disinformation activity to its
10 SITE [Task Force] contact at PCO but
11 rarely receives status updates. At
12 best, the NDP might get a brief email
13 with no information about what to do.
14 Thus, the NDP questions whether
15 reporting out is of value."

16 Do you agree with that statement?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, I think if you're --
18 if you have concrete information to provide the Government of
19 Canada, I think they would be interested in having it. So
20 even if the response is maybe lacking, you know, you should
21 report it.

22 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** But the Liberal Party
23 of Canada is not necessarily reporting it to the government.

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, there's lots of
25 misinformation, disinformation out in the world. You know,
26 oftentimes you report it to the platforms. We don't -- you
27 know, I haven't seen anything to date that would warrant
28 reporting it directly to the government to say, oh. My

1 understanding of the NDP's position, and you'd have to
2 confirm with them, is that their leader is a target of
3 significant misinformation, disinformation from foreign state
4 actors. So I'm sure that that's what they're -- or I assume
5 that that's what they're reporting, not just every piece of
6 misinformation, disinformation that exists on the internet.

7 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Now we can pull the
8 document down now, please.

9 Are you saying that the leader of the NDP is
10 more targeted by disinformation than the leader of the
11 Liberal Party of Canada?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know that he is,
13 but I know that from testimony that Ms. McGrath gave last
14 time, that their leader seems to be a particular target of a
15 particular foreign state.

16 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I would like to go now
17 to RCD.31. You've been the national director of the Liberal
18 Party of Canada since 2017; right?

19 **--- EXHIBIT NO. RCD0000031:**

20 Canadian Lawmakers Say Pro-Russia
21 Group Tried to Derail Sanctions Law

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

23 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I'd like to bring you
24 to some evidence of foreign interference and disinformation
25 campaigns since 2017. And perhaps I'd like to have your
26 opinion as well on the evolution of these disinformation
27 campaigns over the years.

28 So first, this is an article from the New

1 York Times dated October 4th, 2017. This article was in
2 relation to the context of the *Magnitsky Act*, which aimed to
3 impose some sanctions on foreign officials that committed
4 human rights abuses.

5 I would like to ask you to read the first
6 three paragraphs for the record, please.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You want me to read it out
8 loud?

9 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Yes, if possible.

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Sure.

11 "As Canadian lawmakers took up
12 legislation on Wednesday that would
13 bar businesses from dealing with
14 foreigners who have committed human
15 rights abuses, a nonprofit group
16 called the Russian Congress of Canada
17 pushed hard against the measure."

18 **MS. ERIN DANN:** I'm so sorry to interrupt,
19 Mr. Ishmael. Just, when we read, I think we have a tendency
20 to speak ---

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Oh.

22 **MS. ERIN DANN:** --- very quickly. So just if
23 you could try to slow, slightly? Appreciate it.

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Fair enough.

25 "The lawmakers say the effort was
26 part of a broader lobbying campaign
27 orchestrated by Russia against such
28 laws, including one in the United

1 States. Canadian human rights
2 advocates say they were also singled
3 out.

4 The pro-Russia group denies any
5 connection to the Kremlin, but
6 lawmakers say the push fits a pattern
7 of Moscow-backed interference in the
8 West. And they say that the lobbying
9 campaign, which began in 2014 and
10 grew with attacks last spring on
11 Canada's foreign affairs minister,
12 Chrysti Freeland, highlights the
13 dangers of Russian meddling in
14 Canada."

15 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Thank you. We can
16 pull the document down now. I'm wondering if, was foreign
17 interference a concern in 2017 when you became national
18 director in the Liberal Party?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** When I started as national
20 director, a large part of the foreign interference concern
21 was around cyber security.

22 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** But was it a concern
23 at the time?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

25 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** How would you qualify
26 this concern?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** It was something that we
28 were very alive to as an issue.

1 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. I would like to
2 pull you to CAN88.

3 I'll ask the Court Report to pull CAN88,
4 please. CAN88.

5 **--- EXHIBIT NO. CAN000088:**

6 Assessing the Canadian Information
7 Environment During the 2019 Federal
8 Election: A DFRLab Report

9 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** As we'll see, this is
10 a report from the Digital Forensic Research Lab of the
11 Atlantic Council. We don't know the exact date of the
12 publication of that report, but it was provided to us by the
13 Federal Government. It's called *Assessing the Canadian*
14 *Information Environment During the 2019 Federal Election*.

15 As we can see from page 3 of that document --
16 if we can go down, please, the third paragraph, this is a
17 forensic -- yes -- this is a forensic analysis of some of the
18 Canadian information ecosystem in the months -- the month
19 before and three months following the 2019 federal election.

20 The last paragraph of page 3, the page we're
21 at right now, says that:

22 "...the DFRLAB observed a
23 disproportionate volume of [...]
24 negative content [...] directed at
25 Trudeau and the incumbent Liberal
26 government."

27 And that:

28 "...anti-Trudeau hashtags such as

1 #TrudeauMustGo greatly exceeded the
2 volume and intensity of hashtags
3 targeting any political figure[s]
4 associated with the Conservative,
5 Bloc Québécois, New Democratic, or
6 Green Parties."

7 Were you aware of this during the 2019
8 General Election?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That there was a hashtag
10 that said TrudeauMustGo?

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Well that it had such
12 a magnitude, I guess.

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, when it comes to
14 political campaigns, you know, the volume of things is never
15 really surprising, to be honest. Like, there's just lots of
16 -- there's lots of very strong opinions. So, you know, if
17 that -- if the volume was high, I could believe it.

18 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. I want to go
19 down to -- further down in the document, please, at page 15,
20 under the heading -- yes, the heading "Opportunism by Russian
21 state broadcasters"

22 The report says that the reporting from
23 Russia state broadcasters about the blackface situation:

24 "...appeared to be the latest move in a
25 concerted anti-Trudeau editorial
26 campaign that had gained steam since
27 RT had named Trudeau [...] earlier to
28 its list of 'Top 10 Russophobes of

1 2018.'"

2 Did you notice at the time of the 2019
3 election, or prior to this election, that there was a
4 concerted anti-Trudeau editorial campaign from Russian media?

5 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I was not aware, no.

6 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: But do you challenge
7 the conclusions from that report?

8 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I'm not familiar with this
9 organization or this report, but I'm sure they believe what
10 they wrote.

11 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: I want to take you now
12 to 2021. As you see, we're going across the years.

13 I'd like to ask the Court Reporter to pull
14 RCD.19, please.

15 --- EXHIBIT NO. RCD0000019:

16 U.S. Indictment Kalashnikov and
17 Afanasyeva

18 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Have you heard about
19 the recently unsealed indictment from the United States
20 Department of Justice alleging that Canadian influencers
21 received \$10 million U.S. from Russian operatives to set up a
22 news outlet aimed at influencing the U.S. elections?

23 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I've read news articles on
24 it, yes.

25 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: I'd like to go to page
26 5 of this indictment, please, at paragraph 10(a).

27 As we can see here, the indictment alleges --
28 it's not a focus of the indictment, but among other things,

1 the indictment contains the following allegations. That:

2 "From in or about March 2021 to in or
3 about February 2022, Founder-1
4 created videos, posted social media
5 content, and wrote articles pursuant
6 to a written contract between
7 Founder-1's Canadian company [...], and
8 RT's parent organization, ANO TV-
9 Novosti. This content generally
10 consistent of English-language social
11 commentary."

12 I don't think there's a need to bring you to
13 the screenshots of those social media posts, but would it
14 surprise you to learn that this -- these social media posts
15 discredited the Liberal Party of Canada, among other things,
16 and promoted other parties?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

18 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Why not?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well I just think we are
20 the Government of Canada and disinformation looks to
21 destabilize governments. Therefore, given that we are the
22 government, that, you know, people trying to influence it
23 from the inside is not surprising.

24 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And the fact that
25 these posts were made during an election campaign, during the
26 2021 election campaign, do you think that -- does that
27 surprise you as well, or?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, I would imagine if

1 you're trying to interfere in an election, probably the best
2 time is during an election.

3 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Does that mean that
4 this interference campaign's goal was to criticize the
5 government of the day, which was the Liberal Government at
6 the time, but it could have criticized another party if it
7 wanted the Liberal Party to stay in government, for instance?

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, I don't know what
9 their goal was, but I would assume that they're targeting the
10 government in power, yeah.

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. I would like to
12 take you to 2022 now.

13 It's RCD.12. If we can please pull the
14 document?

15 You're probably familiar with the Freedom
16 Convoy?

17 **--- EXHIBIT NO. RCD0000012:**

18 Calls for Trudeau to step down during
19 Freedom Convoy traced back to Russian
20 proxy sites

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I am familiar, yes.

22 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Yeah. So this is an
23 analysis published on February 16, 2023 by Caroline Orr, a
24 scholar, who is also an analyst for the National Observer and
25 who led the Election Integrity Reporting Project.

26 Her conclusion is that, as you can see from
27 the title, is that:

28 "Calls for Trudeau to step down

1 during [the] 'Freedom Convoy' traced
2 back to Russian proxy sites".

3 I'd like to go down please just to see the
4 first paragraph that I would like you to read for the record
5 as well.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:**

7 "Russian propaganda sites attacked
8 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, making
9 false accusations about his
10 government 'ordering' the use of
11 violence against demonstrators, and
12 tore into Canada's mainstream media
13 during last year's 'Freedom Convoy.'
14 The protest occupied downtown Ottawa
15 for three weeks and cost the Canadian
16 economy nearly [illegible] billion
17 [dollars]."

18 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Perfect. Thank you.
19 Are you surprised by those conclusions? Have you heard about
20 this conclusion prior to today?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** To be honest, I might have
22 been familiar with it at the time, but I'm not overly
23 familiar with it.

24 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And do you have any
25 reasons to disagree with these conclusions?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

27 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. I would now
28 like to take you to -- closer again still to the present.

1 We can pull the document down again.

2 We can -- I'll go back to the U.S. indictment
3 that was unsealed two weeks ago that also contained the
4 allegations that we just saw, but it also contains allegation
5 that a news outlet called -- that was identified as Tenet
6 Media was set up by Canadian influencers with the help of
7 Russian nationals, ex-employees of RT.

8 Can we pull RCD20, please?

9 **--- EXHIBIT NO. RCD0000020:**

10 Tenet YouTube videos

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Those are screenshots
12 of Tenet Media's videos that relate to Canada. It's been
13 reported and -- yeah.

14 We can see the -- can we zoom out a little
15 bit, please, just to see more videos at the time? It would
16 be easier, I think, for the witness.

17 Perfect. Thank you.

18 We can scroll down. I want to give you the
19 time to look at the -- mainly at the images and the titles of
20 the different videos.

21 One's called "Canada's Immigration to Spiral
22 Out of Control". There's a picture of Trudeau, the Liberals.
23 Again, pictures of Trudeau, videos of Trudeau.

24 "Make Canada Great Again". "Economic Revolts
25 Imminent". "Canada Is Doomed". "Houses for Everyone".
26 Again, pictures of Trudeau.

27 "Trudeau's Grocery Wars". "Is A Muslim
28 Majority in Canada's Future?". "Canada's Mass Graves". "Is

1 Trudeau in Trouble?".

2 I think we get the point. We can pull the
3 document down.

4 Do you notice anything about these -- this
5 content, these sort of video, this sort of messaging that's
6 being promoted by Tenet Media here?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah. Well, it's clearly
8 directed at the -- it's clearly directed at the Prime
9 Minister and it's clearly directed to raise, you know, social
10 chaos as a potential outcome of it.

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** It was reported by the
12 media that the videos from Tenet Media that relate to Canada,
13 including those that we just saw on YouTube and others on
14 Rumble, were seen half a million times. You mentioned
15 earlier in your testimony that disinformation campaign as
16 opposed to, for instance, voter coercion could have a mass
17 impact on elections or on policy decisions and so on.

18 Do you think that this kind of influence
19 campaign specifically from Tenet Media could have mass
20 impact?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, I don't know all the
22 facts around the Tenet Media, so I don't want to -- I don't
23 want to, you know, opine on something that I don't have all
24 the details on, but a misinformation campaign targeting the
25 Prime Minister absolutely could have an impact, yes.

26 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And is it significant,
27 in your opinion, that this disinformation campaign that we
28 just saw happened, if not in an election year, shortly before

1 an election, a general election in Canada?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, I think we're the
3 target of foreign interference all the time, so you know, of
4 course.

5 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: I'd like to step --
6 take a step back and look at the broader picture.

7 So we've talked since 2017, since the time
8 you became National Director, and I want to have your input
9 about the cumulative impact of those different campaigns that
10 we saw, Russian campaigns, disinformation campaigns. And now
11 we're only talking about Russia, but I'm sure Chinese are
12 doing disinformation as well, India.

13 What can you tell us about the cumulative
14 impact over the years of those different disinformation
15 campaigns?

16 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: It would be hard for me to
17 say specifically this is -- you know, it results in X or Y
18 issue, but clearly, as presented, you know, the thesis of
19 their argument is to destabilize Canada in any form or
20 another. And if you look at the ongoing polarization that's
21 going on in Canadian politics, and this is just my opinion,
22 it's being fed by extreme views of which, you know, clearly
23 what was presented in those -- like the titles of the videos
24 is doing.

25 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: So there's some degree
26 of success to those.

27 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Absolutely.

28 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: And do you think it

1 could explain the growing opposition against the Liberal
2 Party of Canada?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think it feeds the
4 polarization of politics. Does it -- is there a direct line
5 back to the Liberal Party of Canada? I would hope not, but I
6 could believe it, yeah.

7 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And that will be my
8 last question.

9 Do you believe that Russia is satisfied with
10 Prime Minister Trudeau's or the Liberal Party of Canada's
11 foreign policy?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would imagine that our
13 strong stance on Ukraine and support for the Ukrainian
14 country and their freedom is probably not very pleasing to
15 Russia.

16 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Perfect. Those are
17 all my questions. Thank you.

18 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

19 Counsel for the Concern Group.

20 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. NEIL CHANTLER:**

21 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Good afternoon. My name
22 is Neil Chantler. I'm counsel for the Chinese Canadian
23 Concern Group.

24 Sir, I'm going to take you back through some
25 of your evidence earlier today, and I'm going to start with
26 your general assertion that the Liberal Party of Canada
27 sitting here today stands by its existing Party rules and
28 systems regarding membership, candidate selection and riding

1 nomination contests. It does not believe there's any
2 significant need for reform in order to better protect
3 against foreign interference. Is that correct?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

5 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** With respect to
6 nomination contests specifically, your view is that the
7 layers and systems in place are what make the process secure
8 from foreign interference.

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

10 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And that includes the
11 Party's rules regarding membership as well as candidate
12 selection.

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

14 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And I also heard you say
15 that enhancing cyber security protections would be an
16 enormous burden on the Party -- I think you meant a financial
17 burden -- in order to get systems in place that perhaps
18 adequately and better protected your members, devices,
19 electronic communications and so on.

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's not exactly what I
21 said.

22 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Okay. Would you like to
23 clarify?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Sure. When it comes to
25 deploying -- if we're relating back to, you know, the idea of
26 providing every individual their own device or their own
27 email account, it's not that it is burdensome. It's just
28 largely impractical to get that out, to support that

1 organizationally, so. And then, you know, at what point --
2 you know, what is the cutoff? Is it every volunteer that
3 we're providing devices to? Is it every campaign manager?
4 Is it every candidate? And I think that's where we'd
5 actually look to the Commission and we look to some of the
6 findings of the Parliamentary committees to provide guidance
7 on, you know, what is the best practice here.

8 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** I do hear you to be
9 saying that there's some degree of budgetary consideration in
10 that assessment, that it would be too costly to enhance the
11 security of everyone's devices. Is that right?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, everything is a
13 budgetary consideration, but also there would be campaign
14 implications as to local and national campaign limits. But I
15 don't think we would -- you know, if there was something we
16 could tangibly do that would markably (sic) improve the
17 security, we would likely do that. What I guess we would
18 need to be convinced of is that me setting up an email system
19 is more secure than using commercially available systems that
20 are currently available.

21 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** You were taken to a
22 document earlier today suggested that our spy agency, at
23 least, believes that foreign states are motivated to
24 interfere with our democracy by manipulating our nomination
25 contests. You remember that document?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

27 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** I don't need to pull it
28 up, I don't suppose.

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

2 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And in this regard, you'd
3 agree with me that the Parties and your rules surrounding
4 these nomination contests are at the front lines of defending
5 our democracy against foreign interference.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, I would like to
7 think the security establishment is at the front lines of
8 securing our democracy, but we definitely have a role to
9 play. Absolutely.

10 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** You have a role to play
11 and you are participating in or overseeing a very fragile and
12 vulnerable part of our democracy, the appointment of
13 individuals who will, in theory, potentially sit in the House
14 of Commons.

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

16 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And yet -- and the
17 Liberal Party's not alone here. The political Parties rely
18 almost entirely on donations and volunteers to vet
19 candidates, to protect candidates from cyber security
20 threats, and oversee nomination contests; would you agree
21 with that?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct, yeah.

23 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Do you think that we
24 should be relying on volunteers and donations to protect the
25 front lines of our democracy?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I'm never
27 surprised at how extraordinary the volunteers are across the
28 country. Oftentimes, when you look at studies of volunteers

1 participating in activities, they oftentimes do better jobs
2 than paid employees because they believe in it, they're
3 committed to it. And I would, you know, take the commitment
4 of a dedicated Liberal local returning officer who's
5 experienced, who has seen this, to be, you know, quite high
6 in value. I would defend their engagement and their
7 processes. Just because somebody's a volunteer doesn't mean
8 that their contribution to our system is less than somebody
9 who's paid. As a matter of fact, I'd say the Party president
10 of the Liberal Party of Canada who's a volunteer, his
11 contribution is even greater than my own as the National
12 Director.

13 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And would you defend to
14 the same degree the notion that parties are relying on
15 donations as opposed to some more secure source of funding or
16 a return to the per vote subsidy?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The donations that come in
18 to a political party in Canada are some of the most heavily
19 regulated in the world. And to date, I haven't seen anything
20 to suggest that a securely received donation compromises the
21 system. Should somebody be doing something clandestinely or
22 illegal, that would be, you know, clandestine or illegal. I
23 don't think by changing the source of the funding
24 automatically increases the security or the foreign
25 interference posture of any party.

26 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** What I was really
27 referring to was the notion that there's a limited budget for
28 every party, and some parties are bigger than others and some

1 have more money than others.

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

3 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: And some are actually
4 weighing these budgetary concerns and they're unable to
5 perhaps implement the kinds of protections against foreign
6 interference that they might otherwise if they had the
7 funding. Do you not see that as a problem? Do you think
8 that the current system of parties relying solely on
9 donations is sufficient to protect them from foreign
10 interference?

11 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, I think when you
12 look at the major parties, the major parties are operating,
13 you know, budgets that are in the millions of dollars. But
14 at the same time, you know, as I testified earlier, you know,
15 one thing we would appreciate is the sourcing of vendors and,
16 you know, perhaps the combined purchasing power to reduce the
17 financial burden. But I don't think when you're up against a
18 state actor any organization would be subject -- you know,
19 like, any organization would be subject to foreign
20 interference. You know, banks have hugely, you know,
21 multiples of security budgets than political parties have,
22 and yet, they're still targets. You know, a foreign state
23 just has more resources than any political party, regardless
24 of how they're funded will ever have.

25 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Thank you. I want to
26 focus in on one of the requirements for membership in the
27 Liberal Party and that is that someone be ordinarily be
28 resident in Canada. I'm not sure that any precision has been

1 put on that term in this inquiry yet. What is meant by
2 ordinarily required -- or resident of Canada?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So, you know, the
4 generally accepted definition of it is that you're able to
5 prove that you live in Canada, that you reside within your
6 association.

7 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** What percentage of the
8 year? There has to be more precision than that.

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The ability to provide
10 documents that show that you live in the area.

11 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Does that mean if
12 somebody spends 1 month a year in Canada and 11 months
13 somewhere else, they live in Canada?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think that would be up
15 to the local returning officer to decide, but it would seem
16 that that would meet the requirement of ordinarily a
17 resident. If they're there at the meeting as well and
18 they're able to produce that level of ID and, you know,
19 documents.

20 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** So your view is
21 ordinarily resident doesn't mean more than half the time. It
22 could mean as little as a month a year?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** To be honest, I've never
24 considered what is the threshold for ordinarily reside. I'd
25 probably confer with the Party's legal counsel and, you know,
26 the constitutional affairs advisors of the Party to come up
27 with a standard.

28 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Clearly, you and I can't

1 determine what the term ordinarily means here today. It's
2 probably a term that could be clarified.

3 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

4 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Do you agree that people
5 ordinarily resident in Canada are likely to have an account
6 with a Canadian financial institution?

7 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I would assume so, yes.

8 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: But I heard you say
9 earlier today you do not believe that requiring individuals
10 to pay a membership would add any layer of protection against
11 foreign interference. That's your evidence; correct?

12 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, my personal opinion
13 would be that, yeah.

14 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: And you said something
15 along the lines of it's not as meaningful a test as some
16 people say or suggest.

17 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

18 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: I mean, at the very
19 least, would you agree with me that requiring somebody to
20 make a payment of a nominal sum, it could be completely
21 nominal, \$1, by a credit card from a Canadian institution,
22 would add some level of protection and would provide the
23 Party with an address, the billing address for the credit
24 card that could be cross-referenced with the stated address
25 of residency?

26 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, we would have the
27 address that they gave us, but I think when it comes back to
28 it and, you know, it was interesting to hear counsel earlier

1 this morning saying there are tools to defect -- or to detect
2 the use of multiple pre-paid credit cards, which I've never
3 had to look into, so I'm not an expert in the space, but, you
4 know, my knowledge of IT systems and payment processing would
5 lead me to believe that it's not a meaningful test. And I
6 also -- you know, I would also go back to the earlier
7 testimony that if you're engaging in foreign interference,
8 and you're a person that has a bank account, I don't know the
9 creation of some nominal sum raises the bar in terms of
10 engaging in foreign interference.

11 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** I heard you say earlier
12 today that requiring members to be permanent residents or
13 citizens doesn't necessarily add any layer of protection
14 either, that people who are temporarily resident in Canada
15 might be manipulated by a foreign state but so might
16 Canadians. People here permanently might be manipulated in
17 some way to vote a certain way. That's the first I've heard
18 that suggestion. And I ask you, do you have any examples?
19 Have you heard of that happening where large swaths of the
20 Canadian public were improperly encouraged, threatened, under
21 threat to vote in a certain way?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not to vote in a certain
23 way, but, you know, it's very easy to see a scenario in
24 which, you know, somebody is a citizen of Canada and yet the
25 rest of their family resides in a foreign country. Like,
26 that happens all the time.

27 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** You spoke briefly today -
28 - earlier today about this notion of greenlighting a

1 candidate. And some degree of vetting goes into
2 greenlighting a candidate. I presume reviewing their
3 background, some degree of reference checks and so on.

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

5 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** But you I think stopped
6 short of saying that greenlighting was an attempt to combat
7 foreign interference, that it couldn't be left to the Party
8 to somehow determine in that process whether someone was at
9 risk of foreign interference; is that correct?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, I said that it's not
11 particularly only looking for foreign interference. It's
12 looking for anything that would bring the Party's reputation
13 into disrepute. So if -- you know, it would be hard to
14 detect, of course, but if ever you had the thought that it
15 could be foreign interference, that would bring the Party's
16 reputation into disrepute; therefore, the vetting process
17 would catch it in that filter.

18 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** So you'd agree with me
19 that it's very important that we vet candidates carefully and
20 look at their backgrounds to try and detect whether there's
21 any risk of foreign interference?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

23 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Because a Party's name --
24 an individual's name on a ballot is a tacit approval in the
25 eyes of the public that the Party endorses that individual?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

27 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Just briefly, if I may,
28 Madam Commissioner. With regards to donations, you said that

1 there were no policies in place with respect to accepting
2 donations from individuals. There was no review of a
3 donation to determine what source of -- where it came from
4 and whether that was somebody that you wanted to be donating
5 to the Party.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, there is a self
7 attestation on the website saying that you are who you are
8 and that you're making that donation. It's clearly on the
9 Liberal Party of Canada's website. In terms of the system,
10 you know, I don't imagine what that next layer would be. You
11 know, similar to going online and purchasing something, you
12 know, once you've purchased it, you've purchased it.

13 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Would it be possible for
14 ---

15 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** It's going to be the
16 last question because you're already over time.

17 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Okay. It's not the
18 Party's role -- if I may ask a two-part question. It's not
19 the Party's role to enforce the *Canada Elections Act*; you'd
20 agree?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct, but we would
22 comply with it, and if we were to find irregularities, we
23 would report it.

24 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Do you see it as the
25 party's role to assist in ensuring the *Canada Elections Act*
26 is not easily violated by foreign actors?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Our job is to assist
28 Elections Canada to ensure that we have elections that we can

1 have a lot of confidence in, and we're happy to assist them
2 any way they see fit.

3 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Thank you.

5 So the Human Rights Coalition?

6 MR. DAVID MATAS: No questions.

7 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: No questions.

8 Counsel for Jenny Kwan?

9 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:

10 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Mr. Ishmael, good
11 afternoon. My name is Sujit Choudhry. I'm counsel to Jenny
12 Kwan.

13 Mr. Ishmael, I'd like to ask you some more
14 questions about nomination races. I'm sure you're aware that
15 nomination races have emerged as a central theme in this
16 Inquiry in light of some of the evidence that was tendered in
17 the spring and in light of the Commissioner's interim report.
18 And I want to pick up where Mr. Krongold left off.

19 So let me first ask that your witness
20 statement be put up. That's WIT.99. And in particular, I
21 was hoping we could go to paragraph 32. Yes, that page.
22 Great. Okay. That's perfect. Thank you so much.

23 So this section here is entitled "FI
24 Vulnerabilities in the Nomination Process". And your
25 evidence here is that -- and if I could take you to the last
26 sentence in particular:

27 "Though he considers the LPC to be a
28 target of FI, Mr. Ishmael does not

1 think it has been a victim of foreign
2 interference." (As read)

3 And that's your evidence; is it not?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

5 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So thank you.

6 Could we please call up Commission363?

7 So Mr. Ishmael, we're pulling up here the
8 NSICOP report on -- and this is a -- if we could scroll down,
9 please, just so we could see the title? Thank you so much.

10 This is the *Special Report on Foreign*
11 *Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and*
12 *Institutions*. Do you -- have you read this report?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not in its -- not the 92
14 pages, no.

15 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. But, well, I'm
16 going to take you to some passages and we'll see if you've
17 read them or not. And I'd like to ask you some questions.

18 So and just for the record, this was
19 submitted to the Prime Minister on March 22nd, 2024, and was
20 tabled in Parliament on June 3rd, 2024.

21 So let's first go to paragraph 4. And Madam
22 Registrar, that's page 10 of the PDF, page 2 of the report.
23 If you could scroll down? Thank you so much.

24 And so I'd like to take you to the bottom
25 half of that paragraph, which begins with the word "Second".
26 And I'm just going to read it for the record. It says:

27 "Second, the Committee wanted to
28 focus its efforts where it has

1 greatest value: access to highly
2 classified information that cannot be
3 discussed in public. The Committee
4 relied in large part on classified
5 materials, briefings and appearance
6 to inform its understanding of the
7 state of foreign interference in
8 Canada's democratic processes and
9 institutions and the government's
10 response."

11 And so I want to ask you some questions about
12 that -- those sentences, Mr. Ishmael.

13 Are you aware that NSICOP had access to
14 classified intelligence about the Liberal nomination in Don
15 Valley North in 2019?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know that they had
17 that specific level of information. I just know that they
18 had access to classified information.

19 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. And just to be
20 clear, do you have a security clearance?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, I have the secret
22 level.

23 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Secret level. And so --
24 and you have -- through that, you've been given access to
25 some classified intelligence?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I've been given access to
27 it through the SITE Committee.

28 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Through the SITE

1 Committee. Okay.

2 So let's move on now to page 39 of the PDF,
3 which is page 31 of the report.

4 This is "Case Study #4: PRC interference in
5 the Liberal nomination contest in Don Valley North".

6 Now, have you read this page, Mr. Ishmael?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

8 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. Well then I'll
9 take you through it. So let's go through it paragraph by
10 paragraph. So the first paragraph says:

11 "According to CSIS, the PRC had a
12 significant impact in getting Han
13 Dong nominated as the Liberal Party
14 of Canada's 2019 federal candidate in
15 Don Valley North."

16 And so were you previously aware that this
17 was CSIS' conclusion?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

19 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So this is the first
20 time you've learned that CSIS concluded this fact?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

22 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. And would you
23 agree that if this is true, this would count as, to use your
24 words, an irregularity?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, for sure.

26 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Thank you. So let's
27 move on to the next paragraph. And so we'll begin with the
28 second sentence. It says:

1 "Many of Mr. Dong's supporters
2 arrived in buses supported by the
3 PRC: between 175 and 200
4 international Chinese students
5 arrived in several buses."

6 Were you aware of this fact?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We had known that busses
8 were used in the nomination, yeah, which is not atypical.

9 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And did you know that
10 those busses were supported by the PRC?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

12 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** No. And so this is the
13 first time you're learning this?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

15 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And you'd agree that
16 that's an irregularity?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

18 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. So let's move on
19 to the -- so just to stay with that paragraph, the report
20 states:

21 "The Consulate reportedly told the
22 students that they must vote for Mr.
23 Dong if they want to maintain their
24 student visas."

25 Were you previously aware of that fact?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

27 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And you'd agree that
28 that's an irregularity?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct. Yeah.

2 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. So let's move on.

3 "The Consulate..." -- maybe we could scroll up
4 a bit, Madam Registrar? That's good. Thank you.

5 "The Consulate knowingly broke the
6 Liberal Party of Canada's rule that
7 voters in a nomination process must
8 live in the riding."

9 And then it explains that:

10 "...the students reportedly: lived
11 outside of the riding..."

12 Were you aware of this fact previously, Mr.
13 Ishmael?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

15 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And that would be an
16 irregularity?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, if they created fake
18 material to vote in a nomination, absolutely.

19 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Right. And you'd agree
20 that that -- it would be -- it would break Liberal Party of
21 Canada rules if those students who lived outside the riding
22 nonetheless voted in the nomination?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely. Yeah.

24 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. And so similarly,
25 you weren't aware that the students had been provided with
26 fraudulent residency paperwork; were you?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Of course not.

28 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** No. And that would be

1 an irregularity?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

3 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: That would violate
4 Liberal Party of Canada rule?

5 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Absolutely.

6 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: And then it says here
7 the students:

8 "...sought to physically intimidate
9 voters and distribute pro-Dong
10 materials, contrary to Party rules."

11 Were you previously aware of that fact?

12 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No. All reports from the
13 meeting that it was a very successful local nomination
14 meeting with, you know, the processes that rolled out kind of
15 typically.

16 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: So and you'd agree that
17 that would break a Liberal Party of Canada rule as well?

18 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Intimidating voters?
19 Absolutely. Yeah.

20 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: So Mr. Ishmael, I put to
21 you that this is all, as you put it, clandestine activity,
22 because it occurred, but you were not aware of it. Is that
23 fair?

24 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, I guess so. Yeah.

25 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: And your testimony today
26 though is that you doubted the risk that there could be
27 foreign interference in nominations because it would be hard
28 for such clandestine activity to occur unobserved, but in

1 fact, it does seem that CSIS concluded it did occur; did it
2 not?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, my testimony was that
4 to be unobserved, but clearly CSIS has observed it. And I
5 would expect the Commissioner of Elections Canada, if there
6 was a violation affected of the Elections Canada rules, that
7 they would act accordingly.

8 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Oh, so you don't doubt
9 that clandestine activity can occur in relation to
10 nominations?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Clandestine activity, by
12 its very nature, would be clandestine. It would have to be
13 apparent to the Liberal Party of Canada. Our only ability is
14 to enforce the rules as they exist. I don't understand.

15 **MS. ERIN DANN:** I'm sorry to interrupt. It's
16 just a plea from our interpreters to try to slow the pace.

17 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Of course. Thank you,
18 Ms. Dann. I'm very sorry.

19 And so, well, Mr. Ishmael, I must have
20 misunderstood you, because I had thought your evidence, and
21 please forgive me if I'm mischaracterizing it, but I had
22 thought your evidence was the following, that interference
23 couldn't really occur because it would have to be observed,
24 given the large number of people who participate in
25 nomination races, that clandestine, it could not --
26 interference could not occur clandestinely. But we've just -
27 - I've just shown you the conclusion of the security services
28 that in fact there was foreign interference that did occur

1 clandestinely.

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No, my testimony was -- is
3 that it was -- that is the most difficult way in which to
4 interfere with a local nomination race.

5 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Sorry; that is the
6 most...?

7 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Difficult way to interfere
8 with a local nomination race, and the way we protect against
9 that is through a tapestry of security measures.

10 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Right.

11 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: And if, in this case, you
12 know, CSIS or the Office of the Commissioner of Elections has
13 detected something illegal, you know, again as a political
14 Party we would hope that the responsible authorities would
15 take action.

16 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: So you don't doubt that
17 clandestine interference can occur in relation to nomination
18 races.

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think things can happen
20 clandestinely. Like, you know, we wouldn't know about it by
21 the very nature of it being clandestine.

22 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Okay.

23 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I don't understand.

24 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: That's fine. Thank you,
25 Mr. Ismael.

26 Could we please have the bottom paragraph
27 scrolled up to the top, please? The "CSIS assessed that"
28 paragraph. Thank you so much.

1 So this paragraph states:

2 "CSIS Assessed that the PRC's foreign
3 interference activities played a
4 significant role in Mr. Dong's
5 nomination, which he won by a small
6 margin." (As read)

7 Would you agree that Mr. Dong won by a small
8 margin?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't recall the results
10 of the election.

11 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So you don't know how
12 much his margin of victory was?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

14 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Could you estimate it?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

16 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So you have no
17 information about that?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** All I know is that he won.

19 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. I'll take your
20 word for it.

21 Let's go to the next ---

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** This is a nomination
23 meeting that has happened over five years ago, and there's
24 been hundreds of them since.

25 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Sure. And this
26 nomination meeting has been a central topic in a public
27 inquiry on foreign interference, Mr. Ismael. But I'll leave
28 it at that.

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's right. The Liberal
2 Party of Canada doesn't maintain records of who, or the
3 results of nomination meetings.

4 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Well, let's go on to the
5 next paragraph, then. It says:

6 "On September 28th, 2019, CSIS briefed
7 the Liberal Party of Canada's secret
8 cleared representatives on its
9 assessment, who in turn briefed the
10 PM alone the following day." (As
11 read)

12 So Mr. Ismael, were you one of the Liberal
13 Party of Canada's secret cleared representatives who received
14 this briefing?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I received a briefing,
16 yes.

17 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** You did. And so you
18 were aware, then, that CSIS had concerns about foreign
19 interference in Mr. Dong's nomination.

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So I'm not exactly sure
21 what I can reveal about the briefing itself.

22 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And to be clear, I don't
23 -- I'm not asking you -- and forgive me if I've asked --
24 inadvertently asked you. Please don't reveal any classified
25 intelligence, but were you -- well, were you briefed about
26 CSIS's concerns?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I was briefed about a
28 concern CSIS had. I don't know, I feel comfortable at that

1 point.

2 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: All right. And that was
3 in September 2019.

4 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

5 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: And you have respect for
6 CSIS's expertise on questions of intelligence.

7 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

8 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: And so I'd like to just
9 put -- I would like to seek leave from the Commissioner, if I
10 may, to put up Mr. Ismael's witness statement from Stage 1 of
11 the Inquiry. This is WIT32.

12 --- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000032 EN:

13 Stage 1 Interview Summary: Azam
14 Ishmael

15 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Okay, but you're already
16 over your time by two minutes, so you'll have to do it very
17 quickly.

18 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Well, I'll do it very
19 quickly.

20 And so if we could go, first of all, to
21 paragraph 14. And so maybe we could just reduce the size of
22 the text a bit, so we could see the rest of the section.
23 Thank you very much. Just a little bit more. Thank you.

24 So Mr. Ismael, this is your evidence from
25 Stage 1 of the Inquiry, which was regarding -- in relation to
26 Don Valley North. I just want to note -- I don't read here
27 that you disclosed that you had actually been one of the
28 security-cleared representatives of the Liberal Party to have

1 received a briefing from CSIS about Don Valley North. I ---

2 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Commissioner, I just have a
3 -- just a point of order here that at the time that this
4 witness summary was prepared, the information about a
5 classified briefing had not been made public.

6 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Fair, fair. So I
7 withdraw the question, Mr. Ishmael.

8 So then if we could just scroll up to
9 paragraph 16? And this will be my final questions.

10 So Mr. Ismael, at the time you gave this
11 evidence you stated:

12 "From the Party's perspective, there were no issues or
13 irregularities in the Don Valley North nomination process.
14 It was a hotly contested but very organized nomination that
15 complied with Party rules."

16 I'd like to now ask you to revisit that
17 statement, in light of the NSICOP report and what is now in
18 the public record. So is it still the Party's perspective
19 that there were no issues or irregularities in the Don Valley
20 North nomination process?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So from the Party's
22 perspective and the information that's available to us after
23 reviewing with the local people, there were no issues or
24 irregularities. Should -- CSIS seems to have come to a
25 different conclusion given their level of knowledge, and I
26 accept CSIS's -- I accept CSIS's premise. But without
27 knowing that knowledge, it's hard for the Party to change
28 its ---

1 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And in light of the
2 NSICOP report's conclusion, is it still your position that
3 the Liberal Party of Canada has not been the victim of
4 foreign interference?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's an interesting
6 question. I don't have all the information that is available
7 to CSIS, so I don't know -- I don't know if they impacted the
8 result of the election.

9 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Thank you.

10 Thank you, Madam.

11 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

12 Attorney General?

13 **(SHORT PAUSE)**

14 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MS. RYANN ATKINS:**

15 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Good afternoon. Ryann
16 Atkins for the Attorney General of Canada.

17 You were just taken to a passage of the
18 NSICOP report regarding the nomination contest in Don Valley
19 North in 2019. I take it you're not familiar with the
20 intelligence reporting underlying those sections of the
21 report?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

23 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And I take it, therefore,
24 that you're not familiar with any caveats or limitations
25 attached to that intelligence?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

27 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** You've told us that for
28 election-related FI threats, you could engage with the SITE

1 Task Force and the PCO; is that correct?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

3 MS. RYANN ATKINS: I take it the Liberal
4 Party's been told how to get in touch with SITE and the PCO
5 for that purpose?

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Absolutely.

7 MS. RYANN ATKINS: For FI threats outside of
8 the election context, you say at paragraph 9 of your witness
9 statement that the Liberal Party would consult government
10 experts. That includes the Communication Security
11 Establishment, CSE?

12 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah.

13 MS. RYANN ATKINS: I believe you included --
14 you referenced a 1-800 number in your summary?

15 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

16 MS. RYANN ATKINS: That's a ---

17 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: I'm sorry, counsel,
18 just another request to slow down.

19 MS. RYANN ATKINS: I'll do my best; I only
20 have five minutes.

21 That number that you reference, that's a
22 public number available online, right?

23 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: From my understanding,
24 yeah.

25 MS. RYANN ATKINS: It's not an exclusive line
26 for the Liberal Party?

27 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No.

28 MS. RYANN ATKINS: In terms of other

1 government experts the Party could contact with FI concerns,
2 that would include CSIS as well?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, we would always
4 operate through the SITE Task Force, but...

5 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And aside from contacting
6 them through the SITE Task Force, if it's a non-election-
7 related FI concern, CSIS maintains a non-emergency line for
8 reporting national security issues, including FI; correct?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'll take your word for
10 it.

11 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Okay. Would you know how
12 to contact the RCMP or police of local jurisdiction if you
13 had law enforcement-related FI concerns?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely, yeah.

15 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And the Minister of Public
16 Safety, Minister LeBlanc, he's also been in contact with the
17 parties in respect of FI; correct?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

19 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** We heard yesterday that
20 Minister LeBlanc provided political parties with an FI
21 toolkit recently?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

23 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** The Liberal Party received
24 that as well?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

26 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Apart from what the Party
27 can do, if there are concerns about FI, MPs themselves can
28 contact the House of Commons administration, for example.

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes, I assume so.

2 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Okay. Including the
3 Sergeant at Arms parliamentary security?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Sure, yeah.

5 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And I anticipate we'll
6 hear evidence from the House of Commons, based on what's in
7 their institutional report, that the House administration
8 maintains strong partnerships with the Security and
9 Intelligence Establishment and government agencies, including
10 the RCMP, CSIS, Public Safety, CSE; is that your
11 understanding?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would hope so, yes.

13 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** It doesn't come as a
14 surprise to you if that's the case?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

16 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** If an MP did not know how
17 to contact one of these government agencies, they could reach
18 out to their contacts in the House to facilitate a
19 connection; correct?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume so, yes.

21 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** You were asked by
22 Commission counsel about candidates setting up their own IT
23 systems and maintaining responsibility for the security over
24 their systems and devices. I want to ask you a similar
25 question with respect to MPs who maintain their own systems
26 and devices. Does the Party have an expectation that MPs
27 take prudent steps to protect their IT and devices?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** When it comes to Members

1 of Parliament that's largely left to the House of Commons, so
2 I would hope that Members of Parliament are being prudent.

3 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Do you think it's a
4 reasonable expectation for the Canadian public to have of
5 their MPs?

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely, yes.

7 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And you note in your
8 witness statement that if an MP suspects their systems have
9 been comprised, they can report the issue to the Party for
10 assistance?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, if they're a
12 candidate. But, you know, just generally speaking, if ever
13 there's an issue they're happy to report it to us and we're
14 happy to connect them through to the right authority.

15 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And they can also contact
16 the cyber security number at CSE?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Of course.

18 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And this isn't in your
19 witness statement, but I suggest there's a third option, they
20 could also privately engage a cyber security firm to analyze
21 their device if they have any concerns about compromise?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume so. I
23 don't know what the limitations to their member operating
24 budget is, but I would assume so, yeah.

25 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Fair enough. Those are my
26 questions. Thank you.

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

28 Counsel for the Liberal Party.

1 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MS. JENNA GREEN:**

2 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** Good afternoon. It's Jenna
3 Green.

4 I just have one clarification, and if we
5 could pull up COM363, the NISICOP report that my friend, Mr.
6 Choudhry, was taking you to. It's page 39 of the PDF and
7 page 31 of the report.

8 Mr. Ishmael, if you look through these first
9 few paragraphs that my friend took you to, I just want to
10 note the footnotes, 211, 212, 213, 14. And if we scroll down
11 to the bottom, you'll see references there to CSIS and
12 redacted information.

13 I just want to confirm that you have no
14 information relating to these CSIS findings in 2021. I'm
15 sorry, 2021 and 2022.

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not that I know of, no.

17 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** Nothing that went into this
18 report?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not that I know of, no.

20 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** And is it correct you were
21 briefed in 2019?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

23 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** Thank you.

24 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

25 Any re-examination?

26 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** No, thank you.

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So thank you for your
28 time, and let me wish you a good weekend. And don't forget,

1 we do not sit on Monday, so we'll see each other again on
2 Tuesday, 9:30.

3 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

4 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
5 Commission is adjourned until Tuesday, the 24th of September
6 2024 at 9:30 a.m.

7 --- Upon adjourning at 4:14 p.m.

8
9 **C E R T I F I C A T I O N**

10
11 I, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, a certified court reporter,
12 hereby certify the foregoing pages to be an accurate
13 transcription of my notes/records to the best of my skill and
14 ability, and I so swear.

15
16 Je, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, une sténographe officielle,
17 certifie que les pages ci-hautes sont une transcription
18 conforme de mes notes/enregistrements au meilleur de mes
19 capacités, et je le jure.

20
21 

22 Sandrine Marineau-Lupien
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